

The Catechism of the Catholic Church: History and the Reasons Behind Its Project

By

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The present work inaugurates a projected series of articles which we hope to dedicate to the new "Catechism of the Catholic Church." The fundamental importance of this compendium of the doctrine of the Catholic Church, concerning both faith and morals, more than justify whatever effort we deploy to make it known and more understandable to the faithful desirous to learn more about the doctrine of the Church, so that they could anchor themselves more solidly in the faith. This scope evidently presupposes that this valuable catechetical instrument is already well known by those for whom it is primarily addressed: thus, by those responsible in editing and approving local catechisms, with the bishops in the first place, the catechetical experts and the catechists themselves.

The series starts with the history of and the reasons behind the project for a universal Catechism. The time framework of the project's history, from the moment the Holy Father expressed his intention to convoke an Extraordinary Session of the Synod of Bishops to the celebrations marking its publication, is relatively very brief. But the reasons which prompted the Church to provide itself with this catechetical tool goes back further into the early postconciliar years.

THE PROJECT: HISTORY AND THE REASONS BEHIND IT

The Birth of the Idea

On 25th January 1985, Pope John Paul II went to the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside-the-Walls to preside over the concluding ceremonies of

the celebration of the Week for Christian Unity. At the end of the official program, the Holy Father announced his decision to convoke an Extraordinary Session of the Synod of Bishops that year, to which he explicitly attributed a particular importance.¹

The Pope himself stated that the aim of this convocation was "to celebrate, to verify and to promote the Second Vatican Council," at the moment when the Church celebrated the twentieth anniversary of this watershed event. The Sovereign Pontiff refreshed our memory by recalling that in that very same place on 25th January 1959, Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, Pope John XXIII made public his decision to convoke the Second Vatican Council.

The Permanent Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, under its Secretary General the Archbishop Jan Schotte, immediately made the necessary consultations. On the 14th to 15th of March of that year, the Council of the Secretariat met and important decisions were taken, among which was the decision to send questionnaires to all the local Churches by way of sending them to all the "de iure" members of the Synod of Bishops,² so

¹For the text of this Allocution, cfr. *L'Osservatore Romano* (henceforth cited *OR*), del 27 gennaio 1985; or cfr. *Documentation Catholique* (henceforth cited *DC*), t. LXXXII n. 5 (1985), p. 283.

The Pope repeated the same theme in many other occasions, e. g., in his Homily during the Mass which closed the Synod on 8th December 1985, thankful that "the Synod has attained the aims for which it was convoked: to celebrate, to verify, to foster the Council" (original text in Italian. Cfr. AAS, 78 <1986>, p. 443); his Allocution during Vespers at the end of the Synod (cfr. Allocutio in vesperarum celebratione die 8 Decembris 1985 habita in fine secundi extraordinarii Synodi Episcoporum coetus, in SYNODUS EPISCOPORUM. *Allocutiones Summi Pontificis Ioannis Pauli II ad Patres Synodales in Secundo Extraordinario Generali Coetus*, e Civitate Vaticane <1985>, p. 27).

"To celebrate, verify and foster" the Council was, in fact, the main theme of the Extraordinary Synod and is seen repeated to many times in all the related documents. Our translation of the verb "verificare" (the very word used by the Holy Father) into "to verify" does not seem to be very felicitous. The verb "to re-examine" or "to evaluate" (in view of ensuing events) might carry better the significance intended, but does not seem to literally correspond to the verb "verificare".

²If we don't consider the norm on the matter, that the questionnaires were sent only to the members "de iure" of the Synod may lead us to think of a certain "narrowness" of the consultation (cfr. PAULUS PP. VI. *Litterae apostolicae motu proprio datae Apostolica Sollicitudo*, quibus Synodus Episcoporum pro universa Ecclesia constituitur, d. 15 m. Septembris a. 1965, AAS 57 <1965>, 775-780, vid. Art. VI: "Synodus Episcoporum in Coetum extraordinarium congregata complectitur").

In particular, that the Presidents of all the Episcopal Conferences are members "de iure" of the Extraordinary Session of the Synod of Bishops meant, for the most part, that their respective Conferences were consulted. In fact, according to the Report of the Secretary General at the opening of the Synod, one of the main reasons for the difficulty of gathering and compiling the responses within the prescribed time (1st April to 1st September 1985) was that there were Episcopal Conferences whose Annual Assemblies were neither scheduled nor foreseen during that period. Cfr. SYNODUS EPISCOPORUM. *Relatio Secretarii Generalis: de Laboris Secretariae Generalis Synodi necnon Consilii eiusdem Secretarie ad Secundum Coetum Generalem Extraordinarium parandum*, d. 25 m. Novembris a. 1985 (e Civitate Vaticana). pp. 8-9. CIC can. 346 par. 2 does not enumerate who the "de iure" members are, but obviously sends us back to the *Apostolica Sollicitudo*.

as to have a base as wide as possible for the synodal reflections, especially that knowing the extent of the conciliar effects in various parts of the world was essential to the success of the then coming Synod.³

Thus, on 24th November 1985, the Second Extraordinary Session of the Synod of Bishops was opened with the Mass, the Holy Father presiding, with the closing day fixed for the 8th of December to coincide with the end of the Second Vatican Council twenty years back.

In presenting the synthesis of the responses to the questionnaires mentioned above, Godfried Cardinal Danneels, Archbishop of Malines-Brussels (Belgium) and the appointed Rapporteur of the Synod, made it known that a considerable number of the responses spoke, on the one hand, of "renewed efforts in the field of evangelization, catechesis and preaching" in the years following the Council." On the other hand, "catechesis is not without problems in certain countries," their integrality, completeness and structure being judged at times questionable.⁴ Consequently, a number of Episcopal Conferences affirmed the urgency of a Catechism which would provide to the needs of the Church in this postconciliar period.

The idea of a new Catechism for the Universal Church caught fire as the sessions proceeded, save for a some sporadic and few objections.⁵ The *Relatio Finalis*, in fact, mentions twice the need for a Catechism. First, in view of the contemporary practice of reducing to the "minimum" the "knowledge of the faith and the acceptance of the moral order," "a new effort" in the fields of "evangelization and integral and systematic catechism" imposes itself.⁶ Second, and more importantly, the Synodal Fathers voted overwhelmingly the suggestion for a project in this regard,⁷ as we read in

Worth noting also is the "de iure" membership of "three religious representatives of the religious clerical institutes," according to the cited "Motu proprio." The CIC (can. 346 par. 2), however, does not specify the number; it only says "some members of the religious clerical institutes are to be added. . . ." In the case we have at hand, the said institutes were represented by three of its members (Viktor Dammertz, Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Confederation, Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, "Preposito Generale" of the Jesuits, and the Salesian "Rettore Maggiore," Egidio Vigano' (cfr. SYNODUS EPISCOPORUM, *Seconda Assemblea Generale Straordinaria del Sinodo dei Vescovi*, a cura della Segreteria Generale del Sinodo, Città del Vaticano <1985>, p. 43).

