

The Baltimore Catechism

Lesson 1: ON THE END OF MAN

The end of a thing is the purpose for which it was made. The end of a watch is to keep time. The end of a pen is to write, etc. A thing is good only in proportion to the way it fulfills the end for which it was made. A watch may be very beautifully made, a very rare ornament, but if it will not keep time it is useless as a watch. The same may be said of the pen, or of anything else. Now for what purpose was man made? If we discover that, we know his end. When we look around us in the world, we see a purpose or end for everything. We see that the soil is made for the plants and trees to grow in; because if there was no need of things growing, it would be better to have a nice clean solid rock to walk upon, and then we would be spared the trouble of making roads, and paving streets. But things must grow, and so we must have soil. Again, the vegetables and plants are made for animals to feed upon; while the animals themselves are made for man, that they may help him in his work or serve him for food. Thus it is evident everything in the world was made to serve something else. What then was man made for? Was it for anything in the world? We see that all classes of beings are created for something higher than themselves. Thus plants are higher than soil, because they, have life and soil has not. Animals are higher than plants, because they not only have life, but they can feel and plants cannot. Man is higher than animals, because he not only has life and can feel, but he has also reason and intelligence, and can understand, while animals cannot. Therefore we must look for something higher than man himself, but there is nothing higher than man in this world, and so we must look beyond it to find that for which he was made. And looking beyond it and considering all things, we find that he was made for God-to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him both in this world and in the next. Again, we read in the Bible (*Gen. 1*) that at the creation of the world all things were made before man, and that he was created last. Therefore, if all these things could exist without man, we cannot say he was made for them. The world existed before him and can exist after him. The world goes along without any particular man, and the same may be said of all men. Neither was man made to stay here awhile to become rich, or learned, or powerful, because all do not become rich-some are very poor; all are not learned-some are very ignorant; all are not powerful-some are slaves. But since all men are alike and equal in this, that they have all bodies formed in the same way, and all souls that are immortal, they should all be made for the same end. For example, you could not make a pen like a watch if you want it to write. Although pens differ in size, shape, etc., they have all one general form which is essential to them. So, although men differ in many things, they are all alike in the essential thing, viz., that they are composed of body and soul, and made to the image and likeness of God. Hence, as pens are made only to write with, so all men must have only one and the same end, namely, to serve God.

1. Q. Who made the world?

A. God made the world.

The "**world**" here means more than the earth-more than is shown on a map of the world. It means everything that we can see-sun, moon, stars, etc.; even those things that we can see only with great telescopes. Everything, too, that we may be able to see in the future, either with our eyes alone, or aided by instruments, is included in the word "world." We can call it the universe.

2. Q. Who is God?

A. God is the Creator of Heaven and earth, and of all things.

3. Q. What is man?

A. Man is a creature composed of a body and soul, and made to the image and likeness of God.

"**Creature,**" i.e., a thing created. Man differs from anything else in creation. All things else are either entirely matter, or entirely spirit. An angel, for example, is all spirit, and a stone is all matter; but man is a combination of both spirit and matter--of soul and of body.

4. Q. Is this likeness in the body or in the soul?

A. This likeness is chiefly in the soul.

5. Q. How is the soul like to God?

A. The soul is like God because it is a spirit that will never die, and has understanding and free will.

My soul is like to God in four things.

It is "**a spirit:**" It really exists, but cannot be seen with the eyes of our body. Every spirit is invisible, but every invisible thing is not a spirit. We cannot see the wind. We can feel its influence, we can see its work-for example, the dust flying, trees swaying, ships sailing, etc.-but the wind itself we never see. Again, we never see electricity. We see the light or effect it produces, but we never see the electricity itself. Yet no one denies the existence of the wind or of electricity on account of their being invisible. Why then should anyone say there are no spirits-no God, no angels, no souls-simply because they cannot be seen, when we have other proofs, stronger than the testimony of our sight, that they really and truly exist?

My soul will "**never die;**" i.e., will never cease to exist; it is immortal. This is a very wonderful thing to think of. It will last as long as God Himself.

My soul "**has understanding,**" i.e., it has the gift of reason. This gift enables man to reflect upon all his actions the reasons why he should do certain things and why he should not do them. By reason he reflects upon the past, and judges what may happen in the future. He sees the consequences of his actions. He not only knows what he does, but why he does it. This is the gift that places man high above the brute animals in the order of creation; and hence man is not merely an animal, but he is a rational animal-an animal with the gift of reason.

