

Catholic Catechism: Lesson 1

A remarkably practical guide to the Catechism is *Love That Never Ends: a key to the Catechism*, by Di-Noia, O'Donnell, Cessario, and Cameron, Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1996. I summarize its outline for you.

As Cardinal Law notes in the forward, and as you have seen, the 4 supports of the Catechism are the Creed, Sacraments, Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. This is an ancient order, replacing the process of the Council of Trent Catechism of 1566. Because the Trent catechism responded to Protestant attacks on sacramental life, it put sacraments first after creed. When these attacks declined, Vatican II revised our Catechism back to the ancient order. This Catechism is a universal resource for the newly formed global village. There is only one Truth, Jesus Christ, Who calls us all to believe in Him. So we use this one Catechism to call all people to Jesus, Who is our living cornerstone. His life, rather than words, is the purpose for all our efforts. "And eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent", Jn 17:3.

With common experience of wanting things that disappointed us, the authors show that no creature can fill the God-sized hole in our hearts. St. Augustine is more eloquent: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in You". Our infinite longing for Infinity Himself drives us daily. The catechism insists that we settle for no less than God, the Love that never ends. Sharing "in the unending love of the triune God is the destiny of every human person in Christ", 11. This is the "stunning truth" of our true destiny.

This little book does not substitute for the Catechism. It does not even summarize the 800 pages of the treasure. Rather it displays the organic unity of the Catechism, 12. Each of the four supporting pillars sustains the same central mystery of ever increasing union with God. Creed lists our beliefs, to transform our thinking, so that we accept nourishment from sacraments, reform our character through commandments, and subsume all life into prayer. The love that never ends establishes all these supports, and fulfills them when we accept them. Like fingers on a hand, all grow proportionately, and integrate their actions to work together. This work is ultimately the Trinity creating, redeeming, and sanctifying us, if we allow the Triune Unity to act. Jesus is revelation in the flesh, so He draws our attention into this mystery.

Hence the Catechism echoes Christ's voice, and accomplishes His desires. Pope John Paul II eloquently said: the Catechism "will make a very important contribution to that work of renewing the whole life of the Church, as desired and begun by the Second Vatican Council", 13. Doubters were overwhelmed by diversity, but our Pope understood that these many viewpoints demanded a universal catechism. After all, God precisely unifies diversity to sustain the universe. His Spirit guides us to integrate a fragmented Church. This echoes Jesus, Who "came that you might be one, as I and the Father are one". The Church unifies diversity by faithfully echoing Christ. As Three Persons are One in God, so human persons unite in Christ.

Before catechisms there was catechesis, or a person echoing Jesus by teaching others. Catechesis is a theatrical term meaning "to make resound like an echo", 14. Paul and Luke use it during the first century. They certainly made Jesus' voice resound like an echo, faithfully broadcasting what He said to many people. Thus Christ cries out to hearts and minds, "summoning them to a new life of communion with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and with one another in Them", 15. This is a personal call, heart to heart, so that Jesus echoes among us, ever more clearly, and ever more beloved. We teach in His name.

Our first echo is what the Father speaks through His Word, the Son, in the Holy Spirit. This is the call to unite with Them, the Trinity, Love. If we love, then we feast with our beloved Community of Unity. First we answer by accepting Baptism, then we unload our sins in Confession, to accept nourishment in Communion, and accept the Spirit Confirmation. This transforming union enables us to spread sacramental life by Matrimony, Holy Orders, and prepare for heaven in Extreme Unction. So strengthened, we can obey the Ten Commandments, and perfect them in the Beatitudes. Perfection lives in prayer, which starts our response to God, and becomes that response, in loving union. This is a "the communion we already share through the indwelling Holy Spirit, and provides us with a foretaste of its consummation in 'life on high in Christ Jesus'." 16

This Catechism uses words to point past words to Christ-life, the Love that never ends. Our destiny in God is the only genuine satisfaction we want. But we have to know it first. This knowledge can not be confined

to memorized terms. It is our experience itself, 17. We can't have the experience unless we know we have it. This is the necessary start, but not the full finish. As John Paul II said: "In Jesus Christ, God not only speaks to man, but also seeks him out". First we hear Him, then we love Him, all in response to His loving outreach.

