

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION TO THE <i>CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH</i> , Ascension Edition	1
PREFACE	5
APOSTOLIC LETTER <i>LAETAMUR MAGNOPERE</i> in which the Latin typical edition of the <i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> is approved and promulgated.	5
APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION <i>FIDEI DEPOSITUM</i> on the publication of the <i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>	9
PROLOGUE	15
I. The Life of Man—To Know and Love God.	15
II. Handing on the Faith: Catechesis.	15
III. The Aim and Intended Readership of This Catechism	17
IV. Structure of This Catechism	17
V. Practical Directions for Using This Catechism	18
VI. Necessary Adaptations	18
PART ONE: THE PROFESSION OF FAITH	21
SECTION ONE: I BELIEVE—WE BELIEVE	23
Chapter One: Man’s Capacity for God.	25
I. The Desire for God	25
II. Ways of Coming to Know God	26
III. The Knowledge of God According to the Church	27
IV. How Can We Speak about God?	28
IN BRIEF	29
Chapter Two: God Comes to Meet Man.	30
ARTICLE 1: THE REVELATION OF GOD.	31
I. God Reveals His “Plan of Loving Goodness”	31
II. The Stages of Revelation.	32
III. Christ Jesus—“Mediator and Fullness of All Revelation”	34
IN BRIEF	35
ARTICLE 2: THE TRANSMISSION OF DIVINE REVELATION	36
I. The Apostolic Tradition	37
II. The Relationship Between Tradition and Sacred Scripture	38
III. The Interpretation of the Heritage of Faith	39
IN BRIEF	41
ARTICLE 3: SACRED SCRIPTURE	42
I. Christ—The Unique Word of Sacred Scripture	42
II. Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture.	44
III. The Holy Spirit, Interpreter of Scripture	44
IV. The Canon of Scripture	46
V. Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church.	49
IN BRIEF	49

Chapter Three: Man’s Response to God	51
ARTICLE 1: I BELIEVE	52
I. The Obedience of Faith	52
II. “I Know Whom I Have Believed”.	53
III. The Characteristics of Faith	54
ARTICLE 2: WE BELIEVE.	58
I. “Lord, Look upon the Faith of Your Church”	59
II. The Language of Faith	59
III. Only One Faith.	60
IN BRIEF	61

SECTION TWO: THE PROFESSION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH 65

The Creeds 65

Chapter One: I Believe in God the Father 69

ARTICLE 1: I BELIEVE IN GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH 69

Paragraph 1. I Believe in God 69

- I. “I Believe in One God” 69
- II. God Reveals His Name 70
- III. God, “He Who Is,” Is Truth and Love 72
- IV. The Implications of Faith in One God 74
- IN BRIEF 75

Paragraph 2. The Father. 75

- I. “In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” . . . 75
- II. The Revelation of God as Trinity 78
- III. The Holy Trinity in the Teaching of the Faith. 80
- IV. The Divine Works and the Trinitarian Missions. 82
- IN BRIEF 84

Paragraph 3. The Almighty 85

IN BRIEF 87

Paragraph 4. The Creator 87

- I. Catechesis on Creation 90
- II. Creation—Work of the Holy Trinity. 91
- III. “The World Was Created for the Glory of God”. 92
- IV. The Mystery of Creation 93
- V. God Carries out His Plan: Divine Providence. 95
- IN BRIEF 98

Paragraph 5. Heaven and Earth 99

- I. The Angels 101
- II. The Visible World 103
- IN BRIEF 105

Paragraph 6. Man 105

- I. “In the Image of God”. 107
- II. “Body and Soul but Truly One”. 108
- III. “Male and Female He Created Them”. 109
- IV. Man in Paradise. 110
- IN BRIEF 111

Paragraph 7. The Fall.	112
I. Where Sin Abounded, Grace Abounded All the More	114
II. The Fall of the Angels.	115
III. Original Sin	116
IV. “You Did Not Abandon Him to the Domain of Death”	119
IN BRIEF	120
Chapter Two: I Believe in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, Our Lord	121
ARTICLE 2: AND IN JESUS CHRIST, HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD	124
I. Jesus	124
II. Christ.	125
III. The Only Son of God	127
IV. Lord.	128
IN BRIEF	129
ARTICLE 3: WHO WAS CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY	130
Paragraph 1. The Son of God Became Man	130
I. Why Did the Word Become Flesh?	130
II. The Incarnation	132
III. True God and True Man	133
IV. How Is the Son of God Man?	135
IN BRIEF	137
Paragraph 2. Who Was Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary.	137
I. Who Was Conceived by the Holy Spirit,	137
II. Born of the Virgin Mary	139
IN BRIEF	144
Paragraph 3. The Mysteries of Christ’s Life.	145
I. Christ’s Whole Life Is Mystery	147
II. The Mysteries of Jesus’ Infancy and Hidden Life	149
III. The Mysteries of Jesus’ Public Life.	152
IN BRIEF	159
ARTICLE 4: JESUS CHRIST SUFFERED UNDER PONTIUS PILATE, WAS CRUCIFIED, DIED AND WAS BURIED.	160
Paragraph 1. Jesus and Israel	162
I. Jesus and the Law	163
II. Jesus and the Temple.	164
III. Jesus and Israel’s Faith in the One God and Savior	165
IN BRIEF	166
Paragraph 2. Jesus Died Crucified	167
I. The Trial of Jesus	167
II. Christ’s Redemptive Death in God’s Plan of Salvation	170
III. Christ Offered Himself to His Father for Our Sins	172
IN BRIEF	175
Paragraph 3. Jesus Christ Was Buried	176
IN BRIEF	178
ARTICLE 5: HE DESCENDED INTO HELL; ON THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN FROM THE DEAD	178
Paragraph 1. Christ Descended into Hell	179

