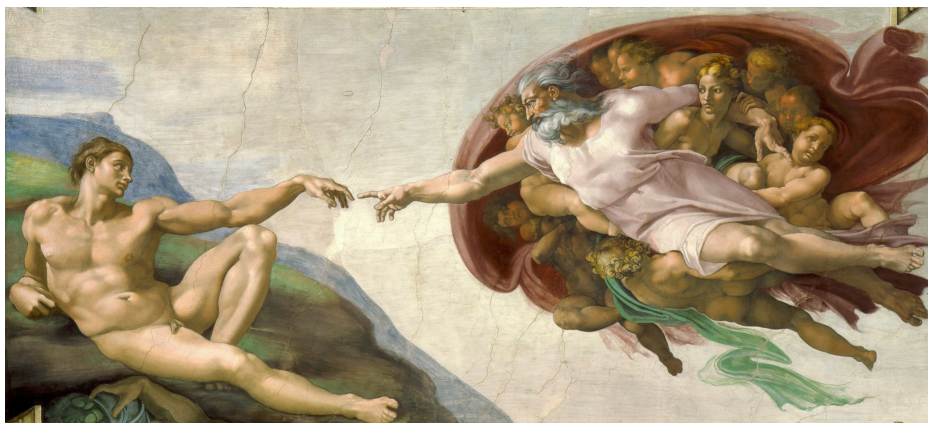


## Art for Lent Three:



Here we have two fresco panels painted by Michelangelo Buonarroti between the years of 1508 and 1512. The top panel is known as “The Creation of Adam” and the lower panel is “The Fall and Expulsion from the Garden of Eden.” Sex and gender play large roles in these stories. But before we jump to a hetero-normative reading, can we use these paintings to read this story afresh? A few curiosities may help us begin. In the Creation of Adam, the billowing cloud around God the creator is speculated to be a human organ. Some say it is a brain, implying that the moment of touch between God and human is the moment that humans gain consciousness. A newer idea is that the red, billowing form is a post-partum uterus, with the teal fabric dangling below representing a newly-cut umbilical cord. In this reading, the land on which Adam is reclining is seen as a woman’s torso, the earth mother that will suckle the newborn Adam (note the nipple in blue just above his head!). What is important here is to acknowledge that as a sculptor, Michelangelo believed the deepest spiritual truths can be represented with or in the human body– the spirituality suggested here is not ethereal, but embodied; enfleshed.

Another detail in the Creation of Adam is the woman under God's Arm. Scholars suggest that it could be either Eve or the Church. Either way, the implication is that the feminine is close to and cherished by God. The figure shows an intimate ease in the way she grasps God's strong arm, laying claim to his protection. Could Eve's implication in the fall be related to her intimacy with God?

In the Fall and Expulsion, Adam and Eve are always together. In both depictions, their bodies overlap. I take this as an invitation to consider what it means to be made in God's image. Could it mean that God's image is not complete without the full spectrum of masculine and feminine? Not simply in a married couple, but within each person? And if we are made in God's image, is it a sin to identify with God, the creator? By no means! Indeed, a psychologist's technical word for love is 'identification'. Furthermore, if we are made in the image of God the creator, are we not then also creators? The labours of childbirth and agriculture that are exacerbated by the fall are labours of bringing forth life, of co-creating with God. Perhaps the suggestion is, then, that judgment hinders creativity. Our human vocation to be co-creators is complicated and made difficult by our tendency to judge, by our preoccupation with good and bad, right and wrong. What would you create if you were free from these worries?

