

Notes and Comments

CATECHISMS FOR THE POST-VATICAN II CHURCH

Situating the *Catechism for the Universal Church* and Its Critiques

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INTRODUCTION

A topic that has gained rather widespread discussion in the periodical literature during the past six months has been the revised draft of the *Catechism for the Universal Church*. Produced by a special commission under the presidency of Cardinal Ratzinger, the revised draft was distributed to all the Bishops in December 1989 for their comments and criticisms, which were to be sent to Rome by May 31, 1990. The draft, published in three languages (English, French and Spanish), was in response to a proposal made by the 1985 Extraordinary Synod and supported by the Holy Father, for a "catechism or compendium of the whole of Catholic doctrine, both of faith and of morals."

The revised draft is a very substantial work of 434 legal size pages, with 4,126 numbered paragraphs, and consisting of a Prologue, an Introduction, and three main Parts (Profession of Christian Faith, the Creed; Celebration of Christian Faith, the Sacraments, and Life in Christ, the Commandments). It concludes with an Epilogue treating the Lord's Prayer, and two appendices, one giving a "specimen" of the glossary intended for the final version, and the other a list of abbreviations used throughout the work. It is published as a provisional text, *sub secreto* — which apparently means it cannot be used in religious education since it is provisional, nor published since it is a draft. It bears the copyright of the Vatican Press Library, 1989.¹

The catechism itself is not intended for direct use with children

1. Cf. Thomas J. Reese, "The Catechism: non placet," *The Tablet* 244 (Feb. 24, 1990) 241-42.

or youth, but rather is expressly written for "those who are responsible for composing and approving national and/or diocesan catechisms — therefore, first of all for the Bishops, the teachers of Faith, and through them, the editors of catechisms, catechists, and so for the whole People of God."² This constitutes an essential norm for a fair evaluation of the catechism — a qualification that has not always been kept in mind in a number of the published critiques.³

Besides, the audience directly intended, two other basic criteria by which the draft is to be judged are explicitly proposed. The *first* is composed of the essential characteristics which the catechism is supposed to exemplify: (a) an *organic* and *synthetic presentation* which is at once *concise* yet *complete* as possible; (b) giving the *essential* and *fundamental elements* of Catholic doctrine on faith and morals; (c) in the *light of Vatican II* and in connection with the preceding Tradition of the Church, and finally, (d) drawing abundantly on the *sources of sacred Scripture*, the *Church Fathers*, the *liturgy*, and the *Church's Magisterium*. The *second* criterion — which itself has come under serious criticism — is its tripartite structure (Creed, sacraments and commandments).

IMPORTANCE AND RELEVANCE

The potential impact of such a catechism, at least in view of the importance of catechisms in the past, is truly enormous. Some already speak of it as the most important written work since Vatican II, and if done well, "will shape the mind of the Church for decades, perhaps centuries, to come."⁴ This prediction is given some support by the present climate in the Church. For despite certain fears and cautious hesitations aired by a number of professional religion educators, John Paul II seems to have touched a real widespread felt-need in asserting that "the Church feels the necessity and urgency of a synthetic and clear exposition of the essen-

2. Taken from the "Explanatory Note to The Provisional Text," p. 2, no. 3, and repeated in the Text, nos. 0018-19.

3. One example is the otherwise excellent critique by William J. O'Malley, "The Catechism and Adolescents," *America* 162 (Mar. 3, 1990) 209-12, 222.

4. Cf. Berard Marthaler, "The Synod and the Catechism," in *Synod 1985 — An Evaluation*, ed. G. Alberigo and J. Provost, *Concilium* 188 (Dec. 1986) 91.

tial and fundamental contents of Catholic faith and morality — an exposition which takes into account the Second Vatican Council.”⁵ This climate can be briefly developed under two specific aspects: (1) the possibility and relevance of *one* catechism for the *universal* Church; and (2) support from the catechetical/religious education situation of the local churches.

Possibility of a Universal Catechism. The very possibility of a “universal catechism” that would constitute a valuable aid to the Church’s Ministry of the Word throughout the whole world is seriously questioned today. This questioning arises not only from the general situation of wide religious and theological pluralism, but more particularly from the major renewal in catechetics itself since Vatican II. The central place of the “traditional” question-answer catechism has largely been replaced with a methodology stressing the experiential, the historical and inculturated, within a dynamic, process-oriented catechesis that constantly draws on new Scriptural studies and the liturgical life of the Church. Vatican II itself had rejected the idea of a “small catechism,” and proposed instead the drawing up of a general catechetical directory. This proposal was accepted and the GCD was eventually published in 1971. At first sight, then, there are strong reasons for judging that the very “project” of a “universal catechism” is doomed from the start.

