

## The Catechism of the Catholic Church

Distance Learning Syllabus

Deacon Michael Ross, Ph.D.

### Introduction

This course will examine the modern Catechism of the Catholic Church (hereafter CCC). Its focus will be on the content of the doctrines the church teaches and the style through which it teaches them. It is divided into four major sections, each corresponding to the four major sections of the CCC. The first of these four parts is entitled the **Profession of Faith** and is based on the Nicene Creed. It reviews the doctrine of the Trinity of God, the incarnation of Christ, and the role of the church in the economy of salvation. The second part is called The **Celebration of the Christian Mystery** and it describes the Liturgy of the church and the seven sacraments that it celebrates. The third part is entitled **Life in Christ** and it discusses the moral teachings of the church. The fourth part of the Catechism discusses **Christian Prayer**.

This approach to the writing of the modern catechism is novel in the history of catechisms in that it emphasizes the reality of faith in God in human experience and the fundamental theology of the church's doctrines about God. It emphasizes the sacramentally based liturgical life of the Catholic Christian and the moral life of the believer. It concludes, rather dramatically, with an emphasis on the life of prayer which is so essential to Christian existence. Moreover, the CCC is heavily influenced by a set of themes common in much of twentieth century theology. In this way it distinguishes itself from other catechisms in the last century that mimicked earlier pre and post Reformation doctrinal summaries. I shall have more to say about these differences from earlier catechisms in the first, introductory module of the course.

One of the purposes of the course is to make certain that before aspiring deacons move into their candidacy formation they are familiar with the basic teachings of the church. It will be very difficult for candidates to understand the content taught in the more advanced, dogmatic, scriptural, sacramental and moral courses to come if there are basic misunderstandings about what and how the contemporary church teaches its doctrines. At issue is not only the content, as much as it reflects the theologies of the twentieth century (with which some may not be familiar), but also *how* this content is expressed; the language, the style and the pedagogy implicit in the language and structure of the CCC. All of this must be understood before commencing to the more complex and challenging courses to come.

For instance, the astute student will quickly note that stylistically the text lacks anathemas, it does not routinely denounce the views of other religions (in fact it promotes ecumenism), it does not threaten the believer, its prose is succinct, and it is well footnoted especially from scripture, and from the documents of the recent councils of the church, most especially those of the Second Vatican Council. The overall posture of the CCC is to clearly describe the church's beliefs in contemporary language, to intellectually and spiritually engage believers in a respectful manner and to invite them to share in the

truth of God expressed in the Church's beliefs, practices and life. Catechisms from earlier ages are occasionally footnoted but for the most part they are set aside, as is the articulation of doctrines promoted by the medieval theologians whose work dominated Catholic catechisms and other church pronouncements for many centuries. The beliefs shared with earlier ages have not changed, but the language in which they were formulated in the past has been altered and "updated." This updating is commensurate with the open commitment of the church to invite its believers, and those who are interested in its faith, to read about it.

What are the themes that emerge in this Catechism? For one, there is the idea that the Triune God, the central mystery of the faith, is essentially relational *ad intra* (within himself) and *ad extra* (in relation to otherness). For another, there is the notion that this God is *personal* on analogy to the human person created by him but in relation to whom he is also absolutely dissimilar. God is in these senses self-disclosing, self-expressive and self-communicating. The very essence of the divine on this view is that God is revelatory of who he is, the persons, their common being and their relationality. This revelation is summed up in the scriptures, but is also expressed in the sacraments, in the presence of the believing person in his or her faith and in the believer's liturgical and spiritual life. The salvific end of divine revelation is stressed, as is the long salvation history that leads eventually to the divine self-revelation in Jesus Christ. There are other themes, most especially, of course, the central and fundamental reality of Christ, as we shall see, but you should note at the start that there is an effort in this language to avoid abstract and depersonalized propositions of belief. Much of the language employed is metaphorical, symbolic and analogous, in keeping with contemporary theology.

On the other hand, the catechism is written as a series of belief claims. These are organized according to the four general topics and then sub-organized into detailed topics that fall under the four general ones. For instance, the first part, entitled, The Profession of Faith, is subdivided into two sections, each with its own chapters and articles. The first section is a discussion of the church's faith in "man's capacity for God." The long second section, called The Profession of the Christian Faith, reviews in detail all the language and doctrinal elements of the Nicene Creed. Each doctrinal claim is given a numbered paragraph which can be traced either by page or by that number itself. And so it goes throughout the four major topical sections of the CCC. At the end of each subsection there are summary paragraphs, also numbered, which will help you grasp *some* of the details. But be careful not to rely on memorization of them alone, for you will be asked to answer questions about the paragraphs they purportedly summarize.

