

*The Knights of Columbus presents
The Luke E. Hart Series
Basic Elements of the Catholic Faith*

CREATION

PART ONE • SECTION THREE OF
CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY

*What does a Catholic believe?
How does a Catholic worship?
How does a Catholic live?*

Based on the
Catechism of the Catholic Church

by
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A WORD ABOUT THIS SERIES

This booklet is one of a series of 30 that offer a colloquial expression of major elements of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Pope John Paul II, under whose authority the *Catechism* was first released in 1992, urged such versions so that each people and each culture can appropriate its content as its own.

The booklets are not a substitute for the *Catechism*, but are offered only to make its contents more accessible. The series is at times poetic, colloquial, playful, and imaginative; at all times it strives to be faithful to the Faith. Following are the titles in our series.

Part I: What Catholics Believe (Theology)

- Section 1: Faith
- Section 2: God
- Section 3: Creation
- Section 4: The Human Person
- Section 5: Jesus Christ
- Section 6: The Holy Spirit
- Section 7: The Holy Catholic Church
- Section 8: The Forgiveness of Sins
- Section 9: The Resurrection of the Body
- Section 10: The Life Everlasting

Part II: How Catholics Pray (Worship)

- Section 1: Introduction to Catholic Liturgy
- Section 2: Introduction to the Sacraments

- Section 3: Baptism and Confirmation**
- Section 4: The Eucharist**
- Section 5: Penance**
- Section 6: Matrimony**
- Section 7: Holy Orders and the Anointing of the Sick**
- Section 8: Prayer**
- Section 9: The Lord's Prayer**
- Section 10: Mary**

Part III: How Catholics Live (Morality)

- Section 1: The Essence of Catholic Morality**
- Section 2: Human Nature as the Basis for Morality**
- Section 3: Some Fundamental Principles of Catholic Morality**
- Section 4: Virtues and Vices**
- Section 5: The First Three Commandments: Duties to God**
- Section 6: The Fourth Commandment: Family and Social Morality**
- Section 7: The Fifth Commandment: Moral Issues of Life and Death**
- Section 8: The Sixth and Ninth Commandments: Sexual Morality**
- Section 9: The Seventh and Tenth Commandments: Economic and Political Morality**
- Section 10: The Eighth Commandment: Truth**

SECTION 3: CREATION

1. *The distinctiveness of the doctrine of creation*

It is a simple and startling fact that no human mind on earth ever conceived the idea that the entire universe, visible and invisible, was *created* out of nothing, not just *made* or *formed* out of something, by a single, all-powerful God, except the Jews and those who later learned this idea from the Jews, namely Christians and then Muslims.

The Jewish idea of the universe as something *created* was as unique in history as the Jewish idea of God the Creator – the idea of a single, all-perfect, all-powerful, all-wise, all-holy, all-just and all-merciful God. The uniqueness of both ideas can be explained by the same fact: both came from God’s revelation, not man’s imagination (see Is 60:1-3).

The truth about our ultimate origin – the doctrine of creation – had the same supernatural source as the equally unique and startling doctrine about our ultimate destiny – to be spiritually married to the one perfect God. That too is something “eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9).

Different human cultures imagined different ultimate destinies: Nirvana, the Happy Hunting Grounds, the Elysian Fields, the Return to Paradise – but all these pale in comparison with the divinely revealed truth about our destiny. Similarly, different cultures also invented many different so-called creation myths, but none ever got as far as a Creator of the very existence of the universe out of nothing.

2. *The meaning of the doctrine of creation*

The Hebrew language had a unique word for this unique concept, found in no other ancient culture. “[T]he verb ‘create’ – Hebrew *bara* – always has God for its subject” (C 290). Man cannot literally create. Man can be “creative” in giving new form to matter, but God alone creates matter itself. Man can make something new out of something old, but God alone can make something out of nothing. For the gap between something new and something old is only finite, and man’s finite power can often close that gap; but the gap between nothing and something is infinite, and only God’s infinite power can close that gap.

To *create* a thing is to give it *existence*. To *make* a thing means to give new form to matter, to something that already exists. What is *created* is not just *changed*, but made to exist in the first place.