IN BRIEF	181
Paragraph 2. On the Third Day He Rose Again from the Dead	181
I. The Historical and Transcendent Event	182
II. The Resurrection—A Work of the Holy Trinity	185
III. The Meaning and Saving Significance of the Resurrection	186
IN BRIEF	187
ARTICLE 6: HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN, AND IS SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY	187
IN BRIEF	190
ARTICLE 7: FROM THERE HE WILL COME AGAIN TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD	190
I. He Will Come Again in Glory	190
II. To Judge the Living and the Dead	194
IN BRIEF	195
Chapter Three: I Believe in the Holy Spirit	196
ARTICLE 8: I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT	199
I. The Joint Mission of the Son and the Spirit	200
II. The Name, Titles, and Symbols of the Holy Spirit	201
III. God’s Spirit and Word in the Time of the Promises	204
IV. The Spirit of Christ in the Fullness of Time	207
V. The Spirit and the Church in the Last Days	210
IN BRIEF	212
ARTICLE 9: I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH	213
Paragraph 1. The Church in God’s Plan	215
I. Names and Images of the Church	215
II. The Church’s Origin, Foundation, and Mission	216
III. The Mystery of the Church	219
IN BRIEF	221
Paragraph 2. The Church—People of God, Body of Christ, Temple of the Holy Spirit	222
I. The Church—People of God	222
II. The Church—Body of Christ	225
III. The Church Is the Temple of the Holy Spirit	228
IN BRIEF	229
Paragraph 3. The Church Is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic	230
I. The Church Is One	232
II. The Church Is Holy	235
III. The Church Is Catholic	237
IV. The Church Is Apostolic	243
IN BRIEF	245
Paragraph 4. Christ’s Faithful—Hierarchy, Laity, Consecrated Life	246
I. The Hierarchical Constitution of the Church	249
II. The Lay Faithful	254
III. The Consecrated Life	257
IN BRIEF	261
Paragraph 5. The Communion of Saints	262
I. Communion in Spiritual Goods	263

II. The Communion of the Church of Heaven and Earth	264
IN BRIEF	266
Paragraph 6. Mary—Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church	266
I. Mary’s Motherhood with Regard to the Church	267
II. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin	269
III. Mary—Eschatological Icon of the Church	269
IN BRIEF	269
ARTICLE 10: I BELIEVE IN THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.	270
I. One Baptism for the Forgiveness of Sins	271
II. The Power of the Keys	272
IN BRIEF	272
ARTICLE 11: I BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY	273
I. Christ’s Resurrection and Ours.	275
II. Dying in Christ Jesus	278
IN BRIEF	281
ARTICLE 12: I BELIEVE IN LIFE EVERLASTING	281
I. The Particular Judgment	284
II. Heaven	285
III. The Final Purification, or Purgatory	286
IV. Hell	287
V. The Last Judgment	288
VI. The Hope of the New Heaven and the New Earth	289
IN BRIEF	291
“Amen”	292

PART TWO: THE CELEBRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY 295

SECTION ONE: THE SACRAMENTAL ECONOMY 301

Chapter One: The Paschal Mystery in the Age of the Church 301

ARTICLE 1: THE LITURGY—WORK OF THE HOLY TRINITY 301

I. The Father—Source and Goal of the Liturgy	301
II. Christ’s Work in the Liturgy	303
III. The Holy Spirit and the Church in the Liturgy	304
IN BRIEF	309

ARTICLE 2: THE PASCHAL MYSTERY IN THE CHURCH’S SACRAMENTS 309

I. The Sacraments of Christ	310
II. The Sacraments of the Church	311
III. The Sacraments of Faith	312
IV. The Sacraments of Salvation	313
V. The Sacraments of Eternal Life	313
IN BRIEF	314

