

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

• 21. Can the catechism be disregarded?

No. The catechism is part of the church's ordinary teaching authority. The pope has placed his apostolic authority behind it. Its doctrinal authority is proper to the papal magisterium. In *Fidei Depositum* the pope has termed the catechism a "sure norm for the teaching of the faith" and "a sure and authentic reference text." He has asked "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 the people to the life of the gospel."

• 22. As the catechism sets forth a systematic presentation of Catholic doctrine, does it neglect the context for that doctrine, namely God's relationship with his people?

The theme of "covenant" is evident throughout the new catechism. It is one of the threads that weaves the catechism into a unified whole. While it is true that both the German and French catechisms for adults organize their content around the "covenant," the new catechism emphasizes that central theme of God's relationship with his people in appropriate ways with frequent references throughout the text.

• 23. Does the new catechism remove the content of faith too much from the lived Christian life?

The largest portion of the catechism treats the content of the faith (Book One), but the second largest treats the moral life (Book Three). The relationship between what one believes and consequently how one behaves on account of that belief is very clear and forceful in the new catechism. This is especially evident in the section on the church's social teachings. Faith, then, is presented as more than the systematic knowledge of doctrine. In mediating the new catechism within local churches, the relationship between faith and life needs continually to be demonstrated so that transforming power of Christian message might be evident.

• 24. Since the catechism is written in a declarative and expository rather than apologetic style, does it discourage searching and questioning?

The new catechism sets forth the content of the faith in a comprehensive yet summary fashion and in a positive and explanatory manner. In this sense, it answers many questions about doctrine in a clear and unambiguous way. On the other hand, however, the catechism recognizes that faith is an ongoing journey on which questions and doubts come naturally and need to be addressed at the opportune moment. The new catechism — far from preempting discussion — provides accurate information with which to carry on informed discussion.

• 25. Can an individual's quest for God be helped by the new catechism?

While the catechism is organized around the four traditional pillars of catechesis, it can be used as a valuable resource for the formation of catechumens in a group or for an individual. Since the catechism does not intend to offer a methodology for catechesis or impose a single learning pattern, its content can be used in a variety of catechetical methods and settings with equal value. The catechism has an inherent flexibility that can correspond to the particular faith journeys of all believers.

• 26. Is the new catechism a spiritual book in any sense?

The catechism's spirituality rests on the foundation of Trinitarian life. The relationships among the persons of the Trinity provide the model for human relationships. Some have suggested reading Book Four (Prayer) first to put the rest of the catechism in the context of prayer. But the frequent references to the saints and the spiritual doctors of the church

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throughout the catechism make this unnecessary. In fact, the catechism can be read from the point of view of a spiritual journey in which what the church believes, celebrates, lives and prays combine to yield information, formation and the hope of transformation by God's grace along the way. The centrality of the Trinity as the organizing principle of the catechism assures its spiritual orientation.

• 27. Is the catechism intended to substitute for local, approved catechisms and catechetical materials?

No. The catechism is intended to encourage and assist national and local churches in drafting new catechisms and catechetical materials. As the pope said in the Apostolic Constitution, *Fidei Depositum*: "It is intended to encourage and assist in the writing of new local cate-

chisms which take into account different situations and cultures but which carefully guard the unity of the faith and fidelity to Catholic doctrine."

• 28. Is the catechism an expression of inculturation on the global or universal level?

Yes. The church is not bound exclusively to any race, nation, way of life or custom. The church enters into communion with all different forms of culture. The catechism re-expresses the Christian message at the level of the universal church and therefore represents a successful inculturation of the faith at that level. It reformulates the documentary tradition of the church within the global culture in an admirable way.

• 29. Does the catechism require inculturation on the local level?

Yes. The catechism does not undertake adaptations of its content nor does it espouse particular catechetical methods required by differences of culture, age, spiritual life and the social and ecclesial situation of those to whom it is addressed. These indispensable adaptations are left to the catechisms which will follow the catechism and, even more importantly,

to those who instruct the faithful.

• 30. Can this "indispensable adaptation" be accomplished?

Yes. The catechism uses a straightforward doctrinal style to communicate the content of the Catholic faith. Such a style presents Catholic doctrine in an intelligent and coherent way which can only assist authors, editors and publishers of national and local catechisms and catechetical materials. It is their responsibility, under the guidance of the bishops, to adapt or mediate the catechism to the local culture and to use this major catechism as the primary resource in the development of minor catechisms.

Two additional guides for the indispensable adaptation of the catechism might be suggested. First, the documents of the post-conciliar catechetical magisterium, especially the *General Catechetical Directory* and *Catechesi Tradendae*, contain criteria of a more general nature for the mediation and inculturation of the catechism. Second, the qualities and attributes of the local, regional and national catechetical ministry contain more particular criteria for the mediation of the catechism.



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