The Catechism of the Catholic Church, which Pope John Paul II gave to the Christian world on 11 October 1992, with the Apostolic Constitution "Fidei Deposita", responded to a universal expectation felt everywhere in the Church; while in some segments of the Catholic intellectual world of the West it met skepticism, indeed, rejection. After the epochal turning point of the Second Vatican Council, the catechetical tools used until then seemed insufficient, no longer on a par with the consciousness of faith as it was expressed by the Council. A multiplicity of experiments began - analogous to what happened with the liturgy. Even with all of the valid elements, that could be found in different publications, a vision of the whole was lacking. After the great turning point it seemed to be problematical to know what was still valid and what was not. This meant that Pastors and the faithful awaited a new reliable reference text, to direct catechesis, which would offer a clear synthesis of Catholic teaching according to the directions of the Council. A group of theologians and specialists in catechesis opposed this in their understandable intellectual desire to be able to experiment as much as possible. The certainty of faith appeared as the opposite of the freedom and openness of continuing reflection. But the faith is not primarily the matter for intellectual experimentation, it is rather the solid foundation - the hypostasis, as the Letter to the Hebrews (11,1) tells us - on which we can live and die. As science is not hindered by the certainties reached over time, but rather these certainties provide the conditions for its progress, so also the certainties which faith grants to us open up ever new horizons, while the constant circling around itself of experimental reflection ends in boredom.

In this situation, there was great gratitude for the Catechism, when it was published, since all the members of the Church, bishops, priests, and laity, collaborated in preparing it; while an ever hostile rejection met it that sought even more reasons. The purportedly centralist manner of preparation was criticized, though that objection obviously contradicted historical truth. The content itself was declared to be static, dogmatic, "pre-conciliar". It was said that the Catechism failed to take into account the theological developments of the last century, particularly exegetical developments; it was not ecumenical; it was not dialogical, but apodictic and affirmative. So one could not speak of a current doctrinal relevance - not then, ten years ago, and today naturally still less so.

Meaning and Limits of a Catechism
What should we think of such opinions? In order to see them in the right light and discuss them with their proponents - to the extent in which they are disposed to do so - we must first of all think about what a catechism is and what is its specific literary genre. The Catechism is not a theology book, but a book of the faith, for the teaching of the faith. In present day theological consciousness this fundamental difference is often not sufficiently present. Theology does not invent with its method intellectual reflections that one can believe or not - in such a case the Christian faith would be entirely a product of our own thought and no different from the philosophy of religion. Theology, if rightly understood, is rather the effort to recognize the gift of knowledge that precedes the reflection. On this point, the Catechism cites the noted saying of St Augustine, that classically synthesizes the essence of the theological endeavour: "I believe in order to understand and I understand the better to believe" (158; Sermo 43, 7, 9). The relation between the given, which God offers to us in the faith of the Church, and our effort to appropriate this given in rational understanding, is a fundamental part of theology. The goal of the Catechism is precisely that of presenting this given that precedes us, whose developing doctrinal formulation of the faith is offered in the Church; it is a proclamation of faith, not a theology, even if a reflection seeking understanding is a natural part of an appropriate presentation.
of the teaching of the Church's faith and in this sense faith is opened to understanding and to theology. Nevertheless, the difference between the work of proclamation or witness and that of theological reflection is not eliminated.