Such doubts, however, are in part answered by the careful preliminary description of the proposed goals of the draft. It is clearly stated that there is NO INTENTION: (1) of supplying the adaptations necessary in inculturating the faith in any particular place; nor (2) of proposing one common catechetical methodology to be followed by all; nor (3) of taking the place of national, regional, or diocesan catechisms; nor finally, (4) of engaging in theological discussion or speculation. The proposed draft, then, differs from the “small catechism” considered by Vatican II in that, first, it is NOT directed toward children, but rather primarily to the Bishops and their catechetical staffs. Secondly, it openly acknowledges that the Christian message must always be presented

5. John Paul II, *L'Osservatore Romano* (Feb. 8, 1989) 5, quoted in Archbishop William Levada, “Catechism for the Universal Church: An Overview,” *Origins* 19 (Mar. 8, 1990) 650. See also John Paul II, “Preparing the New Catechism or Compendium of Catholic Doctrine,” *Origins* 16 (Dec. 11, 1986) 487-88.

in an inculturated manner, in keeping with the local and regional values, attitudes and traditions.

Positively the defense of a universal catechism rests ultimately on the limited but necessary and permanent role of doctrine in living the Christian Faith. Cardinal Hume expressed this in the 1977 Synod:

Doctrine without experience is sterile, [yet] any attempt to live as a Christian without attention to doctrine will lead to confusion . . . Doctrine as the intellectual gateway to thinking about the mysteries of the faith is an important aspect of a total formation that should lead to commitment of the whole person to the person of Christ."⁶

John Paul II reaffirmed this position in insisting on the uselessness of playing off a "catechesis of life" against a "doctrinal catechesis." He went on to explain: "Authentic catechesis is always an orderly and systematic initiation into the revelation that God has given . . . this revelation is not isolated from life or artificially juxtaposed to it . . . [but] illumines the whole of life with the light of the Gospel, to inspire it or to question it."⁷ This need for some synthetic, organic exposition of the essentials of the Catholic faith, then, is the positive basis for the universal catechism project. What one "universal" catechism can contribute is best seen in relation to the concrete catechetical situation of the local Church.

Local Catechetical Situation. Within the literature of catechetics and religious education, the '70s became popularly known as the "decade of the Directories," starting with the publication of the *General Catechetical Directory* in 1971, and followed by national directories published under the auspices of the Italian, Australian, Spanish, United States, and Philippine hierarchies.⁸ The '80s have similarly been tagged the "decade of catechisms" because of the

6. Cardinal Basil Hume, "The Role of Doctrine in Catechetics," *Origins* 7 (Oct. 13, 1977) 263. See also K. Coughlin, "The Role of Doctrine in Religious Education," *Living Light* 11 (1974) 487-502.

7. John Paul II, *Catechesis in Our Time* (Vatican, 1979) no. 22, p. 32. The need for doctrine relative to both the Church as well as the individual believer is sketched in detail in the *National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines* [NCDP], nos. 169-70.

8. For example cf. *Sharing the Light of Faith* (Washington: US Catholic Conference, 1979), and *Maturing in Christian Faith*, The National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines (Manila: St. Paul Publications, 1985). The latter, begun in 1978, had its initial draft published in 1982, and its final Vatican-approved edition in 1985.

rather startling proliferation of catechisms of every size and description, together with major efforts of various hierarchies to publish national catechisms.⁹ This attempt at a "catechism for the universal Church," then, is directly in line with local catechetical efforts throughout the Church.

Compared to past eras when only one or other official Catholic catechism existed, today's plethora of catechisms has undoubtedly led to a certain amount of confusion and feeling of insecurity on the part of many. There seems to be an almost unlimited market for new catechisms, or presentations of the essentials of the Catholic Faith. They actually constitute a number of different genres. First there are the many updated textbooks used for classroom instruction, such as *Your Faith and You* in the popular Finley-Pennock series, M. Kohmescher's *Catholicism Today*, DeSiano's *Presenting the Catholic Faith*, or even the revised version of the "unrevisable" *Christ Among Us* by A. Wilhelm. One sub-type in this class would be P. Perkins' *What We Believe, A Biblical Catechism of the Apostles' Creed*.¹⁰

Second, there are the catechisms written specifically for adults, such as *The Teaching of Christ* by Lawler, Wuerl and Lawler which has gone through two editions (with a local translation in Filipino) and a question-and-answer offshoot entitled *The Catholic Catechism*.¹¹ Also included in this genre would be *This Is Our Faith* by M. Pennock, *Credo — A Catholic Catechism* compiled by the German Catechetical Association, and *Faith Alive* edited by R. Pasco and J. Redford.¹²

Third are the "personal catechisms" often published by Catholic lay persons specifically for the Catholic laity, to clarify and

9. Cf. my article "The National Catholic Catechism Project," *Landas* 1 (1987) 165-82.

10. James Finley and Michael Pennock, *Your Faith and You* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1978); Matthew F. Kohmescher, *Catholicism Today* (New York: Paulist, 1980); Frank P. DeSiano, *Presenting the Catholic Faith* (New York: Paulist, 1987); Anthony Wilhelm, *Christ Among Us*, rev. ed. (Harper & Row, 1987); PHEME PERKINS, *What We Believe: A Biblical Catechism of the Apostles' Creed* (New York: Paulist, 1986).

