

A Catholic Catechism

“Ye Shall Know the Truth”

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Lesson 4

CD 2, TRACK 2 (25:05)

Human Freedom

(Puppets or Men)

Peace be to you.

No one is born an atheist. As no one is born a skeptic. That is to say one who doubts the possibility of ever discovering truth.

- These attitudes are made and they are made less by the way one thinks than by the way one lives.
- If we do not live as we think, we soon begin to think as we live.
- We suit our philosophy to our actions and that is bad.

Let me tell you the story of an atheist in London, England.

I used to do considerable work in St. Patrick’s parish in Soho Square in that city. One Sunday morning I came into the front of the church to read Mass and I found a young lady standing in front of the communion rail haranguing the congregation. She was saying to the congregation, “...*There is no God. There is too much evil in the world. Reason cannot transcend sense. It is impossible to conclude to its existence. Every night*” she said “*I go out to Hyde Park. I talk against God. I circulate England, Scotland and Wales with pamphlets denouncing a belief in the existence of God....*” and on and on she went.

By that time I was up to the communion rail. I said to her, “*Young lady, I am very happy to hear that you say you believe in existence of God.*” She said “*You silly fool I don’t.*” I said, “*I understood you to say just the contrary. Suppose I said that I went out every night to Hyde Park and talked against 20 footed ghosts and 10 centaurs. Suppose I circulated England, Scotland and Wales denouncing a belief in these ghosts and in their centaurs. What would happen to me?*” She said “*You would be crazy, they would lock you up.*” “*Well*” I said, “*Do you not put God in exactly the same category as these fantasies of the imagination, namely ghosts and centaurs? Why then would I be crazy attacking ghosts and centaurs and you are not crazy attacking God?*” She said “*I don’t know, why?*” I said “*because when I attack these phantoms of the imagination, I am attacking something that is unreal but when you attack God, you are attacking something just as real as the thrust of the sword or an embrace. Do you think*” I said “*that we would have any such thing in the world as prohibition unless there was something to prohibit? Could there ever be anti-cigarette laws unless there*

were cigarettes? How can there be atheism unless there is something to atheiate?” She said “***I hate you.***” “Well” I said “now you have given the answer.”

➤ Atheism is not a doctrine it is a *cry of wrath*.

There are indeed two kinds of atheists,

1. There are the simple persons who have read a smattering of science and they conclude *probably* that there is no God.
2. But the other type of atheist is that type that might be called “*militant*,” such as the Communist. They really do not deny the existence of God. **They challenge God.** It is the very reality of God that saves them from insanity. It is the reality of God that gives them a **real object** against which they may **vent their hate**.

Now after discussing the attitudes that any soul may take in the face of proofs, we will investigate the knowledge of God.

First of all how does God know? Well God does not know the way we know. We know by looking at things. **God knows by looking at Himself.** We can get a faint idea of the way God knows from an architect. Before an architect puts up a building he can tell you, if he is the designer: the size of the building, its dimensions, the location of each room, its height, the number of elevators it will have and so forth. How does He know all of this before the building is built? **Because he is the designer of the becoming of the building.**

Now **God is a “cause” too.** But God is not just a cause of the *becoming* of the universe, He is the cause of the **very being** of the universe; and just as an architect needs only look into his own mind to understand something of the nature of that which he has designed; as a poet knows his verses in his own mind; **So God knows all things by looking at Himself.** He does not need to wait for you to turn a corner before He knows that you are doing so. He does not see little boys putting their fingers into the cookie jar and conclude they’re stealing. Everything is naked and open to the eyes of God. For example, he does not just look down at a debutante at a coming out party and then be on tenterhooks for the next five years wondering if she is going to find a man.

- There is no future in God.
- There is no past in God.
- There is only the present.

The Knowledge Of God

We can get a faint idea of what this knowledge is from an example of this kind. Suppose you walk through a cemetery in which you saw a succession of gravestones belonging to the same family. As you walked along slowly you saw written on the first gravestone the inscription *Ezekiel Hinganbottom, Died 1938*. And then you walked a little further and you saw another tombstone reading *Hiram Hinganbottom, Died 1903*. A few steps more *Nahum Hinganbottom, Died in 1883* and then still further on *Reginald Hinganbottom, Died in 1861*. These tombstones would indicate a succession of events that happened in space and time. But now suppose you flew over that cemetery in a plane, then you would **see all at once** and that is how history must look to one who is **outside of time**.

