

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC CATECHISM PROJECT

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Among the more basic works of the Church in the Philippines is that of catechesis. Since catechesis has been going on in one form or another since the Church was founded here, it does not enjoy the special interest attracted by new initiatives such as "the thrust for justice," "building basic Christian communities," "inculturation," "identification with the poor," and the like. Nevertheless, while drawn into all these newer apostolic endeavors, catechesis remains an essential — arguably the most essential — ministry of the Church in the Philippines today. The following presents a particular project of the catechetical ministry — an "interim report" on the effort to produce a national Catholic catechism for the Philippines.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

In October 1984 the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy in Rome gave official approval to the National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines [NCDP] entitled *Maturing in Christian Faith*.¹ This marked the successful conclusion of over five years of wide consultation among catechetical leaders and of persevering collaboration by a group of theologians working for the Episcopal Commission for Education and Religious Instruction (ECERI) under the direction of Archbishop Leonardo Z. Legaspi, O.P., D.D. But in the long process of composition and multiple revisions,

1. Episcopal Commission for Education and Religious Instruction, *Maturing in Christian Faith, the National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines* (Pasay, Metro Manila: Saint Paul Publications, 1985). For an account of the Directory's history, see Linda T. Tacorda, "History and Development of the National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines," *Docete* 9, no. 48 (January/March 1987) 14-28.

it became apparent that something more was needed beyond the general guidelines and principles proposed by the national Directory. What the catechetical leaders in the field were looking for was some book that actually did what the *NCDP* prescribed — a practical example of how the “Good News” could be communicated effectively in our concrete Philippine situation today. While acknowledging the real value of the Directory, these Church leaders in catechesis and religious education nonetheless voiced the need for a follow-up volume that would constitute a general source book, officially approved by the Philippine hierarchy, which could serve as a text in the formation of catechists and in adult catechesis, and as a proximate guide in the production of local materials for school and parish, adapted to specific audiences of various age levels.

Thus even before the *NCDP*'s final approval from Rome, ECERI brought together a representative group to plan for a follow-up volume to the Directory. Preliminary discussions were held in October 1983, and succeeding meetings drew up a rough sketch for a national catechism. A number of the consultants had been members of the Directory's editorial board, but additional experts graciously agreed to contribute to the new project.² Some preliminary outlines were discussed and rejected before the general plan of the catechism was agreed upon in June 1984 and individual chapters assigned to various members of the working committee. Work progressed slowly until preliminary drafts of most of the chapters were completed and discussed in editorial board meetings. A revision of all the question-and-answer sections concluding each chapter was attempted in order to effect greater unity and continuity throughout the catechism, but this proved to be only partially successful. More re-writing and editorial work were needed, but unfortunately this task was interrupted by the national political crisis and was only taken up again in November 1986.

Revised drafts of the Preamble and the first two chapters of the catechism were presented to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) in January 1987, to determine if the project was worth continuing. The Philippine hierarchy heartily

2. Although there has been no attempt to keep secret the names of the editorial board of both Directory and now the catechism, nevertheless the policy adopted was that individual writers and consultants were contributing to the common project as members of a team conscripted by ECERI, and not in view of any personal recognition.

endorsed the projected catechism for the second time, and the way was opened for more concentrated efforts on the part of the editorial staff. Present plans call for completion of the first draft of the catechism for submission to the CBCP in January 1988. Final approval, of course, according to the new Code of Canon Law must be obtained from the Holy See.³

PRESENT CONTEXT FOR A NATIONAL CATECHISM

Before entering into the details of this project of a national Catholic catechism for the Philippines, a preliminary overview of the wider context is needed. First, there are the previous national catechisms and their individual histories, dating from the so-called "Dutch Catechism" of 1965, continuing in the French Catechism, *Pierres vivantes*, and most recently in the publication of the doctrinal half of the German catechism under the general editorship of Walter Kasper.⁴ All three catechisms have been the result of highly skilled teams of professional experts in catechetics, working together through a relatively long and difficult process, and finally encountering (in the case of the first two) serious difficulties in terms of final approval from the pertinent Roman Congregations. In brief, the recent history of national catechisms (and directories) has not been such as to engender undue optimism. Nor does this, of course, take into account the numerous catechism-projects that never succeeded in producing a final text.

