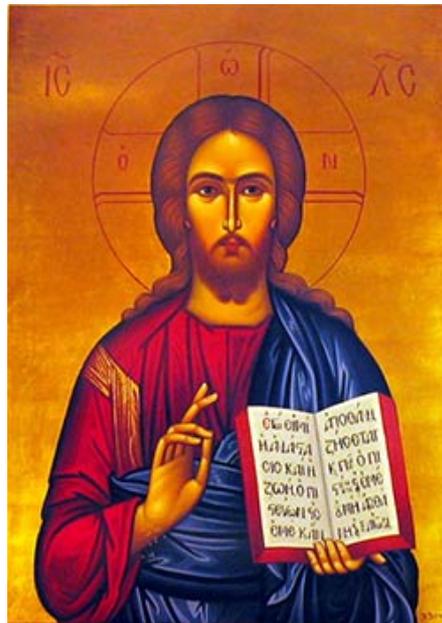


Our Catholic Faith:

The Catholic Theory of Everything

by Deacon Nick Donnelly



The Catholic Theory of Everything

In the late 1980's Stephen Hawking, the Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge University, published his famous book, *A Brief History of Time*, which became a runaway best-seller.

One of the things that caught everyone's imagination was the prospect that the professor held up of science soon discovering a *Theory of Everything* that would fully explain and link together all known physical phenomena in the universe.

There is something exciting and satisfying in the idea of a theory that explains the existence of everything. A Theory of Everything appeals to

our curiosity and sense of beauty.



We are by nature pattern-seekers, who like seeing inter-connections between different parts so that we can see and understand the whole picture. Made in the *image of God* is it any surprise that we want to understand everything?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church is the Catholic Theory of Everything that enables us to see the fundamental pattern and meaning of existence as revealed by God. The structure and layout of the *Catechism* have been designed to present that content of Faith in the simplicity and glory of its inter-related unity.

You can access the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] online at:

http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism/ccc_toc.html

There is a searchable version at: <http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc.html>

The *Catechism*, like a symphony, is divided into four movements that are distinct, self-contained units – *Profession of Faith, Sacraments, Moral Life, Prayer*. Within these movements, various major and minor themes are developed, and recapitulated with variations. These are the different beliefs the Church has about God, Jesus Christ, baptism, the Eucharist, human dignity, sin, contemplation, and the vision of God, to name just a few. Together these beliefs form a symphony of faith, a harmonious whole.

The thing to remember is that all four movements are intrinsically connected to one another, because in reality we experience them as intrinsically connected together in our lives. Believing the Creed [Profession of Faith] is inextricably bound up with our participation in the liturgy [Sacraments], which means also learning to pray [Prayer], which to be authentic means learning to live like Christ [Moral Life].

Jesus is the key



The thing about the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* being the Catholic Theory of Everything is that the *Catechism* does not present a theory in the sense of an abstract set of explanatory propositions. Christianity is not the expression of a theory, it is an encounter with a person – Jesus Christ.

The only Theory of Everything that would truly satisfy us as meaningful would have to be profoundly personal. A set of mathematical formula describing the inter-relations between the forces in the universe would be interesting, but would not answer the ultimate questions of human existence.

A complete Theory of Everything would have to be about love, justice, the value of good over evil, life transcending death. These are all questions of ultimate concern to human beings. These are the questions fundamental to being persons.

Christianity reveals that the heart of the universe is personal – Jesus Christ, true God and true human. The words and deeds of Jesus, particularly His death and Resurrection, reveal that love is the strongest force in the universe, a love that enables finite creatures to enter into a relationship with the infinite God, a love that enables mortal creatures to attain eternal fulfilment through sharing the nature of God.

