

# How the New Catechism Came About

By

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## I

The history of the genesis and development of the *Catechism of the Catholic of the Catholic Church* has already been told more than once. Among the available accounts explaining it there is even included an especially illuminating one coauthored by the two individuals most directly responsible for producing the Catechism, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who headed the Commission for the Catechism for the Universal Church, a twelve-member body of cardinals and bishops appointed to oversee the whole project; and then auxiliary Bishop Christoph Schönborn of Vienna (now archbishop of the same see), who had been a distinguished Dominican theologian at the University of Fribourg before being named a bishop and who served as overall editor of the *Catechism*, while assigned to the Vatican Secretariat created to manage the project.

Together, Cardinal Ratzinger and Archbishop Schönborn have provided a short but most instructive account of how the *Catechism* was put together, what it contains, how it is structured, what the principles underlying it are, what its authority is, and how it can and should be used. This account by Ratzinger and Schönborn has been published in English translation in the United States under the title *Introduction to the Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This slim volume, published in a format uniform with the *Catechism* itself, should be read along with the latter by anybody interested in studying the *Catechism* in depth. How this remarkable work came to be what Pope John Paul II has called a gift to the Church is a truly inspiring story of the faith in our times.

Other accounts of what the *Catechism* represents and how it came to be are also readily available, and hence we shall touch upon its history and background only in briefest outline here, mostly in order to establish a proper context for the all-important topic with which we shall principally be dealing in these pages, namely, the *reception* of the *Catechism*, how this magisterial work is now being received, especially in the United States, now

that the universal Church has gone to the extraordinary lengths that she manifestly has gone to in order to produce it.

When Jesus began his public ministry, the double requirement he immediately enjoined upon those who heard his words was: "**Repent and believe in the gospel**" (Mk 1:15). In other words: Change your lives, yes, but in accordance with certain truths, which I am revealing herewith, and which you are to *believe*, that is, hold in your mind as *knowledge*. Jesus elaborated more than once on the necessary connection between living the faith and believing in its truths, for example, when he said, "**If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples**", whereupon he immediately added, "**You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free**" (Jn 8:31-32). Knowing the truth has an effect on one's life. This knowledge is essential for conversion to Jesus and his Way.

The intellectual or cognitive content of the faith referred to in such scriptural passages is therefore an essential component of the faith. Historically, the Church has seen fit to formulate this essential component in her creeds; this has been true from the earliest times. Equally early catechesis became the means of the transmission of this intellectual content of these creeds. It is important to reiterate these points precisely because the misunderstanding, or de-emphasis, or even abandonment of them in much contemporary catechesis is exactly what brought about a situation where a catechism became necessary.

*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* makes clear the fundamental cognitive nature of catechesis at the outset, quoting Pope John Paul II's *Catethesi Tradendæ* (no. 18):

**Catechesis is an education in the faith of children, young people, and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life (CCC 3; emphasis in the original).**

The imparting of Christian *doctrine* is thus what is involved in catechesis. Nobody denies, of course, that the faith is fuller and broader and deeper than its doctrinal content. The *Catechism* itself, in the passage just quoted, distinguishes the imparting of doctrine from "**the fullness of the faith**". In yet another article, the *Catechism* makes clear that "**we do not believe in formulas but in the realities they express and which faith allows us to grasp.... Still we do approach these realities with the help of the formulations of faith. These permit us to express and transmit the faith,**

**to celebrate it in community, to assimilate it, and through it to live ever more fully" (CCC 170).**

Again, Pope John Paul II, in *Catthesi Tradendæ*, said about the teaching of the Church that "**this teaching is not a body of abstract truths. It is a communication of the living mystery God.**" Given the limitations of human beings, however, this living mystery necessarily has to be communicated in human words and human propositions.

The faith is indeed more than doctrine and includes such things as living one's whole life in faith, just as it also includes community celebration of the same faith. Nevertheless, the imparting of doctrine is what catechesis properly speaking is all about. The *General Catechetical Directory* made this clear when it said that the intention of catechesis was "**to make men's faith become living, conscious, and active through the light of instruction**" (emphasis added).

Today, however, we find a common error—an error especially prevalent among contemporary religious educators—that sees "**doctrine**" as dry and sterile and somehow the antithesis or even the enemy of the "**living, conscious, and active**" faith that is called for. Many modern religious educators have decided that doctrine is to be downgraded if not actually eliminated, as if the faith somehow contained no necessary truths. We cite an example of this new viewpoint selected virtually at random from a recent journal article. Literally dozens of citations to the same effect could be found in the contemporary catechetical literature, but the following represents an entirely typical one: "**Since the Second Vatican Council of the early 1960s,**" it is said, "**the Catholic Church has changed its emphasis in religious education away from catechism—the rote learning of dogma and doctrine —and towards catechesis. The attempt to make Christ present through a variety of experiences: word, worship, community, and service to others.**"

This may well be what a lot of religious educators sincerely think they have been doing, of course; but the statement is crucially wrong in more than one respect. For one thing, it was not "**the Catholic Church**" that changed the emphasis in the manner described but rather theologians and professional religious educators who put into practice mistaken catechetical theories in the guise of implementing Vatican particular formulation errs too in what it attempts to include in "**catechesis**", as we can see if we compare this statement with the quotations from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *General Catechetical Directory* above. It involves a basic confusion of categories, among other things.

While the total faith in its fullness surely does include "**worship, community, service to others**", and the like, in addition to just the "**word**"—and while these things can also be utilized as aids to instruction—catechesis as such continues to be necessarily concerned primarily with imparting the *word*. Catechesis values these other things beyond price; it assumes they have to be present and going on in the life of the Church and of the faithful; it relies on them to reinforce and fecundate its own primary message concerning the truths of the faith.

But these other things are, necessarily, not its own primary concern. Its principal concern is imparting the word, that is, transmitting the truths of the faith, yes, teaching "**doctrine**". To imagine that doctrine is not fundamental is to contradict Christ's own words in the Gospels. Catechesis, accordingly, provides—formal—"education in the faith", as John Paul II said and as the *Catechism* repeats.

The typical approach downgrading "**doctrine**", which is found in catechesis today, could thus not be more fundamentally wrong—or more harmful in its results. This has been abundantly shown over the past thirty years. Again we select an example almost at random, in this case from a new book about the *Catechism*, that we shall be looking at in more detail later on. The author of this book, Jane E. Regan, informs us that the modern theologian generally accepted as the father of the new catechesis, Jesuit Fr. Josef Jungmann (1889-1975), "**made clear that the core of the Christian message cannot be presented solely through instruction**"—the way the *General Catechetical Directory* nevertheless said it *had* to be presented!