11. Ronald Lawler, Donald Wuerl, and Thomas C. Lawler, *The Teaching of Christ* (2nd ed.; Huntington: OSV, 1983); Bishop Donald Wuerl, Thomas C. Lawler, Ronald Lawler, *The Catholic Catechism* (Huntington: OSV, 1986).

12. Michael F. Pennock, *This Is Our Faith* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1989); Sr. Benedict Davies, trans., *Credo: A Catholic Catechism* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983); Rowanne Pasco and John Redford, eds., *Faith Alive: A New Presentation of Catholic Belief and Practice* (Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990).

strengthen their adherence to the Church's proclamation. Such are M. Hellwig's *Understanding Catholicism*, A. Schreck's *Catholic and Christian* and R. Strange's *The Catholic Faith*.¹³ Two popular catechisms by Jesuits could also be included within this group: Wm. Reiser's *An Unlikely Catechism* and G.O'Mahony's *Abba! Father!, A Personal Catechism of the Catholic Faith*. A sub-type in this class would be the short, pithy, updated question-and-answer catechism written in the old format but with new content, exemplified by H. McCabe's *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, a 46 pp. booklet.¹⁴

Finally, there are the major efforts at creating national catechisms, such as *The Church's Confession of Faith*, authored largely by Walter Kasper and published by the German Bishops' Conference, and the Philippine Catholic hierarchy's on-going project, *The Catholic Faith Catechism*.¹⁵ These catechisms make an effort at a judicious compromise between the older "objectivist" approach, and the more contemporary existential-historical methodology. The contrast between these two approaches can be seen by comparing J. Hardon's traditional *The Question and Answer Catholic Catechism* with A. Greeley's experientially grounded *The Great Mysteries, An Essential Catechism*.¹⁶

What is particularly noteworthy in all of this is not simply the number of these current catechisms, but the variety of approaches and methodologies employed. There is obviously a great difference in the *quality* of these catechisms, but the great variety in their type and level is such that it is very difficult to fix on one set of norms with which to honestly and competently evaluate and grade them. But the main point of this brief survey of current catechisms

13. Monica K. Hellwig, *Understanding Catholicism* (New York: Paulist, 1981); Alan Schreck, *Catholic and Christian* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1984); Roderick Strange, *The Catholic Faith* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986).

14. William Reiser, *An Unlikely Catechism* (New York: Paulist, 1985); Gerald O'Mahony, *Abba! Father!* (Middlegreen: St. Paul Publications, 1981); and Herbert McCabe, *The Teaching of the Catholic Church* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1985).

15. *The Church's Confession of Faith: A Catholic Catechism for Adults*, trans. Stephen W. Amdt (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987); Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education [ECCCE], *The Catholic Faith Catechism*, Part I: Doctrine (July 1989); Part II: Morals (July 1990). The third part on Worship is scheduled to be published in 1991.

16. John A. Hardon, *The Question and Answer Catholic Catechism* (New York: Doubleday, 1981); Andrew Greeley, *The Great Mysteries: An Essential Catechism* (New York: Seabury, 1976).

in English has been to call attention to the rather extraordinary proliferation of various attempts to propose the fundamental doctrines of Catholic Faith in up-to-date, relevant terms and methods. This phenomenon can be seen to confirm John Paul II's assessment described above of the deep, current felt-need for a clear, synthetic presentation of the essentials of the Faith.

Comment. Before proceeding to the specific critique of the draft, a number of tentative conclusions could be drawn. *First*, the universal catechism project has already been launched, and it has now become academic to question its viability.¹⁷ The issue now is rather how to contribute toward a successful result of the undertaking.

Second, one can argue for the need for such a "universal" catechism on the basis of the current proliferation of local catechisms. But these catechisms are *responding to* the need, *not creating* it. The need is rather produced by the rather widespread confusion among the faithful concerning just what is the essential Catholic teaching on many matters of faith and morals. The *underlying basis* for this confusion is in many cases the post-Vatican II shift in doctrinal perspectives, the new emphasis on Scriptural approaches, the liturgical renewal, the intensified social teaching, and the like. The *proximate sources* for the confusion are the widely divergent "Catholic" positions published on almost every relevant doctrinal or moral issue. With such disparate sources, the "confusion" could never be removed simply by a "new official catechism."

Third, studies in religious education have brought out the fact of the *divergent expectations* between Catholic parents, school administrators and professionally trained religion teachers regarding the primary goals of RE.¹⁸ This phenomenon applies directly to the "universal catechism" as well. There are considerable differ-

17. Some critics such as Richard McBrien have judged that the Universal Catechism was "born dead" and "should be buried with a Mass of the Angels." Obviously others take a more constructive approach; but it is important to be aware of the extent and depth of critical disapproval and feeling that the draft has elicited in many quarters.

