Catechism for Classical Literature

The Collect for Purity:

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

1. **Gentlemen, what are you?**
    a. I am a king, for I rule myself.

2. **Ladies, what are you?**
    a. I am a queen, for I rule myself.

3. **What does it mean to rule yourself?**
    a. I am free to do good; I am not the slave of my desires

4. **How shall we then live?**
    a. Great art Thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is Thy power, and of Thy wisdom there is no end. ... Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in Thee. Lord, teach me to know and understand which of these should be first, to call on Thee, or to praise Thee; and likewise to know Thee, or to call upon Thee.

5. **Who are the virtuous pagans?**
    a. "For not the hearers of the law *are* just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them* in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel." (Romans 2:13-16)

6. **What is the Stoic solution to suffering and unhappiness?**
    a. "If any be unhappy," the philosopher says, "let him remember that he is unhappy by reason of himself alone. For God hath made man to enjoy felicity and constancy of good." Solomon says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths."

7. **How do we know God?**
    a. He reveals Himself.

8. **How does God reveal Himself?**
    a. In His word and in Nature

9. **How can we read God's Word?**

    The literal teaches what God and our ancestors did,
    The allegory is where our faith and belief is hid,
    The moral meaning gives us the rule of daily life,
    The anagogy shows us where we end our strife.

10. **What is pagan cosmology?**
    a. The origins of the universe for pagan man is a tragic world, a closed system of fate, where all stories begin better than they end. Life is meaningless suffering. "Of all that breathes and crawls across the earth, our mother earth breeds nothing feebler than a man" (*Iliad* XVIII. 130–131). Things get worse, ending in a worse state than when they started.

11. **What is Christian cosmology?**
    a. After creating the world, God says it is good: "Behold, it was very good." Then Adam sins, plunging the story of life into a fall. But there is redemption. Solomon declares, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit" (Ecc. 7:8). There may be a fall, but there is redemption, where things end in a better state of being than at the beginning.

12. **What is tragedy?**
    a. Tragedy is the archetype of a "fall story," one that describes the shape of human history for the Greeks. Tragedy is pagan, not Christian, and is the religious festival celebrating the life and death of Dionysus, whereby the peace of the polis is preserved through enacting the drama of the sacrificial mechanism in the story of a hero crushed by fate on the stage of life. Tragedy always ends in death.

13. **What is sacrifice?**
    a. The ritual that restores atonement theologically and socially. To make atonement for individual or communal sins and to resolve mimetic rivalries, a "scapegoat" is sacrificed for the transgression. For the pagan, sacrifice keeps the gods away. For the Christian, sacrifice brings God near.

14. **What is the polis?**
    a. The city-state, the place of order carved out of the chaos of the world; it is not the wilderness, where disorder and danger lurk, but it is the place where civilization is preserved.

15. What does Plato say about the polis?

a. If you want a just city, you must have a just man.

16. How does the just man live?

a. Scripture declares again and again, "The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). Aristotle says the "just" man has virtuous habits oriented to the Good. Hopkins says,

   i. the just man justices;
   Keeps grace: thát keeps all his goings graces;
   Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is —
   Chríst — for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
   Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
   To the Father through the features of men's faces.

17. What is the oikos?

a. "Human beings, in their settled condition, are animated by oikophilia: the love of the oikos, which means not only the home but the people contained in it, and the surrounding settlements that endow that home with lasting contours and an enduring smile. The oikos is the place that is not just mine and yours but ours. It is the stage-set for the first-person plural of politics, the locus, both real and imagined." It is the place where the goodness of human domestic life takes place. (Roger Scruton, *How to be a Conservative*)

b. "Home is not just any place. It is the place that contains the ones you love and need; it is the place that you share, the place that you defend, the place for which you might still be commanded to fight and die. Oikophilia is the source of many of our most generous and self-sacrificing gestures. It helps soldiers in battle to give their lives for the benefit of their 'homeland'; it animates the place where children are raised, and in which parents make a gift of what they have been given; and it enables neighbours to overlook differences of religion and culture for the sake of their common home. ... Things seen in the light of oikophilia are not to be exploited, surrendered or exchanged." (*How to Think Seriously*, 239, 256).

Timelines of Classical Antiquity:

c. 2300 bc → Noah and the flood.

c. 2000 bc → Abraham

c. 1750 bc → Joseph in Egypt

c.1500 bc → Moses

c. 1250 bc → Time of the Judges and The Trojan War

c. 1183 bc → The Fall of Troy

c. 1150 bc → Aeneas settles Italy

c.1000 bc → David is king in Israel.

c. 950 bc → Solomon builds the first temple.

c. 800 bc → The Homeric texts

c. 776 bc → First Olympics

c. 753 bc → Romulus founds the city of Rome

c. 750 bc → Greek poet Hesiod writes his Theogony and Works and Days.

c. 612 bc → Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar

c. 539 bc → beginning of Medo-Persian Empire

c. 510-300 bc → The Birth of Athenian Democracy & Golden Age of Greece

c. 510 bc → The Founding of the Roman Republic (Cincinnatus and "*dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*")

c. 500-479 bc → The Persian Wars

c. 490 bc → Herodotus, the "father of history," writes the Persian War histories

c. 484 bc → Aeschylus wins the prize for tragedy at the City Dionysia in Athens

c. 468 bc → Sophocles wins the prize for tragedy in Athens, defeating Aeschylus in the competition

c. 431 bc → The renewal of the Peloponnesian War prompts Thucydides to begin a great work

c. 399 bc → Socrates, convicted in Athens of impiety, is sentenced to death and drinks the hemlock

c. 387 bc → Plato establishes a school in Akademeia, a suburb of Athens

c. 367 bc → Aristotle, at the age of seventeen, comes to Athens to join Plato's academy

c. 336-323 → Alexander the Great

c. 264-202 → The Punic Wars

c. 81 bc → Cicero, whose speeches become models of oratory

c. 44 bc → Caesar is assassinated (Beware the ides of March!)

