

Catechism Refresher

What is our purpose in life?

To know and to love God, “to do good according to his will, and to go someday to heaven.”

Why did God make us?

He created us out of “free and unselfish love.”

God has placed in everyone’s heart (people of all religions and cultures)

“a longing to seek and find him.”

Can we know the existence of God by our reason?

Yes. “Human reason can know God with certainty.”

Then why are there Atheists, if everyone can know God by reason?

Because to know God is a great challenge for the human mind unaided by faith. Some are afraid to search for Him. Some do not want to change their lives.

Why are we supposed to evangelize?

We do so because Jesus commands us: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” We do so because we believe that our Faith is joy and light for the world.

How do we know what belongs to the true Faith?

We find it in Sacred Scripture and the living Tradition of the Church.

Is every word of Sacred Scripture accurate?

Scripture teaches without error “those truths which are necessary for our salvation” (*Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*). Its main purpose is to teach precisely the path of salvation. This is done through different genres, including histories, prophesies, poems, or other forms of discourse. Some of the books should not be read like one reads a science textbook, for example.

Number of books in the Old Testament: 46

Number of books in the New Testament: 27

Does the Catholic Church view human sexuality favorably or unfavorably?

Favorably. Human sexuality is a gift of God and should be understood, respected and lived according to the tenets of the Church.

What are those ‘tenets of the Church’ just referred to?

That sexuality becomes “truly human when it is integrated into the relationship of one person to another, in the complete and lifelong mutual gift of a man and a woman” in marriage (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2337).

What is marriage?

Marriage is a sacrament and a permanent covenant of life and love between a man and a woman that is faithful. It is open to giving birth to children and educating them.

Is birth control okay?

The Church endorses natural family planning. “For just reasons, spouses may wish to space the births of their children. It is their duty to make certain that their desire is not motivated by selfishness but is in conformity with the generosity appropriate to responsible parenthood” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2368). The use of artificial means of contraception or birth control must be avoided.

Why do we read the Old Testament if Jesus’ birth appears in the New Testament?

Because Old Testament books are also God’s Word, and without them we cannot understand Jesus.

Do Catholics honor the Bible? Sometimes it seems as if Protestants learn and memorize Scripture more.

Yes, the Catholic Church definitely honors the Bible. In fact, “[b]esides the presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, there is nothing that the Church honors more reverently than Christ’s presence in Sacred Scripture” (Number 19).

Can faith ever contradict science?

No. The Church is quite open to truths learned by genuine scientific inquiry, actually. While we should consider faith to be “above” reason (*Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, number 29), both faith and science are sources of truth, and both originate in God.

Why do I have to belong to a Church to live my faith? Can’t I just relate to God as an individual?

We receive faith from the Church. Also, I need others to support me and build me up in faith.

Why does the Faith need so many definitions, dogmas and creeds? Can’t I just feel close to God, trust in Him and live my Faith that way?

Formulas (such as the Nicene Creed, for example) give us language to express our faith to others and communicate truths about God to others. They enable us to join together and express faith together as a unified Body.

What are creeds?

Creeds are brief formulas of faith that make it possible for us to express our beliefs as one Church in unison. At our Masses we recite together either the Nicene Creed or Apostles' Creed.

Is there only one God, or are there multiple gods?

There is only one, because it is revealed to us in Sacred Scripture. This is the only choice that makes sense logically. If there were two gods, for example, then one would be a limit on the other, and neither of them would be all-powerful, infinite and perfect.

But isn't God also 3 persons?

Yes, but this is different from saying that there are 3 gods. There are 3 persons in one God. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are so united that they share the same intellect and will.

Is Jesus God?

Yes.

Is the world a product of chance and random forces?

No. God created the world and saw how good it was (Genesis 1). He gave it order and purposefulness. "God preserves his creation in being and sustains it" (*Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, number 54). He has inscribed his creation with natural laws.

What is the Sacrament of Penance?

"Sacraments are composed of "matter" — the content or essence of the sacraments — and "form" — the way the sacraments are administered or given according to the Church's rituals for each of them.

