

The Influence in China of the Catechisms from the Catholic Revival Movement (The Counter-Reformation)

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Three popes who promoted the Catholic Revival Movement

The convocation of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) by Pope Paul III (1534-1549) officially launched a long hoped for reform within the Church. The Council clearly distinguished the differences between Catholic doctrine and Protestantism. It clarified to some degree the basic elements of faith and the possible limits for theological debate. It can be said that the Council was of vital significance to the development of the modern Catholic Church.

After the Council of Trent, three great popes dedicated themselves to the implementation and realization of the decrees of the Council: Pius V (1566-1572), Gregory XIII (1572-1585) and Sixtus V (1585-1590). They each played important roles in different areas.

Pope Pius V gained the reputation of being “the most determined and the most genuine figure of the Catholic Revival Movement.” He implemented the resolutions of the Council by promulgating: the Roman Catechism drafted by Cardinal Carlo Borromeo (1538-1584) for the use of priests in 1566; the Breviary, the official set of daily prayers for clergy, in 1568; and the Roman Missal in 1570, to be commonly used for the liturgy throughout the Latin rite of the Catholic Church. (See the Chinese translation of *Modern Church History* 《近代教會史》 written by Karl Bihlmeyer and translated by Leopold Leeb, Beijing: Religious Culture Press, 2011, pp 84-85.)

The gifted and talented Pope Gregory XIII succeeded Pope Pius V. He was very concerned about the issue of unity with the Eastern Churches. He enthusiastically supported religious education in Rome, and strongly sponsored the Jesuits by establishing the Roman College (now the Pontifical Gregorian University). The college became a model of a new type of seminary for the formation of the clergy. It formed many outstanding figures for the Church, including 16 Popes, one third of the Cardinals, one quarter of the bishops, and numerous priests. 21 Saints and 46 Blessed are also numbered among their graduates. (See Xiong Guangyi's "Jesuit Methods of Education" [《耶穌會的教育法》], Taipei: Kuangchi Press, 1965, pp 66-70).

On March 1, 1590, Pope Sixtus V solemnly promulgated the *Latin Vulgata Bible*, a revision of an old Latin translation. In 1592, another revision, the *Vulgata Clementina*, was also published. This version became the Church's blueprint for Biblical translation for centuries.

On August 15, 1534, St Ignatius of Loyola founded the Society of Jesus. This new religious order, on the one hand, greatly promoted internal reforms of the Church through education and spirituality, and on the other hand, effectively curbed the continuous expansion of the Protestant Church (Bihlmeyer, p 86). Pope John Paul II said once, "My predecessor, Pope Paul VI, spoke profoundly when he said: 'Wherever the Church is, even in the most difficult places, at the crossroads of ideology or in the trenches where mankind is often in urgent need of the gospel message, the Jesuits are always there.'" ("Pope John Paul II's Letter to the Society of Jesus," see 《神學論集》 [*Collectanea Theologica*] (90) Taiwan: Kuangchi Press and Catholic Truth Society of Hong Kong, 1992, p 499).

Three Kinds of Catechism That Affected the Catholic Revival Movement

To foster the faith life of Christians, the Church always had the practice of compiling a "Catechism." The late 15th century could be described as "an era of change, when catechetical teaching by vocal instruction, and the focus on faith formation through life experience

turned to books such as the catechism.” Because Martin Luther (1483-1546) published a German Catechism in 1529, and influenced by this, passionate Catholics were not willing to fall behind, they wrote successive catechism books to promote the Church's revival movement. Thus, the 16th century could be called the great century of compiling catechism books.

First, Saint Peter Canisius (1521-1597), a Dutch Jesuit, published three kinds of Catechism in Germany: a large book in 1555 called *A Summary of Christian Teachings (Summa doctrinae Christianae)*; a little book called *The Small Catechism (Catechismus Minor)* in 1559; and the smallest book *A Little Catechism for Catholics (Parvus catechismus catholicorum)* in 1556. Peter Canisius' catechetical books had a significant influence. 400 editions of them have been reprinted, and they were translated into 50 languages. (Fang Chih-Jung: “A Comparison of Three Catechism Books” [《三部要理的比較》], see Gutheinz Luis: 《神學論集》 [*Collectanea Theologica*], volume 100, p 240).