Whether Josef Jungmann did in fact make this clear or not is not the important point here. The important thing is that the new catechists believe that he did, and, judging by the typical evidence of their work, they hold and teach this as "**dogmatically**" as ever any traditionalist ever recited, say, the canons of the Council of Trent. What this means in practice, for them, is that "**instruction**", precisely, must be deemphasized.

Regan goes farther. Citing a few of the developments in catechetical thinking that took place in the 1950s and the 1960s, she then goes on to conclude that "**not even primarily**" does catechesis take place "**within an instructional setting . . . . It is not primarily instruction, but the very life of the faith community that shapes and forms our faith . . . . catechesis involves engaging with the ways in which faith comes to expression within our community—communal living, proclamation, teaching, liturgy, and service.**"

These are conclusions drawn by the modern catechetical movement, and therefore, in Regan's view, they must take precedence over whatever a Catechism or the GCD might say to the contrary.

Also in the view of this particular author, the whole catechetical question has now been

**changed from "How are we to cover all of the topics in our time of instruction?" to "How are we to live within these dimensions of Christian life and learn to reflect on that living?" Once we recognize the community as the agent of catechesis, it becomes clear that the content of catechesis is not something we give or present to the learners, but rather a reality that we attempt to live out and incarnate with the life of the community.**

But once we have accepted that **"the content of catechesis is not something we give or present to the learners"**, we are reluctantly obliged to add: then the way has surely been opened up, and the justification handily provided, for henceforth giving little or nothing in the way of formal instruction at all—and for including no substance or truth content at all in catechesis. This, of course, is exactly the unhappy contemporary situation in catechesis, which so many Catholics have noticed and have been complaining about for a long time. This author's formulation of the question, it would seem, is just one more variant of the widely noted tendency in modern religious education simply to provide the students with **"experiences"** rather than trying to **"teach"** them anything, that is, the truths of the faith as they have been developed and handed down to us in the Church since apostolic times with the help of the Holy Spirit.

It is no accident, by the way, that this sort of new catechetical theory, which eschews content, gets itself adopted by professional Catholic religious educators at the very same time as their colleagues in secular education are also engaged in **"dumbing down"** intellectual content in modern education generally. Thus, in more ways than one, do Catholic religious educators today seem to be looking to the world for their inspiration and models far more than to the Church.

In the true Catholic context, of course, the antidoctrinal viewpoint of the new catechesis fundamentally misunderstands and misrepresents Christian faith. This faith is based first of all on the truths about God and about God's plan for us, revealed first in the Scriptures concerned with the history of God's chosen people and finally revealed in the life and words of Jesus Christ, who intended these things to be perpetuated in his Church. The new catechists make a crucial and fundamental mistake When they try to belittle

or drop truth (again, "**doctrine**") and then perhaps imagine that they can still go on exhorting their students to be "**good**" and "**loving**", to serve justice, or to help the poor, and so on.

But what they have abandoned is the possibility of being able to give their students any *reasons* why they should serve justice or help the poor. Why should the students bother, when the whole secular culture urges them so insistently in the direction of self-will and self-satisfaction instead? The results of the attempt of the new catechesis to "**catechize**", while downgrading or dropping revealed truth were always bound to be disappointing in the nature of the case, and that is exactly the way things have turned out. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* had to come, and not a moment too soon.

## II

Concrete hopes for a new catechism that would restate the faith of the Church for our modern era began farther back than anyone looking at the current catechetical scene in North America or Western Europe might at first imagine. As far back as the Synod of Bishops in 1974, a Synod session that was devoted to the subject of evangelization, the Polish-language group at the Synod (which included Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, archbishop of Cracow) recommended that a universal catechism be prepared. However, the time was not yet ripe for such a recommendation to be accepted.

At the 1977 Synod of Bishops, which was dedicated to the subject of catechesis, the question of a universal catechism was again raised, but the Synod itself did not officially endorse the idea. However, in *Catechesi Tradendæ*, which was based on the work of this Synod, the Pope did encourage "**episcopal conferences of the whole world to undertake . . . in agreement with the Apostolic See . . . 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.**"

Since he was calling for the preparation of catechisms by the bishops, it is clear that Pope John Paul II did not see catechisms as any kind of obsolete instrument for teaching and learning. On the contrary, the Pontiff steadily saw that the point of catechesis was "**educating the faithful . . . in the essential content of revelation**".

In the meantime, though, the anxiety level was clearly rising among many Church leaders as a result of mounting evidence that less and less could Catholics be expected to know their faith on many fundamental points. One

study found that only 31 percent of Catholics could name the Books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as the four Gospels of the New Testament; only 38 percent could identify Jesus as the one who delivered the Sermon on the Mount. Another study by the Gallup organization found that only 30 percent of those surveyed about the Eucharist believed that they received the true Body and Blood of Christ at Communion.

No doubt some or even much of the blame for this state of affairs could increasingly be laid to the often overpowering influence of today's morally debased "**culture**". Few generations since apostolic times have probably deserved more richly than our own such epithets as "**crooked and perverse generation**" (**Phil 2:15**), which are so often found in the New Testament, sometimes on the lips of our Lord himself. Today's marked decline in knowledge of the faith—and *practice* of it, for the one follows from the other, whatever modern religious educators may imagine—has certainly only come about because of factors other than just the "**culture**".

The unpalatable truth, we repeat, is that many Catholics today do not know their faith today for the very simple reason that they have not been—and are not being taught their faith. An *Our Sunday Visitor* survey, for example, found that the lack of knowledge of many Catholics concerning the truths about the Eucharist could be ascribed to '**poor religious education and failure to discuss the subject from the pulpit**'. Other studies have confirmed the same thing.

As the whole situation deteriorated, important figures in the Church's hierarchy were coming more and more to understand how significant the problem of watered-down and defective teaching had become. During the 1980 Synod of Bishops, dedicated to the subject of the family, so many bishops continued to be concerned about catechesis, and about the lack of an authoritative catechism, that, in Pope John Paul II's 1981 apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* on the Christian Family in the Modern World—the teaching document that grew out of this 1980 Synod—the pontiff was obliged to note that "**the Synod Fathers expressed the hope that a suitable catechism for families might be prepared, one that would be clear, brief, and easily assimilated by all**" (emphasis in the original).

