

Chapter 2

GOD

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1. The priority of belief in God

"I believe in God": this first affirmation of the Apostles' Creed is also the most fundamental. The whole Creed speaks of God, and when it also speaks of man and of the world it does so in relation to God. The other articles of the Creed all depend on the first, just as the remaining Commandments make the first "You shall have no other gods before me" explicit. The other articles help us to know God better as he revealed himself progressively to men" (CCC 199).

Scripture begins here too: "In the beginning God" (Gen 1:1)—because all reality begins here; and the Catholic faith, its Scriptures (its data), and its creeds (its summaries) all follow reality and teach us to live in reality. That is the essence of sanity: living in reality. It is also the basis of sanctity, which is the ultimate end of faith.

The first and most basic requirement for living in reality is to believe in God. Faith in God comes first because God comes first.

2. How can man know God?

We can know God in two ways: by reason and by faith; by our natural human minds and by God's supernatural divine revelation; by thinking and speaking about God and by listening to God speak to us.

3. The need for divine revelation

Human reason alone is radically insufficient when it comes to knowing God. For

- a. We are finite, but God is infinite. We are closer to worms than to God. A worm can know us more adequately than we can know God.
- b. We are fallible. We make mistakes—often very serious ones. Only God and his revelation are infallible.
- c. We are selfish, prone to sin, and addicted to false gods. Addicts do not think clearly.

But the knowledge of God is the most important knowledge of all, because God is our ultimate end, our destiny, our happiness. We *must* know our true end and the true road to that end. Living without knowing God is like driving a car without seeing the road. Therefore we desperately need a better knowledge of God than our reason alone can provide.

4. The knowledge of God by human reason

Even without supernatural divine revelation, however, all men by nature know something about God. Scripture itself says so: "His invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made" (Rom 1:20).

We know God instinctively. Children and primitive peoples never begin as atheists. Even atheists like Freud admit that religion is a universal, innate instinct (though they think it is an innate illusion).

We also know God by reasoning, when we begin to think logically about the data we experience. We experience both outer data, about the universe, and inner data, about ourselves. Both lead us to God.

a. Data about the universe:

(1) We see order in nature. We could never design a machine as perfect as the universe. Its designer must be a very great intelligence.

(2) Its maker must also be a very great power. For when we ask why the universe as a whole exists, we see that no part of it can make the whole of it. What is its cause? The very existence of the universe points to a creator, a giver-of-existence.

(3) Everything in the universe changes, moves. All motion requires a mover, and ultimately a "first mover", a beginning. If there is no first, there is no second or third or any others.

(4) Time is finite. Time had a beginning: what modern physics calls the Big Bang, when all matter suddenly came into existence. Since nothing happens without an adequate cause, the Big Bang requires a "Big Banger".

b. Data about ourselves:

(1) Our minds can know unchangeable truths like “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ” and “Injustice is evil” and “Nothing can be and not be at the same time.” Where do we see these unchangeable truths? Everything in our world is changeable. Our minds themselves are changeable. Unchangeable truth is like a visitor from another world, another mind: an eternal Mind.

(2) Our conscience experiences an absolute moral obligation to do good, not evil. Not even moral sceptics and relativists think it is morally good to disobey your own conscience deliberately. But an absolute moral obligation can come only from an absolute moral authority, not from any fallible, human authority. Conscience appears as God’s inner prophet.

(3) The experience of beauty often leads to God more directly and intuitively than does a process of argument. “There is the music of Mozart, therefore there must be God”—you either see this or you do not.

(4) Our desire for joy, for a joy we can never find in this world, even from other people, points to another world (heaven) and another Person (God); for every natural, innate, and universal desire corresponds to a reality that can satisfy it. The reality of hunger shows the reality of food; the same is true of the hunger for God and heaven.

(5) If there is no God, there is no ultimate meaning to life. If we came ultimately from nothing and die ultimately into nothing, we are ultimately nothing. If we are made in the image of God, we are the children of the King of Kings. But if we are made only in the image of King Kong, we are only clever apes.

(6) If we are only accidentally evolved matter, how could we have invented the idea of God? Compare this one idea—a Being infinitely perfect, good, wise, powerful, holy, loving, just, and eternal—with all other ideas we have ever invented, and it tips the scales infinitely. No effect can be greater than its cause; our minds could no more have created God than blind chance could have created our minds.

(7) Finally, “Pascal’s wager” shows that faith in God is life’s best bet, and atheism is life’s most stupid one. For our only chance of winning eternal happiness is to believe, and our only chance of losing it is to disbelieve.

