

f. n. magisterium documents

**CBCP – ECCCE**  
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**HOW TO MAKE THE MOST  
OF THE DOCUMENTS OF THE MAGISTERIUM**

**A. MAIN DOCUMENTS OF THE MAGISTERIUM  
IN THE RECENT HISTORY OF THE CHURCH**

A tradition in the Catholic Church:

to issue official documents for the information or formation of the faithful on:

- doctrinal topics or
- historical events or
- anniversaries that have a special significance for the entire Church or a sizable part of it.

Popes issue bulls, apostolic letters, apostolic exhortations, encyclicals, etc.

Bishops issue pastoral letters and ordinances on topics or events that are especially relevant to their own dioceses.

Since Vatican II, National and Regional Episcopal Conferences also issue official documents and pronouncements for the faithful of their respective circumscription.

This type of magisterial documents is usually the result of national, regional or continental gathering of bishops (Episcopal Conferences) to discuss problems and issues of special importance/relevance.

And so we have the documents of PUEBLA, MEDELLIN, APARECIDA, ECCLESIA IN ASIA, ECCLESIA IN AFRICA, EUROPE . . . etc.

### **Important collections of Church Documents**

Collections of official statements/teachings/documents of Councils and of the ordinary magisterium of the Church have been made along the centuries. The classic one is the Denzinger-Schoenmetzer ***“Enchiridion Symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum”*** (which is mostly limited to the doctrinal aspect of the Catholic faith, and the documents/excerpts are in the original languages: Greek or Latin).

Even before Vatican II, some Jesuit scholars (Josef Neuner, H. Roos, and Karl Rahner) initiated a collection of Church documents/statements in modern languages, which included also the moral aspect of the teaching of the Church. The collection was originally titled “THE TEACHING OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.”

### **The Documents of the Catholic Church after Vatican II**

In the Universal Church, since Vatican II, we have an extraordinarily rich series of magisterial pronouncements, starting with the 16 documents of the Council itself and subsequent instructions on their application. (See the collection of such documents in the two volumes entitled “Vatican II Documents,” which were published in the Philippines by the Daughters of St. Paul many years ago.) In 2011, Fr. James H. Kroeger, MM, edited a new English version. The same did Claretian publications in 2014.

After Vatican II the collection edited by Neuner -- Dupuis was considerably expanded, thanks also to the collaboration of a good number professors of Theology, and was given the title “THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.” This has been repeatedly updated and enlarged by the other Jesuit compiler and only surviving editor Jacques Dupuis, SJ. The latest edition available is that of 2001.

After the Documents of Vatican II there came the

- CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH (1992 and 1997)(originally referred to as, “Universal Catechism”), which was followed by various “COMPENDIA”:
- COMPENDIUM OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH (2004)
- COMPENDIUM OF THE CCC (2005), and recently
- YOUCAT (2010).
  
- To these documents we have to add the immense number of ENCYCLICALS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATIONS, and APOSTOLIC LETTERS of the great popes we had, starting from Leo XIII up to Pope Francis.

### **Documents of the Philippine Hierarchy**

In the Philippines we have a rich collection of pastoral letters, issued by the CBCP, on a great variety of topics. The most important document, which is vast and wide-ranging in its content, is the

- “DOCUMENT AND DECREES OF PCP II” (1991), which was followed by
- the “NATIONAL PASTORAL PLAN”.

Aside from these two documents, we have the

- NATIONAL CATECHETICAL DIRECTORY FOR THE PHILIPPINES (NCDP, entitled “Maturing in Christian Faith” – 1984, which was revised about 10 years ago;) and the
- “CATECHISM FOR FILIPINO CATHOLICS” (CFC -- 1997), both of which have been translated also into Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilongo and Ilocano.

The CBCP has also published a collection of Pastoral letters and other official documents of the Episcopal Conference. It is entitled “CBCP LETTERS AND STATEMENTS – 1984-1990”. Unfortunately, a sequel to that collection has not yet been published.

## **B. A BRIEF EVALUATION**

The first impression one gathers from this short overview is that there exists a GREAT ABUNDANCE OF DOCUMENTS OF THE MAGISTERIUM.

These documents are also characterized by a GREAT RICHNESS and VARIETY OF CONTENT.

All these documents of the Magisterium are a real encyclopedia of the Catholic faith, as they develop in depth almost every aspect of the faith, and with due attention to related problems and challenges of the times when they were written/promulgated.

The Popes and the bishops, over the last 120 years have done a GOOD JOB in the fulfilment of their mission as “teachers of the Faith” and evangelizers.

## **C. SOME RELEVANT QUESTIONS**

One very important question is:

ARE ALL THESE PRECIOUS DOCUMENTS SUFFICIENTLY KNOWN BY THE FAITHFUL?

A reality check reveals a sad fact: with very few exceptions, many of them are not known at all, or are known in a rather superficial way.

Many of them, after an initial enthusiasm, have been forgotten altogether.

An inevitable related question elicited by such finding is:

WHY ARE NOT THESE DOCUMENTS (SUFFICIENTLY) KNOWN?

The causes are varied.

One of them is the fact that many of them are written in a language that is too far above the heads of the ordinary Catholics. Too much theological jargon sounds rather threatening to ordinary lay people.