Another example may make clear the knowledge of God. Imagine you were looking at a motion picture reel. This motion picture reel has the full story or drama written on every single inch of it. Suppose the motion picture reel were conscious. If it were, it would know the whole story, but if you and I were to know the whole story we would have to wait until that screen or rather that film was unrolled upon the screen. We would only **know successively** what the **reel knows all at once**. And that is the way it is with the **knowledge of God**.

Now coming a little more closer to that knowledge. **Because God knows all things and because He is Creator**, it follows that every single thing in the world is **made according to an idea or a pattern existing in the *Divine Mind***. Look round about you, you see a bridge, a statue, a painting, a building. Before any of these things began to be, they existed in the mind of the one who designed or planned them; in like manner there is not a tree, a flower, a bird, an insect in the world that does not in some way correspond to an **idea existing in the *Divine Mind***.

The pattern of them has been wrapped up, as it were, in *matter* and what our knowledge does and what science does is to **unravel and unwrap**, as it were, this matter, in order to **rediscover** the **ideas of God**. And it's because God put **His Ideas or Patterns** in things that **we are assured of the rationality and purposiveness of the cosmos**. It's that that makes science possible. If there were no human minds in the universe, if there were no angelic minds, things would still be true because they corresponded with **the idea existing in the Mind of God**.

Pre-determination Myth:

Naturally we cannot bring up the subject like the **Knowledge of God** without **meeting certain difficulties**. One of the most obvious ones is: "*Well, if God knows all things, he knows then what is going to happen to every single soul in the world.*"

He knows, for example, whether I am going to be saved or I am going to be lost. Therefore I am predetermined.” Well that was an argument that was used a few centuries ago. As a matter of fact it was part of the philosophy of Eastern peoples.

Now in order to understand the Knowledge of God you must make a distinction between Foreknowledge and Predetermination.

The two are not identical. God indeed does foreknow everything, but he does not predetermine us independently of our will and our merits.

Just suppose that you knew the stock market very well and because of your superior knowledge of business conditions, you said that such and such a stock would in six months be selling ten points higher than it is now. Suppose six months later it actually sold ten points higher. Would you have predetermined and caused it, to be ten points higher, although you foreknew it? There were other **influences**, were there not, besides your superior knowledge.

To make it still more concrete, in the early colonial days of this country, a farmer set out to the town to make some purchases. He had gone but a short distance and he came back, and he told his wife he had forgotten his gun. His wife was a perfectly good determinist, and his wife argued this way. *“Either you are predestined to be shot by the Indians or you are not predestined to be shot by the Indians. If you are predestined to be shot by the Indians, the gun will do you no good. If you are not predestined to be shot by the Indians, you will not need your gun.”* But the husband said. *“Suppose I am predestined to be shot by the Indians on condition I do not have my gun?”* and in like manner, God knows all things but He still **leaves us with freedom**.

God’s Influence

How can God influence you, and still leave you free? Well consider various kinds of influences. First, turn a key in the door, there is the impact of something material on something material, and the result is the opening of the door. That is one kind of influence. The influence of a material thing on another material thing.

But there is still **another kind of influence**. In the springtime you plant a seed in the garden. The sun, the moisture, the atmosphere, the chemicals in the earth, all begin to use an **influence upon that seed**. It certainly is not the same kind of action that’s turning a piece of steel in a lock. There are tremendous capacities for growth in that seed and what most awakens the seed to growth is **something invisible**, namely the sun.

Now go a **stage higher**. Consider the case of a father talking to a son, trying to influence him, for example, to become a doctor, what actually influences the son is **some invisible truth** as well as the **deep love of the father** for the son, and of the **son for the father**. What **love actually does** is to bring out in the son, a ***free act***. The son is not obliged to do exactly what his father wants, he is free to do the contrary, but **truth and love have so moved** him that he regards what he does as the **very perfection of his personality**. Later on he may say *“I owe everything I have to that conversation I had with my father. I really began to discover my true self.”* Now in some such mysterious way as this, God works upon your soul. He does not work like a key in a lock. He works less visibly than a father on a son but there are the same mysterious words. **“I”** and **“You.”**

- Because God is the very embodiment of love, His Love inspires you to be what you were meant to be. A free person in the highest sense of the word. The more you are led by God’s Love, the more you become yourself and it is all done without ever losing your freedom.