5. The knowledge of God by divine revelation

God has revealed much more of himself than human reason could ever discover, especially his love and his plan for the salvation of mankind. This revelation took place historically in three “trinitarian” steps:

First, he revealed himself to Israel, his “chosen people”:

a. by establishing his covenant with them (a covenant is a relationship between two parties that is freely entered into and binds both parties. Marriage is the most intimate human covenant and a “horizontal” image of God’s “vertical” covenant of salvation with us);

b. by giving them his law to live by as part of the covenant;

c. by giving them his promise of a Savior;

d. by sending them prophets, his “mouthpieces”;

e. by performing miracles (“signs and wonders”) for them;

f. by inspiring infallible Scriptures;

g. and by revealing to them the reason for his revelation: “God had only one reason to reveal himself to them, a single motive for choosing them from among all peoples as his special possession: his sheer gratuitous love”¹ (CCC 218).

Second, God revealed himself by the Incarnation. Christ is “the Word of God” in the flesh. He is the perfect and complete revelation of God (see Col 1:15–20).

Third, when Christ ascended to heaven, he left his Holy Spirit and his Body, the Church, to continue his work. The Church is the Mystical (invisible) Body of Christ, and the Holy Spirit is her soul (see CCC 813). That is why he said, “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40), and why he said to St. Paul, when Paul before his conversion was persecuting Christians, “Why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4, italics added). The Church is “the extension of the Incarnation”, that is why Christ said to his apostles, “He who hears you hears me” (Lk 10:16).

God gave his Church the authority and infallibility that is fitting for God’s own instrument; anything less would have been unworthy of the honor of God and inadequate to the needs of fallen man.

6. How adequately can we know God?

“This alone is the true knowledge of God: to know that God is beyond knowing” (St. Thomas Aquinas).

Whatever can be known of God, even by the greatest theologian or the greatest mystic, is infinitely less than what God is.

God is “transcendent”; that is to say that God is *always more*—more than we can ever know or think or imagine. God transcends everything in our thoughts just as he transcends everything in our world. He is not some concept or feeling inside us, any more than he is some stone or star outside us.

Love grasps him better than knowledge; for love conforms itself to its object, while knowledge has to fit its object into itself, into the limitations

¹ Cf. Deut 4:37; 7:8; 10:15.

of the knower. A child can understand only a tiny part of a parent but can love the whole. Love can be more true to objective reality than knowledge can, in this sense: we can know others only as we can understand them, but we can love them as they are in themselves.

Thought cannot comprehend God, but love can apprehend him. Our minds cannot surround him and define him, but our wills can reach out to him and touch him. Even among ourselves, we can never fully understand each other, but we can fully love each other.

The ultimate goal of theology is to know God in this way, with the heart and will, not only with the mind: to "know" him as a person loved, not just a concept known. If we know God thus, we will fall on our knees and adore. Our deepest eyes are in our knees.

7. The nature of God

God is infinite; therefore he cannot be defined. But this does not mean he has no nature. He is not a "whatever", an "everything in general and nothing in particular". He has a character. He is one thing and not another: righteous, not wicked or indifferent; wise, not foolish; merciful, not cruel. But each of his attributes is infinite (unlimited): he is infinitely righteous, infinitely wise, infinitely merciful, and so on. He is infinite, but not indefinite. He is infinitely *himself*.

And we can get to know this character:

- a. better by faith than by reason; better by trusting his own revelation of himself than by trusting our own cleverness;
- b. better still by prayer, by real personal contact with him, both private and public, both spontaneous and liturgical;
- c. and best of all by loving him, doing his will and obeying his commandments, especially that of loving each other; "for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 Jn 4:20).

We can know something of God's nature, or character, from ourselves, from our deepest desires. God is our ultimate joy; God is the one whose presence will give us infinite and unimaginable ecstasy without boredom forever. What must God be, to do this? A sea of infinite beauty, a light of infinite understanding, a heart of infinite love. And more, always more, infinitely more, "what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived" (1 Cor 2:9).

8. The attributes of God

- a. God is one (see Deut 6:4). This means (1) that God is unique, that there is only one God; and (2) that God is simple, not composed of parts. He is

three Persons, not three parts. His Trinity does not lessen his unity. The unity of the Trinity, which is freely a love-unity of the three Divine Persons, is more of a unity, not less, than the mere arithmetical unity of any one Person.

b. God is good. This means (1) that he is perfect, that he is "whatever it is better to be than not to be" (St. Anselm). It also means (2) that he is righteous: just, holy, right, moral. The moral law he gave us reflects his own nature: "Be holy, for I am holy" (Lev 11:44). This is why the essential principles of morality for mankind are absolute and unchangeable: because they "go all the way up" into the nature of God, and we are made in the image of this God (see Gen 1:27).

c. God is both just and merciful. With us it is usually either/or, but with God it is both/and. That is why the Father sent his Son to die in our place to save us from the just punishment for our sins: because God must be both just and merciful. On the Cross, Christ got the justice and we got the mercy.

