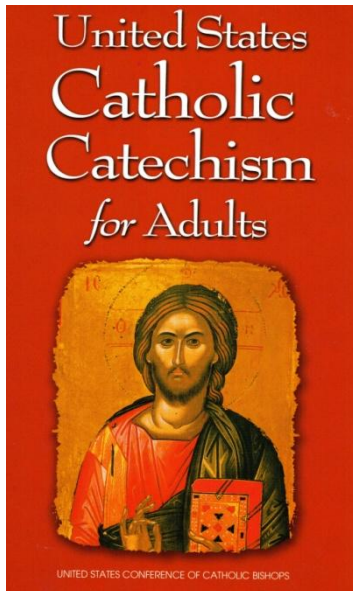


Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults

A Review by Éanna Johnson PhD

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was promulgated by St John Paul II in 1992, and at that time the Pope urged that local catechisms be developed to better address specific situations in different countries.



In 2000 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops decided to produce a catechism, adapted from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in a way which would be more accessible to adults and would relate to the context of the Church in the United States. The intended audience included those preparing for the sacraments of initiation through the RCIA process, young adult Catholics, Catholics who may have drifted away from the practice of the faith, and all those seeking to know more about Catholic belief and practice.

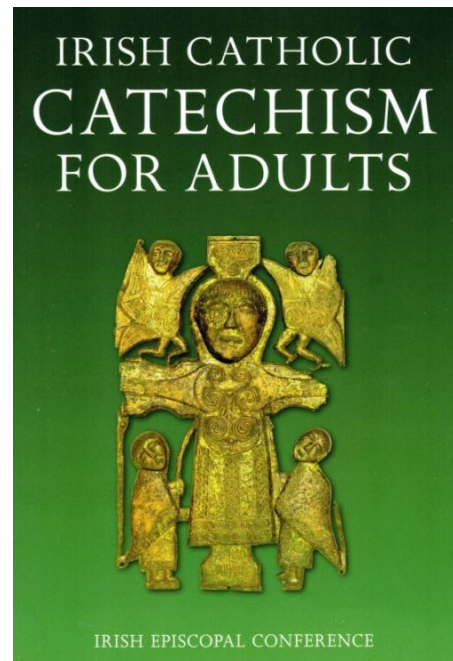
After a six-year preparation process overseen by a five-bishop editorial board, the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* was launched in 2006, with the necessary approval of the Holy See (Canon 775§2), and was well received. Subsequently the Irish Bishops decided that a similar catechism would be helpful in Ireland and in 2008 asked permission from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to produce a version for the Irish Church. The USCCB graciously granted permission, which led to the development of the *Irish Catholic Catechism*

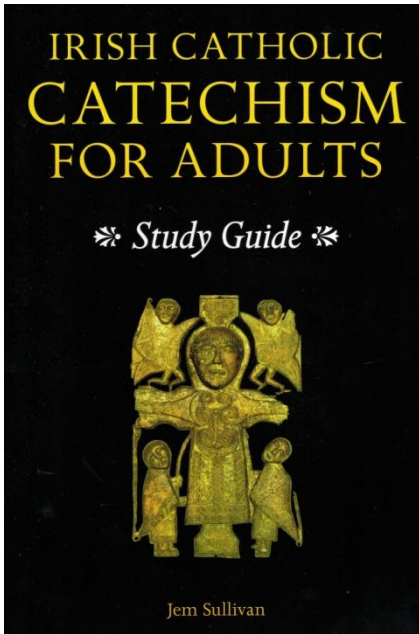
for Adults by the Council for Catechetics of the Irish Episcopal Conference and publication by Veritas in 2014, with the required approval of the Holy See.

The *Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults* is a good publication, a significant asset for authentic Catholic catechesis of adults and potentially helpful in the senior years of secondary school. The Irish Adult Catechism closely follows its US model – the basic structure is the same and most of the text is taken directly from the US Catechism. Both Catechisms follow the four part structure of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: 'Profession of Faith/Creed'; 'Faith Celebrated in Liturgy/Sacrament'; 'Life in Christ/Morality'; & 'Christian Prayer'.

The Catechisms contain 36 chapters, each of which addresses a significant part of the Faith. Each chapter begins with the story of either a saint, biblical figure or exemplary Catholic, whose life illustrates the particular teaching in that chapter, the majority of whom in the US Catechism are understandably Americans. The Irish Catechism includes thirteen people from the US Catechism, the remainder selected as more relevant to the Irish situation – the selection is good, and the stories are generally well presented.

After the opening story, each chapter includes a summary of the relevant teaching, a 'sidebar' with three questions and answers taken directly from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a section relating the teaching to the culture (in many but not all chapters), a set of questions for discussion, a review of points of doctrine covered in the chapter, and closes with a meditation and prayer.





The Adult Catechism is not designed as a substitute for the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* or its excellent summary the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, but rather as an additional resource which should assist in individual or group study of the teachings of the Church. The Irish Bishops have also published a companion Study Guide (based on the *Study Guide for the US Adult Catholic Catechism*), which should prove helpful, but not essential because the Adult Catechism is already structured in a user-friendly way amenable to study.