Secondly, there is the recently launched project of a "catechism for the universal church" recommended by the Synod of Bishops in 1985.⁵ A Pontifical Commission has been formed under the presidency of Cardinal Ratzinger to develop this "compendium of all Catholic doctrine regarding both faith and morals [to serve as] a point of reference for the catechisms and compendiums prepared

3. *The Code of Canon Law* (London: Collins, 1983), Can. 775, 2, which repeats the directives of the *General Catechetical Directory* (1971) nos. 119, e, and 134.

4. See *A New Catechism: Catholic Faith for Adults* (London: Burns & Oates, 1967); *Pierres vivantes*. Recueil catholique de documents privilégiés de la foi (Paris, 1980); and the description of the new German catechism given by Walter Kasper in "The Church's Profession of Faith: On Drafting a New Catholic Catechism for Adults," *Communio* 12 (Spring 1985) 49-70.

5. See John Paul II, "Preparing the New Catechism or Compendium of Catholic Doctrine," *Origins* 16 (1986) 487-88. For two recent comments on the universal catechism, positive by B. Marthaler and negative by E. Zoghby, see *Synod 1985: An Evaluation*, ed. G. Alberigo and J. Provost, *Concilium* 188 (December 1986) 85-98.

in different regions."⁶ Some such idea of a general catechism has been envisioned even from the time of Vatican I and was clearly one motive behind Paul VI's "Credo of the people of God."⁷ John Paul II's description of the present project, however, makes very clear that the catechism (1) serves "not as a substitute for diocesan or national catechisms, but as a 'point of reference' for them; (2) is not meant to be an instrument of flat 'uniformity', but an important aid to guarantee the 'unity in the faith'." The catechism is described positively as (1) having the teachings of Vatican II as constant point of reference; (2) respecting the hierarchy of Christian truths yet truly "complete"; (3) a valid instrument for a catechesis that seeks to adapt its teaching to the capacity of those who receive it; and (4) in a presentation that would be "biblical and liturgical."⁸

Given the fact that this project of a universal catechism was explicitly affirmed NOT to substitute for national catechisms, together with its uncertain projected publication date of 1990, the Philippine Bishops judged it expedient to continue their national catechism project with due diligence and constancy. This practical decision was apparently based on the urgent felt-need for a sound, up-to-date Filipino Catholic catechism, together with the understanding that such a work could be revised and modified in terms of the universal catechism when the latter appeared.

The third aspect of the context surrounding this national catechism project is the proliferation of various catechisms in the local market. The over-riding initial impression is that there already exists a copious number of catechisms for every need and occasion. A more critical second look, however, reveals the solid basis for the felt-need of an officially approved catechism for the whole Philippines. What is perhaps most significant here, however, in

6. See Synod of Bishops, 1985, Final Report II, B, a, 4.

7. Berard Marthaler notes the project of a universal catechism for children which Vatican I left unfinished, and refers to the work of Michael T. Donnellan, *Rationale for a Universal Catechism, Vatican I to Vatican II* (Ann Arbor: Microfilms, 1972). See *Catechetics in Context* (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, 1973) XVI. For Paul VI's creed, see "The Credo of the People of God," *Catholic Mind* 66, no. 1225 (September 1968) 58-64. The Creed was unfortunately eclipsed by the reaction to "Humanae Vitae" which was released less than a month later, July 29, 1968. A Tagalog translation of Paul VI's Creed was made by Msgr. Jose Abriol and published by the Daughters of St. Paul, 1968.

8. John Paul II, "Preparing the New Catechism," 487.

noting this detail of the actual context, is not so much the *number* of local catechisms as the *mentality* and mindset they indicate. Allowing for some over-simplification, it can be said that many engaged in parish and school religious education reveal one striking characteristic: an extremely sharp concentration on their immediate work and problems, with corresponding weakened ability to profit from others' work and collaborate in common projects. This may well be true in most fields of endeavor, but it seems to be especially true of those engaged in religious instruction and formation. They are rightfully led to consider their work as a personal *vocation* rather than a mere occupation or job. While such an appreciation of catechesis is truly admirable, it may, when improperly conceived, be one source of the unfortunate general lack of effective collaboration and continuity decried in the *NCDP*.⁹ Realistically, then, this third aspect of the context means that any "national" catechism must "be sold" to its practitioners. Priests, religious, catechetical coordinators, and the like, have to be shown the advantages of working from a common base. This is the perduring context which the authors of the national catechism have constantly had to keep in mind.