Chapter Two: The Sacramental Celebration of the Paschal Mystery 315

ARTICLE 1: CELEBRATING THE CHURCH’S LITURGY 317

I. Who Celebrates?	317
II. How Is the Liturgy Celebrated?	319
III. When Is the Liturgy Celebrated?	323

IV. Where Is the Liturgy Celebrated?	327
IN BRIEF	329
ARTICLE 2: LITURGICAL DIVERSITY AND THE UNITY	
OF THE MYSTERY	331
IN BRIEF	333
SECTION TWO: THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS	
OF THE CHURCH	
Chapter One: The Sacraments of Christian Initiation	337
ARTICLE 1: THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM	338
I. What Is this Sacrament Called?	338
II. Baptism in the Economy of Salvation	339
III. How Is the Sacrament of Baptism Celebrated?	341
IV. Who Can Receive Baptism?	344
V. Who Can Baptize?	345
VI. The Necessity of Baptism	346
VII. The Grace of Baptism	346
IN BRIEF	349
ARTICLE 2: THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION	351
I. Confirmation in the Economy of Salvation	352
II. The Signs and the Rite of Confirmation	354
III. The Effects of Confirmation	356
IV. Who Can Receive This Sacrament?	357
V. The Minister of Confirmation	358
IN BRIEF	359
ARTICLE 3: THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST	360
I. The Eucharist—Source and Summit of Ecclesial Life	363
II. What Is This Sacrament Called?	363
III. The Eucharist in the Economy of Salvation	364
IV. The Liturgical Celebration of the Eucharist	367
V. The Sacramental Sacrifice: Thanksgiving, Memorial, Presence	370
VI. The Paschal Banquet	376
VII. The Eucharist—“Pledge of the Glory to Come”	381
IN BRIEF	382
Chapter Two: The Sacraments of Healing	384
ARTICLE 4: THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION	387
I. What Is This Sacrament Called?	387
II. Why a Sacrament of Reconciliation after Baptism?	387
III. The Conversion of the Baptized	388
IV. Interior Penance	389
V. The Many Forms of Penance in Christian Life	389
VI. The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation	390
VII. The Acts of the Penitent	393
VIII. The Minister of This Sacrament	395
IX. The Effects of This Sacrament	397
X. Indulgences	398
XI. The Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance	399
IN BRIEF	401

ARTICLE 5: THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK	402
I. Its Foundations in the Economy of Salvation	404
II. Who Receives and Who Administers This Sacrament?	407
III. How Is This Sacrament Celebrated?	407
IV. The Effects of the Celebration of This Sacrament	408
V. Viaticum, the Last Sacrament of the Christian	409
IN BRIEF	409
Chapter Three: The Sacraments at the Service of Communion	411
ARTICLE 6: THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDERS	413
I. Why Is This Sacrament Called “Orders”?	414
II. The Sacrament of Holy Orders in the Economy of Salvation	414
III. The Three Degrees of the Sacrament of Holy Orders	418
IV. The Celebration of This Sacrament	422
V. Who Can Confer This Sacrament?	422
VI. Who Can Receive This Sacrament?	423
VII. The Effects of the Sacrament of Holy Orders	424
IN BRIEF	426
ARTICLE 7: THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY	428
I. Marriage in God’s Plan	430
II. The Celebration of Marriage	434
III. Matrimonial Consent	435
IV. The Effects of the Sacrament of Matrimony	437
V. The Goods and Requirements of Conjugal Love	438
VI. The Domestic Church	441
IN BRIEF	442
Chapter Four: Other Liturgical Celebrations	445
ARTICLE 1: SACRAMENTALS	445
IN BRIEF	448
ARTICLE 2: CHRISTIAN FUNERALS	449
I. The Christian’s Last Passover	449
II. The Celebration of Funerals	450
PART THREE: LIFE IN CHRIST	453
SECTION ONE: MAN’S VOCATION LIFE IN THE SPIRIT	459
Chapter One: The Dignity of the Human Person	459
ARTICLE 1: MAN: THE IMAGE OF GOD	459
IN BRIEF	461
ARTICLE 2: OUR VOCATION TO BEATITUDE	461
I. The Beatitudes	461
II. The Desire for Happiness	463
III. Christian Beatitude	463
IN BRIEF	465
ARTICLE 3: MAN’S FREEDOM	465
I. Freedom and Responsibility	466
II. Human Freedom in the Economy of Salvation	467
IN BRIEF	468

ARTICLE 4: THE MORALITY OF HUMAN ACTS	469
I. The Sources of Morality	470
II. Good Acts and Evil Acts	471
IN BRIEF	471
ARTICLE 5: THE MORALITY OF THE PASSIONS	472
I. Passions	472
II. Passions and Moral Life	473
IN BRIEF	473
ARTICLE 6: MORAL CONSCIENCE	474
I. The Judgment of Conscience	475
II. The Formation of Conscience	476
III. To Choose in Accord with Conscience	477
IV. Erroneous Judgment	477
IN BRIEF	478
ARTICLE 7: THE VIRTUES	479
I. The Human Virtues	481
II. The Theological Virtues	483
III. The Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit	486
IN BRIEF	487
ARTICLE 8: SIN	488
I. Mercy and Sin	488
II. The Definition of Sin	490
III. The Different Kinds of Sins	490
IV. The Gravity of Sin: Mortal and Venial Sin	491
V. The Proliferation of Sin	493
IN BRIEF	494
Chapter Two: The Human Community	495
ARTICLE 1: THE PERSON AND SOCIETY	496
I. The Communal Character of the Human Vocation	496
II. Conversion and Society	497
IN BRIEF	498
ARTICLE 2: PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL LIFE	499
I. Authority	499
II. The Common Good	501
III. Responsibility and Participation	502
IN BRIEF	503
ARTICLE 3: SOCIAL JUSTICE	504
I. Respect for the Human Person	505
II. Equality and Differences Among Men	506
III. Human Solidarity	507
IN BRIEF	508
Chapter Three: God's Salvation: Law and Grace	509
ARTICLE 1: THE MORAL LAW	510
I. The Natural Moral Law	511
II. The Old Law	513
III. The New Law or the Law of the Gospel	514
IN BRIEF	516
ARTICLE 2: GRACE AND JUSTIFICATION	517
I. Justification	517

