

DOCUMENTATION

THE DUTCH CATECHISM⁽¹⁾

Historical Background

In October 1966 the Dutch Hierarchy presented their *The New Catechism* (*De Nieuwe Katechismus*), with a foreword in which they say: "In the following pages we hope to present anew to adults the message which Jesus Christ brought into the world, to make it sound as new as it is."

The work was intended to replace their conventional type of catechism of 1948. It is written in an engaging, extremely simple, narrative style and is more existential than existentialistic in its study of the meaning of revelation, historical rather than dogmatic in its orientation.

The Dutch Catechism was the result of combined effort of some 150 contributors under the Higher Institute of Catechetics in Nijmegen. This explains the Extensive use of the existentialist-Teilhardin categories and rhetoric, so strikingly evident throughout the book.

Barely a month after its publication a group of Dutch Catholic laymen circulated a petition they had sent to the Holy See. They alleged therein that the catechisms ran counter to accepted Catholic teaching on seven different points: *the virginity of our Lady, original sin, the Eucharist, the nature of faith, birth control, the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, the existence of angels.*

The petition, done in Latin and Dutch, was published in the Dutch Catholic daily *De Tijd*, on 22nd November, 1966. On 23rd November, *De Tijd* published a short reply by Fr. E. Schillebeeckx, O.P., and a long one by the Jesuit Fr. Piet Schoonenberg, in two articles, on 10 and 17 December. These diverse views made it clear that the disagreement did not center on what the catechism said about debatable points, but rather on what it *omitted* to say. Later the debate shifted rather sharply to the contention of the defenders of the catechism that the points under discussion were "open questions" rather than matters of faith.

¹ A NEW CATECHISM: Catholic Faith for Adults. New York: Herder and Herder, 1967. PP. 510.

The first official discussion in what was turning to be a growing controversy was held at Gazzada, near Milan, from 8th to 10th April, 1967. The participants were three theologians named by the Holy See and three others designated by the Dutch Hierarchy. The purpose of this discussion was clear-cut: to arrive at an acceptable solution to the difficulties posed by the text of the catechism. The discussion, on the whole, was a failure.

Upon receiving the joint report of this group, the Holy Father set up a Commission composed of Cardinals Frings, Lefebvre, Jaeger, Florit, Browne and Journet. They were to pass upon the matter. Two meetings were held before they issued the Declaration.

The first was held on the 27th and 28th June 1967. In it they reached this decision: (1) the New Catechism was to be carefully revised before new editions and translations thereof were made, and (2) a group of theologians from seven different nations should be chosen to study the text of the Catechism and submit their opinion thereon. Incidentally this group submitted a unanimous report, after a couple of months of continuous hard work.

The *second* meeting was held from the 12th to the 14th of December 1967. On January 4, 1968, a thirty-three page report on the catechisms was sent to Cardinal Alfrink. In essence, the commission requested that changes be made in the statement of *fourteen major* points of doctrine (among them the virgin birth, birth control, original sin, the problem of after-life), and of *forty-two minor* points. It was also decided that these decisions be carried out by a drafting committee composed of two theologians to be unanimously nominated by the Commission and two, by the Dutch Hierarchy. Those nominated by the Commission were Fr. E. Dhanis, S.J., a Belgian residing in Rome, theological adviser to the Pope, secretary to the doctrinal commission at the Synods of Bishops, and Fr. Jan Van Visser, C.S.S.R., a consultant of the Congregation of the Faith and professor at the Alphonsianum, Rome. Those designated by the Dutch Hierarchy were Fr. Joseph Mulders, S.J., a co-author of the catechism, head of the religious department of the Dutch radio, and Fr. Fortmann, rector of the Utrecht Senior Seminary. Fr. Mulders later on requested to be relieved.

By then, several translations of the Dutch Catechism were either in preparation or ready for publication. The bishop of Freiburg, in Breisgau, held up publication of the German edition of the Dutch catechism until the German hierarchy should have read the translation and given their approval. The Bishop of Burlington, U.S.A. gave his Imprimatur to the English edition in July, 1967, only to revoke it later in deference to the awaited findings of the investigating commission. The edition published by Messrs. Burns and Oates and Herder and Herder carries this Imprimatur. The edition published in America carries the imprimatur of the original Dutch edition. This

was denounced by Cardinal Alfrink (*Osservatore Romano*, Nov. 2-3, 1967) as being unapproved and published before the eventual changes could be made.