Brute animals have not reason, but only instinct, i.e., they follow certain impulses or feelings which God gave them at their creation. He established certain laws for each class or kind of animals, and they, without knowing it, follow these laws; and when we see them following their laws, always in the same way, we say it is their nature. Animals act at times as if they knew just why they were acting; but it is not so. It is we who reason upon their actions, and see why they do them; but they do not reason, they only follow their instinct. If animals could reason, they ought to improve in their condition. Men become more civilized day by day. They invent many things that were unknown to their forefathers. One man can improve upon the works of another, etc. But, we never see anything of this kind in the actions of animals. The same kind of birds, for instance, build the same kind of nests, generation after generation, without ever making change or improvement in them. When man teaches an animal any action, it cannot teach the same to its young. It is clear, therefore, that animals cannot reason.

Though man has the gift of reason by which he can learn a great deal, he cannot learn all through his reason; for there are many things that God Himself must teach him. When God

teaches, we call the truths He makes known to us Revelation. How could man ever know about the Trinity through his reason alone, when, after God has made known to him that It exists, he cannot understand it? It is the same for all the other mysteries.

My soul has "**free will:**" This is another grand gift of God, by which I am able to do or not do a thing, just as I please. I can even sin and refuse to obey God. God Himself-while He leaves me my free will-could not oblige me to do anything, unless I wished to do it; neither could the devil. I am free therefore, and I may use this great gift either to benefit or injure myself. If I were not free I would not deserve reward or punishment for my actions, for no one is or should be punished for doing what he cannot help. God would not punish us for sin if we were not free to commit or avoid it. I turn this freedom to my benefit if I do what God wishes when I could do the opposite; for He will be more pleased with my conduct, and grant a greater reward than He would bestow if I obeyed simply because obliged to do so. Animals have no free will. If, for example, they suffer from hunger and you place food before them, they will eat; but man can starve, if he wills to do so, with a feast before him. For the same reason man can endure more fatigue than any other animal of the same bodily strength. In traveling, for instance, animals give up when exhausted, but man may be dying as he walks, and still, by his strong will-power, force his wearied limbs to move. But you will say, did not the lions in the den into which Daniel was cast because he would not act against his conscience, obey the wicked king and offend God-as we read in Holy Scripture (Dan. 6:16)refrain from eating him, even when they were starving with hunger? Yes; but they did not do so of themselves, but by the power of God preventing them: and that is why the delivery of Daniel from their mouths was a miracle. It is clear, because the same lions immediately tore in pieces Daniel's enemies when they were cast into the den.

6. Q. Why did God make you?

A. God made me to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him forever in the next.

"To know" Him, because we must know of a thing before we can love it. A poor savage in Africa never longs to be at a game or contest going on in America, because he does not know it and therefore cannot love it. We see a person and know him; if he pleases us we love him, and if we love him we will try to serve him; we will not be satisfied with doing merely what he asks of us, but will do whatever we think might give him pleasure. So it is in regard to God. We must first know Him-learn who He is from our catechisms and books of instruction, but especially from the teaching of God's ministers, the Holy Father, bishops and priests. When we know Him, we shall love Him. If we knew Him perfectly, we should love Him perfectly; so the better we know Him the more we shall love Him. And as it is our chief duty to love Him and serve Him upon earth, it becomes our strict duty to learn here whatever we can of His nature, attributes, and holy laws. The saints and angels in Heaven know God so well that they must love Him, and cannot therefore offend Him.

You have all seen some person in the world, or maybe several persons, whom you have greatly admired; still you did not love them perfectly; there was always some little thing about them in looks, manners, or disposition that could be rendered more pleasing; some defect or want you would like to see supplied; some fault or imperfection you would like to see corrected. Now suppose you had the power to take all the good qualities you found in the persons you loved and unite them in one person, in whom there would be nothing displeasing, but everything perfect and beautiful. Do you not think you would love such a person very much indeed?

Moreover, suppose you knew that person loved you intensely, would it not be your greatest delight to be ever with such a friend? Well, then, all the lovable qualities and beauties you see in created beings come from God and are bestowed by Him; yet all the good qualities on earth and

those of the angels and saints in Heaven, and even of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, if united in one person would be nothing compared to the goodness and beauty of God. How good and how lovable, therefore, must He be! And what shall we say when we think that He loves us with a greater love than we could ever love Him, even with our most earnest efforts? Try then first to know God and you will surely love and serve Him. Do not be satisfied with the little you learn of Him in the Catechism, but afterward read good books, and above all hear sermons and instructions.