**Universal proclamation, witness**

In this way we touch upon the literary genre of the Catechism, which is derived from its purpose. Its literary form is more than anything else the testimony, the proclamation that comes from the internal certainty of the faith. Even here clarifications have to be made: this testimony is addressed to another and therefore makes reference to his/her point of view; the testimony contains the intelligent summary of the word received, but remains nevertheless distinct from the language of reason that searches scientifically. In the case of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, yet a further fact is added: the audience for whom this book is intended, who determines the subsequent form of the dialogue, is manifold and varied. The Pope notes, in the fourth point of the Apostolic Constitution *Fidei Depositorum*, the progression of those to whom the Catechism is addressed, and to whom he has dedicated the book: pastors and the faithful, particularly those members of the Church involved in catechesis: then, "all the faithful", thereby embracing an ecumenical dimension, and finally - as the Pope says - this book "is offered to every individual who asks us to give an account of the hope that is in us (cf. I Pt 3,15) and who wants to know what the Catholic Church believes". If one bears in mind that it is thus addressed not only to individuals with very different levels of preparation, but to all the continents and varied cultural situations, it is evident that this book cannot constitute the point of arrival in a process of mediations, but must undergo further mediations closer to the different situations. If it were to become more directly "dialogical" for a specific milieu - for example the Western intellectuals -, it would adopt their style, and be beyond the grasp of all the others. Therefore, its style had to remain above specific cultural contexts and seek to address people in this way, leaving further cultural mediations to the respective local Churches. The fact that the Catechism has been received positively in completely different regions and social milieu demonstrates that the effort to make it understood beyond differences of preparation and culture has succeeded surprisingly well. That it must be possible to express in words what we believe in a way that will be available for all, and thereby to draft such a book, should not be contested. Indeed, if it were not possible to write such a book, the unity of the Church, the unity of the faith, the unity of humanity, would be a fiction.

But what shall we say now - prescinding from these formal problems - of the current doctrinal relevance of the Catechism? If we wish to respond adequately, one after another we should go through its individual sections from beginning to end. In this way one could make many valuable discoveries and it would be possible to see how profoundly the Catechism has been shaped by the impulses of the Second Vatican Council, how much, even in its restraint from the point of view of specialized theology, it offers new impulses for theological work. A comparative examination of various themes would be instructive, such as, for example, ecumenism, the relationship between Israel and the Church, the relation between the faith and the world religions, faith and creation, symbols and signs, etc. All of this is not possible here. I would like to limit myself to certain exemplary aspects, which have played a large part in the public debate.

**The Use of Scripture in the Catechism**

Particularly strong attacks were directed against the use of Scripture in the Catechism: as previously noted, (it was said) that this work did not take into account a whole century of exegetical work; for example, how could it be so naive as to use passages from the Gospel of John to speak of the historical figure of Jesus; it would be shaped by a literalistic faith which could be called
fundamentalist, etc. With regard to the specific task of the Catechism, accurate reflection has to take place on the way in which this book should make use of historical-critical exegesis.

Relative to a work which must present the faith - not hypotheses - and which for a significantly long time must be "a sure and authentic reference text for teaching Catholic doctrine" (as the Pope states in the Apostolic Constitution, n. 3), we must keep in mind how rapidly exegetical hypotheses change and, to be honest, how great is the dissent, even among scholars, regarding many theses.

The Catechism has therefore dedicated a special article, numbers 101-104 of the book - to a specific reflection on the right use of Scripture in the witness of the faith. This section has been evaluated by important exegetes as a successful methodological synthesis, which addresses the question not only of the purely historical, but also of the strictly theological, nature of the interpretation of Scripture.

**Historical aspect**

In this regard, it is necessary to respond to the question: what exactly is Sacred Scripture? What is it that makes this to a certain extent heterogeneous literary collection, whose period of formation lasts for about a millennium, one single book, one single sacred book, which we interpret as such?

In the deeper examination of this question, we clarify the whole specificity of the Christian faith and of its concept of revelation. The Christian faith has its specificity, primarily in that it refers to historical events, or better to a coherent history, which actually took place as history. In this sense, the question about the fact, the reality of the event, is essential to it, and must make room for the historical method. But these historical events have meaning for the faith only because it is certain that in them God Himself acted in a specific way and the events contain something which surpasses simple historical facticity, something which comes from elsewhere and gives them meaning for all times and for all people. This surpassing element must not be separated from the facts, it is not a meaning which is subsequently added to them from without, but rather it is present in the event itself, and yet it transcends the purely factual aspect.

