

Further Reading for Session I I: What next?

From the General Directory for Catechesis (GDC 60-72)

60. In this chapter the relationship of catechesis with the other elements of evangelization, of which it is itself an integral part, is demonstrated. Thus, firstly, the relationship of catechesis with the primary proclamation, which is realized in mission, is described. There follows an examination of the close connection between catechesis and the sacraments of Christian initiation. Then is perceived the fundamental role of catechesis in the ordinary life of the Church and its role as continuing teacher in the faith. Special consideration is given to the relationship between catechesis and the teaching of religion in schools, since both activities are profoundly inter-connected, and, together with education in the Christian home, are basic to the formation of children and young people.

Primary or first proclamation and catechesis

61. Primary proclamation is addressed to non-believers and those living in religious indifference. Its functions are to proclaim the Gospel and to call to conversion. Catechesis, "distinct from the primary proclamation of the Gospel", promotes and matures initial conversion, educates the convert in the faith and incorporates him into the Christian community. The relationship between these two forms of the ministry of the word is, therefore, a relationship of complementary distinction. Primary proclamation, which every Christian is called to perform, is part of that "Go" which Jesus imposes on his disciples: it implies, therefore, a going-out, a haste, a message. Catechesis, however, starts with the condition indicated by Jesus himself: "whosoever believes", whosoever converts, whosoever decides. Both activities are essential and mutually complementary: go and welcome, proclaim and educate, call and incorporate.

62. Nevertheless in pastoral practice it is not always easy to define the boundaries of these activities. Frequently, many who present themselves for catechesis truly require genuine conversion. Because of this the Church usually desires that the first stage in the catechetical process be dedicated to ensuring conversion. In the "*missio ad gentes*", this task is normally accomplished during the 'pre-catechumenate'. In the context of "new evangelization" it is effected by means of a "kerygmatic catechesis", sometimes called "pre-catechesis", because it is based on the precatechumenate and is proposed by the Gospel and directed towards a solid option of faith. Only by starting with conversion, and therefore by making allowance for the interior disposition of "whoever believes", can catechesis, strictly speaking, fulfil its proper task of education in the faith.

The fact that catechesis, at least initially, assumes a missionary objective, does not dispense a particular Church from promoting an institutionalized program of primary proclamation to execute more directly Jesus' missionary command.

Catechetical renewal should be based thus on prior missionary evangelization.

Catechesis at the service of christian initiation

Catechesis, an essential "moment" in the process of evangelization

63. The Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* places catechesis firmly within the Church's mission and notes that evangelization is a rich, complex and dynamic reality

which comprises essential but different "moments". "Catechesis", it adds, "is one of these moments—a very remarkable one—in the whole process of evangelization". This is to say that there are activities which "prepare" for catechesis and activities which "derive" from it. The "moment" of catechesis is that which corresponds to the period in which conversion to Jesus Christ is formalized, and provides a basis for first adhering to him. Converts, by means of "a period of formation, an apprenticeship in the whole Christian life", are initiated into the mystery of salvation and an evangelical style of life. This means "initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life".

64. In discharging in different ways the initiatory function of the ministry of the word, catechesis lays the foundation for the building of the faith. Other functions of the same ministry will continue to build, at different levels, on that foundation.

Initiatory catechesis is thus the necessary link between missionary activity, which calls to faith and pastoral activity which continually nourishes the Christian community. This is not, therefore, an optional activity, but basic and fundamental for building up the personality of the individual disciple, as it is for the whole Christian community. Without it, missionary activity lacks continuity and is sterile, while pastoral activity lacks roots and becomes superficial and confused: any misfortune could cause the collapse of the entire building.

In truth, "the inner growth [of the Church] and her correspondence with God's plan depend essentially on catechesis". In this sense catechesis must always be considered a priority in evangelization.

Catechesis, at the service of Christian initiation

65. Faith, by means of which man responds to the proclamation of the Gospel, requires Baptism. The close connection between the two realities is rooted in the will of Christ himself, who commanded his apostles to make disciples of all nations and to baptize them. "The mission to baptize, and so the sacramental mission, is implied in the mission to evangelize".