"In this world:" Because unless we do what is pleasing to Him in this world we cannot be with Him in the next. Our condition in the next world depends entirely upon our conduct in this. Thus we have discovered the answer to the great question, What is the end of man; for what was he made?

7. Q. Of which must we take more care, our soul or our body?

A. We must take more care of our soul than of our body.

8. Q. Why must we take more care of our soul than of our body.

A. We must take more care of our soul than of our body, because in losing our soul we lose God and everlasting happiness.

Every sensible person will take most care of that which is most valuable. If a girl had a hundred dollars in a ten-cent pocket-book, you would consider her a great fool if she threw away the hundred dollars for fear of spoiling the pocket-book. Now, he is a greater fool who throws away his soul in order to save his body some little inconvenience, or gratify its wicked desires or inclinations. Wherever the soul will be, there the body will be also; so we should, in a certain way, try to forget the body and make sure of getting the soul safely into Heaven. You would not think much of the wisdom of a boy who allowed his kite to be smashed in pieces by giving his whole attention to the tail of the kite. If he took care to keep the kite itself high in air and away from every danger, the tail would follow it; and even if the tail did get entangled, it would have a good chance of being freed while the kite was still flying. But of what use is it to save a worthless piece of rag, if the kite-the valuable thing-is lost? Just in the same way, of what use is our body if our soul is lost? And remember we have only one soul. Therefore, make sure to save the soul, and the body also will be saved-that is, the whole man will be saved; for we cannot save the soul and lose the body; they will both be saved or both be lost.

9. Q. What must we do to save our souls?

A. To save our souls, we must worship God by faith, hope, and charity; that is, we must believe in Him, hope in Him, and love Him with all our heart.

"Worship," that is, give Him divine honor. We honor persons for their worth and excellence, and since God is the most excellent, we give Him the highest honors, differing from others not merely in degrees but in kind-divine honors that belong to Him alone. And justly so, for the vilest animal upon the earth is a thousand times more nearly our equal than the most perfect creature, man or angel, is the equal of God. In speaking of worship, theologians generally distinguish three kinds, namely: *latria*, or that supreme worship due to God alone, which cannot be transferred to any creature without committing the sin of idolatry; *dulia*, or that secondary veneration we give to saints and angels as the special friends of God; *hyperdulia*, or that higher veneration which we give to the Blessed Virgin as the most exalted of all God's creatures. It is higher than the veneration we give to the other saints, but infinitely inferior to the worship we give to God Himself. We show God our special honor by never doubting anything He reveals to us, therefore by **"faith"**; by expecting with certainty whatever He promises, therefore by **"hope"**; and finally by loving Him more than anyone else in the world, therefore by **"charity."**

But someone may say, I think I love my parents more than God. Well, let us see. Suppose your mother should command you to commit a sinful act (a thing no good mother would do) and you have therefore to choose between offending her or Almighty God. Now, although you love your mother very much, if in this instance you prefer to displease her rather than commit the sin that offends God, you show that you love God more than her. Again, many who dearly love their parents leave them that they may consecrate their lives to the special service of God in some religious community and thus prove their greater love for Him. The love we have for God is intellectual rather than sentimental; and since it is not measured by the intensity of our feelings, how are we to know that we love Him best? By our determination never to offend Him for any person or thing in the world, however dear to us, and by our readiness to obey and serve Him before all others.

10. Q. How shall we know the things which we are to believe?

A. We shall know the things which we are to believe from the Catholic Church, through which God speaks to us.

"**Catholic Church**" in this answer means the Pope, councils, bishops, and priests who teach in the Church.

11. Q. Where shall we find the chief truths which the Catholic Church teaches?

A. We shall find the chief truths which the Catholic Church teaches in the Apostles' Creed.

"**Chief**" because the Apostles' Creed does not contain in an explicit manner all the truths we must believe. For example, there is nothing in the Apostles' Creed about the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, about the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, or the infallibility of the Pope; and yet we must believe these and other articles of faith not in the Apostles' Creed. It contains only the "chief" and not all the truths.

12. Q. Say the Apostles' Creed.

A. I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; He descended into Hell; the third day He arose again from the dead; He ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

"**Descend**" means to go down, and "**ascend**" to go up.