Then, Jesuit Cardinal Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), who was named a Doctor of the Church, wrote *A Short Exposition of Christian Doctrine* with 96 easily memorized questions and answers in 1597. He also published an *Explanation of Christian Doctrine* in 1598, “which contained 273 questions and answers, and was a catechism book specifically written for the laypeople and children.” The book was circulated extensively with 500 editions in print, and it was translated into nearly 60 languages.

Commissioned by the Council of Trent, Archbishop Carlo Borromeo of Milan (1538-1584), in 1566, compiled the Roman Catechism (*Catechismus Romanus*). “The book divided the material in accordance with the nature of doctrines. It was divided into four parts: the creed, the sacraments, the ten commandments and prayers, to preserve the unity of salvation. Originally written for the use of priests, the book was later used to teach children. It was widely circulated and is still in use today.” (see Fang Chih-Jung, p 239; Gutheinz Luis: 《神學辭典》 [*Theological Dictionary*], p 709).

From the aforementioned catechism books, one can see that the Roman Catechism promulgated by the Council of Trent in 1566 was a great achievement. It succeeded in integrating all the Catechism books of that time, and it possessed official authority.

However, since the book was written for priests, it put more emphasis on theoretical hermeneutics in catechetics. Thus, it was not until the 18th century that Father Ludovico Appiani of the Paris Foreign Mission Society translated the Roman Catechism into Chinese. He used it as teaching material for the formation of Catholics in Sichuan province. Published by Cardinal Bellarmine in 1598, the *Explanation of Christian Doctrine* became an important model for compiling catechisms for many centuries. Pope Clement VIII wished that the 1597 Catechism published by Cardinal Bellarmine would become the official Catechism generally used in the Church. Later on, the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith also suggested using it in the mission areas of East Asia. (*A History of Catechetical Teaching in China* 《中國教理講授史》 written by J. Jennes, translated by Tian Yongzheng, Taipei: Hua Ming Bookstore, 1976, pp 111, 251).

From *Christian Doctrine* 《天主教要》 to Q&A Catechisms 《要理問答》

In 1583, Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607) became “the first one to write Catholic doctrine in Chinese characters and in the Chinese language.” It was the “first Chinese Catechism” for the Catholic Church in China. (Fang Hao, “Personalities in Chinese Catholic History” [《中國天主教人物傳》], Volume I, Catholic Truth Society of Hong Kong & Taiwan Kuangchi Press 1968, pp 66-71)

In March 1605, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), with the assistance of other priests, re-translated and published *Catholic Doctrine for the formation of new Catholics* in Beijing. Matteo Ricci believed that “[t]his work was very essential because the former version was done by the hands of translators who did not fully understand the importance of translating the original meaning of the text. Therefore it needed to be revised every year. At the same time each mission station used its own version and they were not all exactly the same. When a Catholic traveled from one place to another, they might feel confused. Since then, everyone used only this version, and other stations all reprinted this book.” (Matteo Ricci: *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas suscepta ab Societate Jesu* [On the Christian Mission among the Chinese by the Society of Jesus])

translated by Wen Jing, Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2013, pp 355-356) In a letter to Father Fabio De Fabii on May 9, 1605, Matteo Ricci once again talked about the difficulties in translating *Christian Doctrine*. He said, “If possible, I will send you a copy of the first book of *Christian Doctrine* now being printed. You will see that we are really making a great effort to translate it into Chinese, and how important it is for us.” (Matteo Ricci: *Letters of Matteo Ricci II*, translated by Luo Yu, Taiwan: Kuangchi Press, 1986, pp 278-279).

Soon after the revised *Christian Doctrine* was published, Jesuit Father Alfonso Vagnone (1566-1640), who did missionary work in Nanjing, at that time wrote an annotation “Declaration on Christian Doctrine” [《天主教要解略》] for this revision, and published it around 1610. Thus one can see the great importance the missionaries placed on this book for the formation of new Catholics (Matteo Ricci, 2013, p 356).