Those who have converted to Jesus Christ and who have been educated in the faith by means of catechesis, by receiving the sacraments of Christian initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) "are delivered from the powers of darkness through the sacraments of Christian initiation and having died, been buried, and risen with Christ, they receive the Spirit of adoption as children and celebrate with the whole people of God the memorial of the Lord's death and resurrection".

66. Catechesis, is thus, a fundamental element of Christian initiation and is closely connected with the sacraments of initiation, especially with Baptism, "the sacrament of faith". The link uniting catechesis and Baptism is true profession of faith, which is at once an element inherent in this sacrament and the goal of catechesis. The aim of catechetical activity consists in precisely this: to encourage a living, explicit and fruitful profession of faith. The Church, in order to achieve this, transmits to catechumens and those to be catechized, her living experience of the Gospel, her faith, so that they may appropriate and profess it. Hence, "authentic catechesis is always an orderly and systematic initiation into the revelation that God has given of himself to humanity in Christ Jesus, a revelation stored in the depths of the Church's memory and in Sacred Scripture, and constantly communicated from one generation to the next by a living active *traditio*".

Fundamental characteristics of initiatory catechesis

67. Catechesis acquires certain characteristics in virtue of being an "essential moment" in the process of evangelization, in the service of Christian initiation. It is:

- a comprehensive and systematic formation in the faith. The Synod of 1977 underscored the need for a "comprehensive and structured" catechesis, since catechesis is principally distinguished from other forms of presenting the word of God by its comprehensive and vital deepening of the mystery of Christ;
- this comprehensive formation includes more than instruction: it is an apprenticeship of the entire Christian life, it is a "complete Christian initiation", which promotes an authentic following of Christ, focused on his Person; it implies education in knowledge of the faith and in the life of faith, in such a manner that the entire person, at his deepest levels, feels enriched by the word of God; it helps the disciple of Christ to transform the old man in order to assume his baptismal responsibilities and to profess the faith from the "heart";
- a basic and essential formation, centered on what constitutes the nucleus of Christian experience, the most fundamental certainties of the faith and the most essential evangelical values; it lays the foundation of the spiritual edifice of the Christian, nurtures the roots of his faith life and enables him to receive more solid nourishment in the ordinary life of the Christian community.

68. In summary, initiatory catechesis, being comprehensive and systematic, cannot be reduced to the circumstantial or the occasional. As it is formation for the Christian life it comprises but surpasses mere instruction. (208) Being essential, it looks to what is "common" for the Christian, without entering into disputed questions nor transforming itself into a form of theological investigation. Finally, being initiatory, it incorporates into the community, which lives, celebrates and bears witness to the faith. It fulfils, at once, initiatory, educational and instructional functions. This inherent richness in the Catechumenate of non-baptized adults should serve to inspire other forms of catechesis.

Catechesis at the service of ongoing formation in the faith

Continuing education in faith within the Christian community

69. Continuing or on-going education in the faith follows upon basic education and presupposes it. Both fulfill two distinct but complementary functions of the ministry of the word while serving the process of continuing conversion. Initiatory catechesis lays the basis for the Christian life of the followers of Jesus. The process of continuing conversion goes beyond what is provided by basic catechesis. In order to encourage this process, it is necessary to have a Christian community which welcomes the initiated, sustains them and forms them in the faith: "Catechesis runs the risk of becoming barren if no community of faith and Christian life welcomes the catechumen at a certain stage of his catechesis". The accompaniment which a community gives to the initiated is eventually transformed into their being totally integrated by the same community.

70. In the Christian community the disciples of Jesus Christ are nourished at a twofold table; "that of the word of God and that of the Body of Christ". The Gospel and the Eucharist are the constant food for the journey to the Father's House. The action of the Holy Spirit operates so that the gift of "communion" and the task of "mission" are deepened and lived in an increasingly intense way.