Added to these unfortunate events was the arbitrary and misleading act of attributing theological opinions appearing in the Dutch catechism to the theologians named by the Holy See. All these subsequent events seemed to manifest a determined effort to frustrate the plan of the Holy See to resolve the question of the Catechism through mutual understanding with the Dutch hierarchy.

It was then that the Commission of Cardinals decided to release this *Declaration* to present a compendium of the consensus on the New Dutch Catechism. The unanimous Declaration, issued on October 15, 1968 is divided into two parts: historical and doctrinal.

The foregoing has taken up its historical part.

The doctrinal part is subdivided into ten cardinal sections, each containing two or more doctrinal observations, as to what should be changed and in what manner. Clear-cut and concise, the doctrinal part of the declaration needs no further elucidation; it is a re-statement of Traditional doctrines.

In order to facilitate cross-references between each observation of the Declaration and the pertinent statements of the Dutch Catechism, we offer the readers the following table.

DECLARATION	DUTCH CATECHISM
1. <i>Points concerning God the Creator:</i>	
a) Angels	p. 482; on demons, pp. 109-10;
b) Individual human souls: immediate creation	pp. 382, 473.
2. <i>The Fall of Man in Adam: Original Sin</i>	pp. 259-270 "The Power of Sin".
3. <i>With regard to the conception of Jesus by the Virgin Mary:</i>	
a) Virginal Conception of Jesus	pp. 75-77
b) Perpetuity of Mary's Virginity	pp. <i>ibid.</i>
4. <i>The "Satisfaction" made by Christ Our Lord</i>	pp. 279-283.
5. <i>The Sacrifice of the Cross and the Sacrifice of the Mass</i>	pp. 3067; 332-47.

6. *The Eucharistic Presence and the Eucharistic Change: Dogma of Transubstantiation* pp. 342-343.
7. *The Infallibility of the Church and the Knowledge of Revealed Mysteries:*
 a) Infallibility of the Church pp. 364-367;
 b) Understanding of dogmas pp. 365-366.
8. *The Ministerial or Hierarchical Priesthood and the Power of Teaching and Ruling in the Church:*
 a) Dignity and importance of the Ministerial Priesthood pp. 369-370;
 b) Power of Teaching and Ruling in the Church: Magisterium pp. 371-375.
9. *Various Points Concerning Dogmatic Theology:*
 a) Mystery of the Three Persons pp. 498-502;
 b) Efficacy of the Sacraments pp. 111-117; 252-255;
 c) Miracles pp. 107-109;
 d) Souls of the just, which, having been already purified, already rejoice in the immediate vision of God, purgatory, last things. pp. 472-477.
10. *Certain Points of Moral Theology:*
 a) Existence of objective moral laws, binding in conscience always and in all circumstances pp. 449-51; 373-6;
 b) Indissolubility of marriage pp. 394-398;
 c) Conjugal morality pp. 402-403.

Declaration of the Commission of Cardinals of the "New Catechism" ("De Nieuwe Katechismus")

I. HISTORICAL PART

When the "*New Catechism*" was published in Holland ("De Nieuwe Katechismus", 1966) — a work which on the one hand is marked with exceptional qualities but on the other hand, because of its new opinions, from the very moment of issue disturbed not a few of the faithful — the Apostolic See, in virtue of its office of protecting the faith of the people of God, could not fail to take cognisance of the affair. And so the Holy Father wished that, to begin, a discussion should take place between three theologians named by the Holy See and three theologians named by the Dutch hierarchy concerning the difficulties which the text of the Catechism presented.

In the discussion held from the 8th to 10th April 1967 the theologians chosen by the Holy See, according to an agenda sanctioned by the authority of the Sacred Congregation of the Council and according to the mind of the Holy Father, asked with confidence that certain things be introduced into the Catechism which, in more precise formulation, would beyond doubt correspond to the faith of the Church, to objective truth and to the conviction of the faithful. But the discussion produced very few results; and no change was made with regard to those points which by way of example, the Holy Father himself had indicated: "for example, what pertains to the virginal conception of Jesus Christ, a dogma of the Catholic faith to the teaching supported by the Gospel and the Tradition of Church by which we believe that angels exist; and to the satisfactorial and sacrificial character of the redemptive act which Christ offered to His Eternal Father for the remission of our sins and to reconcile men with the Father."

When he knew of the outcome of this discussion, especially from the joint report of the theologians designated by the Holy See, and

the theologians of the Dutch hierarchy, the Holy Father ordered that a Commission of Cardinals (Frings, Lefebvre, Jaeger, Florit, Browne and Journet) examine the matter and give their opinion about it. This Commission meeting for the first time on the 27th and 28th June 1967 with theologians familiar with the Dutch language at hand to assist them, decided that the New Catechism was to be carefully revised before new editions and translations were made, and chose another group of theologians from seven different nations to study the text of the Catechism and to express their mind about it.