It's rather obvious to us that this is Vatican II's Catechism. Our authors give several reasons why this is true. They also show how the bishops cooperated, making this work collegial, 20. Scripture animates the entire work, 21. It shows how Scripture integrates with liturgical life, out of tradition and Christ's teaching authority. This unity enlivens the Church of Jesus Christ, and encourages us to dwell in Scripture more fully. But Scripture sprang from tradition, so we must balance it with its source, 21. Finally the Catechism is ecumenical, reaching out to separated brethren, Jews, and others, 22. Dialog presumes that each party has something to say. The opposite of dialog is abandoning our doctrine, for fear of offending someone.

Our image and likeness to God shows through when we consider personal relationships most precious. That's how it is with God. "What matters most to us matters most to God as well", 24. So we pray that the Father will "see and love in us what He sees and loves in Christ". This intimacy enables us to address God as Our Father. He has adopted us, and loves us without end, 25. We should share Love with His other children. Jesus reconciles and divinizes us, in communion with Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We need to organize truths in a hierarchy, or we get lost, 26. This does not mean we pick and choose truths, in cafeteria-style. Instead "some are ... more central or foundational, others subordinate or derivative", 27. All elements of reality relate to the central Trinitarian mystery. Properly understood, everything fits, but everything is not equally important. All comes from God, and returns to Him. He is the all-embracing unity of life. Everything radiates from the Trinity, and returns to One. These truths serve the communion of love, because God is Love, 28. What matters most is "the inner life of triune God, and our destiny to share in it, 29.

God starts this interaction by drawing close to us. "God, infinitely perfect and blessed in Himself, in a plan of sheer goodness, freely created man to make him share His own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and place, God draws close to man. ... In His Son, and through Him, He invites men to become, in the Holy Spirit, His adopted children, and thus heirs of His blessed life", 30. God is closer to us than we are to ourselves. As First Cause, God animates each creature, who wouldn't even exist without God's intimate creation. This is necessary for us to be. Then God adds to that intimate relationship free knowledge and love that He provides. On top of that, God adds grace and infused theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. There is only one more intimate union, the beatific vision. God provides it, if we prove our desire for Him.

All reality fits into this divine dynamic. So all our knowledge recapitulates itself, as it integrates towards One. "The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to Himself", 31. All man's abilities coordinate toward this perfect goal: to be one with One. All salvation history, from Adam through the end of the world, unites. As John of the Cross expressed it: "In giving us His Son, His only Word (for He possesses no other), He spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word – and He has no more to say ... because what He spoke before to the prophets in parts, He has now spoken all at once by giving us the All Who is His Son. Any person questioning God or desiring some vision or revelation would be guilty not only of foolish behavior but also of offending Him, by not fixing his eyes entirely upon Christ, and by living with the desire for some other novelty", 32.

"The whole concern of doctrine and its teaching must be directed to the love that never ends. Whether something is proposed for belief, for hope or for action, the love of our Lord must always be made accessible...", 32. All this fits into the first statement: "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth". God reaches out to us, so we don't have to solve the problem of finding God. God found us.

Jesus reveals God in the flesh, and continues this revelation in the Eucharist. The sacrifice of the Mass reenacts Christ's passion and death for love of us. His disciples "knew Him in the breaking of the bread". So they knew "that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day", 34. In Eucharist "we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, the only Son of the Father. ... Who suffered and dies for us, and Who now, after rising, is living with us forever", 34.

Mary made this possible by reversing Eve's disobedience. Mary's "yes" to God opens the way for Jesus, the new Adam, Who does it right this time. Incarnation forever surprises and delights us, as we allow its mystery to unfold. Christ was born for this, to correct Adam and Eve's sin, to remove all sin, that we may untie with God, 35. As Pope John Paul II put it: "The whole of Christ's life was a continual teaching: his silences, his miracles, his gestures, his prayer, his love for people, his special affection for the little and the poor, his acceptance of the total sacrifice on the Cross for the redemption of the world, and his Resurrection, are the actualization of his Word, and the fulfillment of Revelation", 36. Fascinating, and there's much more to come.