II.	Grace	520
III.	Merit	522
IV.	Christian Holiness	524
	IN BRIEF	525
	ARTICLE 3: THE CHURCH, MOTHER AND TEACHER	526
I.	Moral Life and the Magisterium of the Church.	527
II.	The Precepts of the Church.	529
III.	Moral Life and Missionary Witness.	530
	IN BRIEF	531
	SECTION TWO: THE TEN COMMANDMENTS	535
	IN BRIEF	541
	Chapter One: “You Shall Love the Lord Your God With All Your Heart, and With All Your Soul, and With All Your Mind”	542
	ARTICLE 1: THE FIRST COMMANDMENT	544
I.	“You Shall Worship the Lord Your God and Him Only Shall You Serve”.	545
II.	“Him Only Shall You Serve”	547
III.	“You Shall Have No Other Gods Before Me”.	550
IV.	“You Shall Not Make for Yourself a Graven Image...”	554
	IN BRIEF	554
	ARTICLE 2: THE SECOND COMMANDMENT	555
I.	The Name of the Lord Is Holy	555
II.	Taking the Name of the Lord in Vain	558
III.	The Christian Name	559
	IN BRIEF	560
	ARTICLE 3: THE THIRD COMMANDMENT	560
I.	The Sabbath Day	560
II.	The Lord’s Day	562
	IN BRIEF	566
	Chapter Two: “You Shall Love Your Neighbor As Yourself”	567
	ARTICLE 4: THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT	568
I.	The Family in God’s Plan	569
II.	The Family and Society	570
III.	The Duties of Family Members	572
IV.	The Family and the Kingdom	575
V.	The Authorities in Civil Society	575
	IN BRIEF	578
	ARTICLE 5: THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT	579
I.	Respect for Human Life	581
II.	Respect for the Dignity of Persons	587
III.	Safeguarding Peace.	590
	IN BRIEF	593
	ARTICLE 6: THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT	594
I.	“Male and Female He Created Them...”	594
II.	The Vocation to Chastity	597
III.	The Love of Husband and Wife	601
IV.	Offenses Against the Dignity of Marriage	605
	IN BRIEF	608

ARTICLE 7: THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT	609
I. The Universal Destination and the Private Ownership of Goods	611
II. Respect for Persons and Their Goods	611
III. The Social Doctrine of the Church	614
IV. Economic Activity and Social Justice.	615
V. Justice and Solidarity Among Nations.	617
VI. Love for the Poor	618
IN BRIEF	620
ARTICLE 8: THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT	622
I. Living in the Truth	623
II. To Bear Witness to the Truth.	624
III. Offenses Against Truth	625
IV. Respect for the Truth	627
V. The Use of the Social Communications Media.	628
VI. Truth, Beauty, and Sacred Art	629
IN BRIEF	630
ARTICLE 9: THE NINTH COMMANDMENT	631
I. Purification of the Heart	633
II. The Battle for Purity	634
IN BRIEF	636
ARTICLE 10: THE TENTH COMMANDMENT	636
I. The Disorder of Covetous Desires.	638
II. The Desires of the Spirit.	639
III. Poverty of Heart.	640
IV. “I Want to See God”	640
IN BRIEF	641