18. See, for example, two articles by Andrew Thompson, the first being an analysis of the Notre Dame study, "The Religious Socialization Goals of Catholic Parents and Teachers," *Living Light* 18 (1981) 37-46, and the second "Toward a Social-Psychology of Religious Valuing," *Chicago Studies* 19 (1980) 271-89. Also relevant is John Elias, "The Three Publics of Religious Education," *Religious Education* 77 (Nov./Dec. 1982) 615-27.

ences concerning what is expected of the catechism by different groups. These differences are apparent even in the published critiques of the draft, which manifest an obvious weakness in that most critics are highly trained professionals in one or other particular theological discipline — *except* the hybrid discipline of religious education. While repeating the almost universal complaint about the length and complexity of the draft, most critics then go on to nullify that complaint by carefully detailing what needs to be added.¹⁹ This problem of diverse expectations will be addressed briefly below in the concluding section.

Fourth, there can be no “*definitive, perfect catechism.*”²⁰ Catechesis is a life-long process, entailing a personal and constant *conversion* that no book can supplant, not even Sacred Scripture. It is important, then, to have a clear and accurate notion of the legitimate function and role of catechisms in general, and of a catechism “for the universal Church” in particular. For any critique of the draft to be sound and constructive, it must be based on such an understanding of the limited but proper role of such a catechism.

BROAD LINES OF A CRITIQUE

In order to sketch the broad lines of what is hopefully a *constructive critique* of the catechism’s revised draft, we shall briefly take up the problems of: (1) to whom and for what purpose the catechism is addressed; (2) the nature of the catechism; (3) its basic structure; (4) methodology; and (5) particular content. By concentrating on this overview, we hope to be able to bring out more clearly the significant and salient points without falling into exaggerated and overly detailed negative criticisms.

The Catechism’s Purpose and Addressee. Despite the efforts to define precisely to whom the catechism is addressed and its basic purpose, the draft suffers from *trying to do too much for too many*. If the Bishops and catechism writers are truly the primary

19. A neutral observer could even get the impression that many critics of the draft equivalently cancel one another out.

20. See Raymond A. Lucker, “Bishops and the Catechism for the Universal Church,” *America* 162 (Mar. 3, 1990) 193. Bishop Lucker offers a brief history of “catechisms” in the Church’s historical carrying out its ministry of the Word, noting that for the first 1,500 years there was no such thing as a catechism as we know it.

addressees, then a much briefer and more sharply focused work would be desirable. *If* the purpose is a compendium presenting an organic, synthetic presentation of the *essentials* of the Faith, then much of the historical details, citations, and theological positions that crowd the pages of the present draft should be dropped.

The official explanation of both addresses and purpose seems to hedge in a way that makes the project a practical impossibility. If those addressed are not only the Bishops but "through them the editors of catechisms, catechists and the People of God," then the readers envisioned include everyone. The draft as proposed is to be both "concise and complete as possible" — a description that seems to many to be almost contradictory. What is officially proposed makes more sense if the draft is seen more as a resource book for those working on national and regional catechisms. Hence it has been strongly suggested to drop the name "catechism" and rename the work "A Compendium of Catholic Doctrine for the Preparation of Catechisms."²¹

There seems little doubt that different proponents of the catechism have had different audiences and purposes in mind. At one extreme are those who obviously are seeking some sort of official norm with which to judge the orthodoxy of all catechisms and catechetical works. At the other end are those who are simply looking for a handy resource book which can be of some aid in fashioning local catechisms. In between are perhaps the majority who are hoping that a model for a basic core expression of the Faith can be produced that focuses on the essentials, uses Scripture, liturgy and Vatican II in a creative and inspiring manner, and is open to adaptation to local conditions and different levels of catechesis.

THE SPECIFIC NATURE OF THE CATECHISM

The general nature of the catechism is well described by its distinctive characteristics: an organic, synthetic presentation, concise yet complete as possible, of the essential elements of Catholic doctrine on faith and morals, in the light of Vatican II, and drawing on Scripture, liturgy and the Church's Magisterium. What was left un-

21. See the special report of the National Conference of [US] Catholic Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on the Catechism for the Universal Church, in *Origins* 19 (Apr. 26, 1990) 775.

said but presumably assumed was "accommodated to Christian life today." In the mind of this reviewer, this is the *single most important defect of the catechism*. Lack of any consistent contact with the world today has undermined the content of the catechism throughout, its basic methodology and use of sources, and any inherent inspirational value it might have possessed.

Many published critiques have mentioned the need for a more experiential approach which addresses the believers of today.²² They speak in computer terms of the draft being "overloaded with information," which gives the impression of an encyclopedia rather than a compendium of essentials.²³ But the serious problem with the draft is its self-enclosed nature, manifesting very little direct relationship to anything that has gone on in the world during the past few decades. This holds for both the religious academic world of Scripture studies, fundamental theology, systematic theology, liturgical renewal, moral theology, catechesis/religious education, and the like, as well as the secular world of history, behavioral and social sciences, contemporary atheism and the climate of secularistic materialism.²⁴

Another commonly voiced critique touching its nature is the need for distinguishing clearly between what is defined doctrine of the Church and what is theological opinion.²⁵ Since the catechism proposes to focus explicitly on the essentials of the faith, the latter should be minimal and clearly marked. There should also be some way to indicate the relative doctrinal "weight" or importance of the many sources cited, instead of presenting them all as if they enjoyed equal authority.²⁶

These criticisms are certainly valid and need to be acted upon. But if the most serious defect of the catechism is identified with its lack of accommodation to Christian life today, then the very

22. See, for example, Avery Dulles, "The Church and the Universal Catechism," *America* 162 (Mar. 3, 1990) 201.

23. See the "Ad Hoc Committee Report on the Universal Catechism," *Origins* 19 (Apr. 26, 1990) 776.

24. See William C. Spohn, "The Moral Vision of the Catechism: Thirty Years That Did Not Happen," *America* 162 (Mar. 3, 1990). While this article contains many excellent points, its tone and frequently over-simplifications impair its overall effectivity.

