

GOD CARRIES OUT HIS PLAN

CREATOR AND CREATION (NOS. 279-354)

SESSION OBJECTIVES

After this session, you should be able to recognize ...

- That creation presents us with convincing evidence that God exists.
- That because a good God created all things good, creation has great value, and we have the responsibility to care for it.
- That the diversity in God's creation calls for service to one another in interdependence.

PART 1: GETTING YOUR BEARINGS

We have gotten our bearings as to where our *Journey Through the Catechism* is going to take us. We have seen that God himself is the blessing toward which we are traveling. We have also come to recognize him as the one God in three Persons-Father, Son, and Holy Spirit-who has a plan of blessing for us. The working out of that plan is disclosed to us in the true story that God reveals in the Bible. That story shows us that, as we confess in the Creed, God is "almighty;" and so also the "master of history" and the God of mercy.

Describing the Indescribable Trinity

The deeper you delve into the *Catechism*, the more you will discover that the Church uses very precise language to express Catholic beliefs. Over time, a Catholic's vocabulary must expand. When describing an indescribable mystery such as the Trinity, the Church relies on the language of philosophy, using the words *substance*, *person*, and *relation*.

Substance, when applied to the Trinity, brings to mind the "essence" or "nature" of the Trinity. *Substance* is the entirety of the divine Being. This encompasses everything about God. Call it the *what* of God as a whole. *Substance* is God's supreme reality.

Person designates the distinctions between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is the *who* of God. Each *Person* of the Trinity is marvelously distinct, yet each exists fully, totally, and in union with the others.

The words *substance* and *person* help us to see that the Trinity is *both* one God *and* three Persons.

Relation expresses how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each unique Persons. Their real distinction as Persons arises entirely from their relations toward one another. Otherwise, they are entirely one. Each expresses the fullness of the divine substance from a distinct "position" of relation (see No. 255). Taken together, these three words describe the *theologia*, the inner workings of the Trinity.

God carries out His plan

"I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth."

In the first line of the Creed, we profess that God is "almighty" and that he is "Creator." Because he is almighty, he can do anything, including accomplishing his divine plan. We begin this session at the beginning of that plan, with God's act of Creation. "[T]he Creed is divided into three parts: 'the first part speaks of the first divine Person and the wonderful work of creation' ..." (No. 190).

After professing belief in the one God, who is also our almighty Father, the Creed asserts that there is a beginning. "A beginning of what?" one might ask. Well, a beginning of anything and everything. In God himself, there is no beginning or end, and so, if there is a beginning, it is a beginning of something different from God, that is, his creation. He can be professed as "Creator" in the Creed only because we creatures are here to profess him as such. Because we owe him our very existence, we owe him this profession.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). The *Catechism* states: "Creation is the foundation of 'all God's saving plans: the 'beginning of the history of salvation'" (No. 280). Here we should note that our journey begins where creation begins. The creation story is already our story; its itinerary is ours, too. We are not mere spectators; we are participants.

God's plan, which St. Paul says has been hidden for all eternity (Ephesians 3:9), is now under way. The *Catechism* calls this plan the "economy." It is already, from the very beginning, a saving history. It is a plan for our salvation, established by God's might and exercised first in his act of Creation. We will need to pay special attention to this first part of the story in this session and the next, because, as the *Catechism* tells us, it will be "... decisive for the meaning and orientation of our life and actions" (No. 282).

BEGIN WITH PRAYER

This week, read Genesis 1:1-2:4. Consider making a few of the verses in that passage the subject of a short prayer each day this week.

Myth: Angels look like Cupid, float on clouds, and play harps.

Or, as in the film classic *It's a Wonderful Life*, they are deceased humans who are looking to get their wings: "Every time a bell rings, an angel gets his wings:'

Today's culture often gets much about angels wrong. The greeting card industry playfully depicts angels as sappy, harp-playing Cupids on clouds. Some films and stories portray angels as former humans now living in heaven. Now that they have earned their wings, or a heavenly berth, these humans-turned-angels are sent to earth to do good deeds.

Real angels, though, are sublime; they are immortal. As pure spirits, they have no bodies. They resemble humanity only in that they, too, are created with intelligence and a will. The word *angel* (meaning "messenger") refers to their office, not their nature.