Continuing formation in the faith is directed not only to the individual Christian, to accompany them in their journey towards holiness, but also to the Christian community as such so that it may mature also in its interior life of love of God and of the brethren as well as in its openness to the world as a missionary community. The desire of Jesus and his prayer to the Father are an unceasing appeal: "May they all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me". Approaching this ideal, little by little, demands of the community a great fidelity to the action of the Holy Spirit, the constant nourishment of the Body and Blood of Christ and continuing education in the faith, listening all the time to the word.

At this table of the word of God, the homily occupies a privileged position, since it "takes up again the journey of faith put forward by catechesis and brings it to its natural fulfillment, at the same time it encourages the Lord's disciples to begin anew each day their spiritual journey in truth, adoration and thanksgiving".

Various forms of continuing catechesis

71. For continuing education in the faith, the ministry of the word uses many forms of catechesis. Among these the following may be highlighted:

- The study and exploration of Sacred Scripture, read not only in the Church but with the Church and her living faith, which helps to discover divine truth, which it contains, in such a way as to arouse a response of faith. The "*lectio divina*" is an eminent form of this vital study of Scripture.
- A Christian reading of events, which is required of the missionary vocation of the Christian community. In this respect the study of the social teaching of the Church is indispensable, since "its main aim is to interpret these realities, determining their conformity with or divergence from the lines of the Gospel teaching".
- Liturgical catechesis, prepares for the sacraments by promoting a deeper understanding and experience of the liturgy. This explains the contents of the prayers, the meaning of the signs and gestures, educates to active participation, contemplation and silence. It must be regarded as an "eminent kind of catechesis".
- Occasional catechesis, which seeks to interpret determined circumstances of personal, family, ecclesial or social life and to help live them in the prospect of faith.
- Initiatives of spiritual formation which seek to reinforce conviction, open new prospective and encourage perseverance in prayer and in the duties of following Christ.
- A systematic deepening of the Christian message by means of theological instruction, so as truly to educate in the faith, encourage growth in understanding of it and to equip the Christian for giving the reason for his hope in the present world. In a certain sense, it is appropriate to call such instruction "perfective catechesis".

72. It is fundamentally important that initiatory catechesis for adults, whether baptized or not, initiatory catechesis for children and young people and continuing catechesis are closely linked with the catechetical endeavor of the Christian community, so that the particular Church may grow harmoniously and that its evangelizing activity may spring from authentic sources. "It is important also that the catechesis of children and young people, permanent catechesis and the catechesis of adults should not be separate watertight compartments... it is important that their perfect complementarity be fostered".

From the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 2559-2565)

2559 "Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God."

But when we pray, do we speak from the height of our pride and will, or "out of the depths" of a humble and contrite heart?

He who humbles himself will be exalted; humility is the foundation of prayer, Only when we humbly acknowledge that "we do not know how to pray as we ought," are we ready to receive freely the gift of prayer.

"Man is a beggar before God."

2560 "If you knew the gift of God!"

The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being.

It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us.

Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him.

2561 "You would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

Paradoxically our prayer of petition is a response to the plea of the living God:

"They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water!"

Prayer is the response of faith to the free promise of salvation and also a response of love to the thirst of the only Son of God.

Prayer as covenant

2562 Where does prayer come from?

Whether prayer is expressed in words or gestures, it is the whole man who prays.

But in naming the source of prayer, Scripture speaks sometimes of the soul or the spirit, but most often of the heart (more than a thousand times).

According to Scripture, it is the heart that prays.

If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain.

2563 The heart is the dwelling-place where I am, where I live; according to the Semitic or Biblical expression, the heart is the place "to which I withdraw."

The heart is our hidden center, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully.

The heart is the place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives.

It is the place of truth, where we choose life or death.

It is the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relation:

it is the place of covenant.

2564 Christian prayer is a covenant relationship between God and man in Christ.

It is the action of God and of man, springing forth from both the Holy Spirit and ourselves, wholly directed to the Father, in union with the human will of the Son of God made man.

Prayer as communion

2565 In the New Covenant, prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father who is good beyond measure, with his Son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit.

The grace of the Kingdom is "the union of the entire holy and royal Trinity . . . with the whole human spirit."

Thus, the life of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God and in communion with him.