This is understandable because, usually the first and main (if not the only) recipients of those documents were the BISHOPS and other members of the clergy.

(This “obstacle” could have been partially solved through the “mediating role” of bishops, priests, religion teachers and catechists. But this does not seem to have been done in a satisfactory manner. This also has different causes . . .)

Another cause is the unattractive presentation of such documents at their very sources (Vatican, Episcopal Conferences, Bishops . . .)

Despite the importance attached to the CONTENT and OBJECTIVES of those documents, their editorial and typographical presentation is the very denial of such importance and relevance.

A look at the external appearance of those documents published by the Vatican even for the Bishops (with the exception of the copies sent to heads of state, members of the Diplomatic Corps and other VIPs) is a sad proof of what I have just pointed out.

His shabby appearance starts with the front cover, and is followed through in the poor book design, with no “headers” or “footers,” and sometimes even using “endnotes” rather than “footnotes”.

The absence of pictures or relevant illustrations in most of the official documents (the Compendium of the CCC is a happy exception), makes them “reader UNFRIENDLY.” In a world and a society that is so full of images and so attracted by colors and artistic shapes, the absence if these elements is a painful “minus.”

Unfortunately, some of the local editions of the same documents follow the same “style,” of the original edition, with the exception of the front cover.

Still another cause of this lamented “lack of attractiveness and sufficient appreciation” is the almost total absence of “supporting literature” and simple didactic aids that would enable group leaders and teachers/catechists

to lead their audiences into a pleasant “discovery” and “assimilation” of the content of the document. Such didactic elements would surely help the readers appreciate the timeliness and preciousness of the content, and thereby stimulate them to be eager to apply its message/teaching to the local/personal situation.

A happy exception to these deficiencies has been the excellent presentation to the media of the encyclicals and apostolic exhortations of Pope Francis.

A plausible effort to present these official documents of the Church through seminars, symposia and talks by renowned speakers has been very helpful in cushioning the negative impact of their typographical presentation at the origin.

#### **D. CONSEQUENCES OF SUCH “LIMITED AUDIENCES” AND LACK OF ATTRACTIVENESS**

Such being the situation, the first inevitable consequence is that much of the content of these vital documents has remained to a great extent unknown to almost all Catholics.

A second inevitable consequence is that most of those documents have not been applied to local situations, except for the changes in liturgical or disciplinary norms and other external instructions.

#### **E. LIGHTING A CANDLE RATHER THAN CURSING THE DARKNESS**

A praiseworthy effort to overcome these deficiencies, has been made by those bishops, parish priests and other religious and lay leaders who have organized the different activities mentioned above which were aimed at enabling ordinary people to come to know and appreciate the content of these documents and – hopefully! – put their “message” into practice at community and personal levels.

WORD & LIFE PUBLICATIONS, over the past ten years or so, has endeavoured to make its contribution to the attainment of these objectives by preparing **“STUDY EDITIONS”** of some of the major documents of the universal Magisterium issued in the recent years.

These “Study Editions” are usually divided into TWO PARTS. The first consists of the original text of each papal document, while the second consists in a set of “STUDY AIDS” that can vary, depending also on the theme developed by the document, and the local situation.

In all cases, however, the “Study Aids” always include a comprehensive “SUBJECT INDEX”; an “HISTORICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION” of the document, and some “METHODOLOGICAL SUGGESTIONS” on how to go about conducting a systematic study of the document with a relatively homogeneous group.

### **Some Important Clarifications**

1. It is important to notice that the level and style of presentation are not scholarly, but as simple as they can be. This has been done purposely in order to enable even those who have no theological background to actively and fruitfully participate in the study sessions.
2. The content of the “Study Aids” is not “comprehensive and exhaustive.” Much more could and perhaps should have been included. But space and time constraints have forced the authors to limit themselves to some essential points/contributions. Much is left to the creativity of the local group facilitators, who should always keep in mind also the special audience each of them faces, as well as the special conditions obtaining in each place/parish/town etc.
3. The Study sessions should never become lectures. They are meant to be characterized by a well-guided personal reading of the text; personal and group reflection/sharing on it; analysis of aspects of the local situation which are similar or relevant to the topic that has been developed in the portion of the document that is being studied; and

application of the “message” of the portion under study to the local/personal situation.

4. This is the main reason why all the participants should have their own PERSONAL COPY of the document, as well as a “PERSONAL NOTEBOOK.”

The personal copy should really be “personalized” through appropriate underlinings, colored marks, and other marks that emphasize and relate ideas, words and other features of the text.

The “Personal Notebook” is meant to enable the user to write down personal impressions/reactions to the text; sketch ideas, proposals, and other elements that surface in the discussion/sharing both on the content of the text itself and on the local situation. Finally, the “Personal Notebook” should contain proposed activities to be carried out as a practical fruit of the session and of the entire series of sessions.

#### **F. SOME REMARKS ON:**

- THE FRONT COVER AND THE PICTURES INSIDE THE BOOK
- THE SUBJECT INDEX
- THE METHODOLOGICAL SUGGESTIONS
- THE “CONTEXTUALIZATION” OF THE DOCUMENT
- THE “QUOTABLE QUOTES”
- THE “DOCUMENTATION”
- OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE “STUDY AIDS”

#### **G. SOME REMARKS ABOUT “EXPLORING GOD’S WORD”**