The meaning of the entire biblical history is found precisely in this transcendence inherent in the fact itself. This specific structure of biblical history is reflected in the biblical books: these are, on the one hand, an expression of the historical experience of a people, but, since history is something more than the action and passion of a people, in reality, in these books, not only do the people speak, but the very God who acts in them and by means of them. The figure of the "author", which is so important for historical research, is therefore articulated on three levels: the individual author is in fact supported in his turn by the people as a whole. This is seen precisely in the ever new additions and modifications of the books. Here source criticism (despite exaggerations and unproven hypotheses) has led to valuable discoveries. In the end, it is not simply an individual author who speaks, rather the texts grow in a process of reflection, culture, and new understanding which surpasses each individual author. It is precisely in this process of continual surpassing, which relativizes the individual authors, that a more profound transcendence is at work: in this process of surpassing, of purification, of growth, the inspiring Spirit is at work, who in the word guides the facts and events and in the events and facts newly inspires the word.

**Bible as canon**

Whoever reflects upon this drama, here only very summarily treated, of the biblical word becoming Scripture, doubtless sees that its interpretation - even independent of the questions proper to the believer - must be externally complex. One who, however, lives in the faith of this same people and finds himself within this process, in his interpreting, must take into account the ultimate reality which he knows is working in it. Then can one speak of theological interpretation, which in fact does not eliminate the historical, but expands it into a new dimension. Based upon such presuppositions,
the Catechism has described the double dimension of correct biblical exegesis, to which the typical methods of historical interpretation belong, while - if one considers this literature as one single book, and still more a sacred book - other methodological forms must be added. In numbers 109 and 110, with reference to *Dei verbum*, n. 12, the essential needs of an historical exegesis are mentioned: one must pay attention to the authors' intentions, to the conditions of their time and culture, as well as being aware of the modes of feeling, speaking, and narrating customary in their time (n. 110). Here one must treat the methodological elements which derive from the understanding of the books as one single book and as the foundation of the life of the People of God in the Old and the New Testament: to be attentive to the content and unity of the whole Scripture; to read Scripture in the living Tradition of the whole Church; to be attentive to the analogy of faith (nn. 112-114). I would at least like to cite the beautiful text which the Catechism uses to present the significance of the unity of Scripture illustrating it with a quotation from St Thomas: "Different as the books which comprise it may be, Scripture is a unity by reason of the unity of God's plan, of which Christ Jesus is the centre and heart, open since his Passover. The phrase "heart of Christ' can refer to Sacred Scripture, which makes known his heart, closed before the Passion, as the Scripture was obscure. But the Scripture has been opened since the Passion; since those who from then on have understood it, consider and discern in what way the prophecies must be interpreted' (St Thomas Aquinas, Expos. in Ps 21, 11)" (n. 112).

**Fourfold meaning of Scripture**

Also from the complex nature of the literary genre "Bible" comes the fact that the meaning of its individual texts cannot be confined to the historical intention of the first author - for the most part established in a hypothetical manner. All of the texts are actually found in a process of continual rewriting, in which their potential richness of meaning is always being more fully disclosed, and therefore no text belongs simply to a single historical author. Since the text itself has a developmental character, it is not permissible, even based upon its literary genre, to confine it to a determined historical moment and to keep it there; in this case it would be confined to the past, while to read the Scripture as Bible means precisely that the present is found in the historical word, opening up a future. The doctrine of the multiple meanings of Scripture, which was developed by the Fathers and in the Middle Ages was given a systematic form, based today upon this particular concept of the formation of the text is again recognized as scientifically satisfactory. The Catechism therefore briefly illustrates the traditional understanding of the four senses of Scripture - it would be better to say, of the four dimensions of the meaning of the text. There is first of all the so-called literal sense, that is, the historical-literary meaning, which an exegete seeks to re-present as the expression of the historical moment of the origin of the text. There is the so-called "allegorical" sense; unfortunately this discredited term prevents us from grasping exactly what it means. In the word, once you take it out of an earlier limited historical context, it actually contains a method of faith, which inserts this text within the whole of the Bible, and beyond that time directed as is every time, coming from God and going to God. There is also a moral dimension - the word of God always gives direction for the journey, and, finally, there is the eschatological dimension, transcending the here and now, and moving toward what is definitive; tradition calls this the "anagogical sense".