The idea that "**catechisms**" truly were needed, in spite of what the experts continued to say, was increasingly catching on and finding favor among more and more members of the hierarchy.

In 1983, in an address delivered in both Paris and Lyons, France, as part of a symposium entitled "**Handing on the Faith Today**", Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger himself returned to the whole subject of the catechism in a way that drew worldwide attention, coming as it did from none other than the

prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Discussing the sources and transmission of the faith in his address, the Cardinal identified some of the fundamental problems in religious education and put his finger on what some of the causes of these problems were. "**A fundamental and grave mistake**", Cardinal Ratzinger said, "**was the suppression of the catechism, together with the claim that the very genre of the Catechism had been superseded and 'surpassed'.**" The implication here was that the teaching of the faith was bound to suffer once the Church dropped, for whatever reason, the use of an instrument that, by definition, provided an ordered and systematic statement of what the faith was. This could only lead, in the Cardinal's view, to a fragmentation of the proclamation of the message, an arbitrariness in explaining it, and, finally, a calling into question of some of its parts—exactly the things that came about in the postconciliar era.

**"Certainly, the catechism, as a book, only came into vogue during the time of the Reformation"**, the Cardinal added. **"But the transmission of the faith as a fundamental enterprise, arising from the very logic of the faith, is also as early as the catechumenate, that is, of the Church herself."** Cardinal Ratzinger concluded that the use of catechism-type formulations of doctrine in order to teach the faith flowed **"from the very nature"** of the Church's mission and therefore, he said, **"cannot be given up or laid aside"** (emphasis added).

Not everyone was prepared to applaud Cardinal Ratzinger's conclusions. For example, a well-known figure in the American catechetical establishment, Fr. Berard Marthaler, O.F.M. Conv., of the Department of Religion and Religious Education at the Catholic University of America, said of the Cardinal's 1983 speech that **"Cardinal Ratzinger's remarks were either disingenuous or misunderstood because he knew that the idea of catechisms was neither suppressed nor obsolete."**

**"He knew"**: whatever else this comment was supposed to signify, it certainly had to be considered a belated admission of some kind, coming as it did from one of the leaders of the Modern catechetical movement that had so persistently and so diligently *tried* to suppress catechisms and make them obsolete. Apparently the catechetical Movement had not finally succeeded in its aims?

The same Fr. Marthaler had himself once written, in an article that was included in one of the foundational books used in the training of professional religious educators in the United States, about what he called **"the chimera of a universal catechism"**, and in the same paragraph he had called for moving **"away from book-centered catechesis"**. This was the view from the Catholic University of America's religion and religious

studies department. Nor should we forget that what the people in the catechetical movement generally follow, as a fairly well-established habit, is not so much what the Cardinal Ratzingers are saying but rather what the Fr. Marthalers are saying.

But Fr. Marthaler and the catechetical movement could not have been more mistaken. With his usual astuteness and penetration, Cardinal Ratzinger had correctly identified in his 1983 speech some of the reasons that had contributed to the dropping by modern religious educators of the catechism as an indispensable tool of teaching and learning. These reasons, as identified by the German Cardinal, included:

- A desire "**to get in line with general developments in teaching and pedagogy**" in the modern world (which Cardinal Ratzinger believed had led to an overemphasis on methodology).
- A mistaken decision to "**limit catechesis to issues for beginners**", and another mistaken decision to subordinate truth to practice.
- An undue concentration on anthropology at the expense of theology (the Cardinal believed that emphasizing method over content made this inevitable):

These were not the only points Cardinal Ratzinger made, or could have made, in his 1983 lecture delivered in Paris and Lyons, concerning the crisis in catechetics that had by then come to be more and more widely recognized. Among other things, he singled out for praise and emulation the four "**pillars**" of the great *Catechism of the Council of Trent*—Creed, Sacraments, Commandments, and the Our Father. These same four "**pillars**" would eventually also serve as the pillars of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as well.

Nor did the Cardinal fail to link the crisis in catechetics with the larger question of the crisis of the faith itself in the modern world. Though himself a scholar of worldwide reputation—easily the peer and usually the master of any of the dissenting theologians and scholars who regularly attack and belittle him—he nevertheless pointed to the danger of attempting to teach a revealed faith on the basis of the latest discoveries of scholarship or science (as if Christians of earlier generations did not have access to the truths that save).

**"When scientific certitude is considered as the only valid, indeed, possible certitude," Cardinal Ratzinger noted in his 1983 speech, "then the certitude of dogma had to appear either as a now by-passed stage of an archaic idea or as the will to power of surviving institutions."**

These are results that, sadly, more than a few modern Catholic theologians and exegetes appear to be quite prepared to embrace, followed by many of their disciples in the modern catechetical movement. But they are also results that, it should go without saying, are radically incompatible with **"the Catholic faith which comes to us from the apostles"**. When Catholics embrace them, in whatever degree, they separate themselves from the authentic faith in that same degree.

Coming as it did from the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Ratzinger's 1983 lectures attracted wide attention and, apparently, signalled a new determination on the part of the authorities of the Church at the highest level to begin to set a term on the confusion concerning what was to be taught by the Church and how it was to be taught. The stage was thus set for 1985, when the Synod of Bishops held in that year would make the key recommendation that would lead to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

### III

That what became the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was, in effect, mandated by the Synod of Bishops in 1985 is rather well known. This particular Synod was an extraordinary session Pope John Paul II had convoked it to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council.

It was not planned in advance that the universal catechism (not mandated by Vatican II) would be mandated by this extraordinary session of the Synod of Bishops instead. On the very first day of the meeting, however, Cardinal Bernard Law, archbishop of Boston, pointed out to the assembled bishops that today **"we have to teach the faith in a world that becomes more and more a global village."** In such a world—a world in which **"young people in Boston, Leningrad and Santiago de Chile all wear blue jeans and listen and dance to the same music"**—in such a world, the Boston Cardinal wondered, why could not a common language be devised in which to express the language of the faith? (It was the part about the **"blue jeans"** that Archbishop Christoph Schöborn would later remember most vividly about this synodal intervention, especially, perhaps, since Cardinal Law's speech was delivered in Latin: **"iuvenes Bostoniensis, Leningradiensis et Sancti Jacobi in Chile induti sunt 'blue jeans' et audiunt et saltant eandem musicam."**

Whether or not such considerations really influenced the bishops at the Synod, the fact is that, by then, more and more bishops had come to realize that a modern, authoritative catechism had become quite simply imperative, regardless of what their experts might still be telling them. The idea of a catechism was already found in the preparatory reports for the Synod from the bishops of Korea, Senegal, and Mauritania. Besides Cardinal Law, Archbishop Ruhana of Burundi and the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Archbishop Beltritti, called for a catechism in interventions from the floor. No fewer than six of the nine language working groups at the 1985 Synod ended up favoring the idea of a new catechism proposed by Cardinal Law.