d. "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). Love (charity) is the highest meaning of "goodness" for any person. Self-giving love is what God essentially is; therefore self-giving love is what motivates everything God does: his creation, his redemption, and his providential care over our lives, including his allowing us to suffer evil (pain) for our own eventual greater good, and even his allowing us to commit evil (sin), out of respect for our free will. Neither the evil we suffer nor the evil we do refutes God's goodness and love.

e. God is omniscient: all-knowing and all-wise. He numbers every hair (Mt 10:30).

f. God is omnipotent (all-powerful). He who created everything out of nothing can do anything. "With God all things are possible" (Mt 19:26).

If we consider these last three attributes together—all-loving, all-knowing, and all-powerful—we can see that it is necessarily true that "all things work together for good for those who love God" (Rom 8:28 KJV). For there is no limit to his love and goodwill toward us, to his wisdom in knowing what is truly best for us, or to his power to arrange every detail in our lives—indeed, every atom in the universe—as a means to that end.

9. God's transcendence and immanence

God is transcendent. He is not part of our universe, like the pagan gods, who supposedly lived in the sky or in the earth. Nor is he part of our personalities, like the modern humanists' god, which is only all the good in man or all the ideals posited by the human spirit. God is always more—more than all his creation and more than all created minds can conceive.

"Transcendent" means "more"; it does not mean "absent". God is immanent (present) as well as transcendent; in fact, he is omnipresent. He is both

“higher than my highest and more inward than my innermost self”.² When he created us, he did not then turn away from us like a parent abandoning his child; that is the God of eighteenth-century Enlightenment Deism, not the God of the Bible.

Therefore, a fundamental exercise in sanctity and sanity (that is, living in reality) is what Brother Lawrence called “the practice of the presence of God”. For God is always present, right here, right now.

10. God's name

“God has a name; he is not an anonymous force” (CCC 203).

Man has given God many names, but once God spoke to man his own true name. Beyond all man-made names is the divinely revealed name given to Moses, and through Moses to Israel, and through Israel to the world. That name is “I AM” (YAHWEH in Hebrew)—a name so sacred no Jew will pronounce it. For “I” is the absolutely unique name, proper to the speaker alone. Jesus was attacked and eventually executed for speaking it (Jn 8:58), for claiming to bear this name; that is, claiming to *be* God.

The name signifies:

- a. God's reality: “I AM.”
- b. God's oneness: “I” is the name of only one.
- c. God's uniqueness: God is not just one being among others, but the Absolute Being. He is not *a* being, a finite being; he is infinite, unlimited Being itself.
- d. God's personhood: “I” signifies the self-consciousness only a person can have. This is what essentially distinguishes man, whom God made in his image, from the animals.
- e. God's eternity: he is present (“AM”), not past or future. God's being is not, like ours, limited by time. Nothing of him is dead, like the past, or unborn, like the future. He is not “what once was but is no more”, nor is he “what will be but is not yet”. He is present to all times; all times are present to him.
- f. God's *mystery*: he does not tell us who he is, but says simply “I AM WHO I AM.” The Hebrew verb can also be translated: “I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE.” The God of the Bible always surprises us, instead of fitting our little expectations. Like the Bible, the Church does not put God in a box for us, even a word-box or formula. She knows he does not sit still while we take his photograph. Like the Bible, the Church tells us only (1) what God is not, by rejecting heresies and idols, and (2) what God is like, by using parables and analogies.

² St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 3, 6, 11: PL 32, 688, see CCC 300.

(Actually, even these parables and analogies do not tell us that God is like the things we can understand, but that these things are a little like God. God is like nothing: “To whom can you compare me?” But everything is like God in some way, since he made it all.)

When the Church speaks of God, she does not claim to know or say what God is, to define his nature. Instead of defining him, she presents him, or rather introduces us to him as he presents himself, above all in Christ. For “he who has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9).

11. God as Father

Of all the names for God that are human analogies, the primary one is “Father”. Jesus always used this name, and we cannot improve on his theology! To claim to have corrected Christ, for instance by a more fashionably gender-inclusive and less “patriarchal” term than “Father”, is to claim far more than any prophet or saint ever claimed. As C. S. Lewis put it, “Christians believe that God himself has taught us how to speak of him.”

“By calling God ‘Father,’ the language of faith indicates two main things: that God is the first origin of everything and transcendent authority” [for ‘authority’ means ‘author’s rights’]; “and that he is at the same time goodness and loving care for all his children. God’s parental tenderness can also be expressed by the image of motherhood,³ which emphasizes God’s immanence, the intimacy between Creator and creature. The language of faith thus draws on the human experience of parents, who are in a way the first representatives of God for man. But this experience also tells us that human parents are fallible and can disfigure the face of fatherhood and motherhood. We ought therefore to recall that God transcends the human distinction between the sexes. He is neither man nor woman: he is God” (CCC 239).