**Scripture, Tradition and the Church**

This dynamic vision of the Bible in the context of the lived and continuing history of the People of God leads also to a further important insight about the essence of Christianity: "the Christian faith is not a "religion of the book", the Catechism states concisely (n. 108). This is an extremely important affirmation. The faith does not refer simply to a book, which as such would be the sole and final appeal for the believer. At the centre of the Christian faith there is not a book, but a person - Jesus Christ, who is Himself the living Word of God and who is handed on, so to speak, in the words of
Scripture, which in turn can only be rightly understood in life with Him, in the living relation with Him. And since Christ built and builds up the Church, the People of God, as His living organism, His "body", essential to the relation with him is participation in the pilgrim people, who are the true and proper human author and owner of the Bible, as has been said. If the living Christ is the true and proper standard of the interpretation of the Bible, this means that we rightly understand this book only in the communal, believing, synchronic and diachronic understanding of the whole Church. Outside of this vital context, the Bible is only a more or less heterogeneous literary collection, not the signpost of a journey for our lives. Scripture and tradition cannot be separated. The great theologian of Tübingen, Johann Adam Möhler, illustrated this necessary connection in an unparalleled way in his classic work "Die Einheit in der Kirche" (Unity in the Church), whose study I cannot recommend highly enough. The Catechism emphasizes this connection, which includes the interpretive authority of the Church, as the second Letter of Peter specifically states: "First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation ..." (II Pt 1,20).

Let us rejoice that, with this vision of the interpretation of Scripture, the Catechism is in agreement with important tendencies of the most recent exegesis. The canonical method of exegesis emphasizes the unity of the Bible as the principle of interpretation; synchronic and diachronic interpretation are being increasingly recognized in their equal dignity. The essential connection of Scripture and Tradition is emphasized by the famous exegetes of all confessions; it seems clear that an exegesis separated from the life of the Church and from her historical experience is not binding and cannot go beyond the category of hypothesis, which must always take into account the transcendence of what is said at a given point in time. These are all reasons to rethink the hasty judgments on the simplistic character of the interpretation of Scripture of the Catechism and to rejoice that, without complexity, it connects us to Scripture as a present word and can thus be shaped by Scripture in all of its parts as by a living spring.

The doctrine of the Sacraments in the Catechism

Now, allow me to say something on the ongoing doctrinal relevance of the second and third parts of our book. Since it is completely determined by Vatican II, the newness of the second part which deals with the Sacraments is immediately visible in its title: "The Celebration of the Christian Mystery". This means that the sacraments are envisaged entirely in terms of salvation history, based upon the Paschal mystery - the Paschal centre of the life and work of Christ - as a re-presentation of the Paschal mystery, in which we are included. This also means that the sacraments are understood entirely as liturgy, in terms of the concrete liturgical celebration. In this the Catechism has accomplished an important step beyond the traditional neo-scholastic teaching on the sacraments. Already medieval theology to a large extent had separated the theological consideration of the sacraments from their liturgical realization and, prescinding from this, treated the categories of institution, sign, efficacy, minister, and recipient, such that only what referred to the sign kept a connection with the liturgical celebration. Certainly, the sign was not considered so much in the living and concrete liturgical form, as it was analyzed according to the philosophical categories of matter and form. Increasingly, liturgy and theology were ever more separated from one another; dogmatics did not interpret the liturgy, rather its abstract theological content, so that the liturgy appeared almost to be a collection of ceremonies, which clothed the essential - the matter and the form - and for this reason could also be replaceable. In its turn, the "liturgical science" (to the extent to which one can call this a science) became a teaching of the liturgical norms in force and thus came closer to becoming a sort of juridical positivism. The liturgical movement of the 1920's tried to overcome this dangerous separation and sought to understand the nature of the sacraments based upon their liturgical form; to understand the liturgy not simply as a more or less casual collection of ceremonies, but as the development of what came from within the sacrament to have its consistent expression in the liturgical celebration.
Mandate of Second Vatican Council

The Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Liturgy highlighted this synthesis in an excellent, if very modest, way and so, based upon this connection, offered to theology and to catechesis the mandate of understanding in a new and deeper way the liturgy of the Church and her sacraments.

Unfortunately, until now this mandate has not been fully realized. Liturgical science tends once again to separate itself from dogmatics and to set itself up as a form of technique of liturgical celebration. In its turn, dogmatic theology has not yet assumed the liturgical dimension in a convincing way. A great deal of reforming zeal is founded upon the fact that one continues to see the liturgical form only as a collection of ceremonies, which can be replaced at will with other "inventions". In this regard, in the Catechism one finds these golden words, based on the profound nature of true liturgical understanding: "For this reason no sacramental rite may be modified or manipulated at the will of the minister or the community. Even the supreme authority in the Church may not change the liturgy arbitrarily, but only in the obedience of faith and with religious respect for the mystery of the liturgy" (n. 1125). In its treatment of the liturgy, which introduces and shapes the sacramental part, the Catechism has taken a great step forward and therefore was received with great praise by authoritative liturgists, for example, by the great scholar of Trier, Mons. Balthasar Fischer.

How to achieve unity in the midst of a variety of rites

Without entering into particulars, I would like in a general way to mention certain aspects of the Catechism's teaching on the sacraments, in which, by way of examples its current doctrinal relevance can be discerned. The proposal to illustrate the individual sacraments based upon their liturgically celebrated form, initially faced the obvious fact that, since the liturgy of the Church consists of a plurality of rites, so a unifying liturgical form for the whole Church does not exist. This did not create a problem for a catechism written only for the Western (Latin) Church or for one particular Church. But a Catechism, such as ours which wills to be "Catholic" in the strongest sense, and, therefore, is directed to the one Church with the plurality of rites, cannot favour one rite exclusively. How then to proceed? The Catechism cites first of all the oldest text of a description of the Christian Eucharistic celebration, which Justin Martyr outlines in an Apology for Christianity addressed to the pagan Emperor Antoninus Pius (138-161) around the year 155 A.D. (1345).

From this basic text of tradition, which precedes the formation of specific rites, one can determine the essential structure of the Eucharistic celebration, which has remained common to all the rites, the Mass of all the centuries. The recourse to this text thus allows at the same time a better understanding of the individual rites and a discovery within these of the common structure of the central Christian sacrament, which ultimately dates back to the time of the apostles and thus to the institution by the Lord Himself. The solution found here is indicative for the overall concept of the Catechism, which could never be only Western and - as it is at the heart of the Oriental Churches - also never solely Byzantine, but has to take into account the wide breadth of tradition. The many texts of the Fathers and witnesses of the faith of all the centuries - men and women - that are included in it, form one of the most valuable aspects of this book. A glance at the list of names shows that ample space is given to the Eastern and Western Fathers, and the voices of holy women are also strongly present, from Joan of Arc, Juliana of Norwich, and Catherine of Siena, to Rose of Lima, Thérèse of Lisieux, and Teresa of Avila. This treasury of quotations alone gives the Catechism its value both for personal meditation and for the ministry of preaching.
Pneumatology
A further trait in the theology of the Catechism on worship, to which I would like to call attention, includes the emphasis on the pneumatologic dimension of the liturgy, and pneumatology itself - the doctrine on the Holy Spirit - is a theme on which the Catechism should be read in a way that cuts across sections, in order to understand its special physiognomy. The section on the Holy Spirit is basic within the framework of the interpretation of the Profession of faith (nn. 683-747). The book emphasizes above all the profound joining together of Christology and pneumatology, which is already visible, for example, in the name Messiah - Christ - the anointed; in fact "anointing" in the patristic tradition means Christ's being penetrated by the Holy Spirit, the living "ointment".