The four movements of the symphony

The organic structure of the *Catechism* is divided into four parts or movements corresponding to the four fundamental aspects of our life in Christ that we see in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching, to the breaking of the bread, to fellowship, and to prayer. (*Acts 2:42*)

1. **The Profession of Faith** – devotion to the Apostles' teaching.
2. **Sacraments** – *devotion to the breaking of bread.*
3. **The Moral Life** – *devotion to the fellowship.*
4. **Prayer** – *devotion to prayer.*

The *Catechism* refers to these four fundamental dimensions of Christian life as 'pillars', because they are the foundational pillars that support the whole of our life in faith. A life based on the four pillars develops the essential aspects of the faith:

1. **The Profession of Faith**(The Apostles' Creed) – Belief in the Triune God and in His saving plan.
2. **Sacraments** (Seven Sacraments) – Sanctification by Him in the sacramental life;
3. **The Moral Life**(Ten Commandments) – Loving Him with all one's heart and one's neighbour as oneself;
4. **Prayer**(The Lord's Prayer) – A life of prayer lived in hope of the coming of His Kingdom and our meeting with Him face to face. (*General Directory for Catechesis, 122*).

As Pope Benedict XVI puts it these four classical and master components of catechesis have served for centuries as the depository and resume of Catholic teaching:

We find there what the Christian should believe (Apostles' Creed), hope (Our Father) and do (Ten Commandments) and in what vital space he is to accomplish these things (Sacraments & Church). (Joseph Ratzinger & Christoph Schönborn, *Introduction to the Catechism of the Catholic Church*).

How to listen to the Catechism's symphony

Just as musicians develop their sense of pitch and rhythm to be able to hear and play music, to be able to hear the symphony of faith you need to develop your sense of faith and your knowledge of God's revelation.

Your sense of faith

We live in a society in which the role of 'faith' is controversial and contested, its value and influence being hotly debated in best-selling

books, in the media, among educational and



political institutions.

Contrary to those who mock faith as unreasonable and belief in nonsense, the *Catechism of the Catholic* [CCC] points out the invaluable role of faith in everyday life. Faith as a human act is essential to everyday existence, and is not restricted to religion. (cf. Pope John Paul, *Fides et Ratio*, 31-32.

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_15101998_fides-et-ratio_en.html).

The *Catechism* establishes that we have a natural, everyday capacity for faith in each other, in order to show that having faith in God is not contrary to our freedom, or experience of knowing things about the world or each other.

So having established that we have a natural capacity for faith, the *Catechism* presents one of the key doctrines [teachings] of Christianity – that God gives us the gift of divine faith in Him. Without this special gift [grace] we could have no knowledge of Him and a relationship with Him would be impossible

[Divine] faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by him. "Before this faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist him; he must have the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts it to God, who opens the eyes of the mind and 'makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth.' (CCC 153).

Divine faith is what moves us to believe, enabling our understanding and will to cooperate with God's grace. God gives us the gift of divine faith so we can receive and respond to the truth of His revelation.

Your knowledge of revelation

It was the purpose of God from the beginning that all of humanity – through access to His divine life in revelation – would become 'sharers in the divine nature' (Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, 2), and would

'share in the good things of God that utterly exceed the intelligence of the human mind'. (First Vatican Council, *Dei Filius*, 113).

It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will. His will was that men should have access to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature. (CCC 51).

Through His free choice God has raised man to a supernatural end – that is, to share in the divine life and love of the Holy Trinity. Therefore it is absolutely necessary that He reveal His inner-most life and the means to attain it because it lies completely beyond human knowledge and experience.

Faith gives us the capacity and desire to trust God's revelation as the direction and guide for our lives.

Revelation has the twofold character of being the manifestation of God's power and actions and the teaching of God.

v Revelation is the personal manifestation of God

The Bible is the record of God's interventions in history through His personal relationships with people of faith. The *Catechism* singles out Abraham – the Father of all who believe (CCC 145) and Mary – Blessed is she who believed. (CCC 149) as examples of people of faith whose lives reveal the personal manifestation of God.

v Revelation is the teaching of God

God has gradually revealed His plan for humanity through the inter-play of His deeds and words in salvation history – the history of His relationship with the people of Israel [Old Testament] and His relationship with the Church [New Testament]. The Bible shows us that God acts and comments on His action to teach humanity its significance and meaning.

Jesus is the peak of revelation

Jesus is the peak of revelation, 'by His full presence and self-manifestation' and through His 'divine testimony'. (*Dei Verbum*, 4).

Jesus is the ultimate expression of God's decision to live and speak with us as friends, because through the incarnation He dwells among us, tells

us of the 'innermost being of God' and 'completes the work of salvation which His Father gave to Him to do'. (Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, 4).

By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation. (Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, 2).

What happens when your faith comes together with God's revelation?