In view of all the interest manifested in a universal catechism at the Synod, it is probably not surprising that the full Synod recommended that such a catechism be prepared. The Final Report of the Synod said:

**Very many have expressed the desire that a catechism or compendium of all Catholic doctrine regarding both faith and morals be composed, that it might be, as it were, a point of reference for the catechisms or compendiums that are prepared in the various regions. The presentation of doctrine must be biblical and liturgical. It must be sound doctrine suited to the present life of Christians.**

Pope John Paul II did not conceal his own enthusiasm for the idea, making mention of it more than once. On June 10, 1986, the Pope named a Commission for the Catechism for the Universal Church, with Cardinal Ratzinger as its head. Other members included Roman Curia Cardinals William Baum, Antonio Innocenti, Jozef Tomko, and Simon Lourdusamy, prefects, respectively, for the Congregations for Catholic Education, for the Clergy, for the Evangelization of Peoples, and for the Eastern Churches—a very representative selection of offices within the Catholic Church's "**general headquarters**", all with a special interest in the teaching of the faith.

Another very logical choice for membership on the commission was Archbishop Jan Schotte, general secretary of the Synod of Bishops. Residential bishops from around the world were included on the commission: Cardinal Law of Boston (no doubt especially because of his key role in recommending that a catechism be prepared in the first place); Archbishop Jerzy Stroba of Poznan, Poland; Greek Melkite Archbishop Neophytos Edelby of Aleppo, Syria; Archbishop Henry Sebastian D'Souza of Calcutta, India; Archbishop Isidore de Souza of Cotonou, Benin, Africa; and Bishop Felipe Benitez Avalos of Vallarica, Paraguay.

It is surely evident from the composition of this commission that its membership was broadly representative of the worldwide Church. Accusations such as those of Hans Küng that the commission represented "**the Roman party**", in which "**everything was decided by a curial commission**", are simply groundless.

The Commission first met in November 1986 and made a number of key decisions. The commission decided, first of all, that the new universal catechism would be called by that name, rather than, for example, being called a "**compendium**", that is, a compilation that might perhaps end up on library shelves as a book for reference only. The commission wanted a book accessible to regular readers, "**offering not technical knowledge, but proclamation**", in Cardinal Ratzinger's words. The book would set forth the faith of the Church rather than mere theological opinions or arguments or products of research.

It was the commission that also decided that the book would be divided into the same four basic parts as the Church's earlier universal Catechism, the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*. These four parts, or "**pillars**", as found in the table of contents of the completed volume, are: (1) "**The Profession of Faith**" (Creed); (2) "**The Celebration of the Christian Mystery**" (Sacraments); (3) "**Life in Christ**" (Commandments); and (4) "**Christian Prayer**" (expanded from the Our Father alone).

This arrangement was criticized from the outset (especially by those who did not want any catechism at all); but its usefulness had long since proven itself in the *Roman Catechism* and its offshoots. As was immediately realized and pointed out, the arrangement corresponds to what the Church believes, what the Church celebrates, what she lives, and how she prays. It proved possible to include and explain everything essential to the faith within this overall arrangement, as anyone who has read or worked with the completed book will be aware. For example, treatment of the virtues, as well as Jesus' two great commandments of love, turned out to be easily subsumed under the general heading of the Commandments.

The Commission further decided that the new catechism would not be what in post-Tridentine times came to be called a *catechismus minor*, a "**small catechism**", that is, what we today would consider a doctrinal textbook for immediate use in catechesis in parishes, schools, and homes. The *Baltimore Catechism*, with its question-and-answer format, is an example of this traditional type of "**small catechism**".

But the new universal catechism being planned by the commission would be a "**great catechism**", or *catechismus major*, like the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* (which was "**great**", by the way, in its realization as well

as in its genre, as the present work also is). And just as the Council of Trent had specified that the catechism it mandated should be addressed primarily to parish priests, *ad parochos*, to aid them in their task of teaching the faithful, so the commission decided that the new universal catechism should be addressed in the first instance to *bishops*, the principal teachers of the faith in each diocese. Bishops are, at the same time, the ones responsible for organizing and overseeing the Church's entire education enterprise in their dioceses, an enterprise commonly extending from a diocesan education superintendent or director, through the pastors, priests, and teachers, down to the newest volunteer CCD teacher in the parish.

The commission hoped that by committing the completed work to the episcopate, greater unity in the faith, as well as in the proclamation and transmission of the faith, would be fostered. The level of the episcopate is the logical level where such unity could most likely be realized.

At the same time, however, the commission in no way intended that use of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* should be limited to bishops or to their professional specialists in religious education. Pope John Paul II himself has made this clear on more than one occasion. For example, in promulgating the *Catechism* on December 7, 1992, the Holy Father made a point of specifying that it is "**a gift for all . . . . In regard to this text, no one should feel a stranger, excluded, or distant. In fact, it is addressed to everyone because it concerns the Lord of all, Jesus Christ.**"

In another address to participants in a workshop on Pope John Paul II. preparing local catechisms, on April 29, 1993, John Paul II reiterated that the *Catechism* was "**addressed to all and must reach everyone . . . . It cannot be considered merely as a stage preceding the drafting of local catechisms, but is destined for all the faithful who have the capacity to read, understand it, and assimilate it in their Christian living.**"

In September 1993, on one of a number of other occasions when he returned to this subject, the Pope told a group of bishops from Western Canada who were in Rome for their *ad limina* visit that: "**It is not just for pastors and specialists—as has been shown by its enthusiastic reception by the laity in many countries—but is destined for all sectors of the Church.**" It is hard to escape the conclusion that John Paul II believes the *Catechism* is for—everybody.