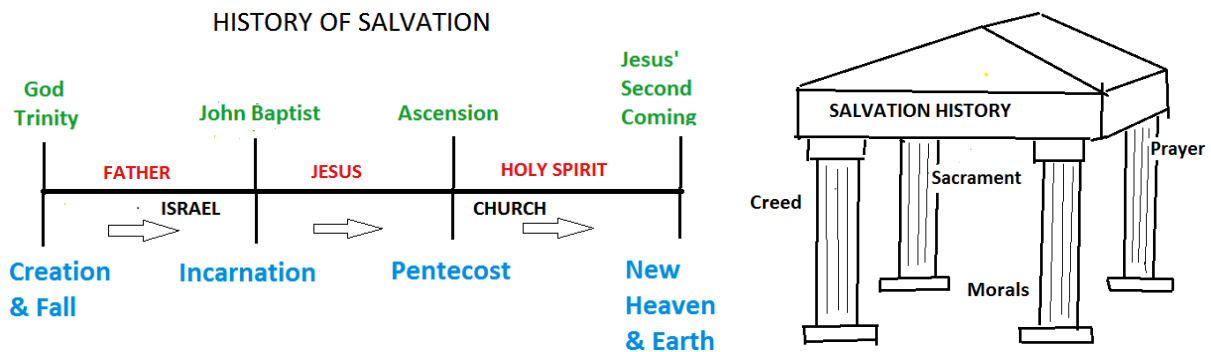
The Irish Bishops are to be highly commended for the *Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults* which is a positive contribution to Catholic catechesis in Ireland. The model of adapting a good authentic Catholic catechetical publication from another country for use in Ireland could helpfully be repeated in other areas of faith education, especially programmes, syllabi, texts and other materials for Catholic schools, primary and secondary.

Limitations

While the *Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults* is to be gratefully welcomed, nevertheless some limitations can be noted.

There are many good reasons for the four-part structure, the four 'pillars', of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, but there is a danger that the teachings of the Church will thereby appear disconnected, lacking in coherence and unity. The Catechism itself seeks to provide this coherence, describing the Church's faith as confessed in the Creed, celebrated in the liturgy and lived in observance of God's commandments and in prayer (CCC26).

However, the *General Directory for Catechesis 1997* (which is the Church's principal document on how to carry out catechesis) goes further, specifying Salvation History as the overall structure for all Catholic catechesis, encompassing the 'four pillars' of Creed, Sacrament, Morality and Prayer (GDC16,98,108,115,117). The first part of the History of Salvation starts with Creation, includes the call of Abraham and the Covenants, and ends with John the Baptist, the last of the Old Testament prophets. The second part, the centre of Salvation History, is the time of Jesus, God the Son and Saviour, his Incarnation, life, death, Resurrection and Ascension. The final part is the 'end times', the time of the Church, marked by the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit, from Pentecost through to the Second Coming of Jesus, ushering in a new heaven and earth.



It seems eminently sensible for the overall structure for catechesis to be Salvation History, for it is The Great Story, the Father's perfect Plan, the narrative revealed in Scripture from Genesis to Revelation, the 'Big Picture' – the frame into which everything fits. A story has the power to seize the imagination, inspire interest and make sense, for both young and old, giving life to a set of propositions. The Adult Catechism could helpfully have followed the wise guidance of the *General Directory for Catechesis* and brought out Salvation History as its overall structure.

In relating the teaching to the culture in Chapters 1,2 & 4, there is recognition of the negative external impact on Catholics of the growing secularisation of Irish society, but the impression is given that the Church herself is doing fine because there is no recognition of any internal problems. In fact the Irish Church has suffered greatly internally from secularisation and other problems, which is somewhat recognised in Catechism's Chapter 18 in the letter of Pope Benedict to the Irish Church. However, there is no recognition at all of the extremely serious problem of deficient and defective catechesis programmes in our Catholic schools over the past 40 years, and continuing.

There are many good and relevant Magisterial documents referenced, but a surprising omission of two of the most important such documents for catechesis: *Catechesi Tradendae* – *On Catechesis in Our Time* 1979 and the *General Directory for Catechesis* 1997. At the same time there is reference to, and nineteen quotations from, *Share the Good News* – *National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland*, lending credibility to this thoroughly unsatisfactory document (though the quotations themselves are reasonable, taken from good elements in *Share the Good News*).

The Adult Catechism includes a quotation attributed to St Francis: 'Preach always. Sometimes use words'. This recently popular quotation, with some variations, implies that witness of life is essential for evangelisation, while words are less important, even optional. This is unhelpful. The quotation's Franciscan origin is doubtful and it does not accord with the teaching of the Church, which stresses equally the importance of both word and witness (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* – *On Evangelisation in the Modern World*, 21-22, 41-42).

Chapter 12 on Mary is headlined: 'Mother of Jesus, Mother of God, Mother of the Church'. The Catechism makes an excellent choice of the Vision of Knock to illustrate the teaching, yet could go further than seeing Knock as essentially a Marian apparition by drawing on the extraordinary depth and breadth of meaning in the complete vision. 'What the Catholic faith believes about Mary is based on what it believes about Christ' (CCC487), so all teaching on Mary can be related to the most important part of the Vision which is *Jesus*, the lamb alive on the altar with the cross, the centre of Salvation History, through which the human race was redeemed from sin and death, made conditional on Mary's freely given 'yes' to be the Mother of God. Mary as *Mother of the Church* can be related to John, apostle and bishop, to whom

Jesus gave Mary as mother at the foot of the cross. Mary is also *Mother of the 'domestic Church'*, symbolised in a special way with Joseph her husband, head and protector of the Holy Family.