25. The need to clearly distinguish between defined doctrine of the Church and theological opinion is voiced by almost all critics. See critiques of Thomas Reese (n. 1 above), Dulles (n. 22), the NCCB (n. 23), etc.

26. Cf. Dulles, "The Church and the Universal Catechism," 219; and "Ad Hoc Committee Report," 776.

nature of the catechism must be reconsidered. Rather than viewed as a norm for checking orthodoxy, or a simple resource book for composing local catechisms, the catechism for the universal Church could better be focused on: HOW TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE TODAY. This would correspond more closely to the hopes expressed by the "in-between group" described above, and to most of those actually engaged in the practical work of catechesis/religious education — as distinct from the professional theologians, Scripture scholars, moralists, liturgists and Church historians. This is meant in no way to denigrate the essential, necessary contribution of these scholars, but only to suggest the equally necessary contribution from the "practitioners" in catechesis/religious education, who will undoubtedly constitute the great part of those who will use the finished catechism.

THE CATECHISM'S BASIC STRUCTURE

The catechism has opted for the tripartite structure borrowed from the great catechisms of tradition: Profession of Christian Faith (Creed), Celebration of the Christian Mystery (Sacraments), and Life in Christ (Commandments). This has come under heavy attack from certain quarters. *First*, this arrangement does not seem suited to the organic doctrinal synthesis desired, nor constitute an apt structure for assimilating the diverse initiatives and inspirations of Vatican II.²⁷ *Secondly*, it forces a number of artificial disjunctions that reduce the draft's effectivity in fostering clearer understanding of the essentials of the Faith. Jesus Christ as revealer is presented before the account of his life, and his moral teaching appears in Part III, more than 100 pages further on.²⁸

Thirdly, among many contemporary moralists and religion educators the use of the Commandments to explain Catholic morality has largely been supplanted in favor of more biblical and inspirational terms such as "discipleship." In fact it is even difficult to locate the 10 Commandments in a good number of contemporary adult catechisms, whose Table of Contents express rather "The

27. See the comments in Dulles, "The Church and the Universal Catechism," 201, 219.

28. Among others, see Elizabeth Johnson, "Jesus Christ in the Catechism," *America* 162 (Mar. 3, 1990) 206.

Gift of Oneself," "Rejoicing with Others," "Assuming Responsibility," "Trustworthiness," "Com-passion," and the like.²⁹

While acknowledging the validity of much of these criticisms, this present writer is not convinced that the basic structure needs to be changed. It must *first* be admitted that not everything can be said at once; one of the more bothersome problems of attempting to expose the "essentials" of the faith is precisely the impossibility of putting everything together at one time. Since the Faith is so organic and integrally one, there are innumerable "essential" inter-relationships that have to be explained for an adequate comprehensive understanding of the point at issue. The would-be synthesizers, therefore, have to choose which set of relationships they consider the most important, and so organize their presentation.³⁰

It is my contention that the tripartite structure of Doctrine, Worship and Morals, is still the best overall structure for exposing the essentials of the Faith. Much adaptation can be incorporated to minimize the negative aspects mentioned above.³¹ The positive reasons for sticking with this traditional structure are many. *First*, the structure is completely open to up-to-date content of all kinds, including the latest Scriptural studies, behavioral and social science data, liturgical developments, and the like. *Secondly*, the universally recognizable pattern is extraordinarily helpful in catechesis/religious education. Perhaps the gravest deficiency of the current stress on Christian discipleship in terms of values and virtues is the lack of such an easily recognizable structure. Every presentation uses a different series of virtues/values, with different inter-relationships stressed. The actual Christian "content" is often in danger of being lost amidst the particular phenomenological or psychological terms and conceptual framework employed.

Thirdly, it seems eminently possible to communicate the essentials of being a disciple of Christ today by using the Creed, Commandments and Sacraments structure. The key to this possibility

29. Taken from the Table of Contents of *Credo: A Catholic Catechism* (1983) 8.

30. This can easily be verified by comparing the approaches in the catechisms listed in footnotes 10, 11, 12, and 13.

31. An example of possible adaptation of this structure is offered by *The National Catholic Catechism for the Philippines* which takes up Christian morality with the Creed's second article on Jesus Christ, thereby joining its treatment of the Creed's third article (Holy Spirit and the Church) directly with its Prayer-Worship part on the sacraments. The Our Father is used as an Epilogue summarizing the total Christian message, not just Christian prayer alone.