Besides the Catechism itself this group was given the above-mentioned report of the first discussion between the theologians. In September a series of emendations presented in the meantime by the authors of the Catechism was added to this report. After painstaking work the group of theologians drew up their observations with regard to the text of the Catechism and with regard to the series of emendations proposed which on the whole did not seem sufficient. Every single observation of the group was approved unanimously in its entirety by the members.

When the designated Cardinals had received these observations of the theologians along with other documents, they met again from the 12th to 14th December 1967. After discussing each of the observations they definitively decided, by vote on each item, what things had to be changed in the text of the Catechism and how they were to be changed; they provided with the help of Cardinal Alfrink that a small commission be set up consisting of two of their delegates and two delegates of the Dutch hierarchy to accomplish the task. The Commission completed this assignment in February 1968 and submitted the results to the Holy See, to the designated Cardinals and to the Dutch hierarchy.

Previously, however, contrary to the wish of the Dutch hierarchy and without the prescribed correction, an English translation of the New Catechism was published; and likewise more recently a German translation has appeared and finally a French translation. Besides, reserved documents of their very nature secret pertaining to this affair, have recently been presented to the public; among them there is even a letter

of the Holy Father himself. This was done in a Dutch newspaper and also in a book published in Italy.

In the book just mentioned copious notes and explanations are added to the documents published, and in these not only are there assigned to the theologians named by the Holy See opinions which they never held, but also the very points of the Catechism which needed correction are glossed over time and again in various ways so as to seem harmless enough while they are not so in reality. Not infrequently they really are not sufficient to correct the opposite explanations. This is all the more true because very frequently these explanations agree with opinions expressed by the authors of the Catechism in other words. With regard to future editions of the Catechism, solutions are proposed contrary to those which the Commission of Cardinals, with the approval of the Holy See decreed, and it is suggested that only those corrections of the Catechism which the Holy Father expressly mentioned, be admitted at all; although as is clear from the above quotation from the Holy Father, he himself was only giving examples of the clarification which he wanted.

In that same book a wrong use is made of the opinion of some modern exegetes as to how St. Matthew and St. Luke wanted to present and explain the principal facts about the birth and infancy of Our Lord. Although the particular theologians and authors to whom the book refers hold that the virginal conception of Jesus is to be placed among the principal events which the Gospel of our Lord's infancy proposed as altogether real, the book itself dares to come to the conclusion, not without violation of the Catholic faith, that the faithful are to be permitted not to believe in the virginal conception of Jesus in its both spiritual and corporal reality, but only in its certain symbolic signification.

These publications strive in various ways to frustrate the plan of the Holy See to resolve in mutual understanding with the Dutch hierarchy a matter of no small moment for the good of the people of God. For this reason, and because the Catechism in an unamended edition, has already appeared in four language, it seems necessary even before the amended editions and translations of the Catechism are published, to give in this present declaration a compendium of the judgments of

the Commission of Cardinals. In this way it will be clear to the faithful how, in full accord with the Church of Christ and the See of Peter, they can think and bear witness without fear of error about the good tidings of salvation.

II. DOCTRINAL PART

1. Points concerning God the Creator. — It is necessary that the Catechism teach that God, besides this sensible world in which we live, has created also a realm of pure spirits whom we call Angels, (Cf. v.g. Conc. Vat. I, Const. Dei Filius, cap. 1; Const. Vat. II, Const. Lumen Gentium, n. 49, 50). Furthermore, it should state explicitly that individual human souls since they are spiritual (Cf. Conc. Vat. II, Const. Gaudium et Spes, no. 14) are created immediately by God (Cf. v.g. Encycl. Humani Generis, ASS, 42 (1950), p. 575).

2. The Fall of Man in Adam. — (Of Conc. Vat. II, Lumen Gentium, n. 2). — Although question regarding the origin of the human race and its slow development present today new difficulties, to be faced in connection with the dogma of original sin, nevertheless in the New Catechism the doctrine of the Church is to be faithfully proposed, that man in the beginning of history rebelled against God (Cf. Conc. Vat. II, Const. Gaudium et Spes, n. 13, 22) and so lost for himself and his offspring that sanctity and justice in which he had been constituted, and handed on a true state of sin to all through propagation of human nature. Certainly those expressions must be avoided which could signify that original sin is only contracted by individual new members of the human family in this sense that from their very coming into the world, they are exposed within themselves to the influence of human society where sin reigns, and so are started initially on the way of sin.

