

A CATECHISM ABOUT CATECHISMS

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.

^t *Catechesis in our Time* (CT) §18; 1979.

2. *What did Jesus Christ say about teaching all nations?* Jesus Christ said to His apostles: Go, therefore, teach all nations (**make** disciples of all nations), baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Matthew 28:18.

3. *What did St Paul say about "faith comes by hearing" ?*
St Paul said that
"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 to be learnt by heart, (See 39, below.)

6. *Who else uses catechisms with questions and answers?* Catechisms with questions and answers are used in modern advertising and in the recent past by the Railways and Motor Licensing. See *Handouts* No. 2, *A Camping Catechism*.

A CATECHIST AND THE CATECHIZED

7. *What is a catechist?*

A catechist is a religion teacher who uses some sort of catechism.

8. *What "seven senses" does a catechist need to have?*

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 the 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 — because, by their 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 and NECESSITY and LIMITATIONS OF CATECHISMS

11. *What sort of teaching aid are catechisms?*

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

12. *Why is a catechism like a skeleton?* A catechism is like a skeleton because it holds together the whole body of teaching, especially in troubled times, but on its own it is just dead bones.

13. *Are catechisms self-sufficient?*
Catechisms are not self-sufficient but depend on a believing teacher and a worshipping community.

14. *What did St Paul say about religious instruction?* St Paul said: "The only 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 & CATECHESIS

DOCTRINE

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.

^t Compare Jude 3.

VATICAN II AND DOCTRINE

17. *What did Blessed John XXIII say was the greatest concern of the Second Vatican Council?*
Blessed John XXIII said "the greatest concern of the Second Vatican Council is that the Sacred Deposit of Christian Doctrine should be more effectively guarded and taught."

^t Opening Speech, 11-11-62, quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p. 2.

CATECHISM of the CATHOLIC CHURCH

18. *At the 1985 Extraordinary Synod what did the Bishops say*

about the Second Vatican Council?
At the 1985 Extraordinary Synod the Bishops said, *inter alia*, there had been "a defective understanding and application of the Second Vatican Council."

^t See *Final Report* (FR) St Paul Edition p. 19; text quoted above is the accurate translation of *defectuoso intellects et applicatione*.

19. *At the 1985 Extraordinary Synod what did the Bishops say about the state of catechesis?*

At the 1985 Extraordinary Synod the Bishops said that "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. *At the 1985 Extraordinary Synod, what did the Bishops say was required in catechesis?* At the 1985 Extraordinary Synod the Bishops said that there was 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." t FR pp.31, 33.

APOLOGETICS FOR CATECHISMS

27. *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 that leaching 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,

1" CT §22. Also there are philosophies that reject objective truth.

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, or declared out-of-date and in opposition to understanding. Its use would have implied that objective truth could be known, taught, understood and remembered.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE ON CATECHISMS

23. *What did Pope John Paul II ask Bishops to do?* Pope John Paul II asked the Bishops to "prepare genuine catechisms, faithful to the essential content of Revelation and up to date in method, and capable of educating future Christian generations to a sturdy faith." t CT §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.

25. *What did Pope John Paul II say about a 'catechism for families'?* Pope John Paul II said the Synod of Bishops desired "a suitable 'catechism for families', clear, brief and easily assimilated by all." t *Christian Family in the Modern World* §39.

26. *What did Pope 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."

t Originally the *Catechism* was called a 'compendium' and part 4 was an epilogue: *L'Osservatore Romano* 27-2-89, p. 16.

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 §55.

28. *What sort of catechesis has been commonplace in Australia?* In Australia, a memory-less catechesis has been commonplace for many years.

DOCTRINAL FORMULAS

29. *What are the 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."! t *General Catech. Directory (GCD)* §73, 1971.

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 essential qualities for catechism answers?*

The essential qualities for catechism answers are that they express true doctrine in children's words and concepts, and are designed for memorization.

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

The 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.

t 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 the pupil.

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 to help children understand and memorize them.

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.

^t Longer answers are tolerable when there is a strong association of ideas by logical or imaginative links. See 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.

^t Perfection at memorizing short formulas is within the reach of everyone. Many educationalists who prohibit memorization passed their own 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 cassettes and computers, by testing each other and the teacher, and by being given rewards (but not punishments).^t

^t See the Summa Theologica II n 49 la 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.

41. Give three examples of mutual support between memory and understanding. Memory and understanding provide mutual support in the Ten Commandments (see 43), in the Resurrection answer (see 44) and in the Pope's list of items to be memorized, (see 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 and actions.

Commandment 4 expresses

our duty to PARENTS

and introduces the other six:

by keeping the 4th 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. (CFC 371)

^t Duty is something we owe to others because of their natural

rights. Duty is not demeaning but rather very noble. Rights and

duties are complementary, like opposite sides of a coin. ^{tt} Contrast

underlining: contrast CAPITALS.

LOGICAL LINKS IN IMAGES — 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. (CFC 133)

^t The imagination should run through the scenes: the stone, the

tomb, the persons, then the bodily senses of sight, hearing, touch and

taste — in a chronological and logical order.

HIERARCHY OF MEMORIZABLE TEXTS

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

Pope 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."

^t CT §55. Pair off 1-2: Christ's words, then words about Him. Pair 3-4:

natural moral law, then Revelation. Pair 5-6: public and private worship.

Finally, 7 embraces all other essentials.

IMPLEMENTING

CHURCH TEACHING ON CATECHISMS

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 introducing memorization

of some items on the Pope's list (see 45)

into parish sacramental programmes

for Confirmation, Confession & Communion.

Then they can introduce it gradually

into the Parish Schools and CCD classes.

47. *Have Parish Priests catechetical rights and duties?* Parish Priests have catechetical rights and duties bestowed on them by Holy Orders as per the Documents of Vatican II and the 1983 Code of Canon Law. Parish Priests can help parents and other teachers of religion to implement the Church's teaching on catechisms by convincing them that it is possible, popular, pleasant, desirable and essential for children to learn by heart the items on the Pope's list. (Sec 45 above)

Canons 776; of. 762, 773, 777, 779, 913, 914.

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 their priests and Catholic school teachers to introduce some memorization! into their teaching of religion, working from the Pope's list.

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. t t Sec canon 775; also GCD §119, CT §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 and children often written with Questions & Answers designed for memorization such as the *Catholic Family Catechism*

The Catechism of the Catholic Church is **intended for: 1. all Bishops** "for whom the Catechism is *primarily* intended" "as a **measuring stick**" **for all religious teaching; 2. for all priests; 3. for all writers of catechisms; 4. for all catechists**, which must surely include Catholic parents and religion teachers in Catholic schools; and, in so far as theologians explain the faith, they must not contradict the *Catechism*; 5. **all the faithful**; (for 1-5, see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §12.) 6. **Separated Brethren**; 7. **every individual**; (for 6-7, see the Papal authorization with which the *Catechism* begins, *Fidei Depositum* §3, in our Australian editions, pp. 5-6. Vinyl pocket size 803pp, \$22.95.

Catholic Family Catechism Apostles' Edition Large Pocket Size has 145pp and 500 Q&A with clear-cut guidelines on 'how to teach' and 'how to learn' with such a catechism. It has simple pictures from Schuster's *Bible History* and Miss Margaret Bond: \$4.35.

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