They are spirits in nature, and their work is "angelic:' Their roles are to be servants and messengers of God (see No. 329).

Christ is the center of the angelic world. An angel choir sung at his birth, and angels protected his infancy when threatened by Herod. Prior to his public life, angels ministered to him in the desert. Before his passion, an angel strengthened him in Gethsemane. On the day of the Second Coming, angels will attend Jesus Christ. Indeed, they are *his* angels: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne" (Matthew 25:31).

READING THE CATECHISM

The presentation for Session Five will cover *Catechism* Nos. 279-354. If your time is limited, you might want to begin with the essential paragraphs for this session: Nos. 279, 280, 282, 286, 288, 290, 293, 294, 299, 301, 302, 305, 307, 309, 311, 324, 328, 329, 335, 336, 338-341, 345, 349, and 354.

GLOSSARY TERMS

Covenant

A solemn agreement between persons with mutual guarantees that bind them together like members of a family. In the ancient biblical world, these bonds regulated the relationships between equals; between kings and subjects; and even between God and his people. Christians are those who have entered into the "new covenant" with God prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31.

Material World

In the Creed, we profess that God created all things "visible and invisible." The material creation is that which we can see (even if only through a microscope). It expresses its existence in matter, and so is subject to the constraints of time and space.

Problem of Evil

The question or problem of evil is one that has plagued man from the beginning. To the question, "Why is there evil?" one possible answer is that, to be able to love, we must be free. To be free is to be able to choose to love-or to choose to do evil. God did not make evil, but he did make us free and so capable of bringing evil into a world he had made without it.

Spiritual World

The spiritual world is the "invisible" world that we speak about in the Creed. Spirits are of two kinds: infinite and finite. God is the only spirit who is infinite. The good and fallen angels and the souls of men belong in the finite or limited category of spirits. While we are unable to recognize the spiritual world with our senses (sight, hearing, touch) because they are not material beings, spirits are very real and, in many ways, "more real" than material things. For example, they are immortal by their nature, and they are not bound by the constraints of time and space.

Our human souls are spirits that are joined to material bodies while we are alive and so bound in space and time. But they are constrained by time and space only through the bodies in which they live and which they animate or give life, not by virtue of their spiritual qualities.

HOMEWORK QUESTIONS

Name: _____

From the *Catechism* Nos. 279-324

1. What two questions are "... decisive for the meaning and orientation of our life and actions"?

2. In addition to pantheism, what other myths and theories about origins does the *Catechism* list?

3. Which scriptural texts about creation occupy a unique place because they remain the principal source for catechesis on the mysteries of the "beginning": Creation, Fall, and promise of salvation?

4. Is Creation the work of God the Father alone? _____

5. What aspect of the physical world has the Church had to defend on many occasions?

6. To what is the witness of Scripture unanimous?

7. "There is not a single aspect of the Christian message that is not in part an answer to the question of _____

From the *Catechism* Nos. 325-354

8. According to St. Augustine, what does the name "angel" mean, and what is the nature of an angel?

9. From Scripture we know certain angels by name. Three such angels, who hold the office of archangel, are:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

10. On what day did the new creation begin?

PRESENTATION OUTLINE

SESSION FIVE: GOD CARRIES OUT HIS PLAN

CREATOR AND CREATION (Nos. 279-354)

I. Catechesis of Creation

A. Recognition of God as Almighty-God's might makes possible the act of creation

B. "Catechesis on creation is of major importance" (No. 282)

1. Foundation of God's plan (see No. 280)

2. Makes history possible

3. Discloses God, shows us that he is good - therefore, created world is good

C. Creation's ultimate purpose: God's glory and "our beatitude"¹ (No. 294)

1. God creates *ex nihilo*, "out of nothing"² (No. 296)

2. "[We] are nothing, made to be something, by Omnipotence"- Frank Sheed

3. Creation is ordered and good (see No. 299)

4. God sustains creation in existence (see No. 301)

5. Recognizing our "utter dependence" on God is wisdom and joy (No. 301)

II. God Carries Out His Plan: Divine Providence

A. Universe created "in a state of journeying" toward perfection (No. 302)

1. History: a chronicle of events
2. Economy: God's acting in human events
3. God is the sovereign Master of his plan (see No. 306)