Especially important and helpful do I find the section on the symbols of the Holy Spirit (nn. 694-701). It shows a typical aspect of the Catechism: its attention to images and symbols. It does not just reflect on abstract concepts, but it highlights symbols. They give us an interior vision, showing the transparency of the cosmos to the mystery of God and at the same time opening the relation with the world of religions. With the emphasis on image and symbol we are therefore already in the realm of liturgical theology, since the liturgical celebration essentially lives on symbols.

The theme of the Holy Spirit returns again in the teaching on the Church (nn. 797-810) - here as an aspect of an essentially Trinitarian vision of the Church. And again we find it amply present in the part on the sacraments (nn. 1091-112), here it belongs to a Trinitarian definition of the liturgy. The pneumatological vision of the liturgy again helps one to have a correct understanding of Scripture - the work of the Holy Spirit. In the liturgical year, the Church traverses the entire history of salvation, and - reading Scripture in a spiritual way, that is, based upon the author who has inspired and inspires it, the Holy Spirit - experiences the today of this history. From here also - from the origin of all Scripture from one single Spirit - even the interior unity of the Old and New Testaments becomes comprehensible; for the Catechism this is also an important item, to demonstrate the profound connection between Jewish and Christian liturgy (n. 1096). In parentheses we can observe in this regard, the theme of the Church and Israel is in fact a theme that cuts across sections, that also permeates the entire work and cannot be judged by a single passage. The fact that the Catechism's strong emphasis upon pneumatology also connects with the Eastern Churches, obviously does not need to be pointed out.

Inculturation: worship, culture
In conclusion, the Catechism has also given proper attention to the theme of worship and culture. It makes sense to speak of inculturation, in reality, only if the dimension of the culture is essential to worship as such. And in turn, an intercultural encounter can be something more than an artificially superimposed external, only if in the developed ritual forms of Christian worship there is pre-contained an inner contact with other ways of worship and cultural forms. The Catechism therefore has clearly highlighted the cosmic dimension of the Christian liturgy, which is essential for the choice and the explanation of its symbols. In this regard it states: "The great religions of mankind witness, often impressively, to this cosmic and symbolic meaning of religious rites. The liturgy of the Church presupposes, integrates and sanctifies elements from creation and human culture, conferring on them the dignity of signs of grace, of the new creation in Jesus Christ" (n. 1149). Unfortunately, in certain sectors of the Church, liturgical reform was conceived in a unilaterally intellectualistic manner - as a form of religious instruction - and furthermore was often culturally impoverished in a worrying way, both in the realm of images in music and in the configuration of liturgical space and celebration. With an interpretation directed entirely to the community, and focused only upon the needs of the present, the great cosmic inspiration of the liturgy and thus its depth and dynamic were in various ways woefully reduced. Against such mistakes the Catechism offers the needed instruments which the new generation was awaiting.
Christian Moral Teaching in the Catechism

Finally, let us look at the third part of the Catechism, "Life in Christ", which treats Christian moral teaching. In the drafting of the book this certainly was the most difficult section, on the one hand, on account of the differences that are debated about the structural principles of Christian morality, and on the other by reason of the difficult problems in the realm of political, social ethics, and bioethics, that are in a continuous process of evolution thanks to constant new facts, as also is the case in the realm of anthropology, while here the debate on marriage and the family, and on the ethics of sexuality, is in full swing. The Catechism does not claim to present the only possible form of moral theology or even the best systematic form of moral theology - this was not its mandate. It sets out the essential anthropological and theological connections that are to be the components of human moral behaviour. Its starting point is found in the presentation of the dignity of the human person, that is at the same time his greatness and the reason for his moral obligation. Then it indicates as the inner stimulus and guide of moral action the human desire for happiness. The primordial human impulse, that no one can deny and which, ultimately, no one can oppose, is the desire for happiness, to have a fulfilled, completed life. Morality, for the Catechism, in continuity with the Fathers, and especially Augustine, is the doctrine of the happy life - so to speak, the development of the rules for happiness. The book connects this innate human tendency with the Beatitudes of Jesus, which free the concept of happiness from all banality, giving it its true profundity and thus revealing the connection between the absolute good, the good in Person - God - and happiness.