PART FOUR: CHRISTIAN PRAYER. 643

SECTION ONE: PRAYER IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. 645

Chapter One: The Revelation of Prayer 649

THE UNIVERSAL CALL TO PRAYER. 649

ARTICLE 1: IN THE OLD TESTAMENT 649

 IN BRIEF 654

ARTICLE 2: IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME 655

 IN BRIEF 661

ARTICLE 3: IN THE AGE OF THE CHURCH 662

 I. Blessing and Adoration 663

 II. Prayer of Petition 664

 III. Prayer of Intercession 665

 IV. Prayer of Thanksgiving 665

 V. Prayer of Praise 666

 IN BRIEF 667

Chapter Two: The Tradition of Prayer 668


ARTICLE 1: AT THE WELLSPRINGS OF PRAYER 669

 IN BRIEF 671

ARTICLE 2: THE WAY OF PRAYER 671

 IN BRIEF 676

ARTICLE 3: GUIDES FOR PRAYER	677
IN BRIEF	680
Chapter Three: The Life of Prayer	681
ARTICLE 1: EXPRESSIONS OF PRAYER	682
I. Vocal Prayer	682
II. Meditation	683
III. Contemplative Prayer	683
IN BRIEF	686
ARTICLE 2: THE BATTLE OF PRAYER	686
I. Objections to Prayer	687
II. Humble Vigilance of Heart	688
III. Filial Trust	689
IV. Persevering in Love	691
ARTICLE 3: THE PRAYER OF THE HOUR OF JESUS	692
IN BRIEF	693
SECTION TWO: THE LORD’S PRAYER “OUR FATHER!”	695
ARTICLE 1: “THE SUMMARY OF THE WHOLE GOSPEL”	696
I. At the Center of the Scriptures.	697
II. “The Lord’s Prayer”.	697
III. The Prayer of the Church	698
IN BRIEF	699
ARTICLE 2: “OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN”	700
I. “We Dare to Say”	700
II. “Father!”	701
III. “Our” Father	704
IV. “Who Art in Heaven”.	705
IN BRIEF	706
ARTICLE 3: THE SEVEN PETITIONS	707
I. “Hallowed Be Thy Name”	709
II. “Thy Kingdom Come”	711
III. “Thy Will Be Done on Earth as It Is in Heaven”.	713
IV. “Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread”	714
V. “And Forgive Us Our Trespases, as We Forgive Those Who Trespass Against Us”	716
VI. “And Lead Us Not into Temptation”	718
VII. “But Deliver Us from Evil”	719
ARTICLE 4: THE FINAL DOXOLOGY	721
IN BRIEF	722
APPENDIX: SOURCES FROM SCRIPTURE AND THE CHURCH	725
GLOSSARY	737
INDEX	771
SUBJECTS AND CONCEPTS	771
ABBREVIATIONS	869
CITATIONS	871



INTRODUCTION
TO THE
CATECHISM
OF THE
CATHOLIC
CHURCH,
Ascension Edition

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is an incredible treasure of our faith. When promulgated by St. John Paul II in 1992, it became the first universal catechism of the Church in over four hundred years. The *Catechism*, which presents us with an organic and systematic summary of the essential doctrines of the Catholic Church, conveys the truth, beauty, goodness, and fullness of our faith in a way that is ever ancient, ever new.

By opening the pages of this *Catechism*, you are taking a decisive step in your journey of faith—a journey to lead you to a greater understanding and appreciation of our Catholic faith and to bring you closer to our Lord.

How This Catechism Works

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* serves as a clear point of reference for Catholic teachings. While the *Catechism* has produced immeasurable fruit in the life of the Church, though, many people will readily admit that it can be difficult to read. Sometimes it can be hard to see how everything comes together. The 2,865 numbered paragraphs of the *Catechism* may seem like pieces of a gigantic puzzle. Just like a picture of the finished product is helpful when putting a puzzle together, a complete view of the whole *Catechism* can help us figure out where each piece fits.

This *Catechism of the Catholic Church* published by Ascension offers that big picture. It gives a way to understand how everything fits together. Using a unique, color coded chart, this edition of the *Catechism* breaks down the complexity of the *Catechism* into easy-to-follow pieces.

THE CHART

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Ascension Edition is paired with Ascension's color-coded chart that gives a snapshot of the whole content of the *Catechism*. The teachings contained in the *Catechism* were organized by its authors into four parts, or "pillars," groups of teachings that are like the pillars holding up a vast, beautiful building. Ascension's chart assigns each pillar of the *Catechism* a color to help keep track of all the teachings that make up that pillar and to help understand the organization and logic of why those teachings belong to each pillar. The colors of the four pillars are:

Teal	Part One: The Profession of Faith (What We Believe)
Red	Part Two: The Celebration of the Christian Mystery (How We Worship)
Green	Part Three: Life in Christ (How We Live)
Purple	Part Four: Christian Prayer (How We Pray)

The chart provides a visual overview of the whole *Catechism* that illustrates the systematic way the *Catechism* presents the breadth of Catholic doctrine. The chart lays out not only each pillar but also the subdivisions within the *Catechism*. It names each section and chapter, with corresponding paragraph numbers, and points to the articles that follow. The chart makes the complicated simple by showing how each paragraph fits into the *Catechism* as a whole.

FOLLOWING ALONG

While the full chart gives a snapshot of the entire *Catechism*, a part of the chart is placed before each section of the *Catechism* to provide an overview of what is to come in that section.

At the top of each page of the *Catechism* is a quick reminder of where you are. The first and last paragraph numbers on the page spread are provided in color-coded tabs that match the pillar's color on the chart. This quick reference, located at the top corners, will help you find your place at a glance. And each page spread is labeled with a "bread crumb trail" that names the page according to its pillar, section, and chapter, leading back to the pillar named on the chart.

Both the chart and the "bread crumb trail" of labels use recognizable terms such as "What We Believe," "How We Worship," "How We Live," and "How We Pray" to help explain the language of the *Catechism*.