The closest man ever comes to creating is “procreating.” Procreating is cooperating with God’s most important act of creation, which is not the creation of mindless galaxies, which are doomed to death in only a few trillion years, but the creation of human beings, with immortal souls, destined to exist eternally. When God creates a new human

soul, out of nothing, he does so only when a man and a woman make a new child's body out of their previously existing matter and genetic form by sexual intercourse. That is why sex is holy.

We will now explore some of the *consequences* of the doctrine of creation; that is, what *difference* does this idea of creation make? – to our idea of God, of the universe, and of ourselves and our lives? Hardly any other idea in human history has ever made a greater difference.

3. The consequences of the doctrine of creation for the nature of God

The God who creates is a God radically different from any other. No pagan, Gentile god-idea comes even close.

- 1) For one thing, he must have *infinite* power to bring things an infinite distance, from nothingness into being.
- 2) For another thing, the Creator and Designer of this whole universe must be *infinitely wise*, for any designer must know everything he designs.
- 3) Also, he must be *infinitely loving, infinitely generous*, for creation is the gift of existence itself, and none of us could possibly *deserve* any gift before we existed – including the gift of existence.
- 4) Finally, he must also be a great artist, with a great sense of *beauty*, to have invented, all by himself, the stars, the sea, the snow. “Poems are made by fools like me, but only God can make a tree.”

God is the Creator, therefore God must be infinite in power, wisdom, love, and beauty.

What difference does knowing this truth about God make for our daily lives in this world? The difference is total. It is that all the power, wisdom, goodness, and beauty we ever see or desire or admire or love must come from this one God, for he has no rival. Because of the fact of creation, because God is the source of the very being of every good thing, he is not just one good among others, and we are fools to try to find any good apart from him. Thus the first and greatest commandment is to worship him alone and to love all that we love for him; for it is from him. All goodness is God's goodness. Only evil is not his.

4. The consequences of the doctrine of creation for the nature of the universe

If God created the universe, then the universe is really real, true, good, beautiful, and one.

- 1) It is *real*, not just an appearance, or a dream, as taught in many Hindu, Buddhist, and New Age philosophies.
- 2) It is *true* – orderly and intelligible – for it came not from mindless chance but from divine wisdom. Thus the doctrine of creation is the strongest basis for natural science.
- 3) It is *good*, and valuable, and to be appreciated and cared for, for “God saw all the things that he had made, and they were very good” (Gn 1:31). When Scripture speaks disparagingly of “the world,” the word used is not *gaia*, “the earth,” the world of nature, which is full of God's glory, but *aion*, “this

age,” the man-made world of history, which is full of folly, sin, and sorrow.

- 4) It is *beautiful*. “The beauty of creation reflects the infinite beauty of the Creator and ought to inspire the respect and submission of man’s intellect and will” (C 341). The doctrine of creation explains why we find nature so beautiful and satisfying, why it moves us so and makes us happy.
- 5) It is *one*. “There is a *solidarity among all creatures* arising from the fact that all have the same Creator and all are ordered to his glory” (C 344). This is the ultimate basis for community: the fact that all things have the same origin (God’s act of creation) and the same end (God’s glory). It is one *uni*-verse because it has one Creator.

5. The consequences of the doctrine of creation for human life

- 1) Since God’s act of creating the universe gave everything in it reality, order, goodness, beauty, and solidarity, and since we are a part of the universe (in fact, the highest, most recent, most complex, and most intelligent part, according to both Scripture and the Theory of Evolution), these five characteristics apply to us too, to us especially.
- 2) The doctrine of creation alters not only our origin but also our destiny (see C 282). The Church tells us that we are God’s children, created in his image and destined to share his Heavenly glory. The modern secular world tells us that we are only acci-

dentally-evolved dust – “dust in the wind” – destined only for the dust of death.