The Problem of Evil

That still leaves another great problem. Namely the problem of evil. You might ask *“If God is Power and Love why does He create this kind of world and why does He permit evil?”* We are not going to give here a complete explanation of evil and a complete explanation of evil cannot be given here below. We will only just give certain indications of why it is possible.

Let us begin with a question. *“Why God made this kind of world?”* You must realize that this is not the only kind of a world that God could have made. He might of made ten thousand other kinds of worlds in which there would be no pain and no struggle and no sacrifices. But this is the **best possible kind of world that God could have made for the purpose that he had in Mind**. Notice the distinction we are making. For example, a little boy says to his father who is a distinguished architect, *“I want you to build me a birdhouse.”* The architect designs a birdhouse. It’s not the best house that that skilled father can design but it may be the very best house that the architect could design for the **purpose that he had in mind**: namely, to build a house for sparrows.

Well that brings us to this other question. *“...What purpose now did God have in mind in making this world?”* The answer is that God intended to build a ***moral universe***. He willed from all eternity to build a stage on which characters would emerge. He might have made a world without morality, without virtue, without

character. He might have made a world in which each and every one of us would have sprouted goodness with the same necessity, for example, that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, but He chose not to make that kind of a world. Not to make a world in which we would be good as fire is hot and ice is cold. He willed to make *a moral universe* in order that by the **right use of the gift of freedom**, characters might emerge. What does God care for things piled into an infinity of space even though they be diamonds or if all the orbits of heavens were as so many jewels glittering as the sun. What would their external but undisturbed balance mean to him in comparison to the **single character** which could take hold of the tangled skeins of a seemingly wrecked and ruined life and **weave out of them** the beautiful tapestry of *saintliness and holiness*.

The choice before God in creating the world therefore, lay between creating a purely mechanical universe, peopled by mere automaton machines or creating a spiritual universe in which there would be a choice of good and evil.

Alright, granted then that God chose to make a **moral universe** in which there would **be character**. What was the **condition** of such a universe? He had to make us **free**. That is to say, He had to endow us with the power to say “**yes**” and “**no**” and to be captains of our own **fate and destiny**.

➤ Morality implies responsibility and beauty but these can exist only on condition of *freedom*.

Stones have no morals because they are not free. We do not condemn ice because it is melted by heat. Praise and blame can be bestowed only on those who are masters of their own will. It is only because you, for example, have the possibility of saying “*no*,” that there is so much charm in your character when you say “*yes*”. Take the quality of freedom away from anyone and it is no more possible for him to be virtuous than it is for the blade of grass which he treads beneath his feet. Take freedom away from life and there will be no more reason to honor the fortitude of martyrs than there would be for example, oh to honor the flames which kindle their faggots. (bundle of stick, twigs or branches used for fuel)

It is therefore any impeachment of God that He chose not to reign over an empire of chemicals? If God has deliberately chosen the kind of empire not to be ruled by force but by **freedom** and if we find that his subjects are able to act against his will as stars and atoms cannot, does this not prove that He has possibly given to those human beings the chance of breaking allegiance in order that there **might be meaning and purpose in that allegiance when they freely chose to give it**.

Here we have then a mere suggestion as to the possibility of evil. It's bound up with the *freedom of man*. Man who is free to love is free to hate. He who is free to obey is free to rebel. Virtue in this concrete order is possible only in those spheres in which it is possibly vicious.

- A man can be a saint only in a church in which it is possible to be a devil.
And you say "*Well if I were God I would destroy evil.*" Well if you did that you would destroy human freedom. **God will not destroy freedom.**
- **If we do not want any dictators on this earth, certainly we do not want any dictators in the Kingdom of Heaven.**

And those therefore who would blame God for allowing man freedom to go on hindering and thwarting His work are like those who see blots and smudges and errors in a student's notebook would condemn the teacher for not snatching away the book and doing the copy himself. Just as the object of the teacher is sound education and not the production of neat and well-written copybooks;

- So the **object of God** is the *development of souls* and not the production of biological entities.

And you say "*...well If God knew I would sin why did he make me?*" God did not make any of us as sinners, **we make ourselves**; in that sense we are creators.

Therefore, the greatest gift of God to man, short of Grace, is the gift of human freedom and the power to love Him in return.

God Love You.