Faith is a personal adherence of the whole man to God who reveals himself. It involves an assent of the intellect and will to the self-revelation God has made through his deeds and words. (CCC 176-177).

Faith as our response to God's revelation has two dimensions:

1. My personal act of faith in God.
2. The living faith of the Church, that is truths based on the deeds and words of God preserved, interpreted and proclaimed by the Church.

Both aspects of faith are inter-related and necessary to each other. God is truly present in His revelation contained in Scripture and the life of the Church. It only takes our personal faith to put us in the presence of God. The personal act of faith give us a sympathy and openness to God's revelation safe-guarded by the Church.

Your personal act of faith

Your personal act of faith will enable you to share here and now in the knowledge which the saints enjoy in heaven and which, more fundamentally, God has of Himself.

The ability to make the personal act of faith in God is an undeserved gift [grace] given entirely freely by God to each individual. We are incapable of sharing in the life of God without the supernatural virtue of faith given by God:

Before this faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist him; he must have the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts it to God, who opens the eyes of the mind and 'makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth. (CCC 153)

Your personal act of faith engages all dimensions of being human – intellect, will, emotion, spirit, body. As Cardinal Ratzinger – now Pope Benedict XVI – puts it, faith is an orientation of our whole personal existence towards God. (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Gospel, Catechesis, Catechism*, p. 25).

It is important to realise that though you make the act of faith as an individual, it doesn't mean you own it like a possession you have chosen to buy at the supermarket. Faith is never merely private, but is always something public that involves the community of the Church.

Faith is a personal act – the free response of the human person to the initiative of God who reveals himself. But faith is not an isolated act. No one can believe alone, just as no one can live alone. You have not given yourself faith as you have not given yourself life. The believer has received faith from others and should hand it on to others. (CCC, 166)

The living faith of the Church

The doctrines [teachings] of the Church presented in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* communicate the Church's understanding of the truths about the innermost being of God which He has chosen to share with us and about which He teaches us.

The doctrines of the Church are not abstract propositions or academic definitions, but privileged ways of encountering the personal reality of God which He has revealed through His glorious manifestations and teachings in salvation history.

Through doctrines presented in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* we are in contact with these personal realities of God and man, which the

Church understands as living truths. They are called 'living truths' because they are truths about the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and truths about our fundamental nature as human persons. The major living truths are:

- One God, three Persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
- The Person of Jesus Christ, true God and true man.
- Christ's saving work, handed on in the Church through the work of the Holy Spirit in the liturgy and sacraments, especially the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.
- The dignity and destiny of the human person to share in the nature of God.

Baptism enables us to share in these living truths

Faith is 'received' from the Church, not self-generated. We do not think up faith on our own. Faith is something handed on to us. We receive faith through the sacraments, particularly the sacrament of baptism.

Baptism is the sacrament of faith. But faith needs the community of believers. It is only within the faith of the Church that each of the faithful can believe. The faith required for Baptism is not a perfect and mature faith, but a beginning that is called to develop. The catechumen or the godparent is asked: "What do you ask of God's Church?" The response is: "Faith!" (CCC 1253).

As Cardinal Ratzinger puts it, to believe the teachings of the Church is to be granted a share in Jesus' vision. Jesus lets us see with Him in faith what only He has truly seen as the Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity:

The grace of faith opens "the eyes of your hearts" to a lively understanding of the contents of Revelation: that is, of the totality of God's plan and the mysteries of faith, of their connection with each other and with Christ, the centre of the revealed mystery. (CCC 158).

Seeking the face of Jesus

Two thousand years after His earthly existence Jesus of Nazareth is still big news, judging by the number of books that are published about Him

each year, and the money spent on blockbuster films such as Mel Gibson's 'The Passion of the Christ' and Dan Brown's 'Da Vinci Code'.

Jesus is as controversial now as He was when He walked the lanes of Galilee and preached in the Temple. No other historical figure from the Classical period, or since, has created the same interest or speculation. Then, as now, people are still asking the question, 'Who is Jesus of Nazareth?'

More importantly, Jesus is still big news because of the billions of Catholics and non-Catholic Christians who acknowledge Him as God and Saviour, and live lives inspired by Him. Millions have died as martyrs for the faith over the centuries. And millions have given their lives in total service as priests and religious.