- 3) If God is our Creator, we have no rights over against God, as we do over against each other. How could a character in a novel have rights over against his author? Since we are created out of nothing, we have nothing we can call our own over against God. No little corner of our lives, no little chunk of our time or money, or even our thoughts, can rightly be kept, or grasped.
- 4) Instead, all good is from the one Creator, everything is a free love-gift that has come down from him (Jas 1:17). And therefore everything is to be freely and lovingly offered up to him. Since every good thing is *from* him, every good deed can be *for* him. St. Therese of Lisieux said we can glorify God by picking up a pin for his sake.
- 5) Since the Creator must be infinitely powerful, wise, and good, we can trust him totally. The God who can “do” the whole universe, the God who can do Everything, can do anything, and we can trust him with every thing. That’s why it is perfectly reasonable to believe that “*all* things work together for good for those who love God” (Rom 8:28). The Creator and Lord of the universe and of every person in it lacks neither the love to will our good, nor the wisdom to know it, nor the power to effect it. That is why it is so reasonable and right that “Jesus asks for childlike abandonment to the providence of our heavenly Father who takes care

of his children's smallest needs" (Mt 6:31-33; C 305).

- 6) Since the very existence of things is God's gift, God's deed, and since existence is not "outside" any thing that exists, but "inside" it, therefore God is present in every existing thing, everything we touch. "[B]ecause he is the free and sovereign Creator, the first cause of all that exists, God is present to his creatures' inmost being: 'In him we live and move and have our being'¹⁵⁸" (C 300). He is both "transcendent" and "immanent."

6. *Christ in creation*

Scripture says about Jesus Christ that "all things were created through him and for him" (Col 1:16-17).

All things were made *through* him, for he is "the Word of God" (Jn 1:1), and when God created the universe, according to Genesis, he did so through his creative Word. He simply *spoke* ("Let there be light!") and it *was* ("And there was light"). This Word is the pre-incarnate Christ, the eternal Christ: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... All things were made through him, and without him was not made anything that was made" (Jn 1:1, 3).

All things were made *for* him too, for he is the end and purpose for which the Father created the universe:

- "The world was made for the glory of God'¹³⁴" (C 293);

- And Christ *is* the glory of God, as a perfect son is the glory of his father, and as sunlight is the glory of the sun. Christ is God’s Sonlight.
- So the world was made for Christ. Christ is the reason for creation.

7. *God’s motive for creating*

God had no *need* to create. He was not lonely, or bored, or incomplete. He has no imperfections. “God created all things ‘not to increase his glory [for that is impossible] but to show it forth and communicate it’¹³⁵” (C 293).

Why did he do it? The motive for this sharing of his glory is pure unselfish love. “God has no other reason for creating than his love and goodness” (C 293).

This love is natural to God. It is his nature, his character, his essence. It is the nature of goodness to be self-giving, or “diffusive of itself” (as St. Thomas Aquinas puts it).

This means willing the good of the other, or charity. God gained nothing by creating us, but we gained everything, first of all our very existence. God created us for the same reason good and generous parents have many children: to share their love.

But though it was *natural* for God to create, it was not *necessary*. The universe “is not the product of any necessity whatever, nor of blind fate or chance. . . . [I]t proceeds from God’s free will” (see Rv 4:11; C 295). Nothing but God has to be; only God is necessary. Every creature is *contingent*, a “might-not-have-been.”

8. Creation and evolution

The doctrine of creation and the theory of biological evolution do not necessarily contradict each other.

We do not know *how* God arranged for the world he created to come to perfection. He could have used the evolution of species by “natural selection” (“the survival of the fittest”) to produce the human body. Scripture says he “formed” it “out of the dust of the earth” (Gn 2:7).

However, “the breath of life” (the soul) was then “breathed” into man by God (Gn 2:7). Souls cannot evolve from matter, but must be directly created by God.

Insofar as evolution explains bodies, it does not contradict the doctrine of creation. Insofar as it claims to explain souls, it does. But it is unscientific and illogical to try to explain immaterial souls by material biology. Souls leave no fossils.

Insofar as evolution explains natural processes, it does not contradict creation. Insofar as it denies supernatural divine design, it does. But then evolution goes beyond its scientific scope and becomes a theology instead of a natural science.

There can be no real contradiction, ever, between true science and true religion, because truth can never contradict truth. The same God wrote both books, nature and Scripture.

9. The natural hierarchy

God created the universe as a hierarchy; some things are “higher,” more valuable, and more important than others. Each human being may be equal in value in the sight

of God, since all are made in his image; but irrational animals are not equal to human beings. They do not have rational souls, free choice, or the knowledge of God. If animals were equal to humans, eating meat would be cannibalism.