³For the complete recounting of the preparatory phases of this Extraordinary Session of the Synod of Bishops, cfr. the above cited *Relatio Secretarii Generalis*.

⁴For the original text in French, cfr. "Synthèse de réponses au questionnaire préparatoire," DC, t. LXXXIII, n. 1 (5 janvier 1986), pp. 31-35. For the official Latin text. cfr. *Praesentatio et Explicatio Relationis ad Eminentissimo Relatore Cardinale Godefrido Danneels Episcoporum Synodi anno 1985 Secundo Extraordinario Coetui datae*, d. 24 m. Novembris a. 1985 (e Civitate Vaticana), pp. 6 et 10.

⁵"Synthèse des réponses au questionnaire préparatoire," p. 33. Cfr. also G. Valente, "Catechismo Universale: la lunga, tempestosa strada," 30 Giorni, febbraio 1992, pagg. 42-43.

⁶Cfr. SYNODUS EPISCOPORUM. *Ecclesia sub Verbo Dei Mystera Christi celebrans pro salute mundi. Relatio Finalis*.

⁷For the results of the votations (18 votations all in all, with the "Suggestions", or projects proposed by the Synod, already taking 11 of the total), cfr. I. SCHOTTE, *Relatio circa labores peractos in Secundo Coetu Generali Extraordinario Synodi Episcoporum*, d. 28 m. Decembris a. 1985, e Civitate Vaticana, pp. 35-37.

II. B.a.4 of the *Relatio Finalis*: It is "very generally wished that a catechism or a global exposé of the whole catholic doctrine both regarding faith and morals be composed, which would become a reference point for the catechisms or global exposés which are composed in different countries. The doctrinal presentation should be such that it would be both biblical and liturgical, presenting an integral doctrine and, at the same time, adapted to the actual christian life."⁸

In his Allocution to the Fathers at the close of this Extraordinary Session, the Pope himself, in singling out the three most significant resolutions of the Synod, mentioned in the first place "the desire to prepare a compendium or catechism of the whole catholic doctrine, to which catechisms or compendia of all the particular Churches should refer themselves to on this matter."⁹ However, just for curiosity's sake, in his Allocution to the members of the Roman Curia on 28th June 1986, he mentioned second "the preparation of a catechism or compendium of the whole catholic doctrine" among the three "specific tasks" which were "indicated with utmost attention at the end of the Assembly of the Extraordinary Synod."¹⁰ Obviously, and as is clear from the consideration of the context of the whole discourse, the re-ordering of the three priorities at this later time was based on the progress of the works on three projects the Pope mentioned.

The Creation of the Commission

Inside the Congregation for the Clergy – under whose competence falls the International Council for Catechesis, presided by the Prefect of the Congregation himself – some preparatives to put out a Universal Catechism seemed to be already had, even before the Extraordinary

⁸A free translation of the *Ratio Finalis*, II.B.a.4. For the original text in Latin, cfr. the above-cited *Relatio Finalis*, p. 11 ("Suggestiones").

⁹IONNES PAULUS PP. II. Allocutio: Synodo extraordinaria exeunte and Patres congregatos habita, *Deo gratias*, d. 7 m. Decembris a. 1985, AAS 78 (1986), 435. Or, for facilitation, cfr. Allocutio: sub fine extraordinarii Synodi Episcoporum coetus habita d. 7 m. Decembris a. 1985, in SYNODUS EPISCOPORUM. *Allocutiones Summi Pontificis Ioannis Pauli II.* . . , p. 14.

The two other themes mentioned were: (1) "the further deepening of the study on the nature of the Episcopal Conferences which, in these our times, offer a precious contribution to the life of the Church;" and (2) "the publication, within a short period, of the Code of Canon Law for the Oriental Churches according to the tradition of these same Churches and the norms of the Second Vatican Council." The first and the last points have already been achieved, with the later having been realized first. The second remains, and it will certainly cause rivers and rivers of ink to flow . . . and its turning dry would not be expected to immediately follow! Various informations have it that the Commission of experts charged to make the study, have already prepared a text, after "a worldwide consultation with the Episcopal Conferences themselves and other organisms concerned," on "the theological status of the Conferences of Bishops." Cfr., for instance, the *Minutes of the Fifth Meeting of the Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops for the Special Synod for Africa*, 24th-27th March 1992, p. 2.

¹⁰IOANNES PAULUS II. Allocuzione: ai Cardinali e ai Collaboratori della Curia Romana, *Le parole, in Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, IX.1 (1986), pp. 1961-1964. Here he mentions first the Code of the Oriental Canon Law.

Synod. We can easily surmise that the Congregation must have already been regularly receiving complaints on this regard from several faithful, priests or bishops. Besides, as the Holy Father said, the demand for a universal catechism was already mentioned in the Synod of 1977.¹¹ Indeed, in *Catechesi tradendae*, as we shall see later below, the Pope addressed himself to the Episcopal Conferences on this matter.

The draft of the project of the said Congregation, entitled "Schema doctrinae catholicae ad usum catecheos," was rejected even before it was submitted to a wider consultation.¹² For one, a Catechism "prefabricated in the Roman Curia" would have already created some "psychological barriers" with regards to its reception! Besides, such a method of preparing the desired catechism would have been contrary to the intentions of the Synodal Fathers.

So, on 10th July 1986,¹³ Pope John Paul II announced the creation of the Commission for the Preparation of the Universal Catechism. In the already mentioned Allocution to the members of the Roman Curia, the Holy Father said that he deemed it important that the Commission were to be representative.¹⁴ The Commission was, therefore, composed of 12 members from various places and with functions: the Cardinal Prefects of the Congregations involved in the project, Bishops representing different Continents and representatives of the Permanent Secretariat at the Synod of Bishops, under the chairmanship of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith.

Faithful to the wishes of the Synodal Fathers for a consultation as wide as possible and to directives of the Pope,¹⁵ the Commission, during its first session, created three organs to help it realize its task. First, there was the "Editorial Committee," made up of seven Bishops and a Secretary, to whom the actual work of composition was entrusted. Second, a Secretariat was put up (assured by the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith itself) to coordinate the activities. Finally, a group of 40 consultants, composed of people chosen either for their pastoral, catechetical or theological expertise, were to collaborate.¹⁶

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 1962.

¹²The shortlived Schema seemed not to be made public. Cfr. g. Valente, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹³The Pope said to have "given the news" of this "particular Commission" on 10th June 1986 (cfr. *Le parole*, p. 1962). In his Allocution on the occasion of the approbation of the Catechism, however, the Commission is said to have been constituted on 10th July 1986. *The Explicatory Note to the Revised Project* of the Editorial Secretariat also gives the later as the date of its creation. And so does R. Martinelli, an Official at the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (cfr. "Un rinnovato impulso all'annuncio cristiano per la nuova evangelizzazione alle soglie del Terzo Millennio", in *OR*, del 31 ottobre 1992, p. 7-8).

¹⁴*Le parole*, p. 1962.

