

# A Catechism About Catechisms

## in 50 Questions & Answers

### INTRODUCTION

1. *What is catechesis ?*

Catechesis is education in the Catholic Faith primarily by word of mouth to promote union with Christ, especially by teaching doctrine.

cf. Catechesis in our Time (CT) n. 18; in 1979.

2. *What did Jesus Christ say about teaching all nations?*

Jesus Christ said to His apostles:

Go, therefore, teach (=make disciple of) all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 28:18.

3. *Who said "faith comes by hearing" ?*

St Paul said "Faith comes from what is heard and what is heard comes from preaching Christ."

Romans 10:17.

4. *What is a catechism?*

A cat-ECH-ism is a handbook to help teach the children of God to ECH-o the faith of the Church.

5. *How are children's catechisms usually written ?*

Children's catechisms are usually written with Questions and Answers (Q&As) to be learnt by heart.

See n. 39, below.

6. *Who else uses Q&As ?*

Modern advertisers use Q&As

and till recently Motor Licensing and Railways.

cf. Handouts n. 002, Australian Bush Catechism of Camping.

### A CATECHIST AND THE CATECHIZED

7. *What is a catechist ?*

A catechist is a religion teacher who uses some sort of catechism, oral or printed.

8. *What Seven Senses does a catechist need ?*

A catechist needs to have

a Sense of Faith and a Sense of the Sacred, a Sense of Compassion and a Sense of Humour, a Sense of History and a Sense of Wonder, and a Sense of the urgency of the Apostolate.

9. *Who needs to be catechized ?*

All baptized Christians need to be catechized – children, youth, adults – for by baptismal grace they have the power to believe what they are taught.

10. *What are catechumens ?*

Catechumens are unbaptized adults who are preparing to join the Catholic Church by receiving Baptism, Confirmation and First Holy Communion.

### CATECHISMS:

#### ADVANTAGES, NECESSITY, LIMITATIONS

11. *How are catechisms a teaching aid ?*

Catechisms are a simple & flexible teaching aid, designed to ensure a systematic and complete coverage of Christian doctrine, inexpensive but priceless.

12. *Why is a catechism like a skeleton ?*

A catechism is like a skeleton to hold together a whole body of teaching, especially for troubled times, but, on its own, it's just dead bones needing living organs and enlivenment.

Without a skeleton, a living body is a jelly fish !

13. *Are catechisms self-sufficient ?*

Catechisms are not self-sufficient but depend on a believing teacher and a worshipping community.

Also other supportive texts: Bible, Missal, Prayer Book.

14. *What did St Paul say on religious instruction ?*

St Paul said: The purpose of our instruction

is that there should be love,

coming from a pure heart,

a good conscience and a sincere faith. 1 Timothy 1:5

### DOCTRINE and CATECHESIS

15. *What is doctrine ?*

Doctrine is the truth revealed by God and taught by the Church.

16. *What is the Deposit of Faith ?*

The Deposit of Faith is what was revealed by Jesus Christ to His Apostles.

cf. Jude 3.

### VATICAN II and DOCTRINE

17. *What did St John XXIII say was "the greatest concern of the Second Vatican Council" (VCI) ?*

Pope St John XXIII said,

"The greatest concern of VCII is that the Sacred Deposit of Christian Doctrine should be guarded and taught more efficaciously."

In his Opening Speech, 11-11-62,

and quoted in Catechism of the Catholic Church, p. 2.

### CATECHISM of the CATHOLIC CHURCH

18. *The 1985 Extraordinary Synod (The Synod)*

*was called to assess the state of the Church*

*ten years after VCII: What did it say ?*

The Synod said, "there had been a defective understanding and application of VCII."

True translation of defectuosus intellectu et applicatione,

mistranslated "an incomplete and lack of application"

in the Final Report (FR) St Paul Edition p.19.

19. *What did The Synod say about catechesis ?*

The Synod said, "everywhere in the world today the transmission to the young of the faith and moral values deriving from the Gospel is in peril.