The number and variety of local catechisms indicate, however, a final dimension of the context: the current, widespread proselytizing of Catholic Filipinos by numerous Christian and non-Christian religious sects, on one hand, contrasted with the growing secularizing modernization experienced throughout the Philippines on the other. Both these phenomena are clearly the immediate motivating force behind most of the local catechetical literature. Nominal "folk Catholicism" has suddenly become inadequate to respond to the concrete challenges, influences and open attacks from these divergent forces on the Catholic faith. All of a sudden there is wide recognition that the great mass of Filipino Catholics are in dire need of a sound, systematic, continuing catechesis in the faith. It is perhaps this dimension of the context that above all grounds the need and legitimacy of the national Catholic catechism project.

9. See the *NCDP*, esp. nos. 453-60 on the need for planning and collaboration.

PLAN OF THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC CATECHISM

The description of this project of a national catechism for the Philippines is organized in responding to four basic questions: (1) *what* is a national catechism?; (2) *why* is such a work needed?; (3) *how* does the catechism respond to these needs?; and (4) *for whom* is the catechism intended? A final section discusses the helps and hindrances that may influence the effective *use* of the actual catechism.

WHAT IS A NATIONAL CATECHISM?

There is first the ambiguity attached to the very term "catechism." It is helpful to distinguish between *catechetics* as the science and art of catechesis, *catechesis* as the activity of communicating the Christian message, leading to maturity of faith, and *catechism* signifying a manual or compendium of Christian doctrine.¹⁰ The ambiguity regarding the meaning of catechism is due to the fact that catechism originally referred to *oral instruction* in the faith, especially related to preparation for Baptism. Only with the coming of the Reformation, Luther's two catechisms, the various catechisms of Canisius, the Roman catechism commissioned by the Council of Trent, and the latter catechism by Bellarmine, did "catechism" commonly refer to a book or manual of Christian instruction.¹¹

Catechesis became "book-centered" (catechism), then, with the coming of the printing press and the Reformation. Subsequent centuries marked a more serious change from the Church's tradition: the separation of catechetical transmission of the faith from the deeper life of the Church in the liturgy. Catechisms were written for the classroom, with more stress on theological accuracy in clear concepts and exact definitions than on communicating the

10. See Pedro S. de Achútegui, "The 1977 Bishops' Synod and its Theological Implications," in *Word, Memory, Witness*, Loyola Papers 11, ed. P.S. de Achútegui and J. Roche (Manila: Loyola School of Theology, 1978) 27, n. 34.

11. Marthaler, *Catechetics in Context*, no. 119, pp. 231-33. Kasper reports that the German commission considered the Roman catechism as the best model for their undertaking. A new edition, "translated and annotated in accord with Vatican II and Post-Conciliar Documents and the New Code of Canon Law," has appeared. See Robert I. Bradley and Eugene Kevane, eds., *The Roman Catechism* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1985).

depth of the mystery of full Christian life.¹² Today this overly "scholastic" and conceptual approach has in great part been overcome by reason of the great renewals of the past half century or more: the kerygmatic renewal in catechetics; and the biblical and liturgical renewals before Vatican II and especially subsequent to it. These renewals have been influential in fashioning a new type of catechism: the catechism for adults, or the adult's book of the Christian faith.¹³ With this new emphasis the question of a "national" catechism was raised more insistently.

A "national catechism" obviously refers to a compendium of Christian life and doctrine designed specifically for the people of God in a particular nation/local Church. The presupposition of such a catechism is that a basic exposition of the Christian faith can be more accurately and effectively communicated when the cultural experience, attitudes, motivations and historicity of the particular audience is directly taken into account. This does *not* mean any shallow attempt to "dress up" the essentials of the faith in some faddish ways to gain "relevance." Rather it simply means that Christian truth is to be lived, and thus Christian doctrine is inescapably joined to Christian life. Thus the exposition of Christian teaching must show an obvious relation to Christian life as it is concretely lived day-by-day in the particular Christian community or local Church to which the catechism introduces the reader.¹⁴

Since in our case the national catechism for the Philippines, represents the follow-up volume of the Directory, its aim is simply expressed by stating: "This national catechism is written to show how the essentials of the Catholic faith can be presented to Filipinos today following the NCDP guidelines."

12. See Kasper, "The Church's Profession of Faith," 57.

13. The new stress on adult religious education was highlighted by the recent document released by the US Bishops' Conference, "Adult Religious Education and the American Catholic Community," *Origins* 15, no. 23 (November 21, 1985) 378-88.

