

## Session 4

# ON GOD THE FATHER AS THE SOURCE OF CATECHESIS

From Dei Verbum

The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Pope Paul VI, 1965

1. Hearing the word of God with reverence and proclaiming it with faith, the sacred synod takes its direction from these words of St. John: "We announce to you the eternal life which dwelt with the Father and was made visible to us. What we have seen and heard we announce to you, so that you may have fellowship with us and our common fellowship be with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:2-3). Therefore, following in the footsteps of the Council of Trent and of the First Vatican Council, this present council wishes to set forth authentic doctrine on divine revelation and how it is handed on, so that by hearing the message of salvation the whole world may believe, by believing it may hope, and by hoping it may love. (1)

2. In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (see Eph. 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (see Eph. 2:18; 2 Peter 1:4). Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (see Col. 1:15, 1 Tim. 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (see Ex. 33:11; John 15:14-15) and lives among them (see Bar. 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself. This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having in inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them. By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation. (2)

3. God, who through the Word creates all things (see John 1:3) and keeps them in existence, gives men an enduring witness to Himself in created realities (see Rom. 1:19-20). Planning to make known the way of heavenly salvation, He went further and from the start manifested Himself to our first parents. Then after their fall His promise of redemption aroused in them the hope of being saved (see Gen. 3:15) and from that time on He ceaselessly kept the human race in His care, to give eternal life to those who perseveringly do good in search of salvation (see Rom. 2:6-7). Then, at the time He had appointed He called Abraham in order to make of him a great nation (see Gen. 12:2). Through the patriarchs, and after them through Moses and the prophets, He taught this people to acknowledge Himself the one living and true God, provident father and just judge, and to wait for the Savior promised by Him, and in this manner prepared the way for the Gospel down through the centuries.

4. Then, after speaking in many and varied ways through the prophets, "now at last in these days God has spoken to us in His Son" (Heb. 1:1-2). For He sent His Son, the eternal Word, who enlightens all men, so that He might dwell among men and tell them of the innermost being of God (see John 1:1-18). Jesus Christ, therefore, the Word made flesh, was sent as "a man to men." (3) He "speaks the words of God" (John 3:34), and completes the work of salvation which His Father gave Him to do (see John 5:36; John 17:4). To see Jesus is to see His Father (John 14:9). For this reason Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making Himself present and manifesting Himself: through His words and deeds, His signs and wonders, but especially through His death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth. Moreover He confirmed with divine testimony what revelation proclaimed, that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to life eternal. The Christian dispensation, therefore, as the new and definitive covenant, will

never pass away and we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ (see 1 Tim. 6:14 and Tit. 2:13).

### **From the Catechism of the Catholic Church**

50 By natural reason man can know God with certainty, on the basis of his works. But there is another order of knowledge, which man cannot possibly arrive at by his own powers: the order of divine Revelation. <sup>1</sup> Through an utterly free decision, God has revealed himself and given himself to man. This he does by revealing the mystery, his plan of loving goodness, formed from all eternity in Christ, for the benefit of all men. God has fully revealed this plan by sending us his beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

51 "It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will. His will was that men should have access to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature." <sup>2</sup>

52 God, who "dwells in unapproachable light", wants to communicate his own divine life to the men he freely created, in order to adopt them as his sons in his only-begotten Son.

<sup>3</sup> By revealing himself God wishes to make them capable of responding to him, and of knowing him and of loving him far beyond their own natural capacity.

53 The divine plan of Revelation is realized simultaneously "by deeds and words which are intrinsically bound up with each other"

<sup>4</sup> and shed light on each another. It involves a specific divine pedagogy: God communicates himself to man gradually. He prepares him to welcome by stages the supernatural Revelation that is to culminate in the person and mission of the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons repeatedly speaks of this divine pedagogy using the image of God and man becoming accustomed to one another: the Word of God dwelt in man and became the Son of man in order to accustom man to perceive God and to accustom God to dwell in man, according to the Father's pleasure.

<sup>5</sup>

## **ON GOD THE SON AS THE FULLNESS OF TRUTH**

From the Catechism of the Catholic Church

65 "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son."

