

**EDITORS' NOTE:** This is the second in a five-part series, which will run through the June 16 issue.

• 11. How is all the material organized in the new catechism?

The new catechism, like the Catechism of the Council of Trent, is divided into four major parts. They are referred to as the "four pillars" on which the catechism is built. In his Apostolic Constitution promulgating the catechism, the Holy Father called them the "four movements of a great symphony." They are 1) the Creed (what the church believes), 2) the Sacraments (what the church celebrates), 3) the Commandments (what the church lives) and 4) the Our Father (what the church prays).

The catechism consists of 2,685 paragraphs, each of which is numbered. There is an internal cross-referencing system among the paragraphs which makes it simple to find all the passages in the catechism which treat a particular subject. In addition, the catechism provides several indices for ease in locating particular passages. Indices are organized according to themes, Scriptural citations, symbols of the faith, documents of ecumenical councils, documents of other councils and synods, pontifical documents, ecclesiastical documents, canon law, liturgical texts and ecclesiastical authors.

• 12. Is the new catechism intended to replace other catechetical documents of the church?

No. The new catechism is intended to stand beside the other catechetical documents such as, *Catechesi Tradendae*, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, The General Catechetical Directory and the catechetical documents of episcopal conferences. These documents create part of the context in which the new catechism is received and mediated to the particular circumstances of the local or national church. The new catechism is intended to be a resource for the continuing renewal of catechesis and the development of future catechetical materials.

**CATECHISM**



**10 QUESTIONS AT A TIME 2ND PART IN A SERIES**

• 13. What is the teaching authority of the new catechism?

The catechism is part of the church's official teaching in the sense that it was suggested by a Synod of Bishops, requested by the Holy Father, prepared and revised by bishops and promulgated by the Holy Father as part of his ordinary Magisterium. The Holy Father has said that the catechism "is given to serve as a sure and authentic source book for the teaching of Catholic doctrine."

• 14. Is the new catechism simply a list of doctrinal formulations?

No. The new catechism presents the history and tradition of the church's doctrine in a complete yet summary way. It draws heavily from Scripture, Patristics, Liturgical texts and the lives and writings of the saints to illustrate the doctrinal content. The witness of these sources, especially the words and example of saints and scholars, underscores the church's ongoing, living tradition.

• 15. Is this new catechism intended to be used "as is" in all the pluriform churches throughout the world that make up the universal church?

Although it will be translated into several languages, there is only one new catechism for the whole church. The new catechism contains what the church holds and teaches throughout the world. It is a resource for the development of culturally sensitive catechisms and catechetical materials. By its own acknowledgement, the catechism does not intend to achieve this cultural sensitivity itself. Rather "such indispensable adaptation, required by differences of culture, age, spiritual life, and social and ecclesial condition among God's people," belongs in oth-

er catechisms inspired by this work, and is the particular task of those who teach the faith.

• 16. How will the new catechism be "adapted" to the multicultural situation of the church in the United States?

This is the task that lies ahead for the bishops and the authors, editors and publishers of catechetical materials. The revision of catechetical materials presently in use in the dioceses of the United States and the development of any new materials will have to take the new catechism's entire content as well as its general directive for "indispensable adaptation" very seriously. Together they will have to find ways to communicate the church's universal teaching as it is expressed in the experience of the church in the United States. That experience is multicultural, therefore any catechetical materials developed from the new catechism will have to be faithful to particular cultural experiences as well as to the entire content of the new catechism.

• 17. What is the doctrinal authority of the catechism?

The Holy Father ordered the publication of the catechism by the Apostolic Constitution, *Fidei Depositum*, on Oct. 11, 1992. An apostolic constitution is a most solemn form by which popes promulgate official church documents. The new Code of Canon Law, for example, was promulgated by the Apostolic Constitution, *Sacrae Disciplinae Leges*.

• 18. What did the Holy Father say about the doctrinal authority of the catechism?

In *Fidei Depositum*, Pope John Paul II said, "The Catechism of the Catholic Church, which I approved on 25 June, 1992, and whose publication I command today in virtue of the apostolic authority, is a presentation of the church's faith and of Catholic doctrine witnessed to or clarified by sacred Scripture, the apostolic tradition and the church's magisterium. I acknowledge it as a valuable and authorized instrument at the service of the ecclesial

communion and as a sure and certain standard for the teaching of the faith."

• 19. Is the doctrinal authority of the catechism equal to that of the dogmatic definitions of a pope or ecumenical council?

By its very nature, a catechism presents the fundamental truths of the faith which have already been communicated and defined. Because the catechism presents Catholic doctrine in a complete yet summary way, it naturally contains the infallible doctrinal definitions of the popes and ecumenical councils in the history of the church. It also presents teaching which has not been communicated and defined in these most solemn forms. This does not mean that such teaching can be disregarded or ignored. Quite to the contrary, the catechism presents Catholic doctrine as an organic whole and as it is related to Christ who is the center. A major catechism, such as the catechism of the Catholic Church, presents a compendium of church teachings and has the advantage of demonstrating the harmony that exists among those teachings.

• 20. Is the doctrinal authority of the catechism equal to the documents of the Second Vatican Council?

Just as the catechism contains the most solemnly defined dogmas of the church, it also contains the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. The worldwide consultation of the bishops that preceded the promulgation of the catechism gives it a collegial character. It is, as the Holy Father has said, "the result of a collaboration of the whole episcopate." It would seem, however, that the catechism did not have the benefit of the complete exercise of effective collegiality that accompanies the writing, disputation, revision, consensus, agreement and eventual promulgation of documents of an ecumenical council. But it must be noted that the form of a catechism is distinct from the form of conciliar documents. They are complementary, but they are not identical.

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