

## Inching Forward: The New Catholic Catechism

Toward the end of 1992, the Roman Catholic Church issued its first new catechism since 1566. Designed principally for bishops, missionaries, and others charged with the responsibility of teaching the faithful, the document reaffirms some traditional positions but also stakes out a certain amount of new ground.

Abortion, euthanasia, birth control, and homosexuality remain unacceptable, but gays may be heartened by the catechism's strongly worded denunciation of discrimination against them. Feminists will note that the widespread demand for rewriting scripture in gender-neutral language has been ignored.

New interpretations are given to some of the Ten Commandments. For example, according to the document, "...employers sin when they pay unfair salaries and executives violate God's law when they appropriate the assets of a company for their private use... The text also includes drunken driving and drug abuse among those acts that are morally as well as socially harmful. Those who cheat on [their] income tax must answer to God as well as to civil authority... The catechism condemn genocide as 'mortal sin,' and obliges better-off nations to 'welcome, within their capacities, the foreigner in search of security and vital resources that he cannot find in his country of origin.'"

Regarding war, the catechism holds to the traditional position that some wars may be just, but rules out any war in which civilian lives are endangered, which in the modern world means that virtually all wars are sinful. Similarly, the document refuses to absolutely condemn the death penalty, but insists that executions be timely and compassionate: conditions rarely, if ever, met in reality.

### Source

Woodward, Kenneth L. "New Rules For an Old Faith," Newsweek, November 30, 1992, p. 71.