RECOGNIZING THE SOURCES

One of the features of the *Catechism* that makes it such an important resource of the Faith is the wealth of references to Scripture, professions of faith, ecumenical councils, particular councils and synods, pontifical documents, ecclesiastical documents, canon law, liturgy, and ecclesiastical writers. However, while these resources add tremendous value to the *Catechism*, they can seem overwhelming.

This edition of the *Catechism* highlights the treasury from Sacred Scripture and the writings of the Church that permeate the *Catechism*. At dozens of points throughout the *Catechism*, lists of sources are provided as a snapshot of Scripture and Church documents that the *Catechism* draws on in the paragraphs ahead. An appendix, "Sources from Scripture and the Church," is added at the end of the book that explains what these sources are in more detail and sheds light on how the *Catechism* cites them.

Additionally, throughout the *Catechism*, words to know are indicated along with the paragraph numbers where they appear in the text. The definitions of these words are provided in the Glossary.

The Appendix, the Glossary, the indexes, and this Introduction are all additional aids for using the *Catechism* itself. These sections, while faithful to Catholic teaching, do not participate in the approval of the text of the *Catechism* itself, given in the Apostolic Constitution *Fidei Depositum* of St. John Paul II.

Truth and Beauty

This edition of the *Catechism* has been carefully designed to make the text readable, organized, and inviting. Its beautiful design is in service to the majestic truth and beauty of the Catholic Faith contained within its pages.

We sincerely hope that this *Catechism* will help you have a more in-depth understanding of the richness of our faith and its basis in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. We also pray that it will help you discover your place in God's marvelous plan for your life.

May God bless you!
The Ascension Team

PROLOGUE

“FATHER, . . . this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”¹ “God our Savior desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”² “There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”³ than the name of JESUS.

I. THE LIFE OF MAN—TO KNOW AND LOVE GOD

1 God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength. He calls together all men, scattered and divided by sin, into the unity of his family, the Church. To accomplish this, when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son as Redeemer and Savior. 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.

2 So that this call should resound throughout the world, Christ sent forth the apostles he had chosen, commissioning them to proclaim the gospel: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”⁴ Strengthened by this mission, the apostles “went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it.”⁵

3 Those who with God’s help have welcomed Christ’s call and freely responded to it are urged on by love of Christ to proclaim the Good News everywhere in the world. This treasure, received from the apostles, has been faithfully guarded by their successors. All Christ’s faithful are called to hand it on from generation to generation, by professing the faith, by living it in fraternal sharing, and by celebrating it in liturgy and prayer.⁶

II. HANDING ON THE FAITH: CATECHESIS

4 Quite early on, the name *catechesis* was given to the totality of the Church’s efforts to make disciples, to help men believe that Jesus is the Son of God so that believing they might have life in his name, and to educate and instruct them in this life, thus building up the body of Christ.⁷

¹ *Jn* 17:3.

² *1 Tim* 2:3-4.

³ *Acts* 4:12.

⁴ *Mt* 28:18-20.

⁵ *Mk* 16:20.

⁶ Cf. *Acts* 2:42.

⁷ Cf. John Paul II, apostolic exhortation, *Catechesi tradendae* 1; 2.

5 “Catechesis is an *education in the faith* of children, young people, and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life.”⁸

6 While not being formally identified with them, catechesis is built on a certain number of elements of the Church’s pastoral mission which have a catechetical aspect, that prepare for catechesis, or spring from it. They are: the initial proclamation of the Gospel or missionary preaching to arouse faith; examination of the reasons for belief; experience of Christian living; celebration of the sacraments; integration into the ecclesial community; and apostolic and missionary witness.⁹

7 “Catechesis is intimately bound up with the whole of the Church’s life. Not only her geographical extension and numerical increase, but even more her inner growth and correspondence with God’s plan depend essentially on catechesis.”¹⁰

8 Periods of renewal in the Church are also intense moments of catechesis. In the great era of the Fathers of the Church, saintly bishops devoted an important part of their ministry to catechesis. St. Cyril of Jerusalem and St. John Chrysostom, St. Ambrose and St. Augustine, and many other Fathers wrote catechetical works that remain models for us.¹¹

9 “The ministry of catechesis draws ever fresh energy from the councils. The Council of Trent is a noteworthy example of this. It gave catechesis priority in its constitutions and decrees. It lies at the origin of the *Roman Catechism*, which is also known by the name of that council and which is a work of the first rank as a summary of Christian teaching. . . .”¹² The Council of Trent initiated a remarkable organization of the Church’s catechesis. Thanks to the work of holy bishops and theologians such as St. Peter Canisius, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Turibius of Mongrovejo, or St. Robert Bellarmine, it occasioned the publication of numerous catechisms.

10 It is therefore no surprise that catechesis in the Church has again attracted attention in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, which Pope Paul VI considered the great catechism of modern times. The General Catechetical Directory (1971), the sessions of the Synod of Bishops devoted to evangelization (1974) and catechesis (1977), the apostolic exhortations *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975) and *Catechesi tradendae* (1979) attest to this. The Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in 1985 asked “that a catechism or compendium of all Catholic doctrine regarding both faith and morals be composed.”¹³ The Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, made the Synod’s wish his own, acknowledging that “this desire wholly corresponds to a real need of the universal Church and of the particular Churches.”¹⁴ He set in motion everything needed to carry out the Synod Fathers’ wish.