## **Pedagogy**

It will be your responsibility to learn everything that is said and to be able to use the language style utilized by it to convey the church's faith. You may well (think) you know much of what the CCC teaches from prior learning experiences, but in this course you will be responsible not only for a general level of knowledge but for deep familiarity with the specifics as well as the style of the language. Success in this course will require a combination of thoughtfulness and memorization. You will be given ample time to absorb the material – roughly three weeks for each major topical section – and to think about what is said, but you will also have to engage in a close study of the texts, attention to the

footnotes, and considerable memorization. In most cases it will not be sufficient to rely on what you already think you know; you will be questioned closely about the details of a sampling of the texts. You will have plenty of opportunity to ask questions about the meaning of the belief claims made in the CCC. You will be divided into four sub-groups each led by a well-informed cleric from your diocese. I will be available to respond to general questions in an open forum. In addition I am requiring that you purchase the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* in addition to a copy of the CCC itself. This work will help answer questions you might have about the theological content, and other matters of interest that you might have. The books required for the course and their ISBN numbers are listed below.

### **Objectives**

The objectives of this course are as follows: (a) learn in detail the teachings of the Catholic Church that constitute the essentials of its faith; (b) become familiar with the style of language used by the contemporary church in its teaching role; (c) so that you too can learn use this language in your teaching (and preaching); (d) and become a worthy model of how the contemporary church relates to itself and the world.

### **Required Readings**

The required texts for this course are as follows:

1. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, second edition, ISBN: 978-1574551099
2. *The Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ISBN: 978-1574557206

Not required but recommended and assigned are two works by Joseph Ratzinger (et. al). These works will help you understand the theological purposes and the stylistic motivations of the modern CCC.:

1. *Gospel, Catechesis, Catechism*, Ignatius, ISBN: 978-089870-633-8;
2. *Introduction to the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (with Cristoph Schonborn), Ignatius, ISBN: 0-89870-485-5

### **Academic Dishonesty**

See the general rules governing courses taken in the Josephinum distance learning program. Academic dishonesty, which includes plagiarism, unapproved sharing of answers to exams and access to unapproved information in preparing for or taking exams is strictly forbidden.

### **Assignments**

The required assignments for this course are as follows.

1. Students are required to do the assigned reading for each module including power point audio presentations. Due to the volume of material that must be learned failure to keep up with the

readings in a regular manner will make it extremely difficult for you to meet the objectives of the course and could jeopardize your continuation into the candidacy stage of the program.

2. There will be a short answer quiz at the end of each major section of the course. These sections correspond to the four parts of the CCC. The quiz will vary in length from 30 to fifty questions depending on the section. You will be given ample time to answer the questions. No extensions will be granted for completing each quiz except for personal or family problems such as illness or worse.
3. There will be a final exam, also in the form of a short answer quiz, which will address material covered during the entire course.
4. There will be a forum driven by questions that I will formulate for each section of the course. You are not required to participate in these opportunities to demonstrate your knowledge of Catholic teaching, but participation can only benefit you. You will not lose credit for failing to participate, but you can improve your final grade if in my judgement you demonstrate insight into the Church's doctrines by your responses to the questions I pose or by the questions you raise. You will have an opportunity to discuss the issues raised by these questions in your small group meetings led by mentors from your diocese.

## Modules

You are required to read, review and study the following material. In reading the CCC, please be attentive to the paragraphs written in a smaller font than the rest of the text and to the footnotes, and access the Compendium as necessary. My power point material is explanatory and summary and does not substitute for a thorough reading of the CCC itself. Occasionally, I refer to specific paragraphs (or footnotes) but for the most part my comments are not summarized in this fashion. At the top of each slide you will find paragraph numbers that identify the texts I am on which I am commenting, and you will note that my commentaries correlate to the CCC material itself.

The few secondary readings are required for background and explanation solely. *You will not be tested on their contents.* If you have already read or have studied parts of the CCC please reread it again, following along with the flow of the course. As you continue your intellectual formation for the diaconate, you will discover that in studying theology the more you read and reread material or supplement with related readings, the better your understanding will become of the teachings of the church.

1. Introduction. A discussion of the purposes, history, and literary genre of catechisms in the history of the church. A brief discussion of the documents issued by the church in connection with the modern catechism during the period before its preparation, at the time of its publication and after. Apostolic Constitution *Fidei Depositum* (On the Publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church), Prologue; See power point.
2. Ratzinger, *Introduction to the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, pp. 9-36; *Gospel. Catechesis, Catechism*, Preface, 9-60; Part One: CCC, *The Profession of Faith*, Section One [**paragraphs 26-184**]; Power Point

3. Part One: *The Profession of the Christian Faith*, Section Two, Chapter One [185-421]; Power Point.
4. Part One: Section Two, Chapter two [422-682]; Power Point.
5. Part One: Section Two, Chapter Three [683-1065]; Power Point
6. Part Two: *The Celebration of the Christian Mystery*, Sections One and Two, Chapter One [1066-1419]; Power Point.
7. Part Two: Section Two, Chapters Two and Three [1420-1690]; Power Point
8. Part Three: *Life in Christ*, Section One, Chapter One and two [1691-1948]; Power Point.
9. Part Three: Section One, Chapter Three; Section Two, Chapter One, [1949-2195]; Power Point.
10. Part Three: Section Two, Chapter Two [2196-2557]; Power Point.
11. Part Four: *Christian Prayer*, Section One, Chapters One, Two and Three [2558-2758]; Power Point.
12. Part Four: Section Two [2759-2865]; Power Point.