The fundamental components of moral action are then developed - freedom, the object and intention of action, the passions, the conscience, the virtues, their distortion in sin, the social character of the human being and, finally the relation between law and grace. Christian moral theology is never simply an ethics of the law, it surpasses even the realm of an ethics of virtue: it is a dialogical ethics, because the moral human action develops out of the person's encounter with God, therefore it is never an activity in itself, self-sufficient and autonomous, pure human achievement, but a response to the gift of love and thus a being drawn into the dynamic of love - of God Himself - who first of all truly frees the person and brings him to his true high dignity. Moral action is never simply one's own achievement, but neither is it only something grafted on from outside. True moral action is wholly gift, and nevertheless precisely so wholly our own action, while what is our own is only unfolded in the gift of love and in turn the gift does not invalidate the person but rather fulfills him.

I believe that it is very important that the Catechism placed the doctrine of justification at the heart of its ethics, because precisely in this way does the interaction between grace and freedom become understandable as existence coming from another as true existence in itself and moving toward the other. In the discussion on the consensus among Catholics and Protestants with regard to justification, the question has rightly been continually posed of how the doctrine of justification can be made comprehensible and meaningful again for people today. I believe that the Catechism, with its presentation of the theme in the framework of the anthropological question of the right action of the human person, has made great strides towards making such new understanding possible. To show the spirit with which justification is treated in the Catechism, I would like simply to cite three passages each of which belongs to the great tradition of the fathers and the saints. St Augustine maintains that "the justification of the wicked is a greater work than the creation of heaven and earth", because "heaven and earth will pass away but the salvation and justification of the elect will not pass away" (In ep. Jo. . 72, 3). He holds also that the justification of sinners surpasses the creation of the angels in justice, in that it bears witness to a greater mercy (n. 1994). Another quotation of St Augustine can be given in the same vein - a prayer of this saint, in which he says to God: "If at the end of your very good works ... you rested on the seventh day, it was to foretell by the voice of your Book that at the end of our works, which are indeed "very good' since you have given them to us, we shall also rest in..."
you on the sabbath of eternal life (Conf. 13, 36,51)” (n. 2002). And here as well the marvellous phrase of St Thérèse of Lisieux: “After earth's exile, I hope to go and enjoy you in the fatherland, but I do not want to lay up merits for heaven. I want to work for your love alone.... In the evening of this life, I shall appear before you with empty hands, for I do not ask you, Lord, to count my works. All our justice is blemished in your eyes. I wish, then, to be clothed in your own justice and to receive from your love the eternal possession of yourself” (n. 2011). The section on justification is an essential ecumenical contribution of the Catechism. It also demonstrates the way in which the ecumenical dimension of the book cannot be sufficiently revealed if we limit ourselves to searching for quotations from ecumenical documents or if we examine the words which appear in the list of arguments, but only if it is read as a whole so that we understand the way in which the whole is shaped by the search for what unites.