The name “God” can be used either for the Father, the first Person; or for the Divine Being or substance, which is fully expressed in all three Persons of the Trinity. Thus Jesus is both the Son of God and God. He both addressed his Father as “God” and accepted Thomas’ worship of himself as “my Lord and my God” (Jn 20:28–29).

12. The reason for the doctrine of the Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity is the primary doctrine of Christianity in that it reveals the ultimate truth, the nature of ultimate reality, the nature of God. (It does not define God, but it truly reveals God.) Other mysteries of our

³ Cf. Isa 66:13; Ps 131:2.

faith tell us what God has done in time (the creation, the Incarnation, the Resurrection), but the Trinity tells us what God is in eternity.

Why do Christians believe the doctrine of the Trinity, that God is three Persons rather than only one? The doctrine sounds strange, even shocking, even after it is explained that this does not mean three Gods, or three parts to God.

We should not be surprised that the real God surprises us. Even created reality shocks our expectations—for instance, Einstein's theory of relativity. In fact, the reason for the doctrine of the Trinity is similar to the reason for Einstein's theory of relativity or any other good scientific theory: it alone explains all the data. The science of theology arises in a way similar to any other science: from data and the need to understand the data. The Church gradually defined the doctrine of the Trinity, in her first six ecumenical councils, to explain her data in Scripture. Theology has different data from other sciences, but it works by the same principle: that the data control the theory, not vice versa.

The datum for Christian theology is first of all Christ himself. On the one hand, he called God his Father, prayed to him, loved him, taught his teaching, and obeyed his will. On the other hand, he claimed to be one with, and equal to, the Father. And he also promised to send the Spirit. The scriptural data from which the Church derives the doctrine of the Trinity are essentially

- that there is only one God (Deut 6:4);
- that the Father is God (Jn 5:18);
- that the Son is God (Jn 8:58); and
- that the Holy Spirit is God (Mt 28:19).

The data are historical: God's progressive revelation of himself, first as the transcendent Creator "outside" us; then as the incarnate Savior "beside" us; then as the indwelling Spirit "inside" us. The reason for this progression, first Father (Old Testament), then Son (Gospels), then Spirit (Acts of the Apostles and the Church), is found in God's very being, which is love (1 Jn 4:18), and in the purpose and motive for God's self-revelation to man, which is love. For love's aim is always greater intimacy, deeper union with the beloved, so the stages of God's self-revelation are stages of increasing intimacy with man (from "outside" to "beside" to "inside").

As the *Catechism* explains it, “God’s very being is love. By sending his only Son and the Spirit of Love in the fullness of time, God has revealed his innermost secret: ⁴ God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange” (CCC 221).

13. Trinity and love

The reason God is a Trinity is because God is love. Love requires twoness, in fact threeness: the lover, the beloved, and the act, or relationship, of love between them. God is Trinity because God is love itself in its completeness.

The doctrine of the Trinity makes the most concrete and practical difference to our lives that can possibly be imagined. Because God is a Trinity, God is love. Because God is love, love is the supreme value. Because love is the supreme value, it is the meaning of our lives, for we are created in God's image. The fact that God is a Trinity is the reason why love is the meaning of life and the reason why nothing makes us as happy as love: because that is inscribed in our design. We are happy only when we stop trying to be what we were not designed to be. Cats are not happy living like dogs, and saints are not happy living like sinners.

The doctrine of the Trinity also tells us the nature of love. Love is altruistic, not egotistic. God is other-love because he has otherness within himself; he is more than one Person.

Pope John Paul II says: "God in his deepest mystery is not a solitude but a family, since he has in himself fatherhood, sonship, and the essence of the family, which is love." The doctrine of the Trinity means that the family is not a mere sociological or biological human fact but "goes all the way up" into the nature of God.

The conventional division between the "liberal" emphasis on love and the "conservative" emphasis on dogma completely breaks down in the Trinity. For here it is the ultimate dogma that is the real foundation for love as the ultimate value. One might almost say that God himself is both a "stick-in-the-mud conservative" (the Trinity is his unchangeable nature) and a "bleeding-heart liberal" (the crucifixion revealed the deepest secret of his heart).

14. The Trinity and human reason

The doctrine of the Trinity surpasses human reason, but it does not contradict human reason.

Human reason could never have discovered this truth by itself without divine revelation. Nor can human reason ever fully comprehend it. Nor can human reason prove it.