¹⁵In the same Allocution, the Pope said: "... la Commissione potrà far appello, per lo svolgimento del suo lavoro a consultori e ad esperti, affinché la preparazione del Catechismo sia fatta nello stile e nel modo auspicati dai Patri sinodali..." (*loc. cit.*).

¹⁶Cfr. the *Explicatory Note to the Revised Project*, 1.2.c.

The Criteria to Govern the Composition

The first session was also dedicated to the discussions on the criteria which were to govern the composition, the content and the style of the projected catechism. For all practical purposes, the "Suggestion" of the Extraordinary Synod served the Commission as the overarching criterion. Thus, to understand better and to appreciate more objectively the final results of the tremendous work undertaken by the above-mentioned organs, let us look into the following salient points:

The first criterion established responded to the question of content and style. The Commission decided that the "Catechism should present an organic and synthetic, as well as concise and complete as possible, the essential and fundamental elements of the Catholic doctrine concerning faith and morals, in the light of the Second Vatican Council and in connection with the Tradition of the Church, drawing abundantly from the sources of the Holy Scripture, of the Fathers of the Church, of the Liturgy, of the Magisterium of the Church."¹⁷ As we can easily note, this is almost a simple paraphrase of the "Suggestion" forwarded by the Extraordinary Synod in its *Relatio Finalis*.

The second criterion concerned the addresses of the Catechism. Who are its targeted users? The Commission, again faithful to the wishes of the Synodal Fathers, ruled that the Universal Catechism be not addressed primarily to every single faithful, but "to those who have the task of editing and approving the diocesan or national catechisms: thus, in the first place, the Bishops, doctors of the Faith, and through them, the editors of the catechisms, the catechists and the People of God."¹⁸

This was a clear (and healthy, we must say for certain) concession to those who were against or were cold (for instance, the Archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Franz König) towards a Universal Catechism in favor of the diocesan, regional or national ones. That this projected Catechism is not addressed primarily to the "faithful as such" but to those who are responsible for the local catechesis, is more than a clear statement that dioceses, ecclesiastical provinces, national or international Conferences of Bishops could still compose their own Catechisms. Cardinal Ratzinger and the Pope himself, even before the realization of the project, had made it clear a number of times that it would serve as a "point of reference."¹⁹ As we shall notice later on, this point is more and more verified as the work on the project progressed, and even more so at the moment of and after the papal approbation and publication.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, I.3.a.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, I.3.b.

¹⁹Cfr. the already cited Papal Allocution *Le parole*, pp. 1262-1263; his Allocution to the members of the Commission for the Preparation of this Catechism and their collaborators, gathered on the occasion of the approbation of the definitive text on 25th June 1992, *E' per me*, in *OR*, del 27 giugno 1992, pp. 1 & 5; cfr. Cardinal Ratzinger's discourse at the Press Conference the

The third point was to govern the general structure of the Catechism. The "tripartite" structure, a method already tried and proven effective both in the Catholic and Protestant Churches, was adopted. The three main parts would be dedicated to the Creed (articles of faith; the longest part), the Sacraments (liturgy), and "Life in Christ" (morals), respectively.²⁰

To these three criteria we may add what the Holy Father said is the need to take into consideration the "pedagogical, psychological and technical exigencies of modern society and culture."²¹ Or, as the Synodal Fathers formulated it, this compendium must be "adapted to the actual christian life" without, however, sacrificing the essential doctrinal certitude.

The Road to the Final Text

And on to work. The Editorial Committee was able to produce two essay versions in 1987, the second one ("Schema of the Catechism") having been examined by the Commission during its second session in May 1987. December of that same year, the Editorial Committee finished the "Avant-Project," the first complete draft of the text of the Catechism. The text was then submitted to the forty consultants for their comments and suggestions.

One year after, in May 1988, the Commission had its third session, with the Editorial Committee present, to examine the results of the just mentioned consultation on the text presented to the experts the previous year. It was during this session that the decision to add an excursus on the "Our Father" was taken. For the six months which followed, the Editorial Committee reworked the "Avant-Project," this time taking into account the various comments and suggestions from the consultants and from the members of the Commission itself.

In February 1989, the revised first complete version was presented to the Commission, this time under the label "Project." With suggestions here and there, the Commission gave its "approval in principle", with the request that the "Project" be submitted to all the Bishops in the world after the required ameliorations shall have been effected.

Thus, finally, on 3rd November 1989, the President of the Commission addressed a Circular Letter to all the Bishops (both ordinaries and titulars, in activity or retired) to accompany the text which, this time, was labelled

day after the approbation, "Una risposta alla sete di Verità e di Certezza che prorompe dal cuore dell'uomo", in *OR*, del 27 giugno 1992, p. 5; cfr. an interview granted by the Cardinal Prefect to the Press, "Ratzinger: La dottrina non cambia," in *Corriere della Sera*, 18 ottobre 1992, p. 12) cfr. the article by R. Martinelli cited above.

²⁰*Explanatory Note to the Revised Project*, 1.3.C. As Cardinal Ratzinger said much later, the composition of the new Catechism "mirrors the same structure as that of the Catechism of the Council of Trent," thought it was not thought of at first a manner. Cfr. ANDREA TORNEILLI, "Testimoni nell'era pagana," an interview with Cardinal Ratzinger, in *30 Giorni*, anno n. X n. 11 (novembre 1992), p. 49.

²¹*La parole*, p. 1263.

"Revised Project," id est, the "Project" reworked with the new input from the Commission gathered during its third session. In it, Cardinal Ratzinger requested the Bishops to "please express your opinion" on the proposed Catechism, with the assurance that their comments and suggestions would be given "the most attentive consideration in view of the definitive edition of the text."

On 7th November of the same year, another Circular Letter was addressed to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences, where it was expressly asked that the "Episcopal Conference as such" had to examine it, with its proper means and consultative organisms. It is interesting to note that the Cardinal President also suggested that "other eventual institutes competent on the matter that the Conference thinks wise to consult may also be asked to express their views on this project."²²

In the first circular Letter, Cardinal Ratzinger reminded the bishops that this universal Consultation was done under the expressed desire of the Holy Father, "in view of preparing a magisterial text" which could serve as a "point of reference for the diocesan and national catechism." In fact, the Pope willed that, "after the composition shall have been completed by the Commission, the consultation with the Bishops and with the masters of the preaching of the Word of God will follow, to gather their suggestions and their opinions . . . so that the finished work would be a real response to the expectations of the Church."²³

The recipients of the "Revised Project" were then requested to send their comments and suggestions, to be written on a pre-prepared formula sent together with the text to facilitate the whole process, to the Secretariat of the Commission on or before the end of May 1990.

More than a thousand bishops responded "personally"; twenty-eight Episcopal Conferences and various institutions also responded, together sending in more than 24,000 comments and suggestions.²⁴ The arduous tasks of sifting, reflecting and re-editing followed. As an overall judgement, the text of the "Revised Project" was deemed a valid base for the final edition of the definitive text. That a catechism for the whole Church was necessary also emerged, in a practically unanimous manner. As an official of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith wrote recently, the differences were in the areas of "how to call it and how to compile it, its contents and the editing style."²⁵ The work after the consultation was,

²²The first Circular Letter must be found in the Archives of all dioceses, and the second one in those of the Conferences of Bishops and Catholic Universities.