He is the only human being whose claim to be God has been taken seriously by so many people, including some of the greatest thinkers, artists, political leaders, and scientists, for such a long time, and in so many different cultures.

Just think of the sheer quantity and quality of architecture, music, paintings, sculptures, literature, philosophy and theology that has been inspired by Jesus Christ. His influence on history and world culture has been profound and unsurpassed.

If His claim to be God is true, then is it any wonder that people seek to find Him, and have a personal relationship with Him? God made man, Jesus brings the truth about the meaning of life, understanding about our place in the world, and the promise of a destiny that transcends death.

The joy of meeting Jesus

Pope Benedict XVI describes the keynote of the *Catechism's* symphony of truth as trust in the biblical word. The *Catechism* trusts the Gospels' portrayal of Jesus, allowing us to truly know Jesus. It trusts that the Gospels are expressions of faith about real historical events. It holds the Christ of the Gospels to be the real Jesus. It assents to the central truth of the New Testament, that the incarnation of the Son of God is a real, historical event. If we would meet Jesus emulating this trust is the one thing necessary.

Therefore, let the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* help you find Jesus.

The *Catechism* understands that is impossible to gain a true understanding of the life of Jesus from a neutral position outside of faith, 'Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written'. (*Dei Verbum*, 12). (cf. CCC 111).

Where do we find Jesus?

Of You my heart has spoken: 'Seek His face'. It is Your face, O Lord, that I seek; hide not Your face. Instruct me, Lord, in Your way. (*Psalm 26: 8-9, 11*).

The invisible God who spoke His name to Moses in the Burning Bush, who spoke to him as a friend on Mount Sinai, and descended in His glory on the Temple, revealed His face to humanity in Jesus Christ. We encounter the mysteries of Christ through Scripture and Liturgy. It is through these two sacred ways that we catch glimpses of His face – His living personality, presence and thoughts.

Jesus in His Gospel

The *Catechism* teaches that for the Bible not to remain dead letters on the page, 'Christ, the eternal Word of the living God, must through the Holy Spirit, 'open [our] minds to understand the Scriptures'. (*CCC 108*).

The *Catechism* teaches that the Gospels are the heart of all Sacred Scripture, 'because they are our principal source for the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our Saviour'. (*CCC 125*).

Through the New Testament we are in contact with the personality, the culture, the history and the events that go together to be the mysteries of Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God's love and wisdom. 'He who has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9).

All of these elements that make up the human life of Jesus, portrayed in Sacred Scripture, are channels of God's transforming power in our lives.

These sacred pages, inspired by the Holy Spirit, describe the life of Jesus upon earth and contain His teachings. It is sufficient for us to read these pages, so simple and so sublime – but to read them with faith – in order to see and hear Christ Himself. The soul who, in prayer, often has recourse to this unrivalled book, comes little by little to the knowledge of Jesus and of His mysteries...For this book is inspired; light and power go out from it to enlighten and strengthen souls that are upright and sincere. (Dom Columba Marmion, *Christ in His Mysteries*, p.20.)

Jesus in His Liturgy

The *Catechism* teaches that the Holy Spirit, with the co-operation of the Church, re-presents the mysteries of Christ in the liturgy. (CCC 1099). This means that through the sacraments Christ becomes truly present in our lives.

The sacraments are not a historical re-enactment, like the re-enactment of an English civil war battle, rather, they enable us to encounter the living mysteries of Our Lord.

Uniquely, Jesus' human acts cannot be merely something of the historical past, like Caesar's conquest of Gaul or the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo. This is a consequence of the Son of God becoming a human being, known as the Incarnation.

Incarnation:

(Latin. Enfleshing). The Church calls the mystery of the wonderful union of the divine and human natures in the one divine Person of the Word the 'Incarnation'. To bring about our salvation the Son of God was made 'flesh' (John 1:14) and became truly man. Faith in the Incarnation is a distinctive sign of the Christian faith. (Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 86).