But reason cannot disprove this doctrine either. It is not logically self-contradictory. It says that God is one in nature and three in Persons, but it does not say that God is both one Person and three Persons, or one nature and three natures. That would be a meaningless self-contradiction.

⁴ Cf. 1 Cor 2:7-16; Eph 3:9-12.

"The divine persons do not share the one divinity among themselves" [as triplets share humanity among themselves] "but each of them is God whole and entire. . . . 'Each of the persons is that supreme reality, viz., the divine substance, essence or nature'⁵ (CCC 253).

"[T]he Church confesses . . . 'one God and Father from whom all things are, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things are, and one Holy Spirit in whom all things are'⁶ (CCC 258).

15. The alternatives to God

God is the ultimate reality. What are the fundamental errors about ultimate reality? What are the alternatives to the true God?

(People who believe these errors, of course, may well be good and sincere people. But that fact cannot turn an error into a truth, any more than the faults of those who believe something true can turn that truth into a falsehood.)

First, one may be an agnostic and claim to know or believe nothing about God ("agnosticism" comes from Greek *a + gnosis*, meaning "no knowledge").

The essential problem with being an agnostic is death. Christianity is God's marriage proposal to the soul; atheists answer "No", Christians answer "Yes", and agnostics answer "I don't know." But at death, "I don't know" turns into "No".

Second, one may be an atheist and believe in no God at all ("theos" means "God" in Greek).

Fewer than 1 percent of all men who have ever lived have been atheists. To be an atheist you must be an elitist and believe that there was nothing but a fantasy and an illusion at the very center of the lives of over 99 percent of all men and women in history. (By the way, there have been extremely few women who were atheists until very recently.)

Third, one may be a polytheist and believe in many gods, like most ancient pagans ("poly" means "many" in Greek). Very few people today are polytheists.

Fourth, one may be a pantheist ("pan" means "all" in Greek) and believe that God is everything and everything is God or a part of God or an aspect of God.

Pantheism is the opposite error from atheism. While atheism denies any God separate from the universe, pantheism denies any universe separate from God. Atheism denies the Creator, and pantheism denies the creation. Most forms of Hinduism and "New Age" religions are pantheistic.

Fifth, one may be a deist. Deism is another error that is the opposite of pantheism. Deism denies God's immanence (presence), while pantheism denies God's transcendence. Deism arose in the eighteenth century as an attempt to keep a God to create the universe but to deny him any active role in it, especially through miracles, which deists mistakenly thought were disproved by modern science.

Sixth, one may be a theist. Jews, Christians, and Muslims are theists. Theists believe in one God who is both immanent (omnipresent) and transcendent, the Creator of the universe and man.

Jews and Muslims (and Unitarians) are unitarian theists: they believe this one God is only one Person.

Christians are trinitarian theists: they believe this one God is "three Persons indeed, but one essence, substance or nature entirely simple"⁷ (CCC 202). ("Simple" here means one.)

The two most distinctive doctrines of Christianity, the two things all orthodox Christians believe and no one else does, are the Trinity and the Incarnation. The Incarnation means that one of the three Divine Persons—the Son—became a man, while remaining God; that Jesus is both human and divine. Thus the Incarnation and the Trinity fit together.

Jews, Christians, and Muslims believe in the same God. God has the same attributes according to all three religions, because Christians and Muslims learned of this God from the same source: his revelation to the Jews, beginning with Abraham. The three theistic religions agree about (a) the oneness of God and about (b) the nature of God, but they disagree about (c) the Persons in God, because they disagree about Christ. Jews and Muslims do not believe in the Trinity because they do not believe in the Incarnation; Christians believe in the Trinity because they believe in the Incarnation.

⁵ Lateran Council IV (1215): DS 804.

⁶ Council of Constantinople II: DS 421.

⁷ Lateran Council IV: DS 800.

Chapter 3

CREATION

1. The distinctiveness of the doctrine of creation
2. The meaning of the doctrine of creation
3. The consequences of the doctrine of creation for the nature of God
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1. The distinctiveness of the doctrine of creation

It is a simple and startling fact that no human mind on earth ever conceived the idea that the entire universe, visible and invisible, was created out of nothing, not just made or formed out of something, by a single all-powerful God—no one except the Jews and those who later learned this idea from the Jews, namely, Christians and then Muslims.

The Jewish idea of the universe as something *created* was as unique in history as the Jewish idea of God the Creator—the idea of a single all-perfect, all-powerful, all-wise, all-holy, all-just, and all-merciful God. The uniqueness of both ideas can be explained by the same fact: both came from God's revelation, not man's imagination (see Is 60:1–3).

The truth about our ultimate origin—the doctrine of creation—had the same supernatural source as the equally unique and startling doctrine about our ultimate destiny—to be spiritually married to the one perfect God. That too is something “no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9).