⁸ CT 18.

⁹ CT 18.

¹⁰ CT 13.

¹¹ Cf. CT 12.

¹² CT 13.

¹³ Extraordinary Synod of Bishops 1985, *Final Report*, II B a, 4.

¹⁴ John Paul II, Discourse at the Closing of the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, December 7, 1985: AAS 78 (1986).

III. THE AIM AND INTENDED READERSHIP OF THIS CATECHISM

11 This catechism aims at presenting an organic synthesis of the essential and fundamental contents of Catholic doctrine, as regards both faith and morals, in the light of the Second Vatican Council and the whole of the Church's Tradition. Its principal sources are the Sacred Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, the liturgy, and the Church's Magisterium. It is intended to serve "as a point of reference for the catechisms or compendia that are composed in the various countries."¹⁵

12 This work is intended primarily for those responsible for catechesis: first of all the bishops, as teachers of the faith and pastors of the Church. It is offered to them as an instrument in fulfilling their responsibility of teaching the People of God. Through the bishops, it is addressed to redactors of catechisms, to priests, and to catechists. It will also be useful reading for all other Christian faithful.

IV. STRUCTURE OF THIS CATECHISM

13 The plan of this catechism is inspired by the great tradition of catechisms which build catechesis on four pillars: the baptismal profession of faith (the *Creed*), the sacraments of faith, the life of faith (the *Commandments*), and the prayer of the believer (the *Lord's Prayer*).

Part One: *The profession of faith*

14 Those who belong to Christ through faith and Baptism must confess their baptismal faith before men.¹⁶ First therefore the Catechism expounds revelation, by which God addresses and gives himself to man, and the faith by which man responds to God (*Section One*). The profession of faith summarizes the gifts that God gives man: as the Author of all that is good; as Redeemer; and as Sanctifier. It develops these in the three chapters on our baptismal faith in the one God: the almighty *Father*, the Creator; his *Son* Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior; and the *Holy Spirit*, the Sanctifier, in the Holy Church (*Section Two*).

Part Two: *The sacraments of faith*

15 The second part of the Catechism explains how God's salvation, accomplished once for all through Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit, is made present in the sacred actions of the Church's liturgy (*Section One*), especially in the seven sacraments (*Section Two*).

¹⁵ Extraordinary Synod of Bishops 1985, *Final Report* II B a, 4.

¹⁶ Cf. *Mt* 10:32; *Rom* 10:9.

Part Three: *The life of faith*

16 The third part of the Catechism deals with the final end of man created in the image of God: beatitude, and the ways of reaching it—through right conduct freely chosen, with the help of God’s law and grace (*Section One*), and through conduct that fulfills the twofold commandment of charity, specified in God’s Ten Commandments (*Section Two*).

Part Four: *Prayer in the life of faith*

17 The last part of the Catechism deals with the meaning and importance of prayer in the life of believers (*Section One*). It concludes with a brief commentary on the seven petitions of the Lord’s Prayer (*Section Two*), for indeed we find in these the sum of all the good things which we must hope for and which our heavenly Father wants to grant us.

V. PRACTICAL DIRECTIONS FOR USING THIS CATECHISM

18 This catechism is conceived as *an organic presentation* of the Catholic faith in its entirety. It should be seen therefore as a unified whole. Numerous cross-references in the margin of the text (italicized numbers referring to other paragraphs that deal with the same theme), as well as the analytical index at the end of the volume, allow the reader to view each theme in its relationship with the entirety of the faith.

19 The texts of Sacred Scripture are often not quoted word for word but are merely indicated by a reference (cf.). For a deeper understanding of such passages, the reader should refer to the Scriptural texts themselves. Such Biblical references are a valuable working-tool in catechesis.

20 The use of **small print** in certain passages indicates observations of an historical or apologetic nature, or supplementary doctrinal explanations.

21 The **quotations**, also in small print, from patristic, liturgical, magisterial or hagiographical sources, are intended to enrich the doctrinal presentations. These texts have often been chosen with a view to direct catechetical use.

22 At the end of each thematic unit, a series of brief texts sum up the essentials of that unit’s teaching in condensed formulae. These **IN BRIEF** summaries may suggest to local catechists brief summary formulae that could be memorized.

VI. NECESSARY ADAPTATIONS

23 The Catechism emphasizes the exposition of doctrine. It seeks to help deepen understanding of faith. In this way it is oriented toward the maturing of that faith, its putting down roots in personal life and its shining forth in personal conduct.¹⁷

¹⁷ Cf. CT 20-22, 25.