This communion of life is always possible because, through Baptism, we have already been united with Christ.

Prayer is Christian insofar as it is communion with Christ and extends throughout the Church, which is his Body.

Its dimensions are those of Christ's love.

From the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the Bishops, Clergy and Lay Faithful at the Close of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 (NMI 32-34)

Prayer

32. This training in holiness calls for a Christian life distinguished above all in *the art of prayer*. The Jubilee Year has been a year of more intense prayer, both personal and communal. But we well know that prayer cannot be taken for granted. We have to learn to pray: as it were learning this art ever anew from the lips of the Divine Master himself, like the first disciples: "Lord, teach us to pray!" (*Lk 11:1*). Prayer develops that conversation with Christ, which makes us his intimate friends: "Abide in me and I in you" (*Jn 15:4*). This reciprocity is the very substance and soul of the Christian life, and the condition of all true pastoral life. Wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, this reciprocity opens us, through Christ and in Christ, to contemplation of the Father's face. Learning this Trinitarian shape of Christian prayer and living it fully, above all in the liturgy, the summit and source of the Church's life,¹⁷ but also in personal experience, is the secret of a truly vital Christianity, which has no reason to fear the future, because it returns continually to the sources and finds in them new life.

33. Is it not one of the "signs of the times" that in today's world, despite widespread secularization, there is *a widespread demand for spirituality*, a demand which expresses itself in large part as *a renewed need for prayer*? Other religions, which are now

widely present in ancient Christian lands, offer their own responses to this need, and sometimes they do so in appealing ways. But we who have received the grace of believing in Christ, the revealer of the Father and the Savior of the world, have a duty to show to what depths the relationship with Christ can lead.

The great mystical tradition of the Church of both East and West has much to say in this regard. It shows how prayer can progress, as a genuine dialogue of love, to the point of rendering the person wholly possessed by the divine Beloved, vibrating at the Spirit's touch, resting filially within the Father's heart. This is the lived experience of Christ's promise: "He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (Jn 14:21). It is a journey totally sustained by grace, which nonetheless demands an intense spiritual commitment and is no stranger to painful purifications (the "dark night"). But it leads, in various possible ways, to the ineffable joy experienced by the mystics as "nuptial union". How can we forget here, among the many shining examples, the teachings of Saint John of the Cross and Saint Teresa of Avila?

Yes, dear brothers and sisters, our Christian communities must become *genuine "schools" of prayer*, where the meeting with Christ is expressed not just in imploring help but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening and ardent devotion, until the heart truly "falls in love". Intense prayer, yes, but it does not distract us from our commitment to history: by opening our heart to the love of God it also opens it to the love of our brothers and sisters, and makes us capable of shaping history according to God's plan.¹⁸

34. Christians who have received the gift of a vocation to the specially consecrated life are of course called to prayer in a particular way: of its nature, their consecration makes them more open to the experience of contemplation, and it is important that they should cultivate it with special care. But it would be wrong to think that ordinary Christians can be content with a shallow prayer that is unable to fill their whole life. Especially in the face of the many trials to which today's world subjects faith, they would be not only mediocre Christians but "Christians at risk". They would run the insidious risk of seeing their faith progressively undermined, and would perhaps end up succumbing to the allure of "substitutes", accepting alternative religious proposals and even indulging in far-fetched superstitions.

It is therefore essential that *education in prayer* should become in some way a key-point of all pastoral planning. I myself have decided to dedicate the forthcoming Wednesday catecheses to *reflection upon the Psalms*, beginning with the Psalms of Morning Prayer with which the public prayer of the Church invites us to consecrate and direct our day. How helpful it would be if not only in religious communities but also in parishes more were done to ensure an all-pervading climate of prayer. With proper discernment, this would require that popular piety be given its proper place, and that people be educated especially in liturgical prayer. Perhaps it is more thinkable than we usually presume for the average day of a Christian community to combine the many forms of pastoral life and witness in the world with the celebration of the Eucharist and even the recitation of Lauds and Vespers. The experience of many committed Christian groups, also those made up largely of lay people, is proof of this.