In the Sacrament of Penance, the "matter" is sorrow for sin or contrition. The "form" is how the Church deals with the matter, namely confession to and absolution by the priest. These are the "outward signs" of this sacrament in search of its grace, God's mercy and forgiveness. ...

The Second Vatican Council and CCC [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*] refer to the Sacrament of Penance as a "sacrament of healing (CCC, 1421)" along with the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick (formerly called Extreme Unction). The 1983 Code of Canon Law states: *In the sacrament of penance the faithful, confessing their sins to a legitimate minister, being sorry for them, and at the same time proposing to reform, obtain from God forgiveness of sins committed after baptism through the absolution imparted by the same minister; and they likewise are reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by sinning* (canon 959).

Individual and integral confession and absolution constitute the only ordinary way by which the faithful person who is aware of serious sin is reconciled with God and with the Church ... (canon

960). An “integral confession” means that a baptized Catholic confesses the kind of sin committed (eg., stealing, lying, etc.) and the number of times (best, truthful estimate).

In his homily of October 25, 2013, Pope Francis preached:

To have the courage in the presence of the confessor to call sin by its name, without hiding it ... to go to confession is to encounter the love of Jesus with sincerity of heart and with the transparency of children, not refusing, but even welcoming the “grace of shame” that makes us perceive God’s forgiveness.”

- Excerpted from “The Sacrament of Penance,” by Bishop David M. O’Connell.

Did God create the world in 6 days?

The number “6 days” with a 7th day of rest is a ‘symbolic’ description of how God created the world (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 337). More important is the fact that God created the world and that He made it good, beautiful and wisely ordered.

Why did God create the world?

He did so out of love. “The world was created for the glory of God who wished to show forth and communicate his goodness, truth and beauty” (*Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, number 53). God did not need to increase his glory or perfection - he was perfect already - but rather He chose to show forth his glory “in order to manifest this perfection through the benefits which he bestows on creatures” (Vatican Council I, *Dei Filius*, 1)

Does God guide the world and my life?

“Yes, but in a mysterious way; God guides everything along paths that only he knows, leading it to its perfection”. God does not control us as if we were puppets, though. He guides us without taking away our free choice. “What he takes away from us and what he gives us, the ways in which he strengthens us and the ways in which he tests us - all these are arrangements and signs of his will” (*YOUCAT*, number 49). God is Lord of history (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 304). God has destined the Universe to an ultimate perfection (*Ibid.*, paragraph 302).

If God is all-powerful and all-good, why does he not prevent evil?

“God is not in any way – directly or indirectly – the cause of evil” (*Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, number 57). God is never pleased that evil occurs and certainly is never the originator of it, but it is true that He does permit it at times. St. Thomas Aquinas said, “God allows evil only so as to make something better result from it.” The greatest example of this is that God permitted the death of His Son Jesus on the Cross so that man could be saved. Eventually at the Last Judgment evil will cease in the world of the living. And for those who follow Jesus, while they experience evil at times for now in this world, “In the life of

the world to come, evil no longer has any place and suffering ends” (*YOUCAT*, number 51).

What is Heaven?

Heaven is the state of supreme and definitive happiness. It is the dwelling place of angels and saints. Those in Heaven see God “face to face” (I Corinthians 13:12). They live in a communion of love with the Most Blessed Trinity. As Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI once said, eternal life would be “like the supreme moment of satisfaction.” “It would be like plunging into the ocean of infinite love, a moment in which time—the before and after—no longer exists.” It would be an eternal moment “in which we are simply overwhelmed with joy” (Pope Benedict XVI, encyclical *Spe Salvi*, paragraph 12).

What is Hell?

Hell is definitely a state to avoid at all costs. It is “final separation from God, the absolute “No” to love (*YOUCAT*, number 53). It is eternal damnation for those who die in mortal sin through their own free choice. (Please note: for a sin to be mortal, the sin must be of a serious or grave nature, for example disobeying one of the 10 Commandments; the sinner must know it is seriously wrong; and the sinner must freely consent to doing it.) “The principal suffering of hell is eternal separation from God in whom alone we can have ... life and happiness” (*Compendium*, number 212). Those in Hell “suffer dreadful torments, especially that of fire, for all eternity” (*Baltimore Catechism*, number 185).

What is the First Commandment of God?