14. Thus the *NCDP* begins with "The Context: Today's Filipino, An Overview," nos. 1-54. John-Paul II affirmed this here in his speech to the catechists: "You must be faithful to man, for the Lord's word and message is intended for every human person. Not an abstract, imaginary person, but the individual who lives in time, with his or her difficulties, problems and hopes. It is to this person that the Gospel must be proclaimed, . . . the effectiveness of catechesis will depend on its capacity to give meaning, Christian meaning, to everything that constitutes man's life in this world." See *John Paul II in the Philippines. Addresses and Homilies*, ed. Pedro S. de Achútegui (Quezon City: Cardinal Bea Institute, 1981) 48.

WHY A NATIONAL CATECHISM?

The first reason for any catechism of substance is the mission given by the Risen Christ to his disciples (Mt 28:19-20). The practical goal of any catechism is to be an instrument for effectively and creatively handing on the faith, building up the Christian community, and inspiring the daily transformative *metanoia* (conversion) to which Christ calls each of his followers as members of His Body.¹⁵

Given this universal originating mission from Christ, a national Catholic catechism for the Philippines would be expected to respond to the particular needs such a mission engenders in our country today. Such needs can be grouped under three main headings, following the basic structure of the *NCDP*.¹⁶ With all the clamor of preaching, proselytizing and pressure propaganda, Filipino Catholics look for the *reliable Catholic word*, especially in family and youth catechesis. Secondly, with all the new life-styles and heady freedoms disseminated through the mass media, Catholics need a clear, reliable sense of *Christian moral values* and *responsibility*, inspired by the Gospel ideal of service, in both personal and social life. Thirdly, with the wide attraction for new forms of prayer and worship, for novel faith-experiences, Filipino Catholics need more than ever to learn and appreciate their *Catholic tradition of community and liturgy*.¹⁷

Much in these needs is already being addressed by local catechetical materials, of course. What a national catechism for the Philippines adds to what is presently available is: (1) a definite emphasis on *inculturation*, following the *NCDP's* insistence on this dimension; (2) a *wider perspective* in grappling with the newly experienced *pluralism* and diversity in religious groups that was formerly unknown in the Philippines; and (3) an *authoritative* text officially approved for the *whole* country that *integrates* all of Christian life and doctrine, in an up-to-date and quality presentation that can serve to unify the many partial, local catechetical materials of widely disparate quality levels, now proliferating in the local centers.

15. The *General Catechetical Directory* offers a brief but penetrating description of the purpose of catechisms in no. 119.

16. See *NCDP*, nos. 159-64, pp. 94-96 et passim.

17. See Kasper, "The Church's Profession of Faith," 52-53.

Regarding *inculturation* of our catechetical materials, it is a sad fact that many school religion texts and a considerable proportion of catechetical material is foreign produced, with minimal or no adaptation to our Philippine culture and scene. As the *NCDP* warns, inculturation is a long process involving far more than external "dressing" in Filipino phrases.¹⁸ The process of inculturation in depth has barely begun — except in the liturgical sphere wherein some real creative work has been accomplished. But there is yet no systematic effort to make the basic Gospel message more intelligible to the average Filipino by speaking in terms of his language, attitudes and cultural values.

Pluralism's major new challenge of great numbers of aggressively proselytizing religious sects has shaken the complacency of many Catholic Church leaders who now recognize the urgent need for more effective and continuing catechesis. The most common reason offered by Catholics who have taken up with a new religious sect or group is that, although they were baptized and brought up as Catholics, they "never really understood" what the Christian faith was about. Now, in their new religious family, they feel a sense of warmth, intimacy, belongingness, that they had never felt before as Catholics. They are brought to a personal love of the Bible, a clearer awareness of Jesus as their personal Savior, and a sharper recognition of moral standards and of their missionary responsibility.¹⁹ A national catechism is surely not the "easy answer" to this complex situation, but it can be a factor in grounding and supporting a more effective response to this challenge to Filipino Catholics. The piecemeal rejoinders characteristic of the Catholic response up to now can be helped appreciably by a clearer, more up-to-date, better *integrated* presentation of the Catholic Church, its approach to Scripture, its sacramental worship, Marian devotions, social thrust, and the like. It is precisely the multiplicity of poorly grounded, out-of-date, partial religious texts, cut off from the broader ecclesial perspective of post Vatican II that has hampered an effective Catholic response to this new challenge thus far.

18. *NCDP*, no. 431, p. 228.

19. These reactions correspond closely to Bishop Whealon's interesting, incisive account of Fundamentalists and Catholics in open dialogue, recounted in "Challenging Fundamentalism," *America* 155 (September 27, 1986) 136-38.

HOW DOES THE NATIONAL CATECHISM RESPOND TO THE NEEDS?