²³*Le parole*, p. 1962.

²⁴SERGIO TRASATTI, "Il Catechismo presentato dal Card. Ratzinger ai giornalisti," a summary of the salient points which came out during the "question-and-answer" part of the Press Conference, in *OR*, del 27 giugno 1992, p. 5. The information was reported by the Cardinal himself.

²⁵Vid. the intervention of Cardinal Ratzinger during the Special Synod for Europe, given on 12th December 1990, where he said: "We have now come to the week of re-elaboration of the text

indeed, herculean, considering the fact that the "Revised Project" was only the fourth one in a series of nine texts prepared, edited and re-edited before the definitive text was drawn.²⁶

In October 1991, the Commission for the Preparation of the Catechism for the Universal Church had its last session, in so far as the "retouches" on the text were concerned. By this time, it was clear that the Catechism was almost ready to be finally submitted to the approbation of the Holy Father. In fact, during this same session, the Commission already took into consideration questions related to its translation into the major languages, its publication and its diffusion.²⁷

To look after these concerns, a mixed Editorial Commission was created, under the chairmanship of Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo, Secretary of the Office of the "Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See."

of the Catechism for the Universal Church, fruit of many criticisms and contributions, but also of a general consensus as regards its necessity." Cfr. DC, t. LXXXIX, n. 2024 (19 janvier 1992), p. 77. Emphasis mine. Cfr. further the above-cited presentation the Cardinal President of the Commission delivered to the Press the day after the approbation, where he said that both the "necessity and urgency of a single catechetical text for the whole Church" was underlined. Cfr. also R. Martinelli, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

²⁶R. Martinelli, *loc. cit.* However, according to Cardinal Ratzinger and as is clear from the chronicles, there was still the "tenth" text, the one which received the final approbation of the Pope on 25th June 1992.

²⁷It may be interesting to mention in passing that the original text was composed in French, as it was the "lingua franca" of the members of the Commission and of the Editing team. But the Latin text remains the official one. Cfr. Cardinal Ratzinger's above-cited discourse to the Press and also his intervention during the Special Synod of Bishops for Europe. The Latin version is, therefore, the one to whom all translations should refer themselves to and with which controversies that may arise later in some translations should be resolved.

That French was the language originally used had its "advantage" and "disadvantage." The "advantage" was that the French version was the only one ready before the official publication. As the Secretariat of State said in its letter of transmission of the copies of the new Catechism sent ("gratis") to all the residential bishops in the francophone world, on 18th November last, "the other versions are not yet at hand due to some difficulties in the translations." The "disadvantage" was that the French Church "spoils the feast of the Pope" as it "breaks the papal embargo," as one Italian daily said (cfr. "Catechismo, Parigi rompe l'embargo del Papa," in *Corriere della Sera*, del 13 novembre 1992, p. 1), in the sense that the French version was made public and distributed on 16th November, days before the solemn presentation made by the Pope (7th-8th December). Indeed, the French text was ready last June.

L'Osservatore Romano comments: "The premature and incomplete publication of some textual passages of the 'Catechism of the Catholic Church' opened the way, during these last months, to comments and interpretations intended more to disinform than to inform. It is for this reason that it was decided not to wait any longer that the translations in other major languages be ready, thus renouncing <the idea> of having a simultaneous translation in the various versions. It was thus preferred to make the 'Catechism of the Catholic Church' available in its integrity to the persons concerned . . ." GIANFRANCO GRIECO, "La presentazione ufficiale e solenne in Vaticano del Catechismo della Chiesa Cattolica," in *OR*, del 18 novembre 1992, p. 1.

According to the same article, the Italian version "might be ready" in time for the solemn celebrations; the Spanish one "should follow it very shortly"; the English one "should be ready by the spring of 1993" and will be simultaneously released in Great Britain, the United States of America, Ireland and Canada; idem for the German translation which will also be simultaneously made available in all German-speaking countries; and the Latin official text to come out last.

Already on two occasions (2nd December 1991 and 24th February 1992), the just mentioned Editorial Commission made contacts with the Episcopal Conferences with regards to the said questions of translation, publication and diffusion.

Finally, on 14th February 1992, the Commission for the Preparation of the Catechism "unanimously approved" the ninth edition of the text. This was submitted to the Holy Father in March, who then "examined it attentively" and "presented some observations to improve the formulation of some paragraphs." The said observations having been faithfully incorporated, the tenth edition, which turned out to be the definitive one, was submitted to the Pope on 30th April, the feast of Pope Pius V, coincidentally also the "Pope of the Tridentine Catechism" (1566), the last universal catechism, in fact!²⁸

The Papal Approval and the Publication

And so, on the 25th of June this year, 426 years after the Tridentine Catechism, the "Catechismus Ecclesiae Catholicae" was born, with the approval of the Holy Father. It was, however, an event without fanfare, the "advertising" being reserved to its "public unveiling," so to speak. The Pope himself described the occasion as "simple but of notable importance." He received the Commission and their collaborators at the "Sala della Biblioteca" in the Vatican, telling them that "he is very happy to officially manifest . . . my approbation to the Catechism of the Catholic Church."²⁹

Naturally, the text was still "sub secreto pontificio" until the time that its publication was to take place, an occasion which the Holy Father wished "would not be too far." After the approbation, the work of translations and printing began. The Commission for the Preparation of the Catechism assured the translations of the official text into some major languages, namely: English, French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese.³⁰ As for the other languages, an agreement would have to be reached between the mixed Editorial Commission and the Episcopal Conferences who would like the text translated into the language or languages used in their territories.

On the French side, Jean-Marie Cardinal Lustiger of Paris, mobbed by journalists after the Press Conference at the seat of the French Episcopate, made it clear that the French Church "did not intend to make a scoop." To the expected question of why the French version was made public before the official celebrations to be presided by the Pope in the Vatican, the Archbishop of Paris responded: ". . . because the Catechism was composed from the beginning in French, which is an honor to our language. You would have wanted it in English? You said no? Well, we have had, therefore, an advantage and perhaps there was a bit of a disorder. Rome knew and thus it is not a question of a race who would have published it first." Meanwhile, the Catechism has already been considered a "best seller" from the day it was made available in the bookstores. Cfr. *Corriere della Sera*, del 17 novembre 1992, p. 17.

²⁸J. RATZINGER, "Una risposta . . .," p. 5.

²⁹Cfr. the above-cited Allocution: E' per me, p. 1. Emphasis in the original.

³⁰J. Ratzinger, "Le catechisme pour l'Eglise universelle," p. 78.