Christ, the Son of God made man, is the Father's one, perfect and unsurpassable Word. In him he has said everything; there will be no other word than this one. St. John of the Cross, among others,

commented strikingly on Hebrews 1:1-2:

In giving us his Son, his only Word (for he possesses no other), he spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word - and he has no more to say. . . because what he spoke before to the prophets in

parts, he has now spoken all at once by giving us the All Who is His Son. Any person questioning God or desiring some vision or revelation would be guilty not only of foolish behaviour but also of offending him, by not fixing his eyes entirely upon Christ and by living with the desire for some other novelty. There will be no further Revelation

428 Whoever is called "to teach Christ" must first seek "the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus"; he must suffer "the loss of all things. . ." in order to "gain Christ and be found in him", and "to know him and the power of his resurrection, and (to) share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible (he) may attain the resurrection from the dead".

429 From this loving knowledge of Christ springs the desire to proclaim him, to "evangelize", and to lead others to the "yes" of faith in Jesus Christ. But at the same time the need to know this faith better makes itself felt. To this end, following the order of the Creed, Jesus' principal titles - "Christ", "Son of God", and "Lord" (article 2) - will be presented. the Creed next confesses the chief mysteries of his life - those of his Incarnation (article 3), Paschal mystery (articles 4 and 5) and glorification (articles 6 and 7).

From the General Directory for Catechesis

40. God revealed himself progressively to man, through the prophets and through salvific events, until he brought to completion his self-revelation by sending his own Son: (86)

"[Jesus Christ] completed and perfected Revelation, he did this by way of his presence and self manifestation—by words and works, signs and miracles, but above all by his death and glorious resurrection from the dead, and finally by sending the Spirit of truth".(87)

Jesus Christ is not merely the greatest of the prophets but is the eternal Son of God, made man. He is, therefore, the final event towards which all the events of salvation history converge.(88) He is indeed "the Father's one, perfect and unsurpassable Word".(89)

41. The ministry of the word must always give prominence to this wonderful characteristic, proper to the economy of Revelation: the Son of God enters human history, assumes human life and death, and brings about the new and definitive covenant between God and man. It is the task of catechesis to show who Jesus Christ is, his life and ministry, and to present the Christian faith as the following of his person.(90)

Consequently, it must base itself constantly on the Gospels, which "are the heart of all the Scriptures 'because they are our principal source for the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our Saviour'".(91)

The fact that Jesus Christ is the fullness of Revelation is the foundation for the "Christocentricity" (92) of

catechesis: the mystery of Christ, in the revealed message, is not another element alongside others, it is rather the centre from which all other elements are structured and illuminated.

140. When the fullness of time had come God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to humanity. He brought to the world the supreme gift of salvation by accomplishing his redemptive mission in a manner which continued "the pedagogy of God", with the perfection found in the newness of his Person. In his words, signs and works during his brief but intense life, the disciples had direct experience of the fundamental traits of the "pedagogy of Jesus", and recorded them in the Gospels: receiving others, especially the poor, the little ones and sinners, as persons loved and sought out by God; the undiluted proclamation of the Kingdom of God as the good news of the truth and of the consolation of the Father; a kind of delicate and strong love which liberates from evil and promotes life; a pressing invitation to a manner of living sustained by faith in God, by hope in the Kingdom and by charity to one's neighbour; the use of all the resources of interpersonal communication, such as word, silence, metaphor, image, example, and many diverse signs as was the case with the biblical prophets. Inviting his disciples to follow him unreservedly and without regret, (491) Christ passed on to them his pedagogy of faith as a full sharing in his actions and in his destiny.

From *Catechesi Tradendae*

Catechesis in our time, Pope John Paul II, 1979

5. The fourth general assembly of the synod of Bishops often stressed the Christocentricity of all authentic

catechesis. We can here use the word "Christocentricity" in both its meanings, which are not opposed to each

other or mutually exclusive, but each of which rather demands and completes the other.

In the first place, it is intended to stress that at the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of

Jesus of Nazareth, "the only Son from the Father...full of grace and truth,"(9) who suffered and died for us and

who now, after rising, is living with us forever. It is Jesus who is "the way, and the truth, and the life,"(10) and

Christian living consists in following Christ, the sequela Christi.

The primary and essential object of catechesis is, to use an expression dear to St. Paul and also to contemporary

theology, "the mystery of Christ." Catechizing is in a way to lead a person to study this mystery in all its

dimensions: "to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery...comprehend with all the saints what is the

breadth and length and height and depth ...know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge...(and be filled)

with all the fullness of God."(11) It is therefore to reveal in the Person of Christ the whole of

God's eternal design reaching fulfillment in that Person. It is to seek to understand the meaning of Christ's actions and words and of the signs worked by Him, for they simultaneously hide and reveal His mystery. Accordingly, the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity.

