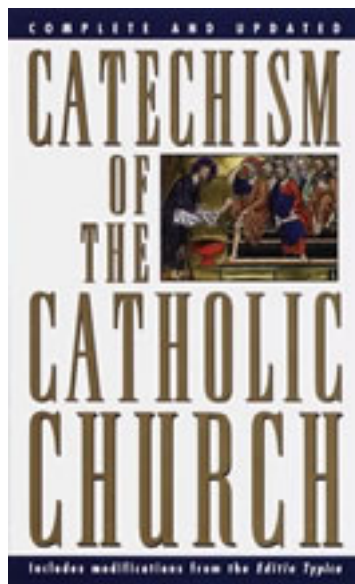


[Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) [1]

1997



We present here a selection of numbers of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1997) that concern: the “problem of origins”; the way to interpret evolution; the problem of evil in the world, and other topics regarding the relationship between Christian faith, reason and scientific knowledge. Strictly speaking, the Catechism does not talk about “evolution”; it speaks, rather, of a “created universe” on its way of becoming, and so destined for fulfillment. Concerning the question that science raises about the “origins”, the Catechism says that “It is not only a question of knowing when and how the universe arose physically, or when man appeared, but rather of discovering the meaning of such an origin.” References to science and faith are more frequent than could be guessed at first sight. The aim of a Catechism is to recall, as well as to organically organize, what is grounded on the Sacred Scripture and on the Church’s Tradition – mainly under its Magisterial declarations – illustrating them with a language that is at same time theological, pastoral and catechetical: a language that must be adequate to the epoch and to the expressions of the particular historical context we live in. With all the limitations that are typical of every short and didactic description, there is no doubt in saying that the current Catechism is nonetheless very remarkable in this effort of talking to contemporary men and women about such delicate topics.



## **On the Ultimate Questions and on the Existence of God starting from the Existence of Creatures**

31. Created in God's image and called to know and love him, the person who seeks God discovers certain ways of coming to know him. These are also called proofs for the existence of God, not in the sense of proofs in the natural sciences, but rather in the sense of "converging and convincing arguments", which allow us to attain certainty about the truth. These "ways" of approaching God from creation have a twofold point of departure: the physical world, and the human person.

32. *The world*: starting from movement, becoming, contingency, and the world's order and beauty, one

can come to a knowledge of God as the origin and the end of the universe.

As St. Paul says of the Gentiles: «For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made» (Rm 1:19-20; cfr. also Act 14,15.17; 17,27-28; Wis 13:1-9).

And St. Augustine issues this challenge: “Question the beauty of the earth, question the beauty of the sea, question the beauty of the air distending and diffusing itself, question the beauty of the sky. question all these realities. All respond: See, we are beautiful. Their beauty is a profession [confessio]. These beauties are subject to change. Who made them if not the Beautiful One [Pulcher] who is not subject to change?” (*Sermones*, 241, 2: PL 38, 1134).

33. *The human person*: with his openness to truth and beauty, his sense of moral goodness, his freedom and the voice of his conscience, with his longings for the infinite and for happiness, man questions himself about God's existence. In all this he discerns signs of his spiritual soul. the soul, the seed of eternity we bear in ourselves, irreducible to the merely material, can have its origin only in God.

34. The world, and man, attest that they contain within themselves neither their first principle nor their final end, but rather that they participate in Being itself, which alone is without origin or end. Thus, in different ways, man can come to know that there exists a reality which is the first cause and final end of all things, a reality “that everyone calls God”.

39. In defending the ability of human reason to know God, the Church is expressing her confidence in the possibility of speaking about him to all men and with all men, and therefore of dialogue with other religions, with philosophy and science, as well as with unbelievers and atheists.

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” (Vatican Council I, *Dei Filius*, DH 3017). “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” (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 36).

2500. The practice of goodness is accompanied by spontaneous spiritual joy and moral beauty. Likewise, truth carries with it the joy and splendor of spiritual beauty. Truth is beautiful in itself. Truth in words, the rational expression of the knowledge of created and uncreated reality, is necessary to man, who is endowed with intellect. But truth can also find other complementary forms of human expression, above all when it is a matter of evoking what is beyond words: the depths of the human heart, the exaltations of the soul, the mystery of God. Even before revealing himself to man in words of truth, God reveals himself to him through the universal language of creation, the work of his Word, of his wisdom: the order and harmony of the cosmos - which both the child and the scientist discover - «from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator», «for the author of beauty created them» (Wis 13:3).



## **Catechesis on Creation**

282. Catechesis on creation is of major importance. It concerns the very foundations of human and Christian life: for it makes explicit the response of the Christian faith to the basic question that men of all times have asked themselves: “Where do we come from?” “Where are we going?” “What is our origin?” “What is our end?” “Where does everything that exists come from and where is it going?” The two questions, the first about the origin and the second about the end, are inseparable. They are decisive for the meaning and orientation of our life and actions.

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” (Wis 7:17-21).

284. The great interest accorded to these studies is strongly stimulated by a question of another order, which goes beyond the proper domain of the natural sciences. It is not only a question of knowing when and how the universe arose physically, or when man appeared, but rather of discovering the meaning of such an origin: is the universe governed by chance, blind fate, anonymous necessity, or by a transcendent, intelligent and good Being called “God.” And if the world does come from God's wisdom and goodness, why is there evil? Where does it come from? Who is responsible for it? Is there any liberation from it?