Notes:

No one is born Atheist or Skeptic

Atheism and Skepticism are *attitudes* that are made

If we do not live as we think we soon begin to think as we live

Philosophy suited to our actions is not good

Railing against God

- Is useless if there is no God
 - Really indicates the reality - God exists
 - There can be no prohibition against that which does not exist
- Atheism cannot exist unless God exists
 - Atheism is not a doctrine – it is a cry of wrath against the God that exists

Atheism

There are two types

Simple persons having read a smattering of science conclude there is no God

Those who can be called *militant*

Communists who deny the existence of God

Communists challenge God

His very existence saves them from insanity

The existence of God gives them a real object against which to vent their hate.

God's Knowledge

How does God know?

God knows by looking at Himself (we know by looking at things)

Architect as example

Knows all attributes of building before construction

He is the designer of the becoming of the building

God is not only the designer of the becoming of the Universe, He is the cause of the being of the Universe

God knows all things by looking at Himself

No future in God , No past in God, only the present

He knows and sees all things at once.

All things created to an idea or pattern in the Divine mind

Because He placed all things in matter. Science is possible - Science unwraps His creation to gain knowledge

Predetermined? / Foreknowledge

Since God knows all things he knows what is going to happen to every single soul in the world.

Foreknowledge is not cause of result

Thus no predestination

He knows all, but in His great love leaves us in *freedom*

In this freedom we are free to become ourselves

without ever losing that freedom

The more we are lead by God's Will – the more we become ourselves. And it all is done without ever losing our freedom.

Evil - why does God permit it?

Why did God make this kind of world?

Intended to build a moral Universe

By right use of the gift of freedom characters might emerge full of saintliness and holiness

To achieve such there **must** be a choice between good and evil

Men must be *free* to choose or be automatons

Powered to be able to say "yes" or "no"

A man can be a saint only if it is possible for him to be a villain

Destruction of evil would be the destruction of freedom

Dictators - if we don't want them on this earth, why would we want them in the Kingdom of Heaven?

The object of God is the *development of souls*, not the production of biological entities!

The greatest gift of God's love, short of grace, is Human **FREEDOM** and the power to **LOVE** Him in return

Questions & Insights:

1. What did you learn from this lesson?
2. How does this knowledge deepen your faith?
3. Where in your life can you apply what you have learned in this lesson?

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

To view the context, please visit <https://www.kofc.org/en/catechism/index.html> or

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM

2123. "Many . . . of our contemporaries either do not at all perceive, or explicitly reject, this intimate and vital bond of man to God. **ATHEISM** must therefore be regarded as one of the most serious problems of our time.'[GS 19 # 1.]"

2124. "The name '**ATHEISM**' covers many very different phenomena. One common form is the practical materialism which restricts its needs and aspirations to space and time. Atheistic humanism falsely considers man to be 'an end to himself, and the sole maker, with supreme control, of his own history.'[GS 20 # 2.] Another form of contemporary **ATHEISM** looks for the liberation of man through economic and social liberation. 'It holds that religion, of its very nature, thwarts such emancipation by raising man's hopes in a future life, thus both deceiving him and discouraging him from working for a better form of life on earth.'[GS 20 # 2.]"

2125. "Since it rejects or denies the existence of God, **ATHEISM** is a sin against the virtue of religion.[Cf. [Rom 1:18](#) .] The imputability of this offense can be significantly diminished in virtue of the intentions and the circumstances. 'Believers can have more than a little to do with the rise of **ATHEISM**. To the extent that they are careless about their instruction in the faith, or present its teaching falsely, or even fail in their religious, moral, or social life, they must be said to conceal rather than to reveal the true nature of God and of religion.'[GS 19 # 3.]"

2126. "**ATHEISM** is often based on a false conception of human autonomy, exaggerated to the point of refusing any dependence on God.[Cf. GS 20 # 1.] Yet, 'to acknowledge God is in no way to oppose the dignity of man, since such dignity is grounded and brought to perfection in God....'[GS 21 # 3.] 'For the Church knows full well that her message is in harmony with the most secret desires of the human heart.'[GS 21 # 7.]"

