



MAN - THE IMAGE OF GOD

Texts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

The life of man - to know and love God

God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, and to know him, to love him with all his strength. he calls together all men, scattered and divided by sin, into the unity of his family, the Church. To accomplish this, when the fullness of time had come, God sent his son as Redeemer and Saviour. In his Son and through him, he invites men to become, in the Holy Spirit, his adopted children and thus heirs of his blessed life. (1)

MAN'S CAPACITY FOR GOD

Desire for God is written in the human heart - man is created by God and for God

The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and the happiness he never stops searching for:

“The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God. This invitation to converse with God is addressed to man as soon as he comes into being. For if man exists it is because God has created him through love, and through love continues to hold him in existence. He cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and entrusts himself to his Creator.” (Vatican II, GS 19) (27)

Man is a religious being

In many ways, throughout history down to the present day, men have given expression to their quest for God in their religious beliefs and behaviour: in their prayers, sacrifices, rituals, meditations, and so forth. These forms of religious expression, despite the ambiguities they often bring with them, are so universal that one may well call man a religious being:

“From one ancestor [God] made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him - though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For ‘in him we live and move and have our being.’” (Acts 17:26-28) (28)

Sin can obscure the desire for God

But this “intimate and vital bond of man to God” can be forgotten, overlooked, or even explicitly rejected by man. Such attitudes can have different causes: revolt against evil in the world; religious indifference; the cares and riches of this world; the scandal of bad example on the part of believers; currents of thought hostile to religion; finally, that attitude of sinful man which makes him hide from God out of fear and flee his call. (29)

MAN - THE SUMMIT OF CREATION

Creation is an inheritance destined and entrusted to man, who is called to a personal relationship with God

Because God creates through wisdom, his creation is ordered: “You have arranged all things by measure and number and weight.” (Wis 11:20) The universe created in and by the eternal Word, the ‘image of the invisible God’, is destined for and addressed to man, himself created in the ‘image of God’ and called to a personal relationship with God. Our human understanding, which shares in the light of the divine intellect, can understand what God tells us by means of his creation, though not without great effort and only in a spirit of humility and respect before the Creator and his work.

Because creation comes forth from God’s goodness, it shares in that goodness - “And God saw that it was good...very good” - for God willed creation as a gift entrusted to man, an inheritance destined for and entrusted to him. On many occasions the Church has had to defend the goodness of creation, including that of the physical world. (299)

Man is of greater value than other creatures

The hierarchy of creatures is expressed by the order of the ‘six days’, from the less perfect to the more perfect. God loves all his creatures and takes care of each one, even the sparrow. Nevertheless, Jesus said: “You are of more value than many sparrows”, or again: “Of how much more value is a man than an sheep!” (Lk 12:6-7; Mt 12:12) (342)

Man is the summit of the Creator’s work

Man is the summit of the Creator’s work, as the inspired account expresses by clearly distinguishing the creation of man from that of other creatures. (343)

IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

Man alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God’s own life

Of all visible creatures only man is “able to know and love his Creator.” He is “the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake”, and he alone is called to share, by knowledge and love in God’s own life. It was for this end that he was created, and this is the fundamental reason for his dignity:

“What made you establish man in so great a dignity? Certainly the incalculable love by which you have looked on your creature in yourself! You are taken with love for her; for by love indeed you created her, by love you have given her a being capable of tasting your eternal Good.” (St Catherine of Siena) (356)

The dignity of a person, not just something, but someone - called to enter into communion with others and with his Creator

Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead. (357)

Only in the mystery of the Word made flesh does the mystery of man become clear

“In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear.” (Vatican II GS)

“St Paul tells us that the human race takes its origin from two men: Adam and Christ...The first man, Adam, he says, became a living soul, the last Adam a life-giving spirit. The first Adam was made by the last Adam, from whom he also received his soul, to give him life...The second Adam stamped his image on the first Adam when he created him. That is why he took on himself the role and the name of the first

Adam, in order that he might not lose what he had made in his own image. The first Adam, the last Adam: the first had a beginning, the last knows no end. The last Adam is indeed the first; as he himself says: 'I am the first and the last'." (St John Chrysostom) (359)