24 By design, this Catechism does not set out to provide the adaptation of doctrinal presentations and catechetical methods required by the differences of culture, age, spiritual maturity, and social and ecclesial condition among all those to whom it is addressed. Such indispensable adaptations are the responsibility of particular catechisms and, even more, of those who instruct the faithful:

Whoever teaches must become “all things to all men” (*1 Cor 9:22*), to win everyone to Christ. . . . Above all, teachers must not imagine that a single kind of soul has been entrusted to them, and that consequently it is lawful to teach and form equally all the faithful in true piety with one and the same method! Let them realize that some are in Christ as newborn babes, others as adolescents, and still others as adults in full command of their powers. . . . Those who are called to the ministry of preaching must suit their words to the maturity and understanding of their hearers, as they hand on the teaching of the mysteries of faith and the rules of moral conduct.¹⁸

Above All—Charity

25 To conclude this Prologue, it is fitting to recall this pastoral principle stated by the *Roman Catechism*:

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, so that anyone can see that all the works of perfect Christian virtue spring from love and have no other objective than to arrive at love.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Roman Catechism*, Preface, 11; cf. *1 Cor 9:22*; *1 Pet 2:2*.

¹⁹ *Roman Catechism*, Preface, 10; cf. *1 Cor 13:8*.

PART ONE

The Profession of Faith



What We Believe

What We Believe

PART ONE: THE PROFESSION OF FAITH

DIVINE REVELATION

Section One: I Believe—We Believe

The Search

*Chapter One:
Man's Capacity
For God*

Desire for God
Knowing God
Knowledge of God
Speaking
about God

CCC 26-49

The Revelation

*Chapter Two:
God Comes to
Meet Man*

The Revelation
of God
(Article 1)
The Transmission
of Divine
Revelation
(Article 2)
Sacred Scripture
(Article 3)

CCC 50-141

The Response

*Chapter Three:
Man's Response
to God*

Believing
(Article 1)
The Faith of
the Church
(Article 2)

CCC 142-184

SECTION ONE

I BELIEVE—WE BELIEVE

SOURCES FROM SCRIPTURE AND THE CHURCH

The following portion of the *Catechism* draws from these sources of Sacred Scripture and the Church. See the Index of Citations for a complete list of citations.

Old Testament

Genesis	CCC 29, 36
Psalms	CCC 30
Wisdom	CCC 32, 41
Jonah	CCC 29

Cited in the *Catechism*

New Testament

Matthew	CCC 29
Acts of the Apostles	CCC 28, 32
Romans	CCC 32

Ecumenical Councils

Lateran IV (1215)	CCC 43
Vatican I (1869-1870)	CCC 36, 38, 47
Vatican II (1962-1965)	CCC 27, 29, 33, 36, 38, 49

Pontifical Documents

Pius XII (1939-1958)	CCC 37, 38
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Liturgy

Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom	CCC 42
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Ecclesiastical Writers

St. Augustine	CCC 30, 32, 45
St. Thomas Aquinas	CCC 34, 38, 43

WORDS TO KNOW

The following portion of the *Catechism* includes this important word to know. See the Glossary for a definition.

Terms

Faith

Cited in the *Catechism*

CCC 26

26 We begin our profession of faith by saying: I believe or We believe. Before expounding the Church's faith, as confessed in the Creed, celebrated in the liturgy, and lived in observance of God's commandments and in prayer, we must first ask what "to believe" means. Faith is man's response to God, who reveals himself and gives himself to man, at the same time bringing man a superabundant light as he searches for the ultimate meaning of his life. Thus we shall consider first that search (*Chapter One*), then the divine Revelation by which God comes to meet man (*Chapter Two*), and finally the response of faith (*Chapter Three*).

Chapter One

Man's Capacity for God

I. THE DESIRE FOR GOD

27 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. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for:

355, 170

1718

The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God. This invitation to converse with God is addressed to man as soon as he comes into being. For if man exists, it is because God has created him through love, and through love continues to hold him in existence. He cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and entrusts himself to his creator.¹

28 In many ways, throughout history down to the present day, men have given expression to their quest for God in their religious beliefs and behavior: in their prayers, sacrifices, rituals, meditations, and so forth. These forms of religious expression, despite the ambiguities they often bring with them, are so universal that one may well call man a *religious being*:

843, 2566

2095-2109

From one ancestor [God] made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For “in him we live and move and have our being.”²

29 But this “intimate and vital bond of man to God” (GS 19,1) can be forgotten, overlooked, or even explicitly rejected by man.³ Such attitudes can have different causes: revolt against evil in the world; religious ignorance or indifference; the cares and riches of this world; the scandal of bad example on the part of believers; currents of thought hostile to religion; finally, that attitude of sinful man which makes him hide from God out of fear and flee his call.⁴

2123-2128

398

30 “Let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.”⁵ Although man can forget God or reject him, He never ceases to call every man to seek him, so as to find life and happiness. But this search for God demands of man every effort of intellect, a sound will, “an upright heart,” as well as the witness of others who teach him to seek God.

2567, 845

368

¹ Vatican Council II, GS 19 § 1.

² Acts 17:26-28.

³ GS 19 § 1.

⁴ Cf. GS 19-21; Mt 13:22; Gen 3:8-10; Jon 1:3.

⁵ Ps 105:3.