During His earthly existence, the words and deeds of Jesus were the actions of a man who was the incarnate Son of God. This means that every word and deed of Jesus transcends time and space because God is eternal. The *Catechism* explains it as follows:

His Paschal mystery is a real event that occurred in our history, but it is unique: all other historical events happen once, and then they pass away, swallowed up in the past. The Paschal mystery of Christ, by contrast, cannot remain only in the past, because by his death he destroyed death, and all that Christ is – all that he did and suffered for all men – participates in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times while being made present in them all. The event of the Cross and Resurrection abides and draws everything toward life. (CCC 1085).

Christ's mysteries in the liturgical year of the Church

Every year the Church celebrates and re-lives the events of Christ's life: His birth, His infancy, His Baptism, His preaching and healing, His

Transfiguration and Passion, and His Resurrection, Ascension, and glorification.

Through the activity of the Holy Spirit – and our participation in faith – in Sacred Scripture and the sacraments we enter into the drama of the mysteries of Christ. We kneel with the shepherds and magi before the manger of Bethlehem, we are plunged into the Jordan by John the Baptist, we stand with the women as they witness Jesus' death on the cross, we wait with Mary and the apostles for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The mystery of Christ in the Eucharist

The ultimate expression of our participation in the mysteries of Christ is the Eucharist, through which we share in the fullness of divine life, expressed by the phrase, *Christ's Real Presence*:

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

The fundamental basis of belief in the real presence can be traced back to the biblical concept of 'remembering' [*anamnesis*]. Louis Bouyer writes that this does not mean the mental act of recalling the past but refers to a ritual that makes the objective reality of a past saving act of God really present now (Louis Bouyer, *The Eucharist*, p. 86).

The intention behind Jesus' command to celebrate the Eucharist in 'remembrance of me' was so that the bread and wine re-actualise in the here and now the saving event of His sacrifice of His body and blood on the Cross.

In the same way that Jesus' physical body was central to His Incarnation and Paschal Mystery, the Eucharist enables Christ to be really present among us. God perpetuates forever His Incarnation through the physical realness of the Eucharistic bread and wine, become the Sacred Body and Precious Blood of Christ.

Jesus Christ is present in the Eucharist in a unique and incomparable way. He is present in a true, real and substantial way, with His Body and His Blood., with His Soul and His Divinity. In the Eucharist, therefore, there is present in a sacramental way, that is, under the Eucharistic species of bread and wine, Christ whole and entire, God and Man. (*Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 282)

Mary leads us to Jesus

Mary, the mother of Jesus, plays an important role in helping us seek the face of Christ. She shows us that it is only through faith that we, too, can participate in the mysteries of Christ:

Only faith can embrace the mysterious ways of God's almighty power. This faith glories in its weaknesses in order to draw to itself Christ's power. The Virgin Mary is the supreme model of this faith, for she believed that "nothing will be impossible with God", and was able to magnify the Lord: "For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name." (Luke 1:37, 49). (CCC 273).

Through meditation and prayer with the Mysteries of the Rosary we enter into the mysteries of Christ. Pope John Paul II writes that Mary's memories of Jesus, impressed upon her heart throughout their life together, became the 'rosary' she prayed in the silence of her heart. By virtue of her Assumption into heaven, Mary's memories are eternal and present at the heart of the Church. Through praying the rosary we share Mary's memories and, as it were, see through her eyes the mysteries of her son. (Pope John Paul, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 11).

Those who do not know the Blessed Virgin, those who do not truly love the Mother of Jesus, run the risk of not profitably understanding the mysteries of Christ's Humanity. Christ is the Son of man as well as the Son of God; these two characters are essential to Him. If He is the Son of God by an eternal ineffable generation, He became Son of man by being born of Mary in time. Let us then contemplate this Virgin at the side of her Son; in return she will obtain for us the power of entering more deeply into the comprehension of these mysteries to which she is so closely united. (Dom Columba Marmion, *Christ in His Mysteries*, p. 154).

If you would like to learn more about the faith of the Catholic Church, we invite you to enrol on the Diocese of Lancaster's online *Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies*, which uses the Catechism of the Catholic Church as a key text. <http://vle.dles.lancsngfl.ac.uk/>

Contact the Education Department to get details about how to enrol. 01524 841190 or email: educationservice@lancasterrcdioocese.org.uk

The above article was taken from the following web page where further information for those interested in the Catholic faith may be found.

<http://www.lancasterdiocese.org.uk/BecomingCatholic.asp>

Version: 23rd June 2009