On 8th October last, the decision of the Holy See as regards the publication was communicated. A month later, on the 15th of November, in his usual Allocution before the recitation of the Angelus at Saint Peter's Square, the Holy Father called the then approaching publication of the new Catechism "an event of great importance for the life of the Church, an "event of historical significance, because the new Catechism is not one of the many theological or catechetical volumes, but a text of general reference for the catechetical activity of the entire People of God."³¹

In the meantime, Pope John Paul II decreed the publication on 11th October 1992, through the Apostolic Constitution *Fidei Depositum*.³² Composed in five parts, n. 4 (subtitled "Textus doctrinale pondus") carries the "fundamental value" of this document, wherein the Holy Father invests and mantles the work with his own authority, making it, in technical terms, "his very own work" (a "specific approbation"). He states: "The Catechism of the Catholic Church, which I approved last 25th June and whose publication I order today by virtue of the apostolic authority, is an exposé of the faith of the Church and of the Catholic doctrine, attested or illumined by the Sacred Scripture, by the Apostolic Tradition and by the Magisterium of the Church. I recognize it as a valid and legitimate instrument in the service of ecclesial communion and as a sure norm for the teaching of the faith."

During the above-mentioned *Angelus* Allocution, the Pope mentioned only in passing the "three moments" to mark this event. Three days later, on 18th November, the program of the official presentation was unveiled.³³

The first "moment," therefore, took place last 7th December. It was a "commemorative moment" which consisted of the solemn presentation of the new Catechism in the presence of the Holy Father, of Personalities representing the Roman Curia, the Hierarchy and the Laity, of the Presidents of the Catechetical Commissions of the Episcopal Conferences and the members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See.

The second one was a "liturgical moment", which took place the following day, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. The Holy Father presided over the Mass in the Basilica of Saint Mary Major, to thank God and the Blessed Mother for this "important catechetical instrument" which the Church is now in possession of.

The third "moment," which took place in the morning of the 9th, was a "journalistic" one, as it was dedicated to a Press Conference at the Press Hall of the Holy See, presided by the President of the Commission for the

³¹Cfr. *OR*, 16-17 novembre 1992, p. 2.

³²IOANNES PAULUS PP. II. Constitutio Apostolica: qua Catholicae Ecclesiae Catechismus post concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II instauratus publici iuris fit, *Fidei Depositum*, d. 11 m. Octobris a. 1992, Cfr. text in *OR*, 16-17 novembre 1992, pp. 1-2.

³³Cfr. *OR*, del 18 novembre 1992, p. 1. Cfr. also GIANFRANCO GRIECO, "Per custodire il 'depositum Fidei'," in "OR Domenica" of the *OR*, del 22 November 1992, p. 2.

Preparation of the new Catechism, Cardinal Ratzinger. The press was, thus, given the chance to ask their questions. It was, at the same time, an opportunity for the Holy See to illustrate the historical import and the ecclesial, catechetical, social and moral relevance of the new Catechism, and to explain the document more clearly, especially those parts which had already raised confusions and criticisms even at the time when the project was still in its earlier stages. And, evidently, "sub secreto pontificio!"

For the first and second "moments," the Pope expressly requested the presence of the President of the Commission for Catechism (or its equivalent) of every Episcopal Conference, other than that of the Cardinal Prefects or Presidents, the Secretaries and the Undersecretaries of the various Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, and the members of the Preparatory Commission and its Editorial Committee.

Thus, true to the desire of the Synodal Fathers and to the wishes of the Pope, this new catechism destined for the whole Church has turned out to be really "catholic," meaning "universal," from the moment the idea was conceived to its solemn presentation to the Church and to the world by the Holy Father. In *Fidei Depositum*, the Pope returns to this theme when he says: "One has reason to affirm that this Catechism is the fruit of a collaboration of the whole Episcopate of the Catholic Church, which welcomed with generosity my invitation to assume their own part of the responsibility in an initiative which concerns closely the ecclesial life. This response evokes in me a profound sentiment of joy, because the concurrence of many voices really expresses that which one can call the 'symphony' of the faith. The realization of this Catechism reflects in such a manner the collegial nature of the Episcopate: it testifies the catholicity of the Church."³⁴

The time has now come for each local Church to do the same. For this catechetical instrument to be really useful and efficacious, the local Churches have to promote it and *use* it; rather, to promote it by using it either "as it is" or as a "point of reference" for their own catechetical tools.

So as not to leave the realization of this important phase to chance, the Congregation for the Clergy, to whom the competence on catechesis is bestowed, recently addressed a Circular Letter to the President of the Commission for Catechesis of each Episcopal Conference, as part of its commitment "to promote a warm reception and correct use" of the Catechism in the local Churches. For the purpose of finding and preparing "suitable orientations" in the catechetical pastoral work in view of the employment of the new Catechism in the local Churches, the Congregation "deems it useful and opportune" to consult the Episcopal Conferences, through the President of the said Commission. Moreover, as one can easily notice from the questions posed therein, the Letter is a veritable stimulus for the local Churches to do something to foster the use of the new catechism, especially

³⁴*Fidei Depositum*, n. 2.

vis-à-vis both the already existing or the still projected local catechisms.”³⁵ It also cites the encouragement the Holy Father gave to the Episcopal Conferences to come up with “well-done catechisms.”

Why a “Universal” Catechism?

But why a universal catechism in the age of inculturation, contextualization, “local Churches coming of age”? Is a universal catechism advisable, or at least justifiable, given the pervading pluriformities?

To appraise the reasons which prompted the Church to provide itself with this catechetical instrument, we have to go back in time, more precisely, to the years which followed the Council. Leaving the detailed study of the documents and events involved to more scholarly exposés, we satisfy ourselves with a rapid and simple “browsing” of the postconciliar years which, nevertheless, tells us in big strokes that the new catechism did not bolt out of the blue and that the Church felt the need for it.

Pope Paul VI collected catechesis as one of his pastoral priorities, as shown by the amount of interventions he made on this subject. For one, he called the Second Vatican Council “the great catechism of the modern times.” He approved the *General Catechetical Directory* of 1971;³⁶ in that same year, he delivered a discourse to the participants of the First International Congress for Catechesis in which he outlined the role and significance of catechesis in the life and mission of the Church in the modern world;³⁷ in 1975, he established the “International Council for Catechesis” and attached it to the Congregation for the Clergy; in 1976, he gave the Church a great stimulus for evangelization with his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, where he explicitly mentioned catechesis as a “means of evangelization not to be neglected;”³⁸ he convoked the IV

³⁵The Circular Letter poses four questions, namely:

(1) What initiatives and criteria this Episcopal Commission for Catechesis considers most suitable to mediate (emphasis in the original; the verb used is “mediare”) the Catechism of the Catholic Church in the Diocesan and National Catechisms and in the local catechesis?

(2) What can the Congregation do to foster the correct mediation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church in the Diocesan and National Catechisms and in the local catechetical pastoral work?

(3) What Catechisms - classified according to age groups - were produced by this Episcopal Conference between 1990 and 1992?

(4) Are there catechisms planned after 1992? How do the produced or the still to be produced catechisms relate themselves to the Catechism of the Catholic Church?