‘I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt not have strange gods before me.’

What does “You shall not have strange gods before me” mean?

It means that one should not:

- Adore other gods or pagan deities or earthly idols.
- Devote oneself entirely to some earthly good (such as money, influence, success, beauty, youth, celebrity, and so on).
- Attribute to a creature a power that belongs to God alone, as when one makes charms or spells or believes in dreams (also known as superstition) (*Baltimore Catechism*, number 212).
- Adhere to occult or New Age practices including fortune telling and visiting psychics, practices that deny that power and providence to God alone.
- Commit sacrilege, defined as mistreating sacred persons, places or things.
- Desecrate what is holy through trafficking (also known as simony).

Can one practice both New Age and Christianity?

No. They have widely different concepts about salvation and divine power. God is a personal being; he is love and life, not some kind of cold, impersonal energy. Most proponents of New

Age believe that man can redeem himself, whereas Christians believe that only Jesus Christ and God's grace can redeem them. Also, nature and the cosmos are not God, as a number of New Age practitioners believe. Rather, God the Creator is greater than his creation and is unlike it and distinct from it.

Why is Jesus the best example of who we should be?

Jesus shows us not only the best ideal of what man should be, through his thoughts, words and actions, through what he wants and wills, but He also shows us God's true nature. It is God doing the things that Jesus does.

Does the Church believe in the equality of all people?

Yes, but we understand "equality" in a certain way. We are all equal inasmuch as we all have the same origin in God. All men and women have the same savior, Jesus Christ. "All men are [equally] destined and called to find their happiness and their eternal blessedness in God" (*YOUCAT*, number 61)

What does it mean that I 'have a soul'?

Each of us is two things united: a body and a soul. The soul is our "spiritual life-principle and inmost being". The soul gives life to the human body. Because I have a soul, I "stand before God as an irreplaceable individual" (*YOUCAT*, number 62). Our souls also are immortal and never die.

Where does my soul come from?

It is created directly by God and is not produced by the parents.

Why did God create males and females? Why didn't he just make us all the same sex/gender?

Men and women give expression to different aspects of God's perfection.

Also, there is an image of God in the love between man and woman in marriage. As husband and wife become one flesh, they "sense something of the happiness of the union with God", a happiness to which every man and woman is called to experience ultimately (*YOUCAT*, number 64). Also, just as God's love is faithful, married love is faithful. Just as God's love is creative, so is the love of husband and wife. God also created man and woman so that they can form a communion of persons, a communion analogous to God who is not solitary in one sense but is a communion of persons as well.

What is the Church's view on homosexuality?

Man and woman need each other's complementary traits and enter into relationship in marriage to give life to children. Homosexual acts do not fit into this design of God. All persons deserve respect and love, however, regardless of their sexual orientation. "God often leads souls to himself along unusual paths: a lack, a loss, or a wound – if accepted and affirmed – can become

a springboard for throwing oneself into the arms of God: the God who brings good out of everything and whose greatness can be discovered in redemption even more than in creation” (YOUCAT, number 65).

Does God want men and women to suffer and die? If not, why does He allow it to happen?

No, God does not want it. Originally mankind was in Paradise, and everything was in harmony. People loved one another and were at peace, and mankind was in harmony with God. But then man sinned, throwing everything into disorder. The toil of work, suffering, mortality, and temptation all entered in as a result of this sin and the loss of Paradise. God did not prevent this from happening because He created man and woman to be free.

What is sin?

Sin is a rejection of God, the refusal to accept his love, and a disregard for his commandments. It is separation from God.

And what is original sin in particular?

Sin is usually spoken of in the sense of something for which I am personally responsible. This is known as actual sin – something I commit. I speak angrily and impatiently to a family member, for example. Original sin on the other hand refers to something that others have done, namely our first parents Adam and Eve, and which we inherit. It refers to the fallen state of mankind into which we are all born even before we sin by free decision. Pope Emeritus Benedict once referred to original sin as like a drop of poison within us (Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, December 8, 2005).

What does God do to draw us out of evil?

He sends us Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer, who “snatches us from the power of sin” (YOUCAT, number 70).

Source: *Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church (known as YOUCAT)*, 2011