c. 27 bc - 180 AD → Augustus inaugurates the *Pax Romana*

c. 19 bc → Virgil dies just after completing the *Aeneid*

0-33 AD → "... and [I believe] in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He arose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. (*passus sub Pontio Pilato, crucifixus, mortuus, et sepultus, descendit ad inferos, tertia die resurrexit a mortuis, ascendit ad caelos, sedet ad dexteram Patris omnipotentis, inde venturus est iudicare vivos et mortuos.*)

34-313 AD → St. Stephen is is the first martyr of the Early Church, followed by many other saints

40-60 AD → Seneca writes on virtue and Stoic philosophy

50-60 AD → St. Paul writes his letters (and maybe chats with Seneca)

70 AD → Destruction of Jerusalem

161-180 → Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius writes his *Meditations*

312 AD: Constantine sees the sign of the Cross (*In hoc signo vinces.*)

Antiqui Voces:

1. **What says Hesiod about human life?**
    a. "But he who neither thinks for himself nor learns from others, is a failure as a man. ... It will not always be summer, build barns." (Works and Days, 302)
2. **What says Homer about human life?**

    Like leaves on trees the race of man is found,
    Now green in youth, now withering on the ground:
    Another race the following spring supplies,
    They fall successive, and successive rise:
    So generations in their course decay;
    So flourish these, when those are past away. (VI.171-175)
3. **What says Homer about the fear of battle?**

    "On valour's side the odds of combat lie,
    The brave live glorious, or lamented die;
    The wretch who trembles in the field of fame,
    Meets death, and worse than death, eternal shame."
    — Homér, Iliad XV. 563–564 (tr. Alexander Pope).
4. **What is the danger of compromise?**

    He runs on Scylla, wishing to avoid Charybdis.
        Incidit in Scyllam, cupiens vitare Charybdim.
5. **What does "pietas" look like?**

    He follows his father with unequal steps.
        Sequitur patrem, non passibus aequis. – Virgil
6. **What is the symbol of temptation?**

    The descent to Avernus is easy; the gate of Pluto stands open night and day; but to retrace one's steps and return to the upper air, that is the toil, that is the difficulty. – Virgil
7. **What should we do when we are moved to despair by the grandeur of antique fragments?**

    And what there is to conquer
    By strength and submission, has already been discovered
    Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope
    To emulate –but there is no competition -
    There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
    And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
    That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.
    For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.
        – T. S. Eliot, "The Four Quartets"
8. **What can modern man learn from ancient heroes?**

        Though much is taken, much abides; and though
        We are not now that strength which in old days
        Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are,

One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.
– Tennyson, "Ulysses"

9. What is a Romantic view of the past?

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;—
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

10. What ought to be our attitude toward learning?

Quomodo dilexi!
Mem
Lord, what love I have for your law;
* all the day long I meditate on it.
You, through your commandment, have made me wiser than my enemies,
* for it is always with me.
I have more understanding than my teachers,
* for your testimonies are my study.
I am wiser than the agéd,
* because I keep your commandments.
I have restrained my feet from every evil way,
* that I may keep your word.
I have not turned aside from your judgments,
* for you yourself have taught me.
Oh how sweet are your words to my taste;
* indeed, sweeter than honey to my mouth.
Through your commandments I get understanding;
* therefore I hate all evil ways. (119:97-104)

Collects for the Week:

a collect for Monday
O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning: Drive far from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheerfulness during the day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

a collect for peace Tuesday
O God, the author of peace and lover of concord, to know you is eternal life and to serve you is perfect freedom: Defend us, your humble servants, in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in your defense, may not fear the power of any adversaries, through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

a collect for grace Wednesday
O Lord, our heavenly Father, almighty and everlasting God, you have brought us safely to the beginning of this day: Defend us by your mighty power, that we may not fall into sin nor run into any danger; and that, guided by your Spirit, we may do what is righteous in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

a collect for guidance Thursday
Heavenly Father, in you we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you, but may remember that we are ever walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

a collect for endurance Friday
Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the Cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen.

errare humanum est	to err is human	Sometimes attributed to Seneca the Younger, but not attested: *Errare humanum est, perseverare autem diabolicum, et tertia non datur* (To err is human; to persist [in committing such errors] is of the devil, and the third possibility is not given.) Several authors contemplated the idea before Seneca: Livy, *Venia dignus error is humanus* (*Storie*, VIII, 35) and Cicero: *is Cuiusvis errare: insipientis nullius nisi, in errore perseverare* (Anyone can err, but only the fool persists in his fault) (*Philippicae*, XII, 2, 5). Cicero, being well-versed in ancient Greek, may well have been alluding to Euripides' play *Hippolytus* some four centuries earlier.[1] 300 years later Saint Augustine of Hippo recycled the idea in his *Sermones*, 164, 14: *Humanum fuit errare, diabolicum est per animositatem in errore manere.*[2] The phrase gained currency in the English language after Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Criticism* of 1711: "To err is human, to forgive divine" (line 325).

When a politician or celebrity is revealed to have some indiscretion (an affair or corrupt business dealings), many of us shrug it off and say, he or she is only “human.” Or that this foible reveals their “human side.” But in truth it is the opposite. In *On the Incarnation*, Athansius has taught us that “when we fall, we fall from a human dignity, not an angelic one.” We never “fall” into being human. After all, Christ has redefined what it means to be human. “It is in keeping commitments and displaying evidence of virtue that a man is most fully human; it is in giving into temptations, even trivial ones, that he becomes that much more bestial.”