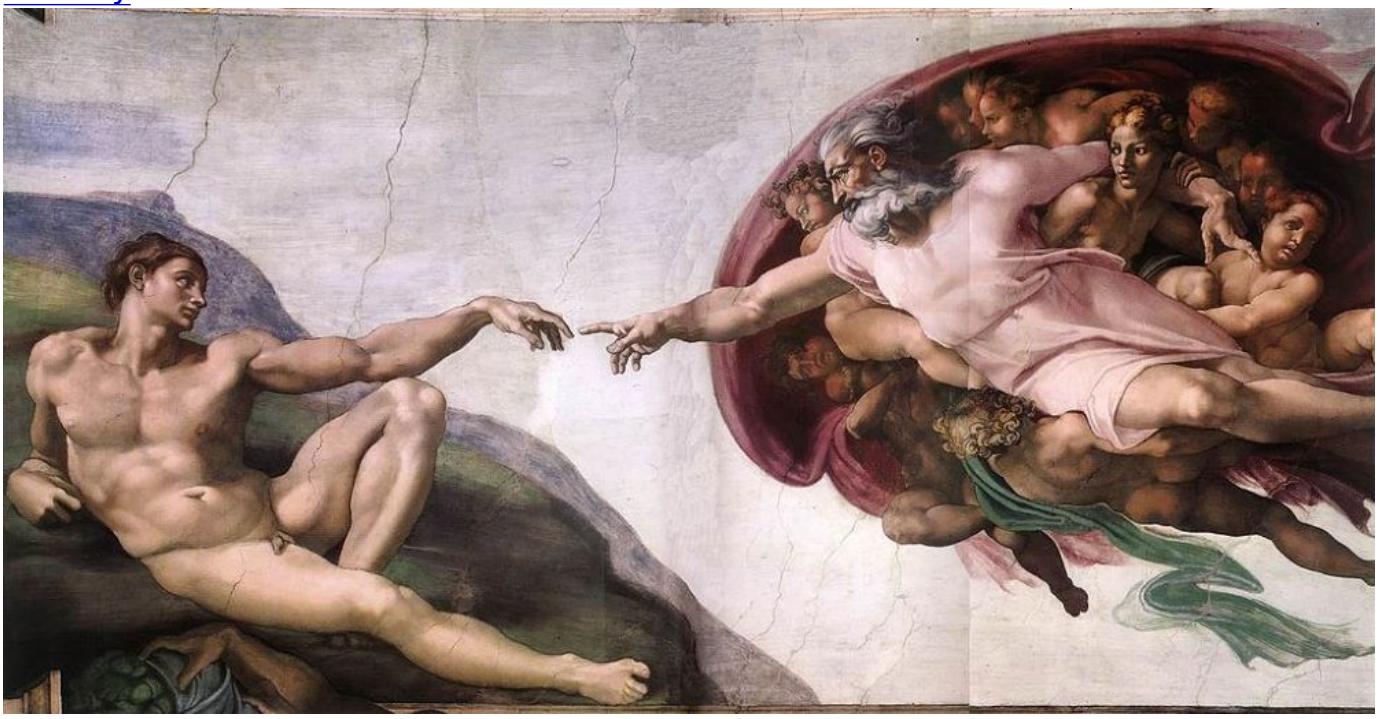
Columns
Ministry



"Creation of Adam," by Michelangelo, c. 1510 (Wikimedia Commons/Public domain/Michelangelo)



by Joan Sauro

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They were a class of 40 seniors, reading Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. It was the spring of the year, and up on the third floor of a run-down school, the racket from the pottery factory across the street meant closed windows and opened books.

We read how a young lover climbed hand over hand to reach the beloved who waited with arms outstretched up on a balcony. We read his words: "But, soft! What light through yonder window breaks? It is the east, and Juliet is the sun."

I will never know if the young man seated near the windows saw the morning light break and took Romeo's bravery to heart. Or if the young student was simply bored with the story and thought to create one of his own. Which he surely did.

He left his seat, went to the nearest window, an old-fashioned type as tall as he was, opened it, and climbed out onto a foot-wide ledge that extended the length of the third floor. He promptly closed the window, filled the whole window, top to bottom, and made antic faces at us, watching in the classroom.

No one waved back, too stunned to move.

Soon the antics stopped and the young man stood in terror, gripping what little window frame he had.

There were no cellphones then, no police patrolling our streets. Actually, very little law enforcement was needed; petty crime was at a minimum in our small town.

So what was a teacher to do?

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In terror myself, I asked two students to come with me to the next window over. And the rest of the class to pray the "Hail Mary." Quietly. "We need her help here. Ask Mary to keep your classmate safe on the ledge. And your teacher safe, as well. I'm going out to bring him in."

I lifted the next window over as high as it would go, hoisted myself up and sat on the ledge, while two students held my legs inside.

I turned to the young man on the ledge one window over. "You are one amazing young man," I said. "I want you to remember this brave and dangerous thing you did for the rest of your life."

"And," I continued, "You are one foolish young man. I want you to remember this ill-advised thing you did, as well, risking your life and maybe your teacher's."

With that I held onto my window with my left hand and extended my right as far as I could in his direction. "Stretch your left hand toward me and slide your feet one inch. Then another inch. Slowly, until you can touch my fingertips."

And so he did. First my fingertips. Then hand. And finally, my arm.

When he reached my window, I got a good grip, told him to squat, and pulled him into the classroom, both of us falling into the two students at the window.

And there we laughed, in a heap on the floor of a run-down school. One shining moment we would remember the rest of our lives.

A few years later, the old school closed, and soon after, the whole of it was demolished. Today it serves as a parking lot for the newly-arrived immigrants working across the street in the pottery factory.

Be that as it may, the book stays open and the story never ends. The Lover still climbs to reach the Beloved. We've all hung on a ledge one place or another.

And the Artist is still hoisted 68-feet high under the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. There, flat on his back, he paints the Finger of God stretched to touch the finger of Adam. Finger to Finger. Life to Life.