6. Christocentricity in catechesis also means the intention to transmit not one's own teaching or that of some other master, but the teaching of Jesus Christ, the Truth that He communicates or, to put it more precisely, the Truth that He is.<sup>(12)</sup> We must therefore say that in catechesis it is Christ, the Incarnate Word and Son of God, who is taught - everything else is taught with reference to Him - and it is Christ alone who teaches - anyone else teaches to the extent that he is Christ's spokesman, enabling Christ to teach with his lips. Whatever be the level of his responsibility in the Church, every catechist must constantly endeavor to transmit by his teaching and behavior the teaching and life of Jesus. He will not seek to keep directed towards himself and his personal opinions and attitudes the attention and the consent of the mind and heart of the person he is catechizing. Above all, he will not try to inculcate his personal opinions and options as if they expressed Christ's teaching and the lessons of His life. Every catechist should be able to apply to himself the mysterious words of Jesus: "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me."<sup>(13)</sup> St. Paul did this when he was dealing with a question of prime importance: "I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you."<sup>(14)</sup> What assiduous study of the word of God transmitted by the Church's magisterium, what profound familiarity with Christ and with the Father, what a spirit of prayer, what detachment from self must a catechist have in order that he can say: "My teaching is not mine!"

7. This teaching is not a body of abstract truths. It is the communication of the living mystery of God. The Person teaching it in the Gospel is altogether superior in excellence to the "masters" in Israel, and the nature of His doctrine surpasses theirs in every way because of the unique link between what He says, what He does and what He is. Nevertheless, the Gospels clearly relate occasions when Jesus "taught." "Jesus began to do and teach"<sup>(15)</sup> - with these two verbs, placed at the beginning of the book of the Acts, St. Luke links and at the same time distinguishes two poles in Christ's mission. Jesus taught. It is the witness that He gives of Himself: "Day after day I sat in the temple teaching."<sup>(16)</sup> It is the admiring observation of the evangelists, surprised to see Him teaching everywhere and at all times, teaching in a

manner and with an authority previously unknown: "Crowds gathered to him again; and again, as his custom was, he taught them "(17); "and they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority."(18) It is also what His enemies note for the purpose of drawing from it grounds for accusation and condemnation: "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judaea, from Galilee even to this place."(19)

8. One who teaches in this way has a unique title to the name of "Teacher." Throughout the New Testament, especially in the Gospels, how many times is He given this title of Teacher!(20) Of course the Twelve, the other disciples, and the crowds of listeners call Him "Teacher" in tones of admiration, trust and tenderness.(21) Even the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the doctors of the law, and the Jews in general do not refuse Him the title:

"Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you"(22); "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"(23) But above all, Jesus Himself at particularly solemn and highly significant moments calls Himself Teacher: "You call me teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am"(24); and He proclaims the singularity, the uniqueness of His character as teacher: "You have one teacher,"(25) the Christ. One can understand why people of every kind, race and nation have for 2,000 years in all the languages of the earth given Him this title with veneration, repeating in their own ways the exclamation of Nicodemus: "We know that you are a teacher come from God."(26)

This image of Christ the Teacher is at once majestic and familiar, impressive and reassuring. It comes from the pen of the evangelists and it has often been evoked subsequently in iconography since earliest Christian times,(27) so captivating is it. And I am pleased to evoke it in my turn at the beginning of these considerations on catechesis in the modern world.

9. In doing so, I am not forgetful that the majesty of Christ the Teacher and the unique consistency and persuasiveness of His teaching can only be explained by the fact that His words, His parables and His arguments are never separable from His life and His very being. Accordingly, the whole of Christ's life was a continual teaching: His silences, His miracles, His gestures, His prayer, His love for people, His special affection for the little and the poor, His acceptance of the total sacrifice on the cross for the redemption of the world, and His resurrection are the actualization of His word and the fulfillment of revelation. Hence for Christians the crucifix is one of the most sublime and popular images of Christ the Teacher. These considerations follow in the wake of the great traditions of the Church and they all strengthen our fervor

with regard to Christ, the Teacher who reveals God to man and man to himself, the Teacher who saves, sanctifies and guides, who lives, who speaks, rouses, moves, redresses, judges, forgives, and goes with us day by day on the path of history, the Teacher who comes and will come in glory. Only in deep communion with Him will catechists find light and strength for an authentic, desirable renewal of catechesis.