3. With regard to the conception of Jesus by the Virgin Mary. — The Commission of Cardinals has asked that the Catechism openly profess that Blessed Mother of the Incarnate Word always enjoyed the honor of virginity, and that the fact itself of the

conformity with the mystery of the Incarnation itself, be taught clearly. In consequence the Catechism should offer no excuse for abandoning this factual truth—in face of the ecclesiastical Tradition founded on Holy Scripture—retaining only a symbolic signification, such as the complete gratuity of the gift which God has given to us in his Son.

4. The "Satisfaction" made by Christ Our Lord. —

The essential elements of the doctrine of the satisfaction of Christ which pertains to our faith are to be proposed without ambiguity. God so loved sinful men as to send His Son into the world to reconcile men to Himself (Cf. 2 Cor. 5, 19). As St. Augustine says: "We are reconciled to a God who loved us even when we were at enmity with Him because of sin" (*In Ioannes Evangelium* Tr. CX, n. 6). Jesus therefore, as the first-born among many brethren (Cf. Rom. 8, 29) died for our sins (Cf. 1 Cor. 15, 3). Holy, innocent, immaculate (Cf. Hebr. 7, 26), he underwent no punishment inflicted on him by God, but freely and with filial love, obedient to His Father (Cf. Phil. 2, 8) he accepted, for his sinful brethren and as their Mediator (Cf. 1 Tim. 2, 5,) the death, which for them is the wages of sin (Cf. Rom. 6, 23; Conc. Vat. II, Const. Gaudium et Spes, n. 18). By this His most sacred death, which in the eyes of God more than abundantly compensated for the sins of the world, He brought it about that divine grace was restored to the Human race as a good which it had merited in its divine Head (Cf. v.g. Hebr. 10, 5-10; Conc. Trid., sess. VI Decr. De justificatione, cap. 3 et 7, can. 10).

5. The Sacrifice of the Cross and the Sacrifice of the Mass.

It must be clearly stated that Jesus offered Himself to His Father to repair our wrong-doing as a holy victim in whom God was well pleased. For Christ "... loved us, giving himself up in our place as a flagrant offering and a sacrifice to God" (*Eph. 5, 2*).

The sacrifice of the Cross is perpetuated in the Church of God as eucharistic sacrifice (Cf. Conc. Vat. II, Const. Sacrosanctum Concilium, n. 47). In the eucharistic sacrifice Jesus as the principal priest offers Himself to God through the consecratory oblation which priests perform and to which the faithful unite themselves. That celebration is both sacrifice and banquet. The sacrificial oblation is completed by commun-

ion, in which the victim offered to God is received as food, to unite the faithful to Himself and to join them with one another in charity (Cf. *I Cor.* 10, 17).

6. **The Eucharistic Presence and the Eucharistic Change.**

—It is necessary that in the text of the Catechism it be brought out beyond doubt that after the consecration of the bread and brought out beyond doubt that after the consecration of the bread and wine the very body and blood of Christ is present on the altar and is received sacramentally in Holy Communion, so that those who worthily approach this divine table are spiritually renewed by Christ Our Lord. Furthermore, it must be explained that the bread and wine in their deepest reality (not in appearance or phenomenologically), once the words of consecration have been spoken, are changed into the body and blood of Christ; and so it comes to pass that where the appearance of bread and wine (the phenomenological reality) remains, there, in a way most mysterious, the humanity itself of Christ, lies hidden together with His divine person.

Once this marvellous change has taken place, a conversion which in the Church is termed transubstantiation, the appearance of bread and wine,—since they actually contain and present Christ Himself, the fountain of grace and charity to be communicated through the sacred banquet,—take on as a consequence indeed a new signification and a new end. But they take on that new signification and that new end precisely because transubstantiation has taken place (Cf. *Enycl. Pauli VI, Mysterium Fidei*, AAS, 57 (1965), p. 766; *Schreiben der Deutschen Bischöfe an alle die von der Kirche mit der Glaubensverkündigung beauftragt sind* n. 43-47).

7. **The Infallibility of the Church and the Knowledge of Revealed Mysteries.** — It should be more clearly stated that the infallibility of the Church does not give her only a safe course in a continual research, but the truth in maintaining doctrine of faith and in explaining it always in the same sense (Cf. *Conc. Vat. I, Const. Dei Filius*, cap. 4, et *Conc. Vat. II, Const. Dei Verbum*, cap. 2) "Faith is not only a seeking of the truth but is above all certain possession of truth" (*Paulus VI, Alloc. ad Episcoporum Synodum*, AAS,

59 (1967), p. 966). Nor is it to be allowed that readers of the Catechism think that the human intellect arrives only at verbal and conceptual expressions of the revealed mystery. Care must be taken rather that they understand that the human intellect is able by those concepts "through a mirror in an obscure way" and "in part", as St. Paul says (*I Cor.* 13, 12) but in a way that is altogether true, to express and grasp the revealed mysteries.

