

Introduction to the Essay *How the New Catechism Came About* by Wrenn and Whitehead

In the Mark's gospel, Jesus said "Repent and Believe" (Mk 1:15). The word "repent" incorporates many aspects of the spiritual dimension of life. For example spiritual development and transformation. Obviously feelings are involved here. "A living conscious and active faith is called for". The word "**believe**" involves a different type of activity. **Knowledge** is now involved. The **intellectual** or **cognitive** component of the faith referred to is an essential element of the faith. Historically, the Church has formulated this essential component in her creeds etc. from the earliest times.

Catechesis means the imparting of Christian doctrine. Some theologians and professional religious educators see "**doctrine**" as dry and sterile compared with the other component of Christianity; "**the living conscious and active faith**".

Professional religious educators have quite correctly sought the highest standards of up to date catechetical resources. However many totally de-emphasized the intellectual and cognitive content of the faith. The anti doctrinal viewpoint of the new global catechesis fundamentally misunderstands and misrepresents the Christian faith.

The people receiving such catechesis are urged to be good, loving, serve justice and help the poor. However they are not given any reasons **why** they should do these things.

To remedy the above incorrect catechetical emphasis, the need for a new catechism was articulated as far back as 1974 at a synod of bishops. This happened at a Polish language synod session devoted to the subject of evangelization. This group included Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, archbishop of Cracow. The synod recommended that a universal catechism be prepared. This recommendation was not accepted at that time.

Catethesi Tradendæ was based on the book of a 1977 synod of bishops. In this document, the Pope encouraged "Episcopal conferences to prepare genuine catechisms which will be faithful to the essential content of revelation, up to date in method, and which will be capable of educating the Christian generations of the future to a sturdy faith."

There was increasing anxiety at all levels of the Church on the increasing evidence that many modern Catholics had a poor grasp of their faith.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger gave a 1983 lecture delivered in Paris and Lyons concerning the crisis in catechetics and the linked crisis of the faith itself in the modern world. The stage was thus set for the 1985 synod of bishops. This particular synod was an extraordinary session that Pope John Paul II had convoked to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. No fewer than six of the nine language working groups at the 1985 synod ended up favouring the idea of a new catechism.

It was not planned in advance that a universal catechism (not mandated by Vatican II) would be mandated by this extraordinary session of the synod of bishops instead.

However on the first day, Cardinal Bernard Law, archbishop of Boston asked (in Latin!) why there could not be devised a common language to express the language of faith.

The final report of the Synod expressed the desire for a new catechism.

On June 10th 1986, the Pope named a Commission for the Catechism for the Universal Church with Cardinal Ratzinger as its head.

The above describes the way in which the stirrings of need for effective catechesis led to the movement to produce a new catechism.

I think one of the most remarkable things about the Catechism was the preparation of it -- the consultations, revisions, drafting and eventual the process of approval.

Also important was the *Catechism*'s production; the way in which bishops from the whole of the Church contributed to the draft and its approval. This was not a document drafted by Vatican theologians of some inner circle but a genuine attempt to present the historic truths of the Faith for the whole of the faithful.

For further information you can go to the essay itself or the actual book, *Flawed Expectations* on my website.

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