Different human cultures imagined different ultimate destinies: Nirvana, the Happy Hunting Grounds, the Elysian Fields, the Return to Paradise—

but all these pale in comparison with the divinely revealed truth about our destiny. Similarly, different cultures also invented many different so-called creation myths, but none ever got as far as a Creator of the universe out of nothing.

2. The meaning of the doctrine of creation

The Hebrew language had a unique word for this unique concept, found in no other ancient culture. “[T]he verb ‘create’—Hebrew *bara*—always has God for its subject” (CCC 290). Man cannot literally create. Man can be “creative” in giving new form to matter, but God alone creates matter itself. Man can make something new out of something old, but God alone can make something out of nothing. For the gap between something new and something old is only finite, and man's finite power can often close that gap; but the gap between nothing and something is infinite, and only God's infinite power can close that gap.

To create a thing is to give it existence. To make a thing means to give new form to matter, to something that already exists. What is created is not just changed but made to exist in the first place.

The closest man ever comes to creating is “procreating”. Procreating is cooperating with God's most important act of creation, which is not the creation of mindless galaxies, which are doomed to death in only a few trillion years, but the creation of human beings, with immortal souls, destined to exist eternally. When God creates a new human soul out of nothing, he does so only when a man and a woman make a new body out of their previously existing matter and genetic form by sexual intercourse. That is why sex is holy.

We will now explore some of the consequences of the doctrine of creation; that is, what difference does this idea of creation make?—to our idea of God, of the universe, and of ourselves and our lives? Hardly any other idea in human history has ever made a greater difference.

3. The consequences of the doctrine of creation for the nature of God

The God who creates is a radically different God from any other. No pagan, Gentle god-idea comes even close.

a. For one thing, he must have infinite power to bring things an infinite distance, from nothingness into being.

b. For another thing, the Creator and Designer of this whole universe must be infinitely wise, for any designer must know everything he designs.

c. Also, he must be infinitely loving, infinitely generous, for creation is

the gift of existence itself, and none of us could possibly deserve any gift before we existed—including the gift of existence.

d. Finally, he must also be a great artist, with a great sense of beauty, to have invented, all by himself, the stars, the sea, the snow. "Poems are made by fools like me, / But only God can make a tree" (Joyce Kilmer).

God is the Creator; therefore God must be infinite in power, wisdom, love, and beauty.

What difference does knowing this truth about God make for our daily lives in this world? The difference is total. It is that *all* the power, wisdom, goodness, and beauty we ever see or desire or admire or love must come from this one God, for he has no rival. Because of the fact of creation, because God is the source of the very being of every good thing, he is not just one good among others, and we are fools to try to find any good apart from him. Thus the first and greatest commandment is to worship him alone and to love all that we love for him; for it is *from* him. All goodness is God's goodness. Only evil is not his.

4. The consequences of the doctrine of creation for the nature of the universe

If God created the universe, then the universe is really real, true, good, beautiful, and one.

a. It is real, not just an appearance or a dream, as taught in most Hindu, Buddhist, and New Age philosophies.

b. It is true—orderly and intelligible—for it came, not from mindless chance, but from divine wisdom. Thus the doctrine of creation is the strongest basis for natural science.

c. It is good and valuable and to be appreciated and cared for, for "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen 1:31). When Scripture speaks disparagingly of "the world", the word used is not *gaia*, "the earth", the world of nature, which is full of God's glory, but *aiōn*, "this age", the man-made world of history, which is full of folly, sin, and sorrow.

d. It is beautiful. "The beauty of creation reflects the infinite beauty of the Creator" (CCC 341). The doctrine of creation explains why we find nature so beautiful and satisfying, why it moves us so and makes us happy.

e. It is one. "There is a *solidarity among all creatures* arising from the fact that all have the same Creator and are all ordered to his glory" (CCC 344). This is the ultimate basis for community: the fact that all things have the same origin (God's act of creation) and the same end (God's glory). It is one *uni-*verse because it has one Creator.

5. The consequences of the doctrine of creation for human life

a. Since God's act of creating the universe gave everything in it reality, order, goodness, beauty, and solidarity, and since we are a part of the universe (in fact, the highest, most recent, most complex, and most intelligent part, according to both Scripture and the theory of evolution), these five characteristics apply to us too, to us especially: reality, order, goodness, beauty, and solidarity.

b. The doctrine of creation alters not only our origin but also our destiny (see CCC 282). The Church tells us that we are God's children, created in his image and destined to share his heavenly glory. The modern secular world tells us that we are only accidentally evolved dust—"dust in the wind"—destined only for the dust of death.

c. If God is our Creator, we have no rights over against God, as we do over against each other. How could a character in a novel have rights over against his author? Since we are created out of nothing, we have nothing we can call our own over against God. No little corner of our lives, no little chunk of our time or money, or even our thoughts, can rightly be kept or grasped.