2128. "Agnosticism can sometimes include a certain search for God, but it can equally express indifferentism, a flight from the ultimate question of existence, and a sluggish moral conscience. Agnosticism is all too often equivalent to practical **ATHEISM**. "

2140. "Since it rejects or denies the existence of God, **ATHEISM** is a sin against the first commandment. "

GOD KNOWS / KNOWING GOD

37. "In the historical conditions in which he finds himself, however, man experiences many difficulties in coming to know **GOD** by the light **OF** reason alone:

Though human reason is, strictly speaking, truly capable by its own natural power and light **OF** attaining to a true and certain knowledge **OF** the one personal **GOD**, who watches over and controls the world by his providence, and **OF** the natural law written in our hearts by the Creator; yet there are many obstacles which prevent reason from the effective and fruitful use **OF** this inborn faculty. For the truths that concern the relations between **GOD** and man wholly transcend the visible order **OF** things, and, if they are translated into human action and influence it, they call for self-surrender and abnegation. The human **MIND**, in its turn, is hampered in the attaining **OF** such truths, not only by the impact **OF** the senses and the imagination, but also by disordered appetites which are the consequences **OF** original sin. So it happens that men in such matters easily persuade themselves that what they would not like to be true is false or at least doubtful.[Pius XII, *Humani generis* 561: DS 3875.] "

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.'[*Dei Filius* 4: DS 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 conserver **OF** all things, who made them what they are.'[GS 36 # 1.]"

FREE WILL / EVIL

311. "Angels and men, as intelligent and free creatures, have to journey toward their ultimate destinies by their free choice and preferential love. They can therefore go astray. Indeed, they have sinned. Thus has moral **EVIL**, incommensurably more harmful than physical **EVIL**, entered the world. God is in no way, directly or indirectly, the cause of moral **EVIL**. [Cf. St. Augustine, *De libero arbitrio* I, 1, 2: PL 32, 1221- 1223; St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* I-II, 79, 1.] He permits it, however, because he respects the freedom of his creatures and, mysteriously, knows how to derive good from it:

For almighty God. . ., because he is supremely good, would never allow any **EVIL** whatsoever to exist in his works if he were not so all-powerful and good as to cause good to emerge from **EVIL** itself.[St. Augustine, *Enchiridion* II, 3: PL 40, 236.] "

164. "Now, however, 'we walk by faith, not by sight';[[2 Cor 5:7](#) .] we perceive God as 'in a mirror, dimly' and only 'in part'. [[1 Cor 13:12](#) .] Even though enlightened by him in whom it believes, faith is often lived in darkness and can be put to the test. The world we live in often seems very far from the one promised us by faith. Our experiences of **EVIL** and suffering, injustice and death, seem to contradict the Good News; they can shake our faith and become a temptation against 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. "

309. "If God the Father almighty, the Creator of the ordered and good world, cares for all his creatures, why does **EVIL** exist? To this question, as pressing as it is unavoidable and as painful as it is mysterious, no quick answer will suffice. Only Christian faith as a whole constitutes the answer to this question: the goodness of creation, the drama of sin and the patient love of God who comes to meet man by his covenants, the redemptive Incarnation of his Son, his gift of the Spirit, his gathering of the Church, the power of the sacraments and his call to a blessed life to which free creatures are invited to consent in advance, but from which, by a terrible mystery, they can also turn away in advance. There is not a single aspect of the Christian message that is not in part an answer to the question of **EVIL**. "

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.[Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, STh I, 25, 6.] 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.[Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, SCG III, 71.]"

311. "Angels and men, as intelligent and free creatures, have to journey toward their ultimate destinies by their free choice and preferential love. They can therefore go astray. Indeed, they have sinned. Thus has moral **EVIL**, incommensurably more harmful than physical **EVIL**, entered the world. God is in no way, directly or indirectly, the cause of moral **EVIL**. [Cf. St. Augustine, De libero arbitrio I, 1, 2: PL 32, 1221- 1223; St. Thomas Aquinas, STh I-II, 79, 1.] He permits it, however, because he respects the freedom of his creatures and, mysteriously, knows how to derive good from it: For almighty God. . ., because he is supremely good, would never allow any **EVIL** whatsoever to exist in his works if he were not so all-powerful and good as to cause good to emerge from **EVIL** itself.[St. Augustine, Enchiridion II, 3: PL 40, 236.] "

312. "In time we can discover that God in his almighty providence can bring a good from the consequences of an **EVIL**, even a moral **EVIL**, caused by his creatures: 'It was not you', said Joseph to his brothers, 'who sent me here, but God. . . You meant **EVIL** against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive.'[Gen 45:8; Gen 50:20; cf. Tob 2:12 (Vulgate).] From the greatest moral **EVIL** ever committed - the rejection and murder of God's only Son, caused by the sins of all men - God, by his grace that 'abounded all the more',[Cf. [Rom 5:20](#) .] brought the greatest of goods: the glorification of Christ and our redemption. But for all that, **EVIL** never becomes a good."