Democracy and equality are good ideas in politics, but nature is not a democracy. God is its absolute monarch, angels his ministers, men his children, animals his pets, plants his decorations, minerals his construction materials, and time his land. All are good, all are precious, and all are loved, but not *equally*. That would be chaos, not cosmos.

“The *hierarchy of creatures* is expressed by the order of the ‘six days,’ [of creation] from the less perfect to the more perfect” (C 342). The theory of evolution agrees with this. Like the days of creation, evolution also proceeds in a progressive and hierarchical pattern.

10. *Providence*

God created the universe full of *time*. Everything in it changes. It was not complete all at once, like God, but it *grows* toward its proper perfection.

Divine providence is God’s plan by which he guides his creation toward this perfection, toward its end (see C 302). The universe is a story, God is its Author, and providence is its plot. Man is its protagonist, or main character. (If there are creatures with rational souls on other planets, they are also protagonists in God’s story. For God is the God of the whole universe, not of only one little planet).

11. First (supernatural) causes and second (natural) causes

When we thank God for the gifts of nature – e.g. when we say grace at meals and thank him for our food – we acknowledge that things in nature have two causes: the Creator and other creatures; the ultimate cause and the proximate cause; first and second causes; supernatural and natural causes. This theological fact has two important practical consequences:

- 1) All good must be traced back to God, ultimately. We must give him all the gratitude and all the glory. “And so we see the Holy Spirit, the principal author of Sacred Scripture, often attributing actions to God without mentioning any secondary causes [see Jn 1:4, for instance]. This is not a ‘primitive mode of speech,’ but a profound way of recalling God’s primacy and absolute Lordship over history and the world,¹⁶⁵ and so of educating his people to trust in him” (C 304).

Our lives can be transformed by this simple truth: we can and should see God in everything and love God in everything. Creatures are like roads on which God comes to us and we come to God. We can become saints in the middle of the most active life in the world if we live in this light and “practice the presence of God.”

- 2) But “[f]ar from diminishing the creature’s dignity, this truth enhances it” (C 308). For God loves to use natural means to do his work, to exalt and glorify his creatures, especially man.

This is true of supernatural things like prayer as well as natural things like food. “God instituted prayer in order to give to his creatures the dignity of being causes” (Pascal).

“To human beings God even gives the power of freely sharing in his providence [thus human free will and divine providence are not contradictory but complementary parts of the same divine plan] by entrusting them with . . . responsibility Though often unconscious collaborators with God’s will, they can also enter deliberately into the divine plan by their actions, their prayers, and their sufferings ¹⁶⁹” (C 307).

“God is the sovereign master of his plan. But to carry it out he also makes use of his creatures’ cooperation. This use is not a sign of weakness, but rather a token of almighty God’s greatness” (C 306). A great king exalts his subordinates; a weak and selfish king does not.

Catholics affirm the absolute sovereignty of God as strongly as Calvinists or Muslims do, but also emphasize second causes more: for instance, the visible Church, physical sacraments, the saints, and Mary.

Non-Catholics often worry that the love and respect we give to these things will detract from God’s glory. But the spirit of Catholicism refuses any rivalry between nature and grace. “Grace perfects nature” and nature points to grace. For instance, Mary always points us to her divine Son, not to herself. God exalts his saints and his saints exalt God.

This unselfish exaltation of the other person begins in the Trinity itself, where the Father loves and glorifies the

Son and the Son loves and glorifies the Father, and the Spirit that eternally proceeds from them is that very love.

12. Man's place in creation

God created “the heavens and the earth” (Gn 1:1), that is, “all that is, seen and unseen” (Nicene Creed; C 325). Man lives in both dimensions. He lives in the visible world of matter by his body, and he lives in the invisible world of spirit by his soul. The acts of the soul are invisible and immaterial: thoughts, feelings, desires, and choices have no size, weight, shape, or color.

“God ‘from the beginning of time made at once (*simul*) out of nothing both orders of creatures, the spiritual and the corporeal [bodily], that is, the angelic and the earthly, and then (*deinde*) the human creature, who as it were shares in both orders, being composed of spirit and body’¹⁸⁷” (C 327). Man is the lowest of spirits and the highest of animals. He is the center and bridge of the created universe. He is creation’s priest, for when he offers his whole self to God he offers all creation, since he is in himself all that creation is: spirit (mind and will), which he shares with angels; sensations and feelings, which he shares with animals; organic life, which he shares with plants; and physical matter, which he shares with chemicals. Man is a “microcosm,” a little cosmos.