Since the national Catholic catechism is still a project — the catechism itself has not been published or tried out in practice — the response to this question must necessarily be in terms of the *plan* of the catechism. This can be done in two steps: first, explaining the major characteristics of the catechism, and second, giving the basic structure of the whole work as well as of its individual chapters.

General Characteristics

The first major characteristic of this catechism is its focus on the *essentials* of the faith. The catechism proposes to explain the Catholic Church's faith in Jesus Christ rather than any particular theological school or trend. Following the *NCDP*, the catechism portrays the essentials of the faith in tripartite fashion: the *doctrine* of the faith, as proclaimed in the Creed every Sunday during the Eucharistic celebration by the Christian community; the witness to the faith in responsible Christian *moral* service and values, governed by the Commandments of God and of Christ; and the celebration of faith, hope and love in the sacramental *worship* of the Church.²⁰

A second basic characteristic consists in the manner in which these essentials are handled, namely, in a *systematic* and *integrated* fashion. "Systematic" catechesis was well described by John Paul II as: (1) programmed to reach a precise goal — not improvised; (2) sufficiently complete — not stopping at initial proclamation of the Christian mystery; and (3) constituting an *integral* Christian initiation — open to all factors of Christian life.²¹ It is on this last notion of *integration* that the catechism puts special emphasis, following the *NCDP*, as will be clear from the exposition of the basic structure of the whole and particularly of each chapter. Briefly stated, integration covers the inter-relating of life and Gospel message as its goal; of doctrine, morals, and worship composing its content; of the use of Scripture, Tradition and human experience

20. This tripartite division of the *NCDP* has been developed in my article "Doctrines" in the National Catechetical Directory," *Docete* 8, no. 42 (July/September 1985) 1-6.

21. See John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae* (Manila: St. Paul, 1979), no. 21. This is developed in the *NCDP*, nos. 74-75, pp. 51-52.

as its basic sources; of both its personal and social dimensions as its context; and finally of the objective catechism itself and the subjective means of integrating within the individual reader.²²

A third characteristic consciously pursued by the authors of the catechism is its *inculturated experiential* aspect. This is a Catholic catechism written specifically for Filipino Catholics of today and tomorrow, exemplifying the *NCDP's* stress on inculturation and on relating to the hearers "where they're at!"²³

But inculturated experience in no way detracts from the authentic *Catholicity* of the work. This is an explicitly "Catholic" catechism, not in any negative sense of questioning the sincerity or value of other faiths or Christian denominations, but positively in terms of its sources, content and goals — all drawn from the living tradition and present life of the Catholic Church. This characteristic draws on the *NCDP's* third basic methodological principle for catechesis, namely, "community-forming."²⁴

A final characteristic is that the catechism aims at *practicality* — it's a book *to be used*, consulted time and again on practical questions about the faith. This does not mean it aims to provide the easy "glib" answer to all the daily problems Filipinos encounter day-by-day. Rather "practical" means the catechism tries to inspire and motivate its readers to actual personal commitment to Jesus Christ in the Catholic community. It invites and challenges its readers to "come and see" (Jn 1:39), to become disciples who "hear the word of God and keep it" (Lk 11:28).²⁵

Basic Structure of the Catechism

Following the guidelines laid down by the *NCDP*, the catechism uses the Creed as its basic structural plan.²⁶ This means that the

22. This notion of integration has been developed in my article, "'Integration' in the National Catechetical Directory," *Docete* 8, no. 41 (April/June 1985) 8-12, and further elucidated in another article to appear in the next issue of *Docete* 9, no. 49 (April/June 1987).

23. See the *NCDP*, nos. 419-33, pp. 222-29, which combines the basic ideas of "Fidelity to Man" with "Inculturated Catechesis."

24. The notion of "Interpersonal and Communitarian Catechesis" is linked with "Fidelity to the Church." See *ibid.* nos. 434-41, pp. 229-33.

25. This presumes that Faith not only responds to the questions we *have*, and more, to the question we *are*, but that faith itself questions both our questions and answers. The Faith of the Church is a total life believers grow into, not a "possession" they manipulate at will.

26. The exceptional value of the Creed for a catechism is stressed by many current

catechism presents a *Trinitarian* Vision of the Catholic Faith that is truly *Christocentric*, thus providing solid grounds for the characteristic Filipino devotion to Mary.²⁷ After the Preface which introduces much of the material presented in this article, the catechism begins with an Introduction composed of four chapters: "Who is the Filipino Catholic?," "God's Call: Revelation"; "Our Response: We Believe," and "Help our Unbelief!" These four chapters lay the foundation of the rest of catechism which is divided into three main parts, ending with a conclusion and Epilogue.