The knowledge of the faith

and the acceptance of the moral order

are often reduced to a minimum."

FR p. 31.

20. *What did The Synod require in catechesis ?*

The Synod required

"a new effort in evangelization

and an integral and systematic catechesis, and

the provision of a catechism or compendium

of all Catholic doctrine, both faith and morals."

FR pp. 31, 33.

### APOLOGETICS FOR CATECHISMS

21. *Why did Catechisms go out of fashion ?*

Catechisms went out of fashion

because it was said that God's Revelation

of Himself and His Plan

could not be expressed in doctrinal formulas,

and besides, that teaching doctrine

was irrelevant to religious behaviour.

Also, some doctrines were rejected

as no longer relevant to life or even true,

or as simply unsuitable for children.

"It is useless to play off orthopraxis against orthodoxy," CT n. 22.

i.e. IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE YOU WON'T BEHAVE

Also there are philosophies that reject objective truth.

Out-of-fashion is not out-of-date !

22. *Why did memorization go out of fashion ?*

Memorization went out of fashion

because the human memory,

a vital aspect of God's Creation,

was ignored, held in contempt,

mocked as out-of-date

and in opposition to understanding.

Its use would have implied

that objective truth could be known,

taught, understood and remembered.

Memory, Intellect and Will are three vital powers of the soul

without which one cannot function. They are images in man

of the Blessed Trinity, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

### CHURCH DISCIPLINE on CATECHISMS

23. *What did St John Paul II ask Bishops to do ?*

Pope St John Paul II asked Bishops to

"prepare genuine catechisms,

faithful to the essential content of Revelation, up to date in method, and capable of educating future Christian generations to a sturdy faith."

CT n. 50.

24. *What does the Rite of Baptism say about catechisms?*

The Rite of Baptism says that

"parents should be provided

with catechisms written for families."

Rite of Baptism for Children, 1971, pp. 10-11; USA p. 18.

25. *What did Pope St John Paul II say (after the 1980 Synod) about a "catechism for families" ?*

Pope St John Paul II said the 1980 Synod

desired "a suitable catechism for families,

clear, brief and easily assimilated by all."

Christian Family in the Modern World n. 39, in 1981.

Italics in original.

26. *What did Pope St John Paul II say about the Catechism of the Catholic Church ?*

Pope John Paul II said that

"the Catechism of the Catholic Church

will deal with the doctrines of the Faith:

1. the Apostles' Creed,

2. the Sacraments and Liturgy,

3. the moral life and holiness,

4. prayer and the Our Father.

It will be inspired by the teachings

of the Bible and Liturgy,

and will not overlook the need for

some fundamental, easily memorized formulas."

L'Osservatore Romano 27-2-89, p. 16. Originally the Catechism

was called a 'compendium' and Part 4 was an epilogue.

27. *What did Pope John Paul II say about the use of memory in catechesis ?*

Pope John Paul II said that

"the blossoms of faith and piety

do not grow in the desert places

of a memory-less catechesis."

CT n. 55.

28. *What has been commonplace in Australia ?*

In Australia, a memory-less catechesis

has been commonplace for many years.

### DOCTRINAL FORMULAS

29. *What are advantages of doctrinal formulas ?*

Doctrinal formulas make possible

exact thinking about the Faith,

and suit its expression and explanation.

"They provide a uniform way of speaking

among the faithful, and, when learnt by heart,

they help in its permanent possession."

General Catechetical Directory, 1971 (GCD) n. 73.

30. *What do doctrinal formulas provide for teachers and adults ?*

Doctrinal formulas provide clarity and orthodoxy

for teachers and adults and help them avoid

vague, confused and erroneous teaching.

31. *What do doctrinal formulas provide for children and youth ?*

Doctrinal formulas provide children and youth

with something their minds can get a grip on.

They delight in what is clear, brief and easily

assimilated, but resent wasting time and effort

mentally chewing cotton wool.

### DESIGNING DOCTRINAL FORMULAS

32. *What are vital qualities of catechism answers?*

Vital qualities for catechism answers

are that they express true doctrine

in children's words and concepts,

and are designed for memorization.