13. Angels

Angels are not mythical but real. They are not an optional addition to the Catholic Faith; their existence is a dogma of the Faith (Lateran Council IV in the thirteenth century). Scripture reports thousands of angels as appear-

ing. The life of Christ especially is surrounded by their work (see C 333).

“Angel” means “messenger.”

“St. Augustine says: ‘Angel’ is the name of their office, not of their nature. If you seek the name of their nature, it is ‘spirit’”¹⁸⁸(C 329).

Angels are spirits who worship and serve God by ministering to men. (So do we!) They minister to men by announcing messages from God (their most important messages were at Christ’s birth) and by guarding and guiding us.

Every human being has a guardian angel assigned to him from birth to death. Christ himself assured us of that (see Mt 18:10 and Lk 16:22).

“Christ is the center of the angelic world. They are *his* angels” (C 331). When he returns at the end of the world, he will come “with all his angels” (Mt 24:31; 25:31).

14. Demons

Angels have intellect and free will, like man. Some angels chose, at their beginning, to rebel against God’s will, and became demons, or evil spirits.

Just as good spirits help us, evil spirits seek to harm us by tempting us to sin.

Any baptized and believing Christian has the power to resist temptation, whether it comes from “the world, the flesh, or the devil” – that is, 1) from the external world of fallen human society, 2) from the internal world of our own fallen, selfish instincts, of body or soul, or 3) from the supernatural world of evil spirits.

No faithful Christian can be demon-*possessed* against his will, though many will be severely *oppressed* and all will be *tempted*. The Church, like Christ, has the power to free those who are “possessed” by exorcising the evil spirits. Christ promised this gift to his Church (Mk 16:17). In most times and places, demon possession and exorcism are rare. But they are real.

If the devil is not real, the Bible lies (e.g. 1 Pt 5:8), and Christ was a fool, for he certainly believed in demons and in Satan (“the devil”) (e.g. see Lk 10:18).

15. The mystery of evil

“If there is no God, why is there good? If there is a God, why is there evil?” That is how St. Augustine stated the famous “problem of evil” (or rather, the mystery of evil). If the all-powerful Creator is all-good (1 Jn 1:5), why is there evil in his creation? The doctrine of creation by a totally good God naturally gives rise to the problem of evil.

For other religions and philosophies, which do not have the doctrine of creation, evil is less of a scandal. For if God did not create matter, evil can be blamed on matter. Or if God is a little bit bad, or weak, or foolish, evil can be blamed on God. But the God of the Judeo-Christian revelation is infinitely good, and wise, and powerful; and this wholly good God declared everything he made to be good (Gn 1:31); so where did evil come from? The question arises naturally from the story of Creation in Genesis 1 and 2, so it is answered in the story of the Fall in Genesis 3.

Evil is not a *thing*, a being, an entity. If it were, it would have to be either the Creator or a creature created by him.

But evil is not just an illusion either. If it were, it would be evil for us to fear a mere illusion! Evil is a real and tragic moral defect, as blindness is a real and tragic physical defect. It is real, like blindness, but it is not a *thing* created by God, like the eye.

The question of evil is really two different questions, for evil means two different things: moral evil and physical evil, sin and suffering, the evil we do and the evil done to us. “. . . [M]oral evil, [is] incommensurably more harmful than physical *evil* . . .” (C 311) because it harms our eternal souls and other people, while physical evil, however bad, harms only our temporal bodies and ourselves.

Fortunately, the answer to the more important question (moral evil) is clearer than the answer to the less important question (physical evil). The answer is that moral evil comes neither from God nor from the material world he created, but from our own choices. To find the origin of evil, look not up at the heavens nor out at the earth, but into a mirror. Man brought evil into the world by disobeying God’s good will and law.

Even here, however, our religion is profoundly positive. Man is not evil by his nature, which God created, but by his own free choice. Human nature is the best of all God’s creations, for it is made in his image. The worth of a single human being is more than that of all the galaxies. That worth can be gauged by the price God deemed it worth paying to redeem him: his own infinitely beloved Son’s life.