Cardinal Ratzinger made the same point in his account of the work of the Commission for the Catechism for the Universal Church. "**This could not mean**", he wrote

**“That the Catechism would be reserved merely for a "select few", for such an interpretation would not have corresponded to the renewed understanding of the Church and of the common responsibility of all her members taught us by the Second Vatican Council. The laity, too, are responsible co-representatives of the Church's faith. They not only receive the teaching of the Church but also hand it on and develop it through their *sensus fidei*. They guarantee both the continuity and vitality of the faith. In the crisis of the post conciliar period, it was precisely this *sensus fidei* which made a decisive contribution to the discernment of spirits. For that reason it was a matter of principle that the work also be accessible to interested laymen as a tool of their Christian maturity and of their responsibility for the faith. They are not merely instructed from above but can also say themselves: **This is our faith.**”**

The idea expressed by some that with the *Catechism* Rome was trying to "**impose**" something from above upon an unwilling Church becomes highly implausible in the light of how the Commission for the Catechism for the Universal Church actually operated. The Commission saw itself as, at least in one important sense, acting for and in the name of average Catholics desirous of being able to affirm "**this is our faith**", in response to contrary modern affirmations based on knowledge or expertise of whatever kind.

Having decided that the new catechism it was commissioned to produce would be addressed to the bishops of the world in the first instance, the commission went on to make another important decision, namely, that the book would be essentially *written* by bishops as well. For this purpose a group of bishops from around the world was selected; it was a group that was almost as broadly representative of the Church as the membership of the commission itself or of the world Synod of Bishops. As things turned out, scarcely a word of the completed book would actually be written in Rome!

The bishops selected for drawing up the text included Bishop José Estepa Llaurens, military ordinary for Spain and Bishop Alessandro Maggolini of Como, Italy, who were made responsible for the first part on the Creed; Bishop Jorge Medina Estevez of Valparaíso, Chile, and Bishop Estanislao E. Karlic of Paraná Argentina, who were given responsibility for the second part on the Sacraments; and Bishop Jean Honoré of Tours, France, and Bishop David Konstant of Leeds, England, who were assigned to draft the third part on the Commandments, or the Christian moral life.

An American Archbishop, William J. Levada of Portland, Oregon and later of San Francisco, was the seventh bishop-writer commissioned to work on the text; he was given primary responsibility for the index. Finally, a general editor to pull the whole text together and insure uniformity was found to be necessary and this task was confided to a Dominican priest, later auxiliary bishop, then Archbishop of Vienna, Christoph Schönborn, of the University of Fribourg.

Thus, eight diocesan Catholic bishops were the primary authors (and general editor) of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Henceforth they were referred to as the "**editorial committee**". They enjoyed expert theological and exegetical advice, of course. In particular, a college of consultors consisting of some forty experts was named to assist the project. Still, we should not lose sight of the fact that the primary authors were working bishops, not one of whom, obviously, was an inhabitant of any ivory tower. Rather, they were pastors with immediate responsibilities for the shepherding of souls.

Choosing actual working bishops to write the *Catechism* was a singularly appropriate decision. When we consider that, as Catholics believe and as the *Catechism* confirms (**CCC 880**), Jesus Christ himself instituted the episcopacy and intended it as the necessary bulwark of his living Church, we can only consider it a remarkably providential sign that, in the present crisis of faith and of the transmission of the faith that currently obtains in our world and afflicts our Church, it should have been *bishops*, at various levels and from a number of countries, who played such a vital and predominant part in the production of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

The *Catechism* itself, of course, is manifestly one of the providential instruments created to help provide the *remedy* for our double crisis of faith and of the transmission of the faith; and it was no one but the bishops of the Church who produced it: *Nihil sine episcopo*; "**nothing without the bishop**". St. Ignatius of Antioch had said it before the Church was a hundred years old; it remains just as true today.

It evidently did not prove possible, however, to find a bishop in a timely enough fashion to write the fourth part of the text on the subject of Prayer; and so a French-born priest now living in Lebanon, the Rev. Jean Corbon, a member of the International Theological Commission, was recruited to carry out this indispensable task. He did so in the midst, of bombardments in the civil-war-ridden city of Beirut, from which he sometimes had to take refuge in his basement; it is amazing to reflect that his beautiful serene text on prayer could have been produced under such conditions.

Another interesting aspect concerning the writing of the *Catechism* was how the original text came to be written in French. An early outline of the book was drafted in Latin in 1987 and submitted for comments to the forty consultors around the world. However, this text had apparently been translated *into* Latin from the modern languages in which the writers most naturally worked: and it created as many problems of understanding and communication as it solved.

It turned out that French proved to be the one language in which all the writers could express themselves with at least some degree of proficiency (and also, no doubt, communicate with the commission and with each other) as successive drafts were produced and revised. So the decision to write the text in French was an essentially practical decision, which had the further advantage, as Cardinal Ratzinger pointed out, that the Church's final, official text in Latin would be able to benefit from having first been produced in French and translated into the other modern languages.

An interesting historical comparison is to be found in the fact that the final version of the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* was also principally written by diocesan bishops—the bishops of the Italian sees of Lanciano, Modena, and Zara—assisted by a Dominican theologian as editorial secretary! Moreover, this Tridentine work was also originally written in the vernacular, in Italian, its definitive Latin text having been produced later by a Renaissance humanist and Latinist. The overall editorial work was supervised by none other than St. Charles Borromeo, nephew of Pope Pius IV.

This original French text of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was the one approved by the commission on February 14, 1992; approved by the Holy Father on June 25, 1992; promulgated by him on October 11, 1992, with the apostolic constitution *Fidei Depositum*; and then finally publicly promulgated by him on December 7, 1992. All the other versions in various languages were translated from this text. It is worth recording that, between 1987 and 1992, this text went through ten separate drafts, which the editorial commission of the Holy See curiously styled "**projects**".

In particular, what was officially called the "**revised project**"—the fourth overall draft—was sent out to all the Catholic bishops of the world in November 1989, asking that their comments and suggested amendments be sent in by May 1990 (later extended to October 1990). This was a simply massive "**consultation**", perhaps unique in the history of the Church. Replies were received from 197 individual bishops, twenty-eight episcopal conferences, twenty-three groups of bishops other than episcopal conferences, twelve theological institutes, sixteen offices of the Holy See, and sixty-two "**others**". A total of more than twenty-four thousand

suggested amendments were sent in, every one of which was individually examined and evaluated.

Anyone who studied or worked on this draft text when it was sent out for consultation— as both the present authors did—can verify how often the suggestions sent in were adopted and the text of what became the final, definitive *Catechism* thereby improved.