d. Instead, all good is from the one Creator, everything is a free love-gift that has come down from him (Jas 1:17). And therefore everything is to be freely and lovingly offered up to him. Since every good thing is from him, every good deed can be for him. St. Thérèse of Lisieux said we can glorify God by picking up a pin for his sake.

e. Since the Creator must be infinitely powerful, wise, and good, we can trust him totally. The God who can "do" the whole universe, the God who can do Everything, can do anything, and we can trust him with everything. The Creator and Lord of the universe and of every person in it lacks neither the love to will our good nor the wisdom to know it nor the power to effect it. That is why it is so reasonable that "Jesus asks for childlike abandonment to the providence of our heavenly Father who takes care of his children's smallest needs" (CCC 305; see Mt 6:31–33).

f. Since the very existence of things is God's gift, God's deed; and since existence is not "outside" anything that exists, but "inside" it; therefore God is present in every existing thing, everything we touch. "[B]ecause he is the . . . Creator, the first cause of all that exists, God is present to his creatures' inmost being: 'In him we live and move and have our being' [Acts 17:28]" (CCC 300).

6. Christ in creation

Scripture says about Jesus Christ that "all things were created through him and for him" (Col 1:16).

All things were made through him, for he is the Word of God (Jn 1:1), and when God created the universe, according to Genesis, he did so through his creative Word. He simply spoke ("Let there be light"), and it came to be ("And there was light"). This Word is the pre-incarnate Christ, the eternal Christ: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (Jn 1:1, 3).

All things were made *for* him too, for he is the end and purpose for which the Father created the universe:

—"The world was made for the glory of God"¹ (CCC 293);

—And Christ is the glory of God, as a perfect son is the glory of his father and as sunlight is the glory of the sun. Christ is God's Sonlight.

—So the world was made for Christ. Christ is the reason for creation.

7. God's motive for creating

God had no need to create. He was not lonely or bored or incomplete. He has no imperfections. "God created all things 'not to increase his glory' [for that is impossible] 'but to show it forth and to communicate it'²" (CCC 293).

Why did he do it? The motive for this sharing of his glory is pure unselfish love. "God has no other reason for creating than his love and goodness" (CCC 293). This love is natural to God. It is his nature, his character, his essence. It is the nature of goodness to be self-giving, or "diffusive of itself" (as St. Thomas Aquinas puts it).

This means willing the good of the other, or charity. God gained nothing by creating us, but we gained everything, first of all our very existence. God created us for the same reason good and generous parents have many children: to share their love.

But though it was natural for God to create, it was not necessary. The universe "is not the product of any necessity whatever, nor of blind fate or chance. We believe that it proceeds from God's free will" (CCC 293; see Rev 4:11). Nothing but God *has* to be; only God is necessary. Every creature is contingent, a "might-not-have-been".

8. Creation and evolution

The doctrine of creation and the theory of biological evolution do not necessarily contradict each other. We do not know how God arranged for

the world he created to come to perfection. He could have used the evolution of species by natural selection ("the survival of the fittest") to produce the human body. Scripture says he "formed" it out "of dust from the ground" (Gen 2:7). However, the breath of life (the soul) was then "breathed" into man by God (Gen 2:7). Souls cannot evolve from matter but must be directly created by God.

Insofar as evolution explains bodies, it does not contradict the doctrine of creation. Insofar as it claims to explain souls, it does. But it is unscientific and illogical to try to explain immaterial souls by material biology.

Insofar as evolution explains natural processes, it does not contradict creation. Insofar as it denies supernatural divine design, it does; but then evolution goes beyond its scientific scope and becomes a theology instead of a natural science.

There can be no real contradiction, ever, between true science and true religion, because truth can never contradict truth.

9. The natural hierarchy

God created the universe as a hierarchy; some things are "higher", more valuable, and more important than others. Each human being may be equal in value in the sight of God, since all are made in his image; but irrational animals are not equal to human beings. They do not have rational souls, free choice, or the knowledge of God. If animals were equal to humans, eating meat would be cannibalism.

Democracy and equality are good ideas in politics, but nature is not a democracy. God is its absolute monarch, angels his ministers, men his children, animals his pets, plants his decorations, minerals his construction materials, and time his land. All are good, all are precious, and all are loved, but not *equally*. That would be chaos, not cosmos.

"The *hierarchy of creatures* is expressed by the order of the 'six days' [of creation], 'from the less perfect to the more perfect' (CCC 342). The theory of evolution agrees with this. Like the days of creation, evolution also proceeds in a progressive and hierarchical pattern.

