

“When I was a child...”

“When I was a child, I spoke like a child, thought like a child, and reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I no longer used childish ways.”

1 Corinthians 13:11

STUDENT: (S): OK, OK. I get it. So now I’m a young adult you want me to develop a more ‘mature’ understanding of the Catholic faith?

TEACHER: (T): Yep.

S: Well, I pretty much switched off in about year 4 when they were still talking about the world being ‘made in seven days’ at school, while I could follow science programs on TV at home which gave compelling evidence that the world was millions of years old and that it and all life has gradually evolved...

T: Hmmm. I’d switch off too if that was the Catholic teaching.

S: What... you mean it’s not?

T: Nope. Some fundamentalist Christian churches still teach that way, but it’s definitely not the teaching of the Catholic Church.

S: Well... what is the Catholic teaching then?

T: For that, you need to go to the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It’s like the guidebook of what Catholics believe. There are three sections that will probably help. Let’s start with section 159.

159 Faith and science: "Though faith is above reason, there can never be any real discrepancy between faith and reason. Since the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith has bestowed the light of reason on the human mind, God cannot deny himself, nor can truth ever contradict truth. Consequently, methodical research in all branches of knowledge, provided it is carried out in a truly scientific manner and does not override moral laws, can never conflict with the faith, because the things of the world and the things of faith derive from the same God. The humble and persevering investigator of the secrets of nature is being led, as it were, by the hand

of God in spite of himself, for it is God, the conservator of all things, who made them what they are."

S: Hmm. So in Catholicism there's no real conflict between Science and Religion?

T: That's right. Because God created both and reveals both, there can't be. As our understanding of the way the world is ordered develops, so too should our appreciation and wonder of the intricacy and beauty of God's creation increase. The only problems arise when with our limited human understanding we make assumptions and get it wrong. Just ask Copernicus, Bruno and Galileo...

S: Yeah! That's what I'm talking about! The Church got it wrong about the Earth as the centre of the universe and all that stuff!

T: Yes, and even though it took far longer than it should have, the Church did finally acknowledge that they'd got it wrong. That's probably part of the reason why the Church is very careful to spell out so clearly this position that allows for advances in knowledge. If the Science is right, that's the way God made it. No conflict.

S: But hey, it says literally 'God made the world in seven days' in the bible! Genesis. It seems we do it to over and over at some stage just about every school year.

T: Hmm. Let's read section 337 from the Catechism

337 God himself created the visible world in all its richness, diversity and order. Scripture presents the work of the Creator symbolically as a succession of six days of divine "work", concluded by the "rest" of the seventh day. On the subject of creation, the sacred text teaches the truths revealed by God for our salvation, permitting us to "recognize the inner nature, the value and the ordering of the whole of creation to the praise of God."

S: See! Seven days. Shabam!

T: OK. Just re-read that again. Exactly *how* does scripture present the work of the Creator?

S: It.. oh. Hmm. 'Symbolically'. So I'm guessing that means...

T: That's right. It's a creation *story*. A myth, designed to convey a truth, but symbolically, not literally.

S: So why did they write it that way in the first place and why do they still teach it that way all through school?

T: Early writers explained creation with the words and the understanding they had available to them at the time. Remember they were writing this for an ancient audience that had no access to the knowledge we now have. We still use this text because it still conveys to little children in a very simple way some essential truths about the world.

S: And what are they, these 'truths' if the whole thing is a myth?

T: It's like in most kids' stories. It's the part that is repeated. Again and again, at the end of each 'day'. What is the line that gets repeated?

S: Ummm... "God saw what he had made and it was good...?"

T: Yes. Indeed, *it was good*. Inspired writing. Great for primary school, but to develop an adult faith, you need to move on from a literal interpretation.

S: So... it's a symbolic story, a myth, but it contains some truth; that the world, the universe and all that is in it was created by God and that it is good.

T: Yep, and the implication therefore for humankind is that...?

S: ...that we should party hard and wreck the joint! No, no; I know. That the world is good so we should look after it.

T: Absolutely. You had me worried there. It's a good story for kids, just like Father Christmas, the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy. Good messages, symbolic truths, but not meant to be taken literally as part of an adult faith. It's time to grow up!

S: OK. You mentioned three sections. We better have the third. What's it all about?

T: Well, section 283 just helps to put it all in perspective, and confirms the attitude we should approach advances in knowledge with. Hopefully future generations will look back at what we understand now and feel a common bond with us; with Copernicus, Bruno and Galileo; and with King Solomon too.

283 The question about the origins of the world and of man has been the object of many scientific studies which have splendidly enriched our knowledge of the age and dimensions of the cosmos, the development of life-forms and the appearance of man. These discoveries invite us to even greater admiration for the greatness of the Creator, prompting us to give him thanks for all his works and for the understanding and wisdom he gives to scholars and researchers. With Solomon they can say: "It is he who gave me unerring knowledge of what exists, to know the structure of the world and the activity of the elements. . . for wisdom, the fashioner of all things, taught me."

S: Hmm. Yeah, wisdom sounds good. And I suppose you're going to say that it depends on me developing a mature faith? OK. I can switch back on.

T: Spot on. Amen to that.