Both the cause of evil (man’s misuse of his free will) and the cure of evil (the death of Christ on the cross) are

deep mysteries, not simple problems. They are not wholly transparent to human reason. “. . . [N]o quick answer will suffice. Only Christian faith as a whole constitutes the answer *There is not a single aspect of the Christian message that is not in part an answer to the question of evil*” (C 309), just as there is not a single aspect of a hospital that is not part of its answer to the problem of disease and pain.

So on the question of moral evil we may say that 1) its *origin* is man’s free will, and 2) its *purpose* is a) the good of preserving our free will and b) the good of Christ’s redemption from it. These are two reasons God allows it. But he does not cause it. “God is in no way, directly or indirectly, the cause of moral evil.¹⁷⁶ He permits it, however, because [a] he respects the freedom of his creatures [he will not treat us like puppets] and, [b] mysteriously, knows how to derive good from it” (C 311), as he did on “Good Friday,” when “[f]rom the greatest moral evil ever committed [the murder of God] . . . God . . . brought the greatest of all goods . . . our redemption” (C 312).

God’s answer to evil is not a thought but a deed, not an explanation but a real cure – through the most amazing and unforeseeable means: his own death on the Cross. We cannot fully comprehend God’s solution to evil, but we can contemplate it every time we look at a crucifix.

Between the cross and the resurrection, between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, it looked very dark for Jesus’ disciples. In a sense that is where we are now – Holy Saturday – for our resurrection is still in the future, and only faith, not sight, will bring us there. The plan is not

over. Until it is, God struggles with us in time and history against evil, through his incarnation in Christ and in Christ's Body the Church, which is the extension of the incarnation.

This is God's solution to moral evil. But what of physical evil? That is different from moral evil and needs a different solution. Yet physical evil is closely connected with moral evil because our bodies are so closely connected with our souls. Thus Scripture traces suffering and death ultimately to sin. Our own individual sins ("actual sins") now cause most of the world's sufferings; and humanity's "original sin" (the state of alienation from God that was brought about in human nature by the Fall) causes suffering and death to be our lot in life.

Evil is the opposite of good, and God is the source of all kinds of good, spiritual and physical; so all evil, spiritual and physical, is some kind of separation from God. Evil takes the form of sin in the soul, and suffering and death in the body. Venial sin is to the soul what disease and suffering is to the body; mortal sin is to the soul what death is to the body.

We have only partial knowledge of just how this close body-soul connection "works," and exactly what happened in the historical event poetically narrated in Genesis 3 that we call the Fall. God has told us more about the practical aspect, what to do about evil, than about the theory, how to explain it. At the heart of that practical answer are the two virtues of *courage* and *charity*. We are to bear our sufferings with active courage, and work to relieve others' sufferings with active charity, especially for the weak, the

poor, and the dying. We can do much more “solving” of the problem of evil by our actions than by our thoughts.

Pain and sin are tests of faith. The saints show us how to pass this test. “St. Catherine of Siena said to ‘those who are scandalized and rebel against what happens to them’: ‘Everything comes from love, all is ordained for the salvation of man, God does nothing without this goal in mind’¹⁸¹” (C 313). If evil depresses you, read Romans 8:15-39, remembering that this is not some subjective feeling from a fallible man but the objective truth from the infallible God.

Notes from the Catechism in Order of Their Appearance in Quotations Used in this Section

¹⁵⁸ *Acts* 17:28.

¹³⁴ *Dei Filius*, can. § 5: DS 3025.

¹³⁵ St. Bonaventure, *In II Sent.* I, 2, 2, 1.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. *Is* 10:5-15; 45:5-7; *Deut* 32:39; *Sir* 11:14.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. *Col* 1:24.

¹⁸⁷ Lateran Council IV (1215): DS 800; cf. DS 3002 and Paul VI, *CPG* § 8.

¹⁸⁸ St. Augustine, *En. In Ps.* 103, 1, 15: PL 37, 1348.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. St. Augustine, *De libero arbitrio* 1, 1, 2: PL 32, 1223; St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* I-II, 79, 1.

¹⁸¹ St. Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue on Providence*, ch. IV, 138.