³⁶SACRA CONGREGATIO PRO CLERICIS. Directorium catechisticum generale, *Ad normam decreti*, d. 11 m. aprilis a. 1971, AAS 64 (19-72), 97-176; or in *Enchiridion Vaticanum (EV)*, vol. 4 nn. 453-624.

³⁷PAULUS PP. VI. Allocutio: Iis qui internationali Conventui de Christianae Doctrinae institutione interfuerunt, *Non possiamo tacere*, d. 25 m. Septembris a. 1971, ASS, 63 (1971), 758-764.

³⁸PAULUS PP. VI. Exhortatio Apostolica, *De Evangelizatione in mundo huius temporis, Evangelii nuntiandi*, AAS 68 (1976), 5-76, especially n. 44 (34-35), which is specifically dedicated to catechesis, in particular that which is intended for infants and the young. The theme of the 1977 Synod was, therefore, specifically taken from this pontifical text. Cfr. also nn. 45-48 and 54 (43).

Synod of Bishops in 1977, dedicated to the theme "catechesis in our times, with a particular reference to the catechesis for the infants and the young."³⁹

At the end of that Synod, the Synodal Fathers addressed a Message to all the "People of God,"⁴⁰ in which they expressed that catechesis "is incessantly demanded for an alive and active diffusion of the word of God," and that this Synod on catechesis was a logical offshoot of the 1974 Synod on evangelization.⁴¹ Given the importance of the theme, the Synodal Fathers explicitly requested the Pope, "through a list of propositions, to give the Universal Church a document on christian formation through catechesis."⁴²

The Holy Father, in his Allocution at the closing of the Synod, "rejoiced upon noting that the absolute necessity of a well-organized and coherent catechesis was given emphasis by all."⁴³ He, then, promised that he would gladly accede to their wish and would address to the Universal Church a document on the most important points indicated by the Synod.⁴⁴

Needless to recall, Paul VI died on the 6th of August 1978. Thus, the *Catechesi tradendae*, the realization of the Holy Father's promise, carried another signature, that of John Paul II.⁴⁵ This Apostolic Exhortation is introduced by recalling to mind that the last instruction given by Jesus to the Apostles was to make disciples of all nations and teach them to observe his commandments. To catechize, precisely. And catechesis, defined in the early Church (and unchanged in its essential even in our times) as "the totality of the efforts exerted to make disciples . . .," has always been considered by the Church as one of the its fundamental tasks.⁴⁶

In this document, the Pope pays homage to the multifarious efforts exerted by Paul VI in the field of catechesis,⁴⁷ indicating explicitly that

³⁹For a rather complete account of the proceedings of the 1977 Synod and the interventions pronounced by some of its members, cfr. *DC*, t. LXXIV n. 1727 (1977), pp. 810-814; n. 1728, pp. 862-869; n. 1729, pp. 913-934; n. 1730, pp. 963-980; n. 1731, pp. 1016-1033.

⁴⁰SYNODUS EPISCOPORUM (1977). de catechesi hoc nostro tempore tradenda praesertim pueris atque iuvenibus, Ad populum Dei nuntius, d. 28 m. Octobris a. 1977, *Cum iam ad exitum*, e Civitate Vaticana; or cfr. *OR*, 30 ottobre 1977, pp. 3-4; or cfr. *EV*, vol. 5 (1977-1979), nn. 375-414.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, n. 375.

⁴²*Ibid.*, n. 377. Thirty-four propositions were submitted to the Holy Father.

⁴³PAULUS PP. Allocutio: sub fine Synodi Episcoporum coetus habita d. 29 m. Octobris a. 1977, *Quoniam ad finem*, AAS (1977) 631-635, specifically 634.

⁴⁴Cfr. p. 633 where he said: "Libenter deinde ea, quae magis expedire visa erunt, voto a vobis significato obsecundantes, universae Ecclesiae patefaciemus." Cfr. also *DC*, t. LXXIV, n. 1730 (1977), pp. 963-965 for a modern language translation.

⁴⁵IOANNES PAULUS PP. II. Adhortatio Apostolica: de catechesi nostro tempore tradenda, *Catechesi tradendae*, AAS 71 (1979) 1277-1340.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, n. 1. Cfr. also nn. 10 & 20.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, n. 2.

this Apostolic Exhortation incorporates "in substance the considerations which Paul VI had already prepared, with a copious use of the documentation left by the Synod." John Paul II made it clear, then, that *Catechesi tradendae* was the "response to the request of the bishops, expressly formulated at the conclusion of the IV General Assembly of the Synod and welcomed by the Pontiff Paul VI in his closing discourse."⁴⁸

Evidently, "catechesis" is a much wider reality than "catechism." The latter is simply one of the means to do the former. The Holy Father, consequently, touches the issue of catechism among the "ways and means of catechesis."⁴⁹ Referring himself directly to the catechisms, he enunciates two important points. First, those "who assume the grave responsibility of preparing the catechetical instruments and, with greater reason, the text of the catechisms, cannot do them without the approval of the Pastors (Bishops), who have the authority to give it . . ." Second, in view of which, the Pope expresses a "fervent encouragement to the Episcopal Conferences throughout the world," that they "undertake with patience, but also with firm resolve, the imposing task of preparing, in agreement with the Apostolic See, well-done catechisms, faithful to the essential contents of Revelation and updated with respect to methodology, capable of educating in a solid faith the christian generations of the present times (*temporum novorum*)."⁵⁰

Some points need to be established here. As far the documents we mention here are concerned, and up to this period, there was no explicit request for a catechism for the Universal Church. On the contrary, the conclusions of the 1977 Synod lead us to understand that catechisms prepared by and for the local Churches were to be the norm. The disposition that those who are charged with the preparation of catechetical texts cannot do so without the approval of the Bishops implicitly means, at least, "diocesan catechisms." Further, and even more clearly, the "fervent encouragement" given by the Pope to the Episcopal Conferences throughout the world to prepare well-done catechisms is incontestably in favor of at least national catechisms. In a word, the norm was for the preparation of catechisms for particular circumscriptions, and not for a universal one.

Thus, it came to pass that so many local Churches prepared their own catechisms during these years, as the responses to the questionnaires for the preparation of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops indicate. And the finding was not encouraging. What was the problem? What was the source of the problem? Where was the problem?

As we have already demonstrated earlier, the "catechetical problem" surfaced among the leading points during the pre-synodal consultations

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, n. 4.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, nn. 46-50.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, n. 50.

and caught more and more fire as the sessions of the 1985 Synod of Bishops progressed. Thus, the final resolution on this matter was given particular attention after the end of the Synod, above all by the Holy Father himself. That the Pope put it as a leading item among the three priorities marked by the 1985 Synod pointed to the seriousness of the problem, if we may surmise, and the felt urgency for a solution.

It is worth repeating here that both the preoccupations of the Bishops in various parts of the world and the "suggestion" of the synod were prompted by the verified negative effects of some misinterpretations and partial readings of the conciliar teachings and, consequently, by the confusions and the doctrinal errors committed by many catechisms prepared in the various local Churches.⁵¹ Any effective remedy for these doctrinal discordances and catechetical sprinterings?