The three main parts manifest clearly the catechism's Trinitarian structure. Part I presents God as Father-Creator, and Christ, the Incarnate *Truth* of the Father, who through his Paschal Mystery has saved us from our sins (cc. 5-13). Part II presents the Catholic moral life of virtue and commandments, following Christ our *Way* (cc. 14-23), while the sacraments as encounters with the Risen Christ, our *Life*, through the power of the Holy Spirit in the Church, are taken up in Part III (cc. 24-36). Thus the three parts present the Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit, while at the same time stressing Christocentricity in picturing Christ as the *Truth* of the Father, our *Way* in morals and our *Life* in worship (Jn 14:6), calling for our Spirit-inspired graced response of Faith, Love and Hope.²⁸

This tripartite division obviously follows the *NCDP's* stress on viewing the Catholic faith in a holistic, integrative manner of doctrine (Creed), morals (commandments, Beatitudes, etc.) and worship (sacraments). The conclusion attempts a synthetic presentation of the Catholic Vision, while the Epilogue presents the Challenge and the Glory of Filipino Catholic Life as interpreted according to the structure and petitions of the Lord's Prayer.²⁹ Thus

authors. See Henri de Lubac, *The Christian Faith: An Essay on the Structure of the Apostles Creed*, trans. Richard Arnandez (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986). See also Josef A. Jungmann, *Handing on the Faith* (Freiburg: Herder, 1959), Appendix 1, pp. 377-86.

27. A remarkable revival of appreciation of the Trinity, and the mutual interrelation between Trinitarian structure and Christocentricity, has taken place, One contributing reason to this essential recognition has been the recent stress on the inner organic unity and coherence among the truths of the Catholic Faith, developing into an awareness of a certain "hierarchy of truths." See *NCDP*, nos. 173-74, pp. 102-3.

28. This approach builds on the place of the Trinity in human life. See *NCDP*, nos. 201-5, pp. 111-14; J. Mackey interrelates Trinity, grace, and the theological virtues in "Grace," *Furrow* 24 (1973) 339-51. See also W. Attard, "Grace and Human Existence," *Catholic Theological Review* 1 (1978) 16-19.

29. In "Sources and Transmission of the Faith," *Communio* 10 (1983) 29, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger emphasizes four master components: the Apostles Creed, the Sacra-

where the catechism began, it ends — the Filipino Catholic today.

The above description of the catechism's basic structure also indicates how the proposed characteristics come to light: focus on the *essentials* of the Faith, in a *systematic* and *integrated* presentation, drawing on the *inculturated experience* of the readers, and manifesting the faith's *Catholicity* in a *practical* book made for use. But beyond these general characteristics, the tripartite division of the catechism relates to another traditional comprehensive view of life. To the question "What can I *know*?" the catechism responds in Part I with Christ's revelation of God as our Father (Col 2:2). To a second question: "What should I *do*?" Part II replies: follow the Lord Jesus Christ, our Way, and his perfect disciple and mother, Mary (Col 1:10). Finally, to a third question: "What may we *hope for*?" Part III describes our sacramental encounters with the Risen Christ in the Spirit, within Christ's Body, the Church, constituting a first sharing in the perfect communion realized only in the world to come.³⁰

Format of Individual Chapters

The specific goals and characteristics of this national catechism are carried through into the common format designed for all the chapters. Each chapter begins with a brief *Opening* which identifies the topic to be treated by means of a Scriptural or liturgical text, or by some pertinent question or comment. This is followed immediately by a section entitled *Context* which focuses on the topic precisely in terms of our specific Filipino situation, with its particular problems, attitudes, values and weaknesses. Thus contextualized, the topic is then developed in the *Exposition* which presents the essential content drawn from Scripture and Church teaching, and related directly to the faith-experience of today's Filipino Catholic. This main part of each chapter concludes with a section entitled *Integration* which offers one explicit example of interrelating the doctrinal, moral and worship dimensions of the

ments, the 10 Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. The last source was very effectively used in *Credo: A Catholic Catechism*, trans. and adapted by Sr. Benedict Davies (London: Chapman, 1983), originally published as *Grundriss des Glaubens* (Munich: Kosel-Verlag, 1980).