**Dialogue and covenant**

The Catechism's treatment of moral content is based on the Decalogue: the Catechism explains the Decalogue - as is right when you start with the Bible - dialogically, that is in the context of the Covenant. Together with Origen it emphasizes that the first word of the Decalogue is freedom - freedom, which under God's direction becomes an event: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (n. 2061). Moral action thus appears as a "response to the Lord's loving initiative" (n. 2062). With Irenaeus, the Decalogue is interpreted as a preparation for friendship with God and justice towards our neighbour (n. 2063). If thus on the one hand the Decalogue is seen completely in the context of the covenant and salvation history, as an event of word and response, nevertheless, it is manifested at the same time as a rational ethics, as a reminder of what reason is truly able to perceive. We cite Irenaeus again: "From the beginning, God had implanted in the heart of man the precepts of the natural law. Then he was content to remind him of them. This was the Decalogue (Adv. haeres. 4, 15, 1)” (n. 2070). This is an important trait in the ethics of the Catechism: it was the call to reason and to man's ability to understand. The moral teaching developed from the Decalogue is rational morality, which certainly lives with the reason, which God has given to us, while with His word, He reminds us of what is deeply inscribed in the soul of everyone.

**Christology and natural law**

One could perhaps marvel over the relatively reduced role which Christology has in the structuring of the ethics of the Catechism. In pre-conciliar manuals the general orientation was usually set by natural law thought which largely prevailed. The renewal movement of the period between the two wars pushed strongly towards a theological conception of moral teaching and proposed as its structuring principle the following of Christ or even simply love as the all encompassing place of every moral action. The conciliar Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et spes*) supported this distancing from the purely natural law-centred mentality and emphasized Christology, especially, the Paschal mystery as the centre of Christian moral teaching. An authentically Biblical moral teaching finally should have developed - this was the imperative that the Council made clear, even if the Constitution itself in its individual themes in reality made ample use of rational argumentation and did not intend to be bound to a moral teaching based purely on revelation - precisely for the reason that it presented a dialogue with the non-Christian modern world about all of the common essential values. If the fundamental outlines of the Council can be designated as a return to a moral teaching interpreted in an essentially biblical, Christocentric manner, nevertheless in the post-conciliar period a radical reversal soon took pace. The Bible could not absolutely convey any "categorical" moral teaching; the contents of moral teaching had always to be mediated in a purely rational manner. The importance of the Bible would be found on the level of motivation, not content.
Thus from a content-based point of view, the Bible and with it Christology, disappeared from moral theology in a still more radical way than before. The difference with the pre-conciliar period consisted in the fact that now, among other things, even the idea of natural law and natural moral law, which had always maintained faith in creation and the basis of moral theology, were rejected. One returned to a morality of calculation which took ultimately as its only criteria the probable effects of an action and in this regard, the principle of the calculation of goods was extended to the whole of moral action. In this difficult situation the Encyclical *Vetitatis splendor* offered fundamental clarifications on the proprium of Christian moral teaching and on the right relation between faith and reason in the elaboration of ethical norms. The Catechism - without systematic claims - prepared these decisions. The Christological principle is present, based as much upon the theme of happiness (the Beatitudes) as on that of anthropology, on the theme of law and grace and above all in the Decalogue, to the extent that the concept of Covenant contains the final embodiment of the Covenant in the person of the Word incarnate and His new interpretation of the Decalogue. But the Catechism does not intend to present a closed system. In the search for an ethics inspired by Christology, it is also necessary to remember that Christ is the Logos incarnate, that He wishes therefore to awaken our human reason to its power.

The original function of the Decalogue - to recall to us the ultimate depth of our reason - is not abolished by the encounter with Christ, but only led to its full maturity. An ethics that in listening to revelation also wishes to be authentically rational, in this way responds precisely to the encounter with Christ which the new Covenant gives us.

Those who search for a new theological system in the Catechism, or for surprising new hypotheses, will be disappointed. This is not the concern of the Catechism. Drawing from Sacred Scripture and the complex richness of tradition in its many forms and inspired by the Second Vatican Council, it offers an organic vision of the entirety of the Catholic faith, which is beautiful in its entirety - with a beauty in which the splendour of the truth shines forth. The present relevance of the Catechism is the relevance of the truth formulated and thought afresh once again. This relevance will remain intact far beyond the murmurings of its critics.