is INTEGRATION. This is a multi-faceted notion that builds on the organic inter-relationships of living Faith, and of a dynamic, interpersonal communicating the Faith. Integration is perhaps the most important principle of *The National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines*.³² By consistently showing throughout the catechism how doctrine, morals, and worship imply and involve one another, much of the artificial fragmentation of the message can be minimized. In this area, *The National Catholic Catechism for the Philippines* may be able to offer a concrete alternative.³³

A final word on structure concerns the Epilogue, whose exposition of the Lord's Prayer, the "Our Father," constitutes the draft's treatment of "prayer" in general. This unfortunately repeats the same mistake made in some earlier versions of the American catechetical directory, *Sharing the Light of Faith*, of neglecting the general topic of prayer before treating the Church's liturgy and sacraments. This slip is aggravated in the draft by the fact that Part Three on Life in Christ [Morality] separates the treatment of sacraments from the Epilogue. Integrating the topic of prayer in general and personal prayer with the liturgy and sacraments would seem to be an obvious gain, while the Epilogue's treatment of the Our Father could be reoriented to summarize the entire catechism — the whole Christian message.

THE METHODOLOGY OF THE CATECHISM

The methodology employed throughout the draft, particularly regarding its use of sources, has also come under heavy criticism. These criticisms can, without too much oversimplification, be grouped under four headings, namely the use of: (1) Sacred Scripture; (2) the liturgy, (3) Church tradition, especially Vatican II; and (4) current catechetical resources. A brief comment on each group will suffice to indicate the relative importance of these cri-

32. Integration is taken up expressly in the *NCDP*, nos. 414-18. For a fuller treatment of its various dimensions, see my "Integration in the National Catechetical Directory," *Docete* 8 (Apr./June 1985) 8-12, and esp. "The NCDP's Multiple Integrations," *Docete* 10 (Apr./June 1987) 2-11.

33. An example of how integration can be carried out on the level of individual chapters in the catechism is presented by the *National Catholic Catechism for the Philippines*. Each chapter concludes its exposition by indicating one or other typical relationships between the chapter's topic of either doctrine, or moral or worship, with the other two dimensions.

tiques.

Sacred Scripture. There is rather common agreement among the scriptural critics that the *use of Sacred Scripture* in the draft resembles the "proof-texting" popular in neo-scholastic theology manuals up until the eve of Vatican II.³⁴ There is a notable absence of a fundamental sense of modern methods of Scriptural interpretation which have been accepted by Catholic scholars since Pius XII's *Divino Afflante Spiritu*. This is particularly evident in the use of the Gospels grounding the draft's treatment of Jesus Christ. Such a critique must surely be taken as seriously impairing the viability of the entire draft. It seems apparent that the basic criticism is objectively valid in the sense that any synthetic exposition of the Faith must manifest an up-to-date command of current Biblical theology and exegesis. In fact one of the most important values of a "catechism for the universal Church" would be its potential precisely as a model for the variety of ways in which Sacred Scripture can be handled in basic catechesis.

Given the basic vitality of this criticism regarding the draft's use of Scripture, a certain caution must nevertheless be expressed. It is simply the fact that a concise exposition of the essentials of the Faith cannot enter into the detailed treatment of a Scriptural monograph. Similar to some criticisms of scholars in moral theology, Canon Law, liturgy, and Church history, some comments by Scripture scholar critics seem to lose a bit of balance and common sense in detailing the weaknesses of the draft. For one thing, the proposed nature and size of the catechism render some of the critical suggestions and assumptions a practical impossibility. Even more telling is the absence up to the present of any commonly accepted methodology or group of methodologies regarding the use of Scripture in catechesis. It seems the gap between today's scripture scholars and those engaged professionally in catechesis/religious education — not to speak of the ordinary adult Catholic — has grown dangerously wide.³⁵

34. See, for example, Johnson, "Jesus Christ in the Catechism," 207-8, and "Ad Hoc Committee Report," 776-77.

35. The basis for this lack of common methodology in catechesis' use of Scripture is graphically pictured in John O'Grady's recent article on "Biblical Methodologies" in *Chicago Studies*' section entitled "Horizons, A Pastoral Survey." O'Grady surveys twelve different contemporary methodologies discernible in current biblical studies. See *Chicago Studies* 29 (Apr. 1990) 87-100.

Liturgy. Regarding the draft's use of the *liturgy*, there is a surprising amount of content drawn from the eastern liturgies. This runs into two difficulties: (1) since the content is relatively unknown in the Western church, it does not seem to fit in a work concentrating on essentials; (2) this Eastern inspiration unfortunately does not modify the basically scholastic approach to the sacraments where it would have been most helpful. What seems needed is a sharper focus on Vatican II's "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," the doctrinal canons of the revised 1983 Code of Canon Law which draw on it, and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA).³⁶

Vatican II. Perhaps most surprising is the draft's methodological weakness in its *use and understanding of Vatican II*. In all the preliminary descriptions of the catechism's goals, a deeper understanding of Vatican II was stressed. The documents of Vatican II have even been described as the "great catechism of our time." Hence it comes as a surprise to find how little the "spirit of Vatican II" seems reflected in the draft. Despite numerous quotations throughout the work, the consensus among the critics is that Vatican II has often been ignored, and when used, it has been cited "selectively" and "inconsistently." Typical examples of this are mentioned below under the following section on Particular Content.