33. *What are desirable qualities for catechism answers ?*

**Desirable** qualities for catechism answers are that they are carefully tested with children, set out in sense-lines like poetry, repeat the wording of the question, use Scripture and Liturgy, and are clear, brief and easily assimilated by all. The shorter and simpler the answers, the harder they are to construct.

34. *Why should catechism answers repeat the questions ?*

Catechism answers should repeat the questions so that the question prompts the answer to make it easier for young disciples.

35. *Why should catechism answers be written in sense-lines ?*

Catechism answers should be written in sense-lines to make it easier for children to read them aloud, especially for poor readers, and help them to understand and memorize.

36. *What is an ideal maximum length for catechism answers ?*

An ideal maximum length for catechism answers is about four lines of five words each, that is, a twenty-word limit.

Longer answers are tolerable when there is a strong association of ideas by logical or imaginative links. See Q&A 44.

#### MEMORIZING DOCTRINAL FORMULAS

37. *What advantages does memorisation provide ?*

Memorization provides easy and permanent possession of the doctrines of the faith. It is popular with children, and matches their readiness. It gives the satisfaction of achieving something definite, and an equality of achievement for otherwise slower learners. Moreover, the use of memorization creates its own demand for carefully crafted catechisms.

Perfection at memorizing short formulas is within the reach of everyone. Many educationists who prohibit(!) memorization passed their tertiary exams in education by rote learning their lecture notes.

38. *At what two levels does memory work ?*

Memory works at two levels: remembering things in a general way and memorizing exact words.

39. *What is the difference between rote learning and learning by heart ?*

**Rote learning** is parrot learning, and is good for names, addresses and telephone numbers, etc., but **learning by heart** is about something we love and for the sake of The One we love above all things.

40. *How do children learn answers by heart ?*

Children learn answers by heart by understanding them (at least partially), by imagining them (helped by pictures), by careful listening, and by the teacher's example of memorization. This concentration on impression is strengthened through expression by much accurate repetition (word for word accuracy), by chanting them, by writing them down and drawing their own pictures (not just colouring in), by reading them aloud, by using recording devices and computers, by testing each other and the teacher, and by being given rewards (but not punishments).

See Summa Theologica II II 49 1a ad 2. Also, good teachers set an example of learning the answers by heart themselves. Adult memory is weaker than children's, but adult understanding evens things up.

#### MAKING MEMORABLE

41. *How are catechism answers made more memorable ?*

Catechism answers are made more memorable by clarity, brevity, poetry (rhyme, rhythm, alliteration), and similar wording for similar topics such as for each of the Sacraments and the Commandments.

42. *Give three examples of mutual support between memory and understanding.*

Memory and understanding provide mutual support in the Ten Commandments (see n. 43), in the Resurrection answer (see n. 44) and in the Pope's list of items to be memorized (see n. 45).

#### HIERARCHY OF VALUES

43. *Explain how memory and understanding provide mutual support in learning the Ten Commandments.*

COMMANDMENTS 1-3 express our duty to GOD in **thoughts, words & actions**.

Commandment 4 expresses our duty to PARENTS and introduces the last six: by keeping the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment, we grow-up learning our duty to HUMAN LIFE, MARRIAGE & PROPERTY.

COMMANDMENTS 5-7 express our duties to ourselves and others in **actions** which respect and safeguard HUMAN LIFE, MARRIAGE & PROPERTY. COMMANDMENTS 8-10 express our duties to ourselves and others in **words** which respect and safeguard HUMAN LIFE, and in **thoughts** which respect and safeguard MARRIAGE & PROPERTY. (CFCAE n.371, DE p.93)

Contrast the underlinings; contrast the CAPITALS.

Duty is what we owe to others because of their natural rights implied in duties. Doing one's duty is not demeaning but noble. Rights & duties are complementary, like opposite sides of a coin.