## ON GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT AS THE INTERIOR TEACHER

From *Catechesi Tradendae*

Catechesis in our time, Pope John Paul II, 1979

72. At the end of this apostolic exhortation, the gaze of my heart turns to Him who is the principle inspiring all catechetical work and all who do this work—the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, the Holy Spirit.

In describing the mission that this Spirit would have in the Church, Christ used the significant words: "He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." (122) And He added: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...he will declare to you the things that are to come." (123)

The Spirit is thus promised to the Church and to each Christian as a teacher within, who, in the secret of the conscience and the heart, makes one understand what one has heard but was not capable of grasping: "Even now the Holy Spirit teaches the faithful," said St. Augustine in this regard, "in accordance with each one's spiritual capacity. And he sets their hearts aflame with greater desire according as each one progresses in the charity that makes him love what he already knows and desire what he has yet to know." (124)

Furthermore, the Spirit's mission is also to transform the disciples into witnesses to Christ: "He will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses." (125)

But this is not all. For St. Paul, who on this matter synthesizes a theology that is latent throughout the New Testament, it is the whole of one's "being a Christian," the whole of the Christian life, the new life of the children

of God, that constitutes a life in accordance with the Spirit. (126) Only the Spirit enables us to say to God: "Abba,

Father." (127) Without the Spirit we cannot say: "Jesus is Lord." (128) From the Spirit come all the charisms that build up the Church, the community of Christians. (129)

In keeping with this, St. Paul gives each disciple of Christ the instruction: "Be filled with the Spirit." (130) St.

Augustine is very explicit: "Both (our believing and our doing good) are ours because of the choice of our will,

and yet both are gifts from the Spirit of faith and charity." (131)

Catechesis, which is growth in faith and the maturing of Christian life towards its fullness, is

consequently a work of the Holy Spirit, a work that He alone can initiate and sustain in the Church. This realization, based on the text quoted above and on many other passages of the New Testament, convinces us of two things.

To begin with, it is clear that, when carrying out her mission of giving catechesis, the Church- and also every individual Christian devoting himself to that mission within the Church and in her name- must be very much aware of acting as a living, pliant instrument of the Holy Spirit. To invoke this Spirit constantly, to be in communion with Him, to endeavor to know His authentic inspirations must be the attitude of the teaching Church and of every catechist.

Secondly, the deep desire to understand better the Spirit's action and to entrust oneself to Him more fully - at a time when "in the Church we are living an exceptionally favorable season of the Spirit," as my predecessor Paul VI remarked in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*(132) - must bring about a catechetical awakening.

For "renewal in the Spirit" will be authentic and will have real fruitfulness in the Church, not so much according as it gives rise to extraordinary charisms, but according as it leads the greatest possible number of the faithful, as they travel their daily paths, to make a humble, patient and persevering effort to know the mystery of Christ better and better, and to bear witness to it .

I invoke on the catechizing Church this Spirit of the Father and the Son, and I beg Him to renew catechetical dynamism in the Church.

From the General Directory for Catechesis  
Divine pedagogy, action of the Holy Spirit in every Christian

142. "Blessed is the the man whom thou dost chasten, O Lord, and whom thou dost teach out of thy law" (Ps 94:12). In the school of the word of God, received in the Church, the disciple, thanks to the gift of the Holy Spirit sent by Christ, grows like his Teacher "in wisdom, stature, and in favour with God and men" (Lk 2,52). He is also assisted in developing in himself "the divine education" received by means of catechesis and by means of knowledge and experience. (494) In this way, by knowing more about the mystery of salvation, by learning to adore God the Father, and "by living in the truth according to charity", the disciple seeks "to grow in all things towards him, who is the Head, Christ" (Eph 4:15). The pedagogy of God can be said to be completed when the disciple shall "become the perfect Man, fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself" (Eph 4:13). For this reason there cannot be teachers of the faith other than those who are convinced and faithful disciples of Christ and

his Church.

From the Catechism of the Catholic Church

683 "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit."

<sup>1</sup>

"God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"

<sup>2</sup>

This knowledge of faith is possible only in the Holy Spirit: to be in touch with Christ, we must first have been touched by the Holy Spirit. He comes to meet us and kindles faith in us. By virtue of our