8. The Ministerial or Hierarchical Priesthood and the Power of Teaching and Ruling in the Church

Care must be taken not to minimize the excellence of the ministerial priesthood, that in its participation of the priesthood of Christ, differs from the common priesthood of the faithful, not only in degree, but in essence (Cf. Conc. Vat. II, Const. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 10; *Instructio de Cultu Mysteriorum Eucharistici*, AAS, 59 (1967), n. 11, p. 548). Care must be taken that in describing the office of priest there is brought out especially the mediation which they exercise in preaching the word of God, in forming the Christian community, in administering the Sacraments and above all in offering the Eucharistic sacrifice. One must be careful, therefore, not to make their office seem to consist principally in helping human society in temporal concerns.

Furthermore, the Cardinals asked that the Catechism clearly recognize that the teaching authority and the power of ruling in the Church is given directly to the Holy Father and to the Bishops joined with him in hierarchical communion, and that it is not given first of all to the people of God to be communicated to others. The office of Bishops, therefore, is not a mandate given them by the people of God to be communicated to others. The office of Bishops, therefore, is not a mandate given them by the people of God but is a mandate received from God Himself for the good of the whole Christian community.

It is to be brought out more clearly that the Holy Father and the Bishops in their teaching office do not only assemble and approve what the whole community of the faithful believes. The people of God are so moved and sustained by the spirit of truth that they cling to the word of God with unswerving loyalty and freedom from error

under the leadership of the Magisterium to whom it belongs authentically to guard, explain and defend the deposit of faith. Thus it has come about that understanding the faith that has been handed down, in professing that faith and in manifesting it in deed, there is a unique collaboration between Bishops and the faithful (Cf. Conc. Vat. II, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 11, and *Dei Verbum*, n. 10). Sacred Tradition and the Sacred Scripture—which constitute the one and only holy deposit of the word of God — and the magisterium of the Church are so joined that one cannot stand without the other (Cf. Conc. Vat. II, Const. *Dei Verbum*, n. 10).

Finally, that authority by which the Holy Father directs the Church is to be clearly presented as the full power of ruling, a supreme and universal power which the pastor of the whole church can always freely exercise (Cf. Conc. Vat. II, Const. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 2).

9. Various points concerning Dogmatic Theology. —

In the presentation of the mystery of the three Persons in God, the Catechism should not seem to deny that Christians do well to contemplate them with faith and love them with filial devotion not only in the economy of salvation where they manifest themselves but also in the eternal life of the Divinity, whose vision we hope for the efficacy of the Sacraments should be presented somewhat more exactly.

Care must be taken that the Catechism does not seem to say that miracles can only be brought about by divine power insofar as they do not depart from that which the forces of the created world are able to produce.

Finally, let open reference be made to the souls of the just, which, having been thoroughly purified, already rejoice in the immediate vision of God, even while the pilgrim Church still awaits the glorious coming of the Lord and the final resurrection (Cf. Conc. Vat. II, Const. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 49 et 51).

10. Certain points of Moral Theology. The text of

the Catechism is not to make obscure the existence of moral laws which we are able to know and express in such wise that they bind our conscience always and in all circumstances. Solutions of cases of conscience should be avoided which do not sufficiently attend to the in-

dissolubility of marriage. While it is right to attach great moment to the moral habits, still one must be on guard lest that habit be presented without sufficient dependence upon human acts. The presentation of a conjugal morality should be more faithful in presenting the full teaching of Vatican II and of the Holy See.

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The above observations, though not few and not insignificant, still leave untouched by far the greater part of the New Catechism with its praiseworthy pastoral, liturgical and biblical character. Neither are they opposed to the laudable purpose of the author of the Catechism, namely, to present the eternal good tidings of Christ in a way adapted to the understanding and the thinking of the present day man. Indeed the very fine qualities which make this an outstanding work demand that it ever present the true teaching of the Church in no way obscured or overshadowed.

Joseph Card. Frings
 Laurentius Card. Jaeger
 Joseph Card. Lefebvre
 Hermenegildus Card. Florit
 Michael Card. Browne
 Carolus Card. Journet

PETRUS PALAZZINI
Secretary

October 15th, 1968.