B. Providence and the scandal of evil

1. Christianity is an answer to the question of evil (see No. 309)
2. God doesn't give a philosophical answer to the question of evil; in Christ, he *becomes the answer*
3. God is not the cause-either directly or indirectly-of moral evil; he creates free beings- free to do good or evil, to love or not (see No. 311)
4. God would not permit an evil if he did not cause a good to come out of it (see No. 324)

III. God Is Creator of Heaven and Earth, of Things "Visible and Invisible"

A. The Invisible World = Angels

1. Their existence is a truth of faith (see No. 328)
2. Because immaterial existence cannot be known by reason alone; revealed throughout the Old and New Testaments (see Nos. 332-333)
3. As pure spirits, angels work everywhere as "messengers" of God (the word *angel* comes from Greek *angelos*, "messenger") (see No. 329)
4. Angels as "God's hands;" as his intermediaries
5. The angels belong to Christ (see No. 331)
6. Scripture refers to nine "choirs" of angels-in three groups of three, a type of "Trinitarian" pattern
7. Pure spiritual intelligences; present where they are acting
8. Angels can move material things by exercise of spiritual power

9. God grants then a direct infusion of knowledge
10. Asking intercession of guardian angel (see No. 336; see Matthew 18:10)

B. The Visible World

1. A "riot" of variety
2. Our differences enable us to share with one another and serve one another, fostering communion (see Nos. 340-341)
3. Order and harmony results from "diversity of beings" (No. 341)
4. The hierarchy of creatures (see No. 342)
5. Man is at the height of the hierarchy of visible creation (see No. 343); revealed in marriage of Adam and Eve
6. The Sabbath rest follows the sixth day of creation (see No. 345), when God creates man and woman and joins them in matrimony
7. The Sabbath represents God's entering into covenant with us (see No. 346)
8. Creation story organized in two sets of three days; significant in Hebrew numerology:

Number 3 = divine and heavenly ("holy, holy, holy")

Number 4 = material, earthly, temporal (four seasons, four directions)

Number 7 = joining of heaven and earth in "covenant embrace"

9. The Sabbath is a promise of the eternal rest of heaven= beatitude

PART 4: GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. "(C)atechesis on creation is of major importance" (No. 282) because it answers people's fundamental questions. How does it affect your life to know that you were created by God to live in heaven with him for all eternity? How might your life be different if you did not know or believe these truths about your origin, the origin of all creation, and your eternal destiny?
2. One of the important implications of a proper understanding of God as Creator is that we understand our right relationship to him as creatures, and secondarily, that we live according to the proper understanding that, "God is infinitely greater than all his works" (No. 300). Sometimes we place more importance on creation than on the Creator. Can you identify specific examples of this imbalance in society? In your own life?
3. "Jesus asks for childlike abandonment to the providence of our heavenly Father who takes care of his children's smallest needs ..." (see No. 305), and references the Gospel of Matthew: "Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' ... your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (Matthew 6:31-33). In what ways has God provided for you? What keeps you from trusting his providence with "childlike abandonment"?
4. The *Catechism* addresses the problem of evil (see Nos. 309-311), indicating that God permits moral evil, but also that he knows how to derive good from it. Can you give an example from your experience of how a good result proceeded from an event or issue that was originally tragic or painful?

5. "[T]he whole life of the Church benefits from the mysterious and powerful help of angels"¹ (No. 334). Can you describe a situation in your own life or in the life of someone you know in which you have been made aware of an angel's help or presence?
6. The *Catechism* (No. 347) indicates that, "Creation was fashioned with a view to the Sabbath ..." and that "Worship is inscribed in the order of creation"² (No. 347). In what specific ways do you try to "keep holy the Sabbath"?

CLOSING PRAYER

Ever-living God, we adore you and thank you for the gratuitous love you show in willing us into existence and sustaining us in every way. Help us to learn to see creation, and especially our place within it, as just such an act of love. Grant that we may respond to your unceasing attention to us with unceasing adherence to your holy will as expressed in revelation, the Church's teaching, and in the facts of our everyday lives. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.