After that, the Jesuit Fathers published many other catechetical books. These included Father Jacques Motel’s (1618-1692) “Rites and Rules for Baptism” [《聖洗規儀》]; Fathers Giulio Aleni (1582-1649) and Lazzaro Cattaneo’s “The Essential Meaning of Repentance” [《悔罪要指》]; Giulio Aleni’s “Catechism on the Eucharist” [《聖體要理》], “Prayers for the Eucharist” [《聖體禱文》] and the “Four Character Classic” [《四字經》], a book for the formation of children; Father Francesco Brancati’s (1607-1671) “Conversations with the Angels” [《天神會課》] (1661) and “Rites and Rules for the Eucharist” [《聖體規儀》] (1679); and “Handbook on Conversion and Baptism” [《進教領洗捷錄》] by Franciscan Father Francisco a Concepción Pieris (1635-1701). All were in a simple format, making the style of the catechisms acceptable to both the educated and ordinary people. Thus they were able to be of service to the missionary regions of China at different times and in different places. (See “Catholic Documents of the Ming and Qing Dynasties in the National Library of France” [《法國國家圖書館明清天主教文獻》], compiled by Nicolas Standaert, Adrian Dudink, et al., (18) Taipei Ricci Institute, 2009; J. Jennes 1976, p 54).

After the Controversy of Rites broke out, the Catholic Church in China suffered nationwide persecution for more than a century,

from the second year of the Yongzheng Emperor (1724) to the Opium War (1844). Missionaries were arrested, expelled, or went underground to do missionary work clandestinely. It was very difficult for them to find any opportunity to compile or translate any books on catechetics.

Since then the leaders of the China Church had the opportunity to discuss the compilation of a unified national Catechism in Shanghai from November 7 to December 3, 1851. However, no unanimous opinion was reached. There were a number of meetings later to discuss a unified version of the Catechism for the Church in China. However, it was not until the Shanghai synod of 1924 that a consensus was reached. A “Commission for Creating a Unified Catechism and Prayers” was set up to take responsibility for compiling the Catechism and prayer book. The aim was to resolve the problem of different vocabulary in the Catechism used by Catholics across the country. After a long period of diligent work by the commission, “the booklet of an ordinary Catechism finally came out in 1934. It was meant to teach Catholics to acquire a general knowledge of the Catechism.” This booklet-catechism was made up of four volumes: “I. doctrine, II. ethics, III. grace, IV. prayers and celebration of feasts,” which primarily reflected the basic characteristics of the medieval education in catechetics, that was found in Canisius’ *Catholic Catechism* in 1556, the *Roman Catechism* in 1566, and Cardinal Bellarmine’s *Explanation of Christian Doctrine* in 1598. As for a larger catechism book, the bishops eventually produced one based on the translation of Cardinal Gabrielis’ *Question and Answer Catechism* [《要理問答》] and the revised *Detailed Explanation of the Catechism* [《要理條解》]. They integrated them into a book which was later called *A Complete Catechetical Work* [《要理大全》] for the use of training Catholic catechists. (Jennes, 1976, pp 254-258).

The Influence of the Roman Catechism on the Church in China

During the revival movement of the Church in the 17th century, although the Latin Vulgate Bible was promulgated, the Bible did not get the attention it deserved and Catholics could only

come into contact with certain passages of the Bible during the Mass. Only a few clergy in Europe could possess a personal pocket-size Bible. During this period, interest in learning and studying the Bible was fully reflected in the compilation and publication of catechism books. Some of the well-known catechism handbooks came into being, and these greatly promoted the reform of faith life among Christians.

In 1634, the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith stipulated that “bishops around the world had to supervise the faithful in studying handbooks of doctrine, especially Cardinal Bellarmine’s *Handbook of Doctrine* 《教義手冊》 to ensure that everyone was guided to learn the necessary requirements for salvation. This was especially to be done at Sunday Mass.” The decision of the Congregation shows that the “Catechism” and “Participation in Sacraments” increasingly received the attention of the Church authorities. (Nicolas Standaert, “The Bible in Early Seventeenth-Century China” [《聖經在十七世紀的中國》], see *Collectanea Theologica*, Issue 126, Kuangchi Press, 2001, p 546).