BODY AND SOUL BUT TRULY ONE

Man, whole and entire, corporeal and spiritual, is willed by God

The human person, created in the image of God, is a being at once corporeal and spiritual. The biblical account expresses this reality in symbolic language when it affirms that "then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." (Gen 2:7) Man, whole and entire, is therefore willed by God. (362)

Soul signifies the spiritual principle in man

In Sacred Scripture the term 'soul' often refers to human life or the entire human person. But 'soul' also refers to the innermost aspect of man, that which is of greatest value in him, that by which he is most especially in God's image: 'soul' signifies the spiritual principle in man. (363)

The human body is animated by the soul, destined to praise God, and to be raised up again

The human body shares in the dignity of the 'image of God': it is a human body precisely because it is animated by a spiritual soul, and it is the whole person that is intended to become, in the body of Christ, a temple of the Spirit:

"Man, though made of body and soul, is a unity. Through his very bodily condition he sums up in himself the elements of the material world. Through him they are thus brought to their highest perfection and can raise their voice in praise freely given to the Creator. For this reason man may not despise his bodily life. Rather he is obliged to regard his body as good and to hold it in honour since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day." (Vatican 2 GS 14) (364)

The soul is the 'form of the body' and man is a single nature

The unity of soul and body is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the 'form of the body': i.e., it is because of its spiritual soul that the body made of matter becomes a living, human body; spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature. (365)

Every spiritual soul, which is immortal, is immediately created by God

The Church teaches that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God - it is not 'produced' by the parents - and also that it is immortal: it does not perish when it separates from the body at death, and it will be reunited with the body at the final Resurrection. (366)

'Spirit, soul and body' - from creation man is ordered to communion with God

Sometimes the soul is distinguished from the spirit: St Paul for instance prays that God may sanctify his people 'wholly', with "spirit and soul and body" kept sound and blameless at the Lord's coming. The Church teaches that this distinction does not introduce a duality into the soul. 'Spirit' signifies that from creation man is ordered to a supernatural end and that his soul can gratuitously be raised beyond what it deserves to communion with God. (367)

MAN'S VOCATION - LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

It is in Christ that man has been created 'in the image and likeness of the Creator

"Christ,...in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, makes man fully manifest to himself and brings to light his exalted vocation." (Vatican 2 GS 22) It is in Christ, "the image of the invisible God", that man has been created 'in the image and likeness of the Creator'. It is in Christ, Redeemer and Saviour, that the divine image, disfigured in man by the first sin, has been restored to its original beauty and ennobled by the grace of God. (1701)

From conception the human person, endowed with an spiritual and immortal soul, is destined for eternal beatitude

Endowed with a 'spiritual and immortal soul', the human person is "the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake". (Vatican 2 GS 24) From his conception he is destined for eternal beatitude. (1703)

The human person has reason and free will

The human person participates in the light and power of the divine Spirit. By his reason, he is capable of understanding the order of things established by the Creator. By free will, he is capable of directing himself toward his true good. He finds his perfection "in seeking and loving what is true and good". (Vatican 2 GS 15) (1704)

Man, inclined to evil, bears in his nature the wound of original sin

"Man, enticed by the Evil One, abused his freedom at the very beginning of history". (Vatican 2 GS 13) He succumbed to temptation and did what was evil. He still desires the good, but his nature bears the wound of original sin. He is now inclined to evil and subject to error: "Man is divided in himself. As a result, the whole life of men, both individual and social, shows itself to be a struggle, and a dramatic one, between good and evil, between light and darkness." (Vatican 2 GS 13) (1707)

All human life is sacred: 'You shall not kill'

"Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains for ever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being." (CDF Donum Vitae) (2258)

IN BRIEF

- **Man, though made of body and soul, is a unity. The doctrine of the faith affirms that the spiritual and immortal soul is created immediately by God. (382)**
- **Man is by nature and vocation a religious being. Coming from God, going toward God, man lives a fully human life only if he freely lives by his bond with God. (44)**
- **Man is made to live in communion with God in whom he finds happiness: "When I am completely united to you, there will be no more sorrow or trials; entirely full of you, my life will be complete" (St Augustine).**
- **Man is predestined to reproduce the image of God's Son made man, the "image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15), so that Christ shall be the first-born of a multitude of brothers and sisters. (cf. Eph 1:3-6; Rom 8:29)**