The Church then thought that a universal catechism to serve as reference for the locally made ones might be the best antidote to the malaise. Indeed, the idea was given birth by a twofold reason: positively, to re-enforce the positive fruits of Vatican II is presenting the same doctrinal truths in its light; and, negatively, to tide down or to put an end to centrifugal, superficial, partial, erroneous and even contradictory local catechisms. In other words, after the "experiments", certainly undertaken with the best of intentions, it was found out that there was the death of a general text to serve as a point of reference and guide for all the locally prepared catechisms.

One may still object by saying that the generally negative experiences with local catechisms which came out during the 1985 Synod were reported by only a narrow portion of the Universal Church, i.e., the "de iure" members of the Synod. Such objection was, however, denied any basis by the more than 24,000 responses gathered during the blanket consultation from November 1989 to May 1990 (on the text of the "Revised Project"), in which all those who were consulted and responded were practically unanimous in reaffirming the necessity of a universal catechism. Indeed, they commented that the project for a Catechism for the Universal Church was "relevant and necessary, as well as urgent . . . which could serve as a 'point of reference' for the edition of national or diocesan catechisms."⁵² The bishops must have been fully aware of what they were saying here, since theirs is the responsibility in editing and approving any catechetical text.

⁵¹Cfr. both *Ecclesia sub Verbo Dei Mysteria Christi celebrans pro salute mundi*, II. 3 ("de phaenominis negativis in Ecclesia tempore post Concilium Vaitcanum II"), and *Relatio Finalis*, I.4 ("causae externae et internae difficultatum"). Cfr. also II. B.2, where it is said: "Ubique terrarum hodie transmissio fidei valorumque moralium ex Evangelio promanantium ad generationem proximam (iuvenes) in periculo est. Cognitio fidei et agnitio ordinis moralis saepe ad minimum reducitur. Novus ergo nusus in evangelizatione ac in catechesi integrali et systematica requiritur." Emphasis mine.

⁵²R. Martinelli, *loc. cit.*

It would not be too much to suppose that many of the bishops themselves must have been probably confused all along, not sure which doctrines were to be considered essential (a catechism with or without the angels? with or without original sin? with or without Adam and Eve? etc.), and confronted with pressures from various groups with their proper agenda and tendencies (an emphasis or an "amnesia" on sexual morality? a strong or a compromising stand against abortion, contraception and divorce? creation or evolution? more on social justice and less on "theoretical" doctrines? ad nauseam). In the midst of all the mind-boggling alternatives and pressures, the urgent need for a universal catechetical reference could have already been a given in the "boggled episcopal minds."

Moreover, it cannot be denied that catechesis has been left too much in the hands of the "professionals" in many a local Church. I believe it is worthwhile here to cite at length Cardinal Ratzinger's words relative to this theme, contained in a declaration entitled: "The Bishop, teacher of the faith."⁵³ Although it is addressed to a particular group of Bishops, it, nevertheless, gives us an insight into the problem or problems that many Bishops must have had to contend with.

The Cardinal is said to be "pleased that, in general, today's bishops preach more than in the past." But "the scale of the balance tips much less to the positive the moment we come to the evolution of catechesis during the postconciliar period. In large measure, this field was left in the hands of the 'professionals.' This fact, in its turn, has lead to an excess in experimentation . . . which rendered more and more difficult (for the faithful) to distinguish the voice of the Gospel" in the cacophonie thus created.

And the scene has been even worse in the field of bishops-theologians relationships. The latter, too often, "give themselves, to the intension of the grand public, to a totally discordant concert, playing the instruments of the media in a manner that their voice drowns that of the bishop . . . The theologians . . . have taken the place of the bishops as teachers of doctrine." Worse still, the "bishops, in large measure, bowed to such a scheme and haven't at all exercised their teaching authority, in opposition to that of the theologians."

But again we ask: is a "universal" catechism, in spite of these felt problems, acceptable to the contemporary mentality and auspicious to the present ecclesial goals towards fostering the local Churches with their own distinctiveness and peculiarities? This question has already been asked a numberless times, often in a provocative manner.

⁵³J. RATZINGER, "L'évêque, enseignant de la foi." This declaration was addressed specifically to the American Archbishops, on the occasion of the Meeting, convoked by the Pope, they had in the Vatican with the members of the Roman Curia and the Holy Father himself, from 8th to 11th March 1989. Original text is, therefore, in English which, unfortunately at this moment is not at my disposal. It was published in the review *Origins*. For an alternative reference, cfr. DC t. LXXXVI, n. 1983 (7 may 1989), pp. 432.434.

We often say that the contemporary mentality tends toward doctrinal subjectivism and "moral privatization." Well, does this not signal the necessity to rally anew the faithful to the essential and universal doctrine of the Church? Or, as Cardinal Ratzinger says, "in a world characterized by "subjectivism" due to the fragmentation of diverse messages; in a world in which realities like: God, Christ, man. . . seem to lose sense and relevance, an announcement of Truth which could save man and his world, which could imbue hope into the turbulent path of human history, which could constitute an anchor of salvation amidst the foundering of various human certainties, is invoked by various parties and in various ways." And this new Catechism, "in spite of all its limitations and inadequacies, wants to offer itself as an instrument which can help to give a response to such a thirst for Truth and Certainty, which insistently and diffusely bursts out even in the heart of the contemporary man."⁵⁴

An opposition between what is universally held and that which fosters the local Churches is false and, should we say, a question not any more en vogue. Can it be possible that what is held in faith by the Universal Church be harmful, or at least false, in some of its parts? And if some local Churches are sending some signs of moving away from the orbit of the Universal Church to spin around its small self, the Church, as a good Mother, has to remind them of their dangerous course. But a good mother does not and should not in any way oblige all her children to wear the same clothes and act in exactly the same way. In a parallel manner, each diocese or Episcopal Conference is encouraged to have its own catechism, based on this "sure 'point of reference'," in the words of the Holy Father himself.⁵⁵ Indeed, "a book, which gives a common point of reference born out of the common faith and of a very vast ("vastissima") collaboration in the Universal Church, cannot be a point of separation."⁵⁶ Take it from Cardinal Ratzinger.

Moreover, an answer to our question can be found in the stated purpose of the new Catechism itself. From the time of the realization of the need for a new catechism to the worldwide consultation with all the Bishops in the world in 1989-1990, one had always spoken of a "Catechism for the Universal Church." This title was, however, "contested" during the just mentioned consultation. And for good reason: it did not seem to indicate precisely its stated purpose of being a "point of reference," and not a "replacement," for the national or diocesan catechisms. Thus, to put to rest every doubt about its purpose, the title was changed to "Catechism of the Catholic Church."

⁵⁴J. RATZINGER, "Una risposta . . .", p. 5.

⁵⁵Allocution: *E' per me*, p. 5 Emphasis in the original.