Thus, once again, the entire enterprise of producing the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, far from being something "**out of Rome**", turned out to be an essentially collegial work carried out by a group of bishop-writers with the active support of the Catholic bishops of the whole world, themselves assisted by theologians and other knowledgeable collaborators. It is imperative not to lose sight of this fact of what we may almost term *collective* authorship as we proceed to examine and evaluate how the *Catechism* has been and is being received.

Moreover, in the act of producing this *Catechism*, which they thus collectively produced, the Catholic bishops demonstrated their total and entire understanding of what the Catholic faith *is*, and how it should and must be taught. As the First Vatican Council expressed it: "**For the teaching of faith, which God has revealed, has not been proposed as a philosophical discovery to be perfected by human ingenuity, but as a divine deposit handed over to the Spouse of Christ to be guarded faithfully and expounded infallibly.**"

In *Fidei Depositum*, the apostolic constitution by which he promulgated the *Catechism*, Pope John Paul II solemnly asked that this product of such Herculean efforts and exhaustive consultations be received by the faithful at all levels in the same spirit of faith and hope in which the Church hierarchy had conceived, planned, written, and proclaimed it:

**I ask the Church's Pastors and the Christian faithful to receive this *Catechism* in a spirit of communion and to use it assiduously in fulfilling their mission of proclaiming the faith and calling people to the Gospel life. This *Catechism* is given to them that it may be a sure and authentic reference text for reaching Catholic doctrine and particularly for preparing local catechisms. It is also offered to all the faithful who wish to deepen their knowledge of the unfathomable riches of salvation (cf. in 8:32). It is meant to support ecumenical efforts that are moved by the holy desire for the unity of all Christians, showing carefully the content and wondrous harmony of the Catholic faith. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, lastly, is offered to every**

**individual who asks us to give an account of the hope that is in us (cf. I Pet 3:15) and who wants to know what the Catholic Church believes.**

In other words, the *Catechism* is henceforth intended to serve as the authoritative, authentic statement of what the Catholic faith is for as far ahead as we can see into the future.

## IV

Now that we have the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, what is it that we have? The Holy Father has stated it very plainly: the book is nothing else but a statement of "**what the Catholic Church believes**". In the very same apostolic constitution *Fidei Depositum* in which he promulgated it, the Pope further described it as "**a statement of the Church's faith and of Catholic doctrine, attested to or illumined by Sacred Scripture, Apostolic Tradition and the Church's Magisterium. I declare it to be a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion and sure norm for teaching the faith.**"

What could be plainer—or stronger? We must continue to bear in mind both the force and the solemnity of the Holy Father's words about the *Catechism* here as we go on to review, in the chapters that follow, the ways in which some in the Church have nevertheless found themselves unable "**to receive**" this document, in spite of the force of the Pope's solemn words.

It is beyond dispute, however, that what we have in this *Catechism* is an entirely faithful, as well as remarkably clear and intelligible, modern compendium of "**the faith once delivered to the saints**" (**Jude 3**), as it has developed over the centuries and has been faithfully guarded and handed down by "**our mother the Church**" (**CCC 171**):

**Through the centuries in so many languages, cultures, peoples, and nations, the Church has constantly confessed this one faith, received from the one Lord, transmitted by one Baptism, and grounded in the conviction that all people have only one God and Father (CCC 172)**

It sets forth the tenets of the faith as contained in Scripture, tradition, and the Magisterium, along with the essentials of what follows from these tenets, in its short and lucid **2865** numbered paragraphs. Included in these numbered paragraphs is a veritable treasure trove of quotations from the Fathers, doctors, and saints of the Church; true gems are to be found on page after page. For example:

- St. Augustine (the most frequently quoted individual author): "**I would not believe in the Gospel had not the authority of the Catholic Church moved me**" (CCC 119).
- St. Thérèse of Lisieux: "**If the Church was a body composed of different members, it couldn't lack the noblest of all: it must have a heart, and a heart burning with love.**" (CCC 826).
- St. John Chrysostom: "**Priests have received from God a power that he has given neither to angels nor archangels**" (CCC 983).
- St. Gregory Nazianzen: "**We must remember God more often than we draw breath**" (CCC 2697).

But the *Catechism* is much more than a collection of sayings, however true and inspiring: it is an orderly and systematic presentation of the whole Catholic faith. Archbishop Schönborn points out that, like the *Catechism of the Council of Trent before it*, its four parts really represent a magnificent "**diptych**", in which 60 percent of the book (Creed and sacraments) is devoted to the works of God on behalf of man, while around 40 percent (Commandments and prayer) cover man's necessary response to God. "**God is first; grace is first**", Archbishop Schönborn concludes. "**This is the true hierarchy of truth.**"

One very interesting difference between this contemporary *Catechism* and the Tridentine one, however, is that while both books do devote around 60 percent of their total space to the *magnalia Dei*, the marvellous things God has done for us, the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* allots 37 percent of its total space to the Sacraments and only 22 percent to the Creed. This proportion is approximately reversed in the new *Catechism*, which devotes only 23 percent to the Sacraments and 39 percent to the Creed, or beliefs.

This difference is entirely explicable when we reflect that, while Trent was reacting to the challenge the Protestant Reformation posed to the Sacraments and the sacramental system, today what we have is, precisely, a fundamental crisis of faith or belief. The new *Catechism* has accordingly not only not failed to address the fundamental problem we do, in fact, face today, the question of the truth of the faith; it has done so in an admirably

sensitive manner that indicates a lively awareness of the difficulties faith encounters today.

Even a quick reading will confirm that the *Catechism* has squarely and creditably addressed and responded to the problems of disbelief and dissent that we face in the Church today. The text does not normally say that this is what it is doing. It is not argumentative; it simply does it. The *Catechism* explicitly upholds and reaffirms virtually every single point of faith and morals that has been disputed by the theological dissenters in the Church over the past generation and more.