Catechetical Resources. Lastly, the draft's use of specific post-Vatican II *catechetical sources* seems meager. One would have expected the *General Catechetical Directory*, Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, John Paul II's *Catechesi Tradendae*, and the *RCIA* to have dominated the presentation. Such is not the case — perhaps more because of the sheer number of sources cited, many from the Patristic era. Though interesting and at times even fascinating as these citations are, they do not seem proper to a work whose nature is to focus on the essentials of the Faith, in a concise, synthetic manner, "accommodated to the life of Christians today."

THE CATECHISM'S PARTICULAR CONTENT

Preliminary Note. In the directives issued by the Vatican re-

36. These observations are discussed in the NCCB report, "Ad Hoc Committee Report," 781-82.

garding the consultation, two types of comments were requested. First, general observations responding to four questions posed in an attached questionnaire, and second, individual recommendations called "modi," which refer to particular paragraphs of the draft. The latter would be considered only if offering an alternative text for the revision.

Based on the preceding discussion of the draft, this commentator considers recommendations on individual paragraphs of the catechism to be both practically *impossible* as well as *counter-productive*. A "practical impossibility" for at least two basic reasons. First, because the overall critique is of such a depth and so all-embracing that a good third or more of the paragraphs would have to be completely redone. Given the time and nature of the consultation, this was certainly not the meaning of the directives. Secondly, no coherent "alternative" could be suggested for individual paragraphs unless the key decisions governing the overall revision were first made and clarified. To have all the Catholic Bishops of the world suggesting individual specific changes in the wording of possibly more than half of the draft's 4,126 paragraphs — from individual points of view and within individually conceived overall parameters — is truly mind-boggling.

Moreover, such individual recommendations could very well be *counter-productive* in that they might obscure the primary and principal recommendation: the revision needed is NOT one of individual paragraphs nor even of specific articles and chapters, but rather *a revision of the WHOLE draft* in terms of underlying approach, integration of its major parts, sources and language used, and especially its accommodation to Christian life today.

Consistent with this position, then, only a few typical indications of recommended revisions in content will be listed here. They are provided more as examples of the type of updating recommended regarding the actual content of the draft.

Language. Before entering into particular areas of content, one observation must be made about the language used in the English edition: it constantly uses the masculine gender to signify all human persons. Such is also the case, it must be admitted, in the most popular English translation of Vatican II (1965), as well as of many recent Papal encyclicals and Apostolic Exhortations. Never-

theless, times change, and what was not an issue in former times has become such today. So-called "exclusive" language has now become totally unacceptable in the US, and is fast becoming so in other English-speaking nations. Hence any adequate revision of the draft must include a serious effort to remove all "sexist language."³⁷

Revelation and Faith. The text's exposition of *faith* suffers seriously from its lack of direct contact with today's world, in both its secular and religious dimensions. Unlike Vatican II, it makes little allowance for today's widespread secularistic attitudes, agnosticism, and contemporary forms of atheism. Moreover the current focus on Faith studied experientially and phenomenologically as an on-going personal activity and life (*fides qua*) is largely bypassed in favor of an objective treatment of faith — what is believed in (*fides quae*). Hence much of the developments in theological anthropology that make critical use of the humanistic sciences find no echo in the draft.

Revelation is generally treated in a manner reminiscent of pre-Vatican II scholastic theology stressing "propositional" revelation more than *Dei Verbum's* description of revelation with its historicity and on-going character, and realized by "deeds and words having an inner unity" (DV 2). Its use of the term "deposit" of faith unwittingly supports the erroneous idea of revelation as a static "banking-system" reality to be passed on much as one passes on a monetary inheritance. Such a concept contradicts the draft's own exposition of the work of the Holy Spirit and of grace.

The Creed. In the doctrinal exposition the draft again suffers from the absence of direct influence of current questions, interests and advances. Much recent theological work in the *Trinity* which has made considerable progress in restoring that central mystery to its rightful place in Christian Faith, has been neglected. The contemporary issues in science and religious faith regarding *creation* and *ecology* are underplayed, while the theological explanations of "original justice" are over-played. The extended treatment of the Holy Spirit should be integrated with other sections on Grace, on the dignity and value of culture and the world, and on Christian

37. See one relatively balanced expression of this concern — not without a certain sense of humor which is often missing in such matters — in Lisa Cahill, "Sex Gender: The Universal Catechism's Presentation," *America* 162 (Mar. 3, 1990) 197-200, 217.

dialogue with other religions. The *Church* is presented as identified with the Kingdom of God, and developed in terms of the four traditional "marks," but little attention is paid to current major trends such as the lay apostolate and the growth of non-ordained ministries, the family as the "domestic Church," the BECs, the importance of collegiality, and the intensification of the Church's social mission.³⁸