In this context, missionaries who came to China certainly used the “Catechism” as the framework for the formation of Catholics. First, Matteo Ricci, known as the father of the Catholic Church in China, had the insight that “Chinese people always had high regard for the written text, and that books could usually reach places where people could not go.” Thus, he said, in China, “All religions are promoted by printed books, not by the way of preaching and teaching their doctrine in public.” Hence he asked “Catholics to study the printed *Christian Doctrine* [《天主教要》] on their own, or ask their relatives and friends to read it to them, so that they could quickly remember the content in their minds.” The cultural-adaptation missionary approach used by Matteo Ricci opened the road of evangelization in China.

Since the Ming and Qing dynasties, *Christian Doctrine* has played a significant role in the formation of new Catholics, and has created many good witnesses. At that time, a new Catholic called Li Yingshi, with the baptismal name of Paul, asked for confession from his heart, after he had read for the first time “the content about the Seven Sacraments written in the new edition of *Christian Doctrine*. During the confession, he completely concentrated his

mind on it, and cried out his sins with deep sorrow. Driven by him, many people began to confess, including his son and other family members, even his wife.” (Matteo Ricci, 2013, pp 354, 361)

Christian Doctrine had been an important book on catechesis for the new Catholics during the period when they were still catechumens. Before the priests went to preach in a place, they would first send a catechist there to explain and prepare the people for their preaching. After the priest arrived, he would begin explaining the meaning of salvation to the people. Then he would put the statute of Jesus on the altar so that everyone could worship and pray. At last, the priest would distribute the *Christian Doctrine* to the active participants and encourage them to read it earnestly. This method of preaching was extremely effective. Those who wanted to convert knelt fervently before the altar, and "solemnly accepted the *Christian Doctrine*." When they "knew well the content of the *Christian Doctrine*, they would prepare to enter the church, and participate in the first half of the Mass. Later on, they would be baptized." (Matteo Ricci, 2013, p314)

In 1610, Father Jean de Rocha (1566-1623) translated *The Revelation of Catholicism* into Chinese [《天主聖教啟蒙》]. It also gives us a vivid picture of how the early Church in China taught the doctrine through the format of the “teacher (T) asking a question” and “the student (S) answering.” The doctrinal point used in this example is “the Christian and the Trinity.”

T: What does *Cristo* (Christian) mean?

S: It means believing in one’s heart and declaring with one’s mouth the decrees of Jesus Christ.

T: What does it mean to believe in one’s heart and declare with one’s mouth the decrees of Jesus Christ?

S: Being a Christian, means not only believing in one’s heart, sometimes it means declaring publically: I am a Christian, even if it means losing one’s life. For this reason, I would rather die than to deny that I am a Christian.

T: How does the Trinity become one God?

S: Because the three are made up of one entity, one power, one wisdom, one holiness, so the three become one God.” (“Catholic Documents in Ming and Qing Dynasties from Roman Archives of

the Society of Jesus,” [《耶穌會羅馬檔案館明清題那主教文獻》] Volume I, pp 379, 389).

After the Jesuit Fathers' dedicated formation through catechesis, some prominent families and respectable clans were baptized and joined the Church. Examples of these are: the Xu Guangqi family in Shanghai; the Duan Gun and Han Lin families in Jiangzhou, Shanxi province; the Li Jiugong family, the Miao clan, and the Chen family in Fuzhou, Fujian province, etc. Through "the collective memory of faith and the recognition of ethnic identity" and by the collective learning of the "Catechism" and group prayer, the faith was extended through families and clans, and thus the traditional Catholic faith was established in China. (see Zhang Xianqing: "Local Government, Lineages and Christianity: A History of the Rural Church in Fu'an" [《官府、宗族與天主教：17-19 世紀福安鄉村教會的歷史敘事》], Beijing, Zhonghua Bookstore, 2009, pp 312-319).