The following represent only some of today's "**disputed questions**", on which the *Catechism* invariably upholds the Church's traditional teaching: Original Sin (**CCC 388-89**); the existence and power of Satan (**CCC 391, 635**); the existence of angels (**CCC 327**); the fact that Satan is an angel (**CCC 2864**); Purgatory (**CCC 958, 1030-31**) not to speak of the four last things ever to be remembered, which we once learned about in childhood, namely death, judgment, heaven, and hell (**CCC 633, 1022**); the perpetual virginity of Mary (**CCC 499-501**); the teaching authority of the Church (**CCC 953**); the strict obligation to profess the faith and accept the teaching authority of the Church (**CCC 3, 14, 892, 1270, 1466, 1816**), which, not incidentally, simply excludes modern-style "**theological dissent**"; the truth that the end can never justify the means (**CCC 1753**); Transubstantiation (**CCC 1376**); the institution of the seven Sacraments by Christ (**CCC 1114**); the limitation of sacred ordination to baptized males (**CCC 1577**); the truth that priests are not "**delegates**" of the people (**CCC 1533**); the indissolubility of the marriage bond (**CCC 1614-16**); the prohibition of remarriage after divorce (**CCC 1649-50**), of the use of contraception (**CCC 2370**), and of homosexual acts (**CCC 2357**), and so on.

These represent only a few of the traditional Church teachings that the *Catechism* unhesitatingly reaffirms, even certain supposedly up-to-date theologians and others — often apparently remaining "**in good standing**" in the Church all the while—have tried to convince the faithful that these same points have been "**changed**" since Vatican II.

Of course there never was any confusion at the top about any of these teachings. The supreme pontiffs of our day, John XXIII, Paul VI, and even John Paul I, every bit as much as John Paul II, have never failed to teach the authentic doctrine of the faith, usually in a clear and exemplary way. The bishops, too, have quite consistently issued excellent statements concerning what the Catholic Church continues to teach and stand for.

But there has nevertheless been more than one persistent problem: How much of the official teachings of the popes and the bishops ever really

filtered down to the average Catholic? Or how much got hopelessly distorted by the media in the telling, often with the help of dissenting "**Catholic**" commentators? Or how much of what Catholics always knew perfectly well was Church teaching nevertheless came to be imagined or represented as having been "**changed**" at or after Vatican II? Or how much simply got lost amid the general cacophony of dissident modern voices?

Whatever the confusion about all these things over virtually an entire generation, the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* now does inaugurate the possibility of a wholly new era. There no longer need be, nor should there be, any question or dispute about what the Catholic Church in fact does hold and teach, for the *Catechism* now provides the indispensable "**point of reference**" about this: anybody can look it up! The *Catechism* is accessible to everyone, and hence no one need be any longer in doubt.

This is as true of questions of faith as it is of questions of morals; it is as true in the public forum as it is of what is being taught in Catholic schools and CCD courses: again, anybody can look it up. (Concerning religious instruction, there no longer need be any dispute about, for example, memorization; the *Catechism strongly* strongly recommends it (**CCC 24**), the only "**teaching method**" it does endorse, as a matter of fact.)

In adverting to all the confusion and dissent about Catholic teaching in our time, we are not principally concerned with accusing or pointing fingers at those who have helped bring the teaching and public affirmation of the Catholic faith in our day to such a generally low estate. It is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* itself, in effect, that "**accuses**" and "**points fingers**" at them. The *Catechism* does this by reaffirming, unequivocally, the very things that not a few of the new theologians, new exegetes, and new religious-education gurus have been so diligently trying to downgrade or deny throughout the postconciliar period.

But now the new catechesis has been proven to be **wrong**; its failure has been **shown**—dramatically—by the issuance of a new fundamental teaching instrument that reaffirms and reinforces all the doctrinal truths of the Catholic faith that so many parents, pastors, and teachers had been trying in vain to get restored to catechesis for so long, only to be put off or put down, most of the time, with some such sibylline pronouncement from one of the new religions educators as, "**Oh, we don't teach like that any more.**"

But the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* does teach "**like that.**" Precisely. The *Catechism* has declined to buy into the brave new Church. Instead, it has reaffirmed the real Church, the permanent Church, the Church of all time—which is also the Church of the future.

Among its unequivocal reaffirmations, the *Catechism* reminds us that the Catholic faithful have a *right* to be instructed in the true faith (**CCC 2037**). The promulgation and diffusion of the Catechism itself thus constitutes a giant step forward in making possible for the faithful around the world the authentic instruction that is called for. The great importance of this document, therefore, resides not only in the fact that it so clearly and so comprehensively states the faith; it also lies in the fact that it is basically accessible to anybody: who can read. It might often profit from but it in no way strictly, requires, the mediation of "**experts**". Again, anybody can look it up.

## V

A final word concerning the importance of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* will complete this chapter, and it is this: just as the *Catechism* makes the traditional Catholic faith itself accessible again, so it also makes accessible, finally, the Second Vatican Council! In a very important sense, this book is the Catechism of Vatican II, just as the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* of in 1566 was the book of the sixteenth-century Tridentine council.

Pope John Paul II himself has described the *Catechism* as "**the most mature and complete fruit of the Council's teachings [it] presents it in the rich framework of the whole of ecclesial Tradition.**" The book, although drawing upon "**the whole of the Church's Tradition**", nevertheless also expressly describes itself (**CCC 11**) as aiming to present "**an organic synthesis of the essential contents of the Catholic doctrine as regards both faith and morals, in the light of the Second Vatican Council**" (emphasis added). The *Catechism* singles out the Council, in other words, as one of its own principal sources. After sacred Scripture itself, in fact, Vatican II is the single most frequently quoted source for the *Catechism's* teachings. John Paul II concludes *Fidei Depositum*, the official document promulgating the *Catechism*, significantly, with the words: "**Given October 11, 1992, the thirtieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council.**"

All this is important. Vatican Council II, the twenty-first general council of the Catholic Church, even though it was itself one of the most significant Church events of the entire twentieth century—General Charles de Gaulle, while president of France, once remarked that it was the most important event of any kind in the twentieth century!—has nevertheless also been one of the most misunderstood. In the experience of the average Catholic it has also been, too often, a clumsily misapplied event, and hence it still remains misunderstood.

Students of the history of the Church can make an excellent case that Vatican Council II was not only necessary. it was long overdue. The work of the First Vatican Council, after all, had never been formally, completed, having been interrupted by the entry of an Italian occupying army into Rome in September 1870. Vatican I was never either reconvened or officially closed. Several subsequent popes thought of reconvening it, but what finally happened, as everybody knows, is that Pope John XXIII decided, in 1959, to convene an entirely new council, which became Vatican II.

Vatican II, as it actually took place, had two kinds of results. It had "**official**" results, embodied in the sixteen documents issued by the Council, and in the further legitimate and "**official**" reforms that issued from them, enacted by the authority of the Church. Unfortunately, it also had some other, rather dramatic, "**unofficial**" results as well, results that arose at least partly out of the fact that certain liberal elements in the Church desirous of "**change**" seized upon what they called "**the spirit of Vatican II**" in order to import into the Church's life many things the Council had neither mandated nor called for.

