

Book Review

A Tour Of The Catechism-The Creed

Volume 1

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As a father of five children and a teacher in Catholic high schools for 36 years, it has been my overarching objective to pass on to my children and to the students in my care a correct understanding of the teachings of the Catholic Church. In doing so, my prayer has been that by embracing this teaching they will come to love Jesus Christ and his Church all the more. To this end, I have found the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) to be an indispensable aid.

The CCC owes its origin to a resolution of the 1985 Synod of Bishops which called for the publication of a catechism or compendium of Catholic teachings for the universal Church. The Synod Fathers expressed concern about the state of catechesis in the Church and about difficulties which had arisen regarding the transmission of the faith to new generations of Catholics. At the time, Blessed Pope John Paul II understood this request for a Catechism of the Universal Church as expressive of a desire “acutely perceived in the whole Church, for greater clarity and doctrinal certainty in order to put an end to teachings or interpretations of faith and morals that do not agree among themselves or with the universal Magisterium” (*L’Osservatore Romano*, July 7, 1986).

Published in 1992, the CCC followed the structure of previous catechisms of the Universal Church in that its four major sections were: i) The Profession of Faith (Creeds); ii) The Celebration of the Christian Mystery (Sacraments); iii) Life in Christ (Commandments); (iv) Christian Prayer.

In promulgating the CCC, Blessed Pope John Paul II envisioned it as a sure and authentic reference text for other catechisms that would be prepared in the various languages and regions of the world. It is against this backdrop of the emergence of the CCC and its function in the Universal Church that we can appreciate the value of Fr John Flader’s recently published book *A Tour of the Catechism: Volume I - The Creed*.

In his *Foreword* to the book, Cardinal Pell says: “Fr Flader has mastered the enormously rich material of the Catechism and broken it down for the lay reader. As well he has added his own enlightening observations and fitting quotations from Catholic writers to illustrate the text and assist in its comprehension.” Coupled with this, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, Archbishop of Vienna and general editor of the CCC says: “Fr Flader’s book is truly a helpful guide through the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, leading to a deeper understanding of the Apostolic Creed and our Faith.”

Faithful to the content of the CCC, Fr Flader’s presentation of the Creed draws heavily on Apostolic Tradition, Sacred Scripture, and the teaching of the Magisterium (teaching authority of the Pope and of the bishops teaching in communion with him). It also draws on the writings of the Fathers, Doctors, and saints of the Church. It places the great doctrines expressed in the Creed into a historical framework and traces their origins through the Old and New Testaments – all the while pointing to “the centrality of Christ in the whole of Scripture” (p.39).

A most attractive aspect of the book is the way in which Fr Flader draws on the findings of modern science to illustrate how faith and reason complement each other to the extent that both are ordered to assisting us in the acquisition of truth and wisdom (cf. pp. 17-19). Fr Flader's writing in this regard reminds me of a widely quoted statement of Blessed Pope John Paul II, who in his encyclical *Faith and Reason*, said: "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth – in a word, to know himself – so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves."

In launching the book at the Mustard Seed Bookshop in Lidcombe on May 24, Bishop Julian Porteous said the book was like a tour guide who helped a visitor to a great cathedral to appreciate more fully every aspect of the building and its decorations. I found this a very appropriate comparison. Fr Flader helps the reader to understand the background, the significance and the meaning of the rich content of the Catechism.

The *Tour* contains copious references with good indexing and page layout. The commentary in the text is written in easily accessible language, something that renders it suitable for use by a wide audience: including priests, religious, parents, teachers, RCIA catechists and candidates.

Most importantly, the *Tour* speaks of the teachings of the Faith from a perspective of love, gratitude and humility. On this basis, the book is a must-read for all Catholics who love their Faith and desire to exercise their baptismal vocation to share this faith with others. In this regard, and in terms of its faithfulness to the teaching of the Church, Fr Flader's book is an excellent example of the type of catechetical materials that are needed to equip the faithful with the knowledge they require in order to be effective protagonists of the New Evangelisation.

Finally, a study of Fr Flader's book could be useful to Catholics and Protestants engaged in ecumenical dialogue. The first condition for authentic ecumenism is that the parties in dialogue know their own faith tradition and present its teachings accurately. Since the *Tour* gives a clear and extensive exposition of how the Catholic Church understands the various articles of the Apostles and Nicene Creeds, something many Protestant denominations claim to hold to as well, then various sections of the *Tour* could be used as good discussion starters for Catholics and Protestants engaged in ecumenical dialogue.

The Creed is available from the Mustard Seed Book for \$29.95 (+\$7.65 p/h) on 02 9646 9000 or www.mustardseed.org.au.