⁵⁶S. TRASATTI, "Il Catechismo presentato dal Card. Ratzinger ai giornalisti," p. 5. The citation are words of the Cardinal.

The Pope restates this aspect in the Apostolic Constitution *Fidei Depositum* when he writes: "This Catechism is given to them (to the Pastors of the Church and to the faithful) so that it may serve as a sure and authentic reference text for the teaching of the catholic doctrine, and in a very particular manner for the elaboration of local catechisms." We find another passage of capital importance when he says further: "This Catechism is not aimed to substitute the local Catechisms duly approved by the ecclesiastical authorities, the diocesan Bishops and the Episcopal Conferences, above all if they have received the approbation of the Apostolic See. This is aimed to encourage and help the composition of new local catechisms, which would take into account the diverse situations and cultures, but which would keep with care the unity of the faith and the fidelity to the Catholic doctrine."⁵⁷ We believe these statements of the Holy Father should dissipate whatever doubt there as regards the real intention of the new Catechism.

On the part of our much quoted Cardinal, he makes it clear also that the texts contained therein are neither prefabricated answers nor obligatory for all local catechisms; they only offer the pattern according to which local texts could be formulated. Nevertheless, "a part of these text can be accepted also in local catechisms as part of a language common to all christians, or at least to all catholics, but (have to be) naturally completed by appropriate adaptations dictated by the diversity of the situations."⁵⁸

The above statements of the two highest doctrinal authorities in the Church also offer us an opening to say a word on inculturation, albeit simply in passing. Inculturation: a word which does not shock nor scare nor render nervous anybody any more, an area of close collaboration between the Universal and the local Churches, a project which continues to grab particular attention everywhere, an "acquired" wealth for every local Church for whose "defense" some opponents of the present universal catechism evoked. For, as "inculturation" denotes "diversity," "universality" is sometimes misinterpreted to mean "uniformity."

Thus, in more ways than one - and in a very special manner illustrated by the willed and deliberate change of its title -, the new catechism will do nothing more than to promote every legitimate and healthy inculturation thus far achieved and that which will be achieved in the future. On the contrary, it encourages them. Let me cite just a few examples. The Holy Father, in *Catechesi tradendae*, says that with respect to catechesis, "we can say that it is called to bring the force of the Gospel in the heart of culture and cultures. For this, catechesis will try to know such cultures and their essential components; it will understand their most significant expressions; it will respect their particular values and richness. It is in

⁵⁷*Fidei Depositum*, n. 4.

⁵⁸*Loc. cit.* Emphasis mine.

this manner that it can propose to such cultures the knowledge of the hidden mystery"⁵⁹ Needless to cite here all the passages; the recent Encyclical on Mission, *Redemptoris missio*, is replete with ideas on this subject.

And very recently, in recommending the new catechism to the participating of the VIIIth Congress of the International Council for Catechesis, the Pope had this to say: "And I am also certain that you, experts on catechesis, will know how to put in evidence the vast gamut of services that the Catechism of the Catholic Church is capable of offering also for purposes of inculturation which, to be efficacious, could never cease to be true."⁶⁰ It is worthwhile to note here that the primary theme of this year's Assembly of the said Council was precisely to find "the most appropriate catechetical languages to inculturate the faith." The participants of the Congress reflected as well on the relations between the Catechism of the Universal Church and the Catechisms of the particular Churches.⁶¹ Among the specific items discussed was the "increased awareness in the Church of the importance . . . of inculturation in catechesis . . ." From this Congress a document on the rapport between "inculturation of the faith" and "catechetical language" will soon be submitted for papal approbation.⁶² And even more recently, the Holy Father called the new catechism "a qualified and authorized instrument . . . firmly anchored in the unique and immutable truth of the Gospel, but also attentive to the 'signs of the times' and projected in all its being to evangelization and human promotion."⁶³

Finally, we have also to consider the concrete situation a one vital element in the preparation of catechetical texts. As the very term itself, "inculturation" implies "culture," that totality of recurring and more or less permanent elements which define and identify a people: how they live, think, react, etc. However, a "catechetical inculturation" seems or should be beyond culture understood as such, if it intends to incarnate in a most fruitful way what it wants to impart. Thus, local catechisms have to be beyond the question of how to present the doctrine according to the local culture; let should further ask the question: what is the concrete situation of the faithful who are going to be hearers and users of the catechetical instrument to be prepared? Indeed, this element can even be, in certain cases, more determinant than "culture." Poverty, for instance, is neither a "cultural trait" nor is "culture." Yet, it can be more vital an element to consider than how a certain people think of "life after death"!

⁵⁹*Catechesi tradendae*, n. 53.

⁶⁰Cfr. Archbishop Crescenzo Sepe, Secretary of the Congregation for the Clergy, in his address to the Holy Father during the Pontifical Audience, in *OR*, del 27 settembre 1992, p. 5.

⁶¹Cfr. Archbishop Crescenzo Sepe, Secretary of the Congregation for the Clergy, in his address to the Holy Father during the Pontifical Audience, in *OR*, del 27 settembre 1992, p. 5.

⁶²Cfr. "Le conclusioni dei lavori del Consiglio," in *OR*, del 27 settembre 1992, p. 5.

⁶³GIOVANNI PALO II. Angelus, del 15 novembre 1992, in *OR*, del 17 novembre 1992, p. 2.

In this regard, we permit ourselves to cite some concrete situations as examples: while the precarious situation of the Amazon forests calls for an emphasis on the doctrine of creation and environmental responsibility, the notorious materialism in wealthy countries requires an emphasis on christian solidarity towards the less privileged; while the rampant practice of abortion and the causal use of contraceptives calls for greater awareness on the sacredness of human life and sexual morality, the "the-more-children-the-better-and-the-richer-we-are" mentality in many Third World countries demands an underscoring on responsible parenthood and family size limitations in accordance with the moral teachings of the Church; if poverty is caused by cases of injustices and violations of human rights, then, may the catechism of that Church inculcate with a certain urgency the necessity of rendering justice to the oppressed and educate the people to respect and defend human rights from abuses. In other words, the catechism for the Archdiocese of Rome would not be suited for some island diocese lost in the vast Pacific Ocean. This aspect must be at least one of the important reasons why the "mediation" of the local catechisms to promote the new universal one is, in the very words of the Holy Father, "deemed indispensable."⁶⁴

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. The "depositum fidei" is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. And "to keep the deposit of faith is the mission which the Lord entrusted to his Church and which it does all the time," as the opening statement of Apostolic Constitution says.⁶⁵ Yet, because of its unfathomable richness and its timeless newness in every situation, time and place, it becomes more efficacious and attractive if it is presented in diverse ways and methods, if some of its contents receive the relevant emphases given a certain time, a particular culture, a concrete place.

To keep the faith. And to keep it always actual. This is the twofold challenge to which the new "Catechism of the Catholic Church" and the local ones have to measure themselves up. □

⁶⁴Allocution: *E' per me*, p. 5.

⁶⁵*Fidei Depositum*, no. 1.