The *Christology* presented is the classic, ontological, "from above" Christology of the dogmatic tradition, and in this case can rightfully be accused of seriously diminishing Christ's humanity. It is doubtful if the long section on the mysteries of Christ's hidden and public life, inserted to make up for this lack in the Creed, accomplishes its purpose. It is far more important to communicate in a simple, direct manner, the historical reality of many orthodox presentations of Christ in the New Testament and throughout Christian tradition. Undoubtedly in a catechism on the essentials of the Faith, the riches of the Church's Christological and soteriological heritage can only be briefly touched upon; but some indication would be of great help in deepening the faithful's understanding of Jesus, our Lord and God.³⁹

Liturgy and Sacraments. The draft's lack of direct contact with the prayer-life of Christians today may explain its overly ecclesiastical and "other-wordly" treatment of the liturgy. Some critics have gone so far as to characterize this part as almost totally unrelated to the Christian faithful's life today. For example, the draft explains the relation of the sacraments to human life by using an antiquated theory of St. Thomas rather than drawing upon the wealth of well-developed, contemporary personalist anthropological data. Topics of current interest such as the CRIA, adult Baptism, new approaches to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and the like, could well replace some of the outdated questions which are discussed in the present draft.

Christian Moral Teaching. Despite a major section on the

38. See Dulles, "The Church and the Universal Catechism," 202-3, 219.

39. The NCCB report rightly points out that the major difficulty with the draft's presentation of Christology is its attempt to harmonize the differences among the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of St. John, and thus "provide a unitary historical account of the life and ministry of Jesus, much as the 'life of Jesus' movement did 50 years ago." See "Ad Hoc Committee Report," 779; also Johnson, "Jesus Christ in the Catechism," 207-8, 222.

Church's social teaching, this Part III suffers the most from the draft's consistent relative isolation from contemporary currents. Its treatment of virtues is a classic example of a traditional "two-story" anthropological approach that has been completely superseded in both contemporary moral theology and the human sciences. The communitarian dimension of human freedom is not sufficiently brought out — a major deficiency in the field of catechesis/religious education. A more positive exposition of the Ten Commandments, stressing the fundamental human values which the commandments are fostering, is needed.

Resume. These few selective comments have merely attempted to give some slight indication of the tenor and substance which a serious critique of the catechism's content would entail. They lead naturally to our final brief section, proposing our recommendations for improving the draft of the "catechism for the universal Church."

CONCLUSION

At the end of this overly long commentary on the revised draft of the universal catechism, a brief attempt to pull things together and formulate some specific recommendations seems in order. In general, the recommendations correspond to the main sections of the article's critique of the draft.

Goal, Nature and Audience. The first recommendation is that all ambiguity regarding the proper goal of the catechism be removed. Let other means be used to check on orthodoxy, or to supply resource material for local catechisms. The catechism should focus clearly and sharply on one single positive goal: to set forth the essentials of HOW TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE TODAY. The immediate *audience* would remain the Bishops and those directly involved in creating national and regional catechisms, but indirectly all the faithful would be affected by such a catechism.

Basic Structure. The basic tripartite structure should be kept, but with the proviso of much greater *integration* throughout the entire work, in terms of both the three main parts and of individual chapters and sections. But the inter-relationship between doctrine, morals and worship should be carefully studied. There is a tendency to speak of doctrine and morals, as if the tripartite divi-

sion was reducible to two. Secondly, there is a pious tendency to let worship supplant moral service.⁴⁰ In brief, the essential content within each part (doctrine, morals, worship) must be clearly perceived in order to accurately work out their authentic organic inter-relationships.

The topic of personal prayer should not be relegated to the exposition of the Lord's Prayer in the Epilogue, but should be integrated into the section on Liturgy/Sacraments. An Epilogue on the "Our Father" could rather be used to summarize the whole Christian message.

Methodology. The single most important recommendation is to revise the draft by opening it up to the world of today, both secular and religious/theological. This would demand a major change in the current studies called into play, but especially in the manner of using the three basic sources for all catechesis: Scripture, Church teaching (in this case, Vatican II) and human experience. There is no shortcut possible here; a collaborative effort by those with *professional theological training* and *practical experience* in catechesis/religious education, is essential.

Content. The content will be revised by the changes in basic methodology and overall purpose of the catechism. Renewed emphasis on the practical necessity for conciseness will be necessary to stop the "experts" from creating another version of encyclopedic proportions. The open, inspirational simplicity of Christ's Gospel message should ever be kept before one's mind. Constantly in touch with the inspired word of God in Sacred Scripture and the teaching of Vatican II, with the actual prayer and sacramental life of Christians today, and with the personal and social challenges in their moral lives, a newly revised "catechism for the universal Church" might truly point the way towards HOW TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE TODAY.

40. A certain lack of clarity in distinguishing between doctrine, morals and worship is manifested in the otherwise excellent work from the Congregation for Catholic Education, entitled *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School: Guidelines for Reflection and Renewal* (Rome, 1988). See also my commentary "Educating Catholic Filipino Youth Today," *Landas* 3 (1989) 112-29, esp. 121-22.