30. The three basic questions drawn from Kant form the pattern adopted by William Reiser in his *An Unlikely Catechism* (New York: Paulist, 1985).

topic in question. Thus each chapter explicitly brings out the importance of integration in the "unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man's concrete life, both personal and social."³¹

Finally each chapter ends with a *Conclusion* which consists first in a series of questions and answers summarizing the basic content of the chapter, followed by some Scriptural texts and inspirational quotes and prayers from the Catholic tradition which offer fuller insight and motivation to the chapter. The question-and-answer section may cause some surprise in an adult catechism, but it was decided to include such a section for two reasons. First, Filipino Catholics, especially adults, are looking for clear answers to specific points of faith, particularly those under attack from non-Catholics, or others which are commonly misunderstood even among the faithful. The question-and-answer section of this catechism attempts to deal with such real, genuine questions of adult Filipino Catholics rather than with the typical "staged," artificial questions of the old type children's catechisms.

The second reason for including a question-and-answer section in each chapter is to present what is most important and central in the topic discussed in the chapter — a help, in other words, to enable the typical reader to focus on the essentials without being distracted by the more peripheral aspects of the theme. There is a possibility, of course, of eventually publishing different versions of the national catechism — longer or shorter as the particular need may dictate. In any case, the question-and-answer sections of each chapter taken together should form a helpful summary of the essential content of the Faith, as well as guide the readers toward an accurate understanding of the fuller expositions forming the bulk of the chapters.³²

FOR WHOM IS THE NATIONAL CATECHISM INTENDED?

The last question outlining the description of the national catechism concerns the audience envisioned by the project. This is not

31. This principle is found in Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Pasay, Metro Manila: Daughters of St. Paul, 1976) no. 29, p. 24, and used as a formative characteristic of the *NCDP*; see Preface, section "1."

32. The place of question-and-answer method, together with the larger question of memorization in catechesis, has been discussed at great length for years. The *NCDP* takes a moderate, balanced position, recognizing both its legitimate place and its limitations (see no. 421, pp. 223-24) following John Paul II's exposition in *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 55.

unimportant because catechisms today are written for distinctly different audiences, and this fact is a major determining factor in planning every aspect of the catechism's content, method, goal, physical format and presentation.³³ Even the case of a "national" catechism, which obviously is directed toward a large group of the faithful, has to determine as accurately as possible its own proper focus regarding its intended readers.

The national catechism for the Philippines is written for all who are actively engaged in communicating or studying the faith in our country — priests, religious, catechists, religious teachers, and perhaps most of all, parents! It is a basic "adult catechism" in the sense that it is addressed to the typical Sunday Mass congregation of an ordinary Filipino parish. Hence the catechism is NOT a school religion textbook, but is rather intended to serve as the proximate source and norm for creating school religion textbooks which are written for a particular level of elementary, high school or college students.³⁴

This intended audience explains a very important emphasis in composing the catechism, namely, its consistent stress on Scripture and the Church's liturgy. Since the catechism is aimed primarily at committed Filipino Catholics — those, in fact, who are engaged in handing on the Faith — its emphasis is on basic formation of Catholics rather than winning new converts to the Catholic faith. The Word of God in Scripture and its celebration in the liturgy constitute for the Catholic the principal means of encountering the Risen Christ, as a member of the Catholic community united by the Holy Spirit. In opting for its Creedal structure and Scriptural expression of the faith, the catechism provides an open, ecumenically positive source for fruitful dialogue and cooperation with other Christians. But at the same time, by constantly drawing on the living Tradition of the Church, especially Vatican II and contemporary pronouncements of the Philippine hierarchy, the catechism provides Filipino Catholics with sound apologetic

33. Just the question of basic starting point and methodology in procedure differentiates radically the major current catechisms. This is well explained in Guy Bedouelle's "The Birth of the Catechism," *Communio* 10 (1983) 35-52, which puts the present works into historical perspective.

34. Both Kasper and Ratzinger warn against "over-programming," or failing to distinguish between the levels of basic text (e.g. the Creed) and commentaries designed to explain the text to a particular audience. No catechism eliminates the need for the catechist to find an appropriate means for transmitting the Faith.

grounds for "giving the reason for this hope" that Faith instills in them (1 Pt 3:15) and encourages them to "hold fast to the authentic message, so that [they] will be able both to encourage men to follow sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it" (Ti 1:9).