285. Since the beginning the Christian faith has been challenged by responses to the question of origins that differ from its own. Ancient religions and cultures produced many myths concerning origins. Some philosophers have said that everything is God, that the world is God, or that the development of the world is the development of God (Pantheism). Others have said that the world is a necessary emanation arising from God and returning to him. Still others have affirmed the existence of two eternal principles, Good and Evil, Light and Darkness, locked, in permanent conflict (Dualism, Manichaeism). According to some of these conceptions, the world (at least the physical world) is evil, the product of a fall, and is thus to be rejected or left behind (Gnosticism). Some admit that the world was made by God, but as by a watch-maker who, once he has made a watch, abandons it to itself (Deism). Finally, others reject any transcendent origin for the world, but see it as merely the interplay of matter that has always existed (Materialism). All these attempts bear witness to the permanence and universality of the question of origins. This inquiry is distinctively human.



## **Purpose of Creation and Purpose within Creation**

295. We believe that God created the world according to his wisdom. It is not the product of any necessity whatever, nor of blind fate or chance. We believe that it proceeds from God's free will; he wanted to make his creatures share in his being, wisdom and goodness.

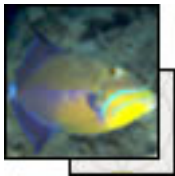
296. We believe that God needs no pre-existent thing or any help in order to create, nor is creation any sort of necessary emanation from the divine substance. God creates freely “out of nothing.”

302 Creation has its own goodness and proper perfection, but it did not spring forth complete from the hands of the Creator. The universe was created “in a state of journeying” (*in statu viae*) toward an ultimate perfection yet to be attained, to which God has destined it. We call «divine providence» the dispositions by which God guides his creation toward this perfection:

By his providence God protects and governs all things which he has made, reaching mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and ordering all things well. For all are open and laid bare to his eyes, even those things which are yet to come into existence through the free action of creatures.

306 God is the sovereign master of his plan. But to carry it out he also makes use of his creatures' co-operation. This use is not a sign of weakness, but rather a token of almighty God's greatness and goodness. For God grants his creatures not only their existence, but also the dignity of acting on their own, of being causes and principles for each other, and thus of co-operating in the accomplishment of his plan.

310. But why did God not create a world so perfect that no evil could exist in it? With infinite power God could always create something better. But with infinite wisdom and goodness God freely willed to create a world “in a state of journeying” towards its ultimate perfection. In God's plan this process of becoming involves the appearance of certain beings and the disappearance of others, the existence of the more perfect alongside the less perfect, both constructive and destructive forces of nature. With physical good there exists also physical evil as long as creation has not reached perfection.



## **On the Origin and Reciprocal Ordering of the Creatures**

338. *Nothing exists that does not owe its existence to God the Creator.* the world began when God's word drew it out of nothingness; all existent beings, all of nature, and all human history are rooted in this primordial event, the very genesis by which the world was constituted and time begun (cf. St. Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, 1, 2, 4: PL 35, 175).

339. *Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection.* For each one of the works of the “six days” it is said: “And God saw that it was good.” “By the very nature of creation, material being is endowed with its own stability, truth and excellence, its own order and laws” (*Gaudium et spes*, 36). Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things which would be in contempt of the Creator and would bring disastrous consequences for human beings and their environment.

340. *God wills the interdependence of creatures.* The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other.

341. *The beauty of the universe*: the order and harmony of the created world results from the diversity of beings and from the relationships which exist among them. Man discovers them progressively as the laws of nature. They call forth the admiration of scholars. the beauty of creation reflects the infinite beauty of the Creator and ought to inspire the respect and submission of man's intellect and will.



## **Ethical Aspects of the Scientific Practice**

2292. Scientific, medical, or psychological experiments on human individuals or groups can contribute to healing the sick and the advancement of public health.

2293. Basic scientific research, as well as applied research, is a significant expression of man's dominion over creation. Science and technology are precious resources when placed at the service of man and promote his integral development for the benefit of all. By themselves however they cannot disclose the meaning of existence and of human progress. Science and technology are ordered to man, from whom they take their origin and development; hence they find in the person and in his moral values both evidence of their purpose and awareness of their limits.

2294. It is an illusion to claim moral neutrality in scientific research and its applications. On the other hand, guiding principles cannot be inferred from simple technical efficiency, or from the usefulness accruing to some at the expense of others or, even worse, from prevailing ideologies. Science and technology by their very nature require unconditional respect for fundamental moral criteria. They must be at the service of the human person, of his inalienable rights, of his true and integral good, in conformity with the plan and the will of God.

2295. Research or experimentation on the human being cannot legitimate acts that are in themselves contrary to the dignity of persons and to the moral law. the subjects' potential consent does not justify such acts. Experimentation on human beings is not morally legitimate if it exposes the subject's life or physical and psychological integrity to disproportionate or avoidable risks. Experimentation on human beings does not conform to the dignity of the person if it takes place without the informed consent of the subject or those who legitimately speak for him.

2296. *Organ transplants* are in conformity with the moral law if the physical and psychological dangers and risks incurred by the donor are proportionate to the good sought for the recipient. Donation of organs after death is a noble and meritorious act and is to be encouraged as a manifestation of generous solidarity. It is not morally acceptable if the donor or those who legitimately speak for him have not given their explicit consent.

It is furthermore morally inadmissible directly to bring about the disabling mutilation or death of a human being, even in order to delay the death of other persons.

2417. God entrusted animals to the stewardship of those whom he created in his own image (cf. Gen 2:19-20; 9:1-4). Hence it is legitimate to use animals for food and clothing. They may be domesticated to help man in his work and leisure. Medical and scientific experimentation on animals is a morally acceptable practice, if it remains within reasonable limits and contributes to caring for or saving human

lives.

Source of the English digital text: *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Eng. transl. by Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 1997<sup>2</sup>. See the [full text of the Catechism](#) [2]

[From the Catholic Church Magisterium](#) [3]

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