In 1775, after the Jesuit Society left China, the Franciscan Order, the Congregation of the Missions (Vincentians), the Dominican Order and the Paris Foreign Missions Society took over supervision of the missionary work in China. The ways of preaching used by Franciscans and Dominicans were more inclined towards gathering the faithful together and openly proclaiming the *Q&A Catechism* [《要理問答》]. They used this kind of method for teaching the faith. Catholics received formation when they prayed at church each Sunday. They would spend 15 to 20 minutes reciting loudly the questions and answers of the Catechism. They even recited all of its four volumes of text. It was through instilling knowledge of faith in this way that the Christians received the guiding principles to counter the attacks that secularism brought to church life.

Conclusion

The Catholic Revival Movement (Counter-Reformation) produced a series of famous books on catechetics which had a significant impact on the faith life of the Catholic Church in China for 400 years. Among them, books with the greatest impact included Canisius' *Parvus catechismus catholicorum* in 1556, the

Roman Catechism promulgated by the Council of Trent in 1566 and Cardinal Bellarmine's *Explanation of Christian Doctrine* in 1598. These three forms of the Catechism together constituted the main source of the four volumes of the *Q&A Catechism* for the Catholic Church in China.

Since the Council of Trent recognized Latin as the official language of the Catholic Church, the language was used in "administering the sacraments, and offering the Mass" in the universal Church. As Catholics did not understand Latin, they could only participate in the mystery of Christian faith by way of "observing the Mass" or "listening to the Mass." The key channel for them to obtain guidance in the faith was from community liturgies and catechetical teachings, and through the open explanations offered in the *Q&A Catechism*.

As a tool to foster the faith life of Catholics, the *Q&A Catechism* had a far-reaching influence on the Catholic Church in China. It provided Catholics with the most basic teachings on "faith, ethics, liturgies, prayers and the celebration of feasts." In fact, the four-volume *Q&A Catechism* had become an essential book for every Catholic family. This catechetical book was not only brought along by priests in their yearly visit to the rural Catholic villages to offer basic formation for the faithful. It was also the book used to inspire children, and was a useful tool to help catechumens learn about Catholicism. In short, during the era when the Bible was not available, the *Q&A Catechism* played an extremely significant role in the Chinese Church.

In addition to the *Q&A Catechism*, many other holy books had an effect on the Church, like the "Records of Words and Deeds of the Descending God" 《天主降生言行記略》, "Life of the Virgin Mary" 《聖母行實》, "Acts of the Apostles" 《宗徒行傳》, "Biographies of the Saints" 《聖人傳記》, "The Imitation of Christ" 《師主篇》, etc. They had nurtured the faith life of generations of Catholics to various degrees and fostered in them the power of faith. This helped them to maintain their faith in Christ in times of persecution of the Church and helped them to resist the three enemies of the soul (devil, worldliness, and flesh), which corrupt and create challenges to a Christian's faith life.

The influence of the Council of Trent on the Catholic Church in China was profound and long-lasting. For although the Second Vatican Council was successfully held in the early 1960s and had achieved satisfactory results, due to historical reasons, the Church in China only had the opportunity to learn the council's teachings in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Besides the Documents of the Second Vatican Council, the Church enjoys another outstanding accomplishment with the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* approved by Pope John Paul II on June 25, 1992. This book is "a strong statement of the Church's faith and of Catholic doctrine, attested to or illumined by Sacred Scripture, the Apostolic Tradition and the Church's Magisterium.... a sure norm for teaching the faith and thus a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion." (Pope John Paul II: *Apostolic Constitution Fide Depositum on the Publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 3 "The Doctrinal Value of the Text")

The Catechism of the Catholic Church in 1992 maintained the major structure of the catechism during the revival movement of the Church, with contents on "faith, ethics, liturgy, prayers and liturgical celebrations." It fully assimilated the text of the Scriptures, the writings of the Doctors of the Church and the documents of the magisterium. Although one may say it is a bit of "new wine in old wineskins," it has become an important reference for the local Church to compile its own catechetical material. It also reflects that the theology of the Church has the broad scope to cover and include theologies of other Christian denominations.

Hopefully, the Catholic Church in China will be able to integrate the current cultural context and social situation in compiling a Catechism for the Catholic Church in China that could possess the characteristics of a Church inculturated into the local culture, while keeping the profound communion with the universal Church. Such a catechism would hopefully contribute beneficially to the development of the whole Church in China.