#### LOGICAL LINKS IN IMAGES -- a sample

44. *Did Jesus Christ really rise from the dead ?*

Jesus Christ really rose from the dead: the stone was rolled back and the tomb was empty; the Apostles and holy women saw Him, spoke with Him, touched Him and ate with Him. (CFCAE n. 133; DE p. 38)

Picture the events in logical, chronological order: imagine the scenes: the stone, the tomb, the people, note the bodily senses of sight, hearing, touch and taste.

#### HIERARCHY IN TEXTS TO MEMORIZE

45. *What items did Pope St John Paul II say we should memorize ?*

Pope St John Paul said we should memorize:

1. the words of Jesus
2. important Bible passages
3. the Ten Commandments
4. the Creeds
5. liturgical texts
6. essential prayers
7. key doctrinal ideas, etc. CT n. 55.

Pair off 1-2: Christ's words & words about Him.

Pair 3-4: natural moral law & Revelation.

Pair 5-6: public & private worship; n. 7 has other essentials.

#### IMPLEMENTING CHURCH TEACHING

46. *What can Parish Priests do to implement the Church's teaching on catechisms ?*

Parish Priests can implement the Church's teaching on catechisms by gradually introducing memorization of some items on the Pope's list (see Q&A 45)

into parish sacramental programmes for Confirmation, Confession & Communion. Then they can introduce it gradually into the Parish Schools and CCD classes.

47. *What are Priests catechetical rights & duties?* Priests have catechetical rights and duties bestowed on them by Holy Orders as per VCII and Canons 773-777, 762, 914.

Priests can help parents and other teachers implement the Church's teaching on catechisms by showing them it's possible, popular, pleasant, desirable & essential for children to learn by heart the items on the Pope's list.

48. *What can the lay faithful do to implement the Church's teaching on catechisms ?*

The lay faithful can implement the Church's teaching on catechisms in **family catechetics** at home, and also by encouraging priests and teachers to introduce memorization from the Pope's list into their teaching of religion.

Experiments have already begun with children singing catechism answers in plain chant.

49. *What can Parish Priests do to help Bishops implement the Church's teaching on catechisms ?*

Parish Priests can help Bishops implement the Church's teaching on catechisms by keeping them informed of the children's success at memorizing doctrinal formulas and preparing the way for Bishops to introduce diocesan catechisms.

See canon 775; also GCD n. 119, CT n. 50.

50. *What are major and minor catechisms ?*

**A major catechism** is one issued by the Pope such as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and **a minor catechism** is a simplified version for beginners & children often in Q & A's designed for memorization such as the *Catholic Family Catechism*.

*A Catechism About Catechisms* began in *News-letter Cardinal Newman Catechist Centre* 77A/1-4 of 8-12-1989, next in *Handouts* n. 001 and then in *Catholic Family Catechism*, 1991, which has:

*Nihil obstat:* John Doran, B.Th.  
*Imprimatur:* + Patrick Murphy, D.D.  
Bishop of Broken Bay, 15<sup>th</sup> April, 1991.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is for:

1. all Bishops "for whom the Catechism is primarily intended as an instrument for all religion teaching;
2. all writers of catechisms;
3. all priests;
4. for all catechists (including Catholic parents and religion teachers in Catholic schools; and, in so far as theologians explain the faith, they cannot contradict the *Catechism*);
5. all the faithful;
- (for 1-5, see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* n. 12);
6. Separated Brethren;
7. every individual;

(for 6-7, see Papal mandate with which the Catechism begins, *Fidei Depositum* n. 3, in our Australian editions, pp. 5-6.

AVAILABLE from Faith Resources (see below)

*Catechism of Catholic Church Revised Edition* with enhanced Indices and Glossary \$23-95.

*Catholic Family Catechism Apostles' Edition* with 500 Q&A in 145pp: \$5-00.

*Catholic Family Catechism Disciples' Edition* only 50 Q&As in 128pp: \$5-00.

Both have clear-cut guidelines on 'how to teach' and 'how to learn' with such catechisms; and simple pictures from *Schuster's Bible History* and others, especially Miss Margaret Bond.

Father James Tierney