

FOREWORD

In religious education certain basic teachings are necessary for doctrinal substance and stability. Therefore the American Bishops have set down the principal elements of the Christian message in their statement, "Basic Teachings for Catholic Religious Education," issued January 11, 1973. The statement reads: "It is necessary that these basic teachings be central in all Catholic religious instruction, be never overlooked or minimized, and be given adequate and frequent emphasis. . . . It is necessary that the authentic teachings of the Church, and those only, be presented in religious instruction as official Catholic doctrine. Religion texts or classroom teachers should never present merely subjective theorizing as the Church's teaching." (Introduction)

In order to help to carry out this directive of the Bishops, the text of this catechism was prepared in closest harmony with the text of their statement. The question and answer presentation has much merit. It does not mean that the answers must be memorized, but that the essential elements of the doctrine can be emphasized and discussed in an orderly way, and perhaps retained with greater ease and clarity. A simplified edition of the catechism is also available for use of children.

May this *New American Catechism* help at least in some way to fulfill the desire and prayer of our Bishops—"for a laity transformed by the gospel message, who put the gospel to work in every action of their daily lives, whose joy and simplicity and concern for others are so radiant that all men recognize them as Christ's disciples by the love they have for one another."

Father Lawrence G. Lovasik, S.V.D.

Divine Word Missionaries
207 Lytton Avenue
Pittsburgh, Penna. 15213

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the reality of baptism in the name of Christ and his people.

If we are thus joined to Christ in an intimate sense, then Jesus, like the Israel of old, is seen as rooted in the earth, as well as Son of God, Son of David, of the house of

It is through his blood that we are saved by our Savior. The Divine cannot cancel out his truly human nature. We look to God from slavery to Passover. We look to Jesus. This brings us to man, our God with

(2) In describing the Church, the Council placed on the fact that it includes the Pope, bishops, and the Council said: "The Church, like the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, in the people there is a basic

(3) Just as God made the world in the Testament, so Christ made the Church. He has the right to teach and to give life. He is given for the service of the people. There are different responsibilities. God are important for the service of God, and by the Son.

158. Is there a difference between the priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of the Church? The Church is also a community. The priesthood is essential to the life of the people." Yes, the Church is the People of God.

Chapter 21

THE CHURCH AS A COMMUNITY

157. Why is the Church a community?

(1) The Church is a community sharing together the life of Christ, a people assembled by God. (2) Within this assembly there is a basic equality of all persons. (3) There are different responsibilities in the Church.

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▲ They are fully incorporated in the society of the Church who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept her entire system and all the means of salvation given to her, and are united with her as part of her visible bodily structure and through her with Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops. (*The Church, 14*)

EXPLANATION . . .

● (1) The Church is the worldwide community of those whom God has called to give witness to his Son Jesus and to the new life he has brought to man. This assembly is called "the People of God" and "the body of Christ."

The description of the Church as the People of God and the body of Christ helps each of us to see himself as one with a group to whose destiny we are tied, and whose welfare we share. This is

the reality of baptism; we are joined to Christ, to the whole Christ, Christ and his people, the Church.

If we are thus joined in Christ, he is truly one of us in a very real and intimate sense. For if the Church is seen as a successor to Israel, then Jesus, the Messiah and Head of the new People of God is seen as rooted in humanity. The Infant Jesus is the Son of Mary, as well as Son of God. He is of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Judah, of the house of David.

It is through his humanity that each of us is united to Christ as our Savior. The Divinity of Christ must not be slighted; but it must not cancel out his true humanity. Each time we use the phrase the "People of God" we see Christ, greater than Moses, who shares a truly human nature with Moses and like him leads the People of God from slavery to freedom, from death to life. Christ is our Passover. We look to the daughter of Zion, Mary, whose Son is Jesus. This brings home the fact that he is one of us, truly Emmanuel, our God with us.

(2) In describing the Church as the People of God emphasis is placed on the fact that the Church is composed of people. It includes the Pope, bishops, priests, and all the laity. That is why the Council said: "The Church is a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." In this assembly of people there is a basic equality of all persons.

(3) Just as God made Moses the leader of his people in the Old Testament, so Christ gave to his apostles and their successors the right to teach and to command in his name. These powers are given for the service and welfare of the People of God. Hence there are different responsibilities in the Church. The People of God are important because they are made to the image and likeness of God, and because they are joined to Christ, the only-begotten Son.

158. Is there a difference between the ministerial priesthood and the priesthood of the people?

The Church is also a priestly people. But the ministerial priesthood is essentially different from "the priesthood of the people." Yet all are united and equal as the one People of God.

who profess to be Christians have not made a total commitment of their entire being to Christ. They become victims of a double allegiance: "To serve both God and mammon."

The complete commitment to Christ that makes a man a full Christian is an enduring act of his free will, aided by the grace of God. Total commitment includes the whole of his nature, spiritual and physical, intellectual and emotional, and the only faculty that can commit his whole nature to anything is his will. This internal commitment of the mind and heart and will manifests itself by a life lived in conformity with the principles which Christ taught.

Dedication to Christ means obeying the commandments, fulfilling the duties of our state of life, accepting the sufferings God permits in our life, striving to perform our actions for the love of God, working to spread the reign of Christ. Every individual in the Church who thus joins in the one cause of Christ by total commitment to him deserves our deepest respect.

(2) Christ came to earth to incorporate all mankind into himself, to make men one with him, members of the Body of which he is the head. This incorporation into the death and resurrection of Christ is brought about through baptism.

In addition to baptism, Christ has given us the Holy Eucharist as a means of union with him. Through the grace of these sacraments Christ is present in us, and by his power the Catholic Church is gathered together in every parish, no matter how small.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do we share together the life of Christ in the Church? (157)
2. In what sense is the Church a community? (157)
3. Why is the ministerial priesthood different from "the priesthood of the people"? (158)
4. Why does every individual in the Church have a call to holiness? (159)
5. Why does every individual in the Church deserve respect? (160)