EFFECTIVE USE OF THE CATECHISM

Since the national catechism is planned as a book to be *used*, more than ordinary care is being taken in drawing up the Table of Contents, the Index of all topics treated, cross references throughout the chapters of the book, and a Glossary of common terms appended to the text to provide clear, brief descriptive definitions for easy reference. But while formulating both the general order of topics, and more specifically the chapter titles throughout the book, a common characteristic of recent catechisms was noticed: a general tendency to avoid explicit mention of the commandments by substituting various lists of virtues (loving in deed, trustworthiness, com-passion, etc.).³⁵ This raised the question: "how traditional" in terminology should the "national" catechism be, especially in regard to major chapter titles and headings throughout the book?

The general position taken was to aim at easy identification and ready accessibility rather than stressing startling, interest-catching, novel captions, as long as the quality, post-Vatican II presentation was unimpaired. There is a conscious effort, therefore, to make the book easy to use for ordinary Filipino Catholics. The practical goal sought is to make a catechism that can serve the Filipino Catholic *family*, especially the parents, as a practical handbook and means for deepening their grasp of the faith. In this regard, three principal obstacles to effective use of the catechism are foreseen: the language of the catechism; its diffusion throughout the cities, towns and barrios of our country; and its practical implementation on the part of priests, religious, and catechists throughout the dioceses.

35. The *Credo* catechism cited above in n. 29 exemplifies this trend. Ratzinger cites this misunderstanding of the 10 Commandments as one of the two basic problems he sees in current catechetical works. See his "Sources and Transmission of the Faith," 32-34.

In regard to the importance of *language*, there is no doubt but that the *Directory* needs to be translated into all the major languages of the Philippines, if it is ever to have its full effect. English is *not* the ordinary medium of catechetical instruction throughout the country — the local language is, whether Filipino (Tagalog), Cebuano, Ilongo, Ilocano, etc. This factor of language is even of far greater importance for the catechism than for the *Directory*. If the catechism is to become the *family manual* of the Catholic Faith, it must be in the language in which family life is carried on. Given the number of major and minor linguistic groups in the Philippines, this poses a major challenge for the hierarchy: the speedy and accurate translation of the national catechism, prepared in English, into all the major languages in the country. The effort to accomplish this task will need to be creative, for it will mean in many instances creating a new official vocabulary in the local language to describe the essentials of the faith.³⁶

If the remarkably slow diffusion of the catechetical *Directory* (*NCDP*) can be taken as an accurate indication of how fast the catechism will gain national recognition and common use, then another major problem has to be faced. Initially one would think that the *Directory* could more easily become widely known and used since it is directed to a limited group of parish priests, catechetical coordinators, and the like. The catechism, destined for a much larger audience, would seem to be more difficult to popularize. Hopefully, this may not be the case. The catechism may respond to a much more widely felt-need than the *Directory*, and thus its diffusion may be much more spontaneous and enthusiastic than what has been experienced regarding the *Directory*. Nonetheless, there must be a practical planned effort to bring the catechism, especially in its local language translation, into the hands of the catechetical workers in the field, and with enough introductory explanations to make it actually usable. Its advantages have to be "sold" to the workers in the field if it is to have any real effect on the Church's catechetical ministry in the Philippines.

Finally, there is precisely this problem of practical implementation: how the national catechism will actually be used by the local catechetical personnel. The past decade or more has seen a number

36. See *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 59.

of very promising catechetical programs and initiatives which, after a relatively short period of time, have commonly run into unexpected difficulties. One of the reasons for this has been the tendency to gradually change the promising new program into an inflexible system imposed on the individual catechist or particular catechetical work. But much of this inflexibility, it must be candidly admitted, is a result of the recipients' own demand for very detailed syllabi, work sheets, lesson plans, and the like, worked out for them and prescribed by local authorities. As the *NCDP* wisely notes, any methodology — or in our case, actual catechism — depends for its efficacy on its *intelligent use*.³⁷ No book teaches itself; the best catechism produced can be so misused that it becomes an obstacle rather than an effective means for drawing others closer to Christ. Much care will be needed, then, not only in diffusing the finished catechism to every diocese, parish, and mission station, but also in instructing how to use it. In brief, a program of planned introductions for effective use of the catechism, with cautions against common mistaken misuses of such a handbook, must be part of the overall project of the national catechism.

On this note, then, we can fittingly conclude this "interim report" on the project of a national Catholic catechism for the Philippines. The catechism will only be a means, an instrument, in furthering the catechetical ministry throughout the islands. Its effectivity will depend on the comprehensive renewal of catechesis and of ecclesial life in general, of which, by the grace of God, the Catholic Church in the Philippines has shown such remarkable signs in these past few years.

37. *NCDP*, no. 405, p. 216.