Meanwhile, many traditionally minded "**good Catholics**", especially in North America, had never really seen the point of the Council anyway. For them the Church seemed to be "**just fine**" as she was, and no "**changes**" were considered necessary. When, however, what appeared to be almost a mania for change for the sake of change then came to seem to be the principal result of the Council, it is perhaps not surprising that some of these Catholics reacted against what they understood "**the Council**" to be.

Indeed, some traditionally minded Catholics, even today, continue to hearken back nostalgically to the preconciliar days when the Church had indeed seemed "**just fine**"—when there were more reverent and better attended Masses, sounder teaching, stricter moral practice, more respect for authority, conversions up, priestly and religious vocations up, fewer divorces, and so on. It is not terribly hard to understand, in fact, a preference for the Church as she was in those days, before she was beset with all the problems that have obviously plagued her since.

It does not matter that many of these problems stem as much as anything from the intrusion of the modern culture of the World into the Church. The fact remains that in certain important respects the Church no longer appears to be what she appeared to be before the Council; *post hoc, ergo propter hoc!*

Moreover, it remains true that all of the changes in Church practices legitimately voted by the bishops at Vatican II *did*—and necessarily so—

mean the inauguration of an official "**era of change**" in the Church. In the course of this particular era of change, however, a number of other agendas besides Vatican II's official agenda were also unfortunately introduced into the life of the Church. Too often these alien agendas were successfully promoted by various interested parties working in such areas as theology, liturgy, catechetics, and the like. Some of these same alien agendas are still present in today's Church.

Much of the confusion in the Church over the past quarter century, in other words, including especially that brought about by the new catechesis itself, came in under the guise of changes supposedly mandated by Vatican II, whether or not that was actually the case. Vatican II again, *did* mandate many changes. It did not, however, mandate all of those that have actually occurred, nor, certainly, was it responsible for the *way* in which some of them occurred. The new catechesis, though it is demonstrably incompatible with the doctrines of Vatican II, was nevertheless successfully represented and widely implemented as something that had indeed been mandated by the Council.

The average Catholic, of course, could not, and, generally speaking, cannot, distinguish between changes legitimately mandated by proper authority and changes introduced on their own by zealots and innovators working within the Church's own structural "**system**". Indeed, it has sometimes even seemed that many pastors and bishops have sometimes had trouble distinguishing between changes that are legitimate and those that are not, according to the authentic mind of Vatican II as set forth in its official enactments.

Doctrinally speaking, of course, Vatican II changed nothing, even while it clarified much and signalled important and legitimate doctrinal developments. Few of the faithful, however, have ever directly, studied the sixteen documents of Vatican II in depth. Instead, Catholics, out of long-standing habit, have naturally tended to rely on their priests and theologians to interpret and implement all the changes for them. Consequently, depending upon whether the Church's official Vatican II agenda or a dissenting variant of it was being implemented in any particular case, Catholics generally have gotten widely varying versions of just what it was the Council actually taught and mandated and entailed. In fact, some of this confusion continues to reign. Discerning what is authentic according to the true mind of the Church is not always easy.

In such a confused situation, it is perhaps not surprising that some sincere Catholics could even come to question the legitimacy of Vatican II itself. At the very least, it is understandable that they might have reacted quite negatively to certain things reputed to result from "Vatican II". A few traditionalist Catholics even imagine, apparently, that the whole conciliar

and postconciliar experience has been nothing but a bad dream and that somehow, some day, in their view, the Church will just wake up and restore the Latin Mass and the other practices of what is remembered as the Church of Pope Pius XII (or imagined to be such by those who never experienced it) back before all the unpleasantness began.

This "**traditionalist**" view, of course, is quite untenable: there is no way that Vatican II can be considered anything but an entirely legitimate ecumenical council of the Catholic Church. Its doctrinal teachings are guaranteed by the assistance of the Holy Spirit promised to the extraordinary Magisterium of the Church, and its legitimate practical mandates are incumbent upon all loyal Catholics. All the supreme pontiffs of our day, from John XXIII through John Paul II, have understood and accepted the Council in precisely these terms.

And with the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, it is now possible for the most traditionally minded of Catholics to be able to *see* how Vatican II really fits into the long and inspired history of the Catholic Church. Up to now the sixteen documents of Vatican II have been largely *terra incognita* for too many Catholics, who have generally reacted to the Council more or less according to how it happened to impinge upon their lives in their parishes. Now, however, these sixteen documents of Vatican II have been marvellously integrated into the *Catechism's* systematic presentation of the Church's whole faith and life.

Dozens, indeed hundreds, of individual *Catechism* entries consist mostly, if not entirely, of direct quotations from the documents of Vatican II (for example, **CCC, 51, 781, 898, 909, 913, 954, 1163, 1422, 1555, 1667, 1776, 2371, 2527**, and so on). Over and over again, the reader is struck by how aptly, and pertinently a reference to or even a direct quotation from the Council does enshrine the Church's perennial teaching on this or that point of faith and morals.

Not the least important thing about the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, then, is that it has finally and at long last made the Second Vatican Council accessible to the average Catholic. The late Pope Paul VI liked to refer to Vatican II as "**the catechism of our times**", but too many Catholics did not understand what he meant, and a few of them still do not.

Now, however, the means exist to enable us to begin to see how it all fits together. The true renewal of the Church originally envisaged by Pope John XXIII and enacted by the Council, so often sidetracked and even derailed by dissident agendas within the Church, can now finally be carried out in reality. With this *Catechism*, Catholics can now turn confidently toward a future that must necessarily include a program for the evangelization

(including, in many places, the reevangelization) of the world. This, after all, is fundamentally what Vatican Council II was supposed to be all about, as Pope John XXIII originally conceived it. The *Catechism*, marvellous gift to the Church that it represents, cannot but be one of the providential instruments that we now possess in order to aid us in this task of evangelization to which we are all called.

The above essay is taken from the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of the book, *Flawed Expectations* by Monsignor Michael J. Wrenn and Kenneth D. Whitehead. It can be viewed online using the link <http://www.christendom-awake.org/fe.htm> A brief introduction to the essay can also be accessed on the same web page. In addition there is provided a link for you to view the complete online version of the book.

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