10. Providence

God created the universe full of time. Everything in it changes. It was not complete all at once, like God, but it grows toward its proper perfection.

Divine providence is God's plan by which he guides his creation toward this perfection, toward its end (see CCC 302). The universe is a story, God is its Author, and providence is its plot. Man is its protagonist, or main character. (If there are creatures with rational souls on other planets, they are also

¹ *Dei Filius*, can. § 5; DS 3025.

² St. Bonaventure, *In II Sent.* 1, 2, 2, 1.

protagonists in God's story. For God is the God of the whole universe, not only one little planet.)

11. First (supernatural) causes and second (natural) causes

When we thank God for the gifts of nature—for example, when we say grace at meals and thank him for our food—we acknowledge that things in nature have two causes: the Creator and other creatures; the ultimate cause and the proximate cause; first and second causes; supernatural and natural causes. This theological fact has two important practical consequences:

a. All good must be traced back to God, ultimately. We must give him all the gratitude and all the glory. "And so we see the Holy Spirit, the principal author of Sacred Scripture, often attributing actions to God without mentioning any secondary causes." [See *Jonah* 1:4, for instance.] "This is not a 'primitive mode of speech,' but a profound way of recalling God's primacy and absolute Lordship over history and the world,³ and so of educating his people to trust in him" (CCC 304).

Our lives can be transformed by this simple truth: we can and should see God in everything and love God in everything. Creatures are like roads on which God comes to us and we come to God. We can become saints in the middle of the most active life in the world if we live in this light and "practise the presence of God".

b. But "[f]ar from diminishing the creature's dignity, this truth enhances it" (CCC 308). For God loves to use natural means to do his work, to exalt and glorify his creatures, especially man.

This is true of supernatural things like prayer as well as natural things like food. "God instituted prayer in order to give to his creatures the dignity of being causes" (Pascal).

"To human beings God even gives the power of freely sharing in his providence" [thus human free will and divine providence are not contradictory but complementary parts of the same divine plan] "by entrusting them with . . . responsibility. . . . Though often unconscious collaborators with God's will, they can also enter deliberately into the divine plan by their actions, their prayers, and their sufferings"⁴ (CCC 307).

"God is the sovereign master of his plan. But to carry it out he also makes use of his creatures' cooperation. This use is not a sign of weakness, but rather a token of almighty God's greatness" (CCC 306). A great king exalts his subordinates; a weak and selfish king does not.

Catholics affirm the absolute sovereignty of God as strongly as Calvinists

or Muslims do, but they also emphasize second causes: for instance, the visible Church, physical sacraments, the saints, and Mary.

Non-Catholics often worry that the love and respect we give to these things will detract from God's glory. But the spirit of Catholicism refuses any rivalry between nature and grace. "Grace perfects nature", and nature points to grace. For instance, Mary always points us to her divine Son, not to herself. God exalts his saints, and his saints exalt God.

This unselfish exaltation of the other person begins in the Trinity itself, where the Father loves and glorifies the Son, and the Son loves and glorifies the Father, and the Spirit that eternally proceeds is that very love.

12. Man's place in creation

God created "the heavens and the earth" (*Gen* 1:1), that is, "all that is, seen and unseen" (CCC 325, referring to the Nicene Creed). Man lives in both dimensions. He lives in the visible world of matter by his body, and he lives in the invisible world of spirit by his soul. The acts of the soul are invisible and immaterial: thoughts, feelings, desires, and choices have no size, weight, shape, or color.

Man is the lowest of spirits and the highest of animals. He is the center and bridge of the created universe. He is creation's priest, for when he offers his whole self to God he offers all creation, since he is in himself all that creation is: spirit (mind and will), which he shares with angels; sensations and feelings, which he shares with animals; organic life, which he shares with plants; and physical matter, which he shares with chemicals.

13. Angels

Angels are not mythical but real. They are not an optional addition to the Catholic faith; their existence is a dogma of the faith (*Lateran Council IV*). Angels appear many, many times in Scripture. The life of Christ especially is surrounded by their work (see CCC 333).

"Angel" means "messenger". St. Augustine says: "'Angel' is the name of their office, not of their nature. If you seek the name of their nature, it is 'spirit'."⁵ (CCC 329). Angels are spirits who worship and serve God by ministering to men. (So do we!) They minister to men by announcing messages from God (their most important messages were at Christ's birth) and by guarding and guiding us.

Every human being has a guardian angel assigned to him from birth to death. Christ himself assured us of that: see *Matthew* 18:10 and *Luke* 16:22.

³ Cf. *Isa* 10:5-15; 45:5-7; *Deut* 32:39; *Sir* 11:14.

⁴ Cf. *Col* 1:24.

⁵ St. Augustine, *En. in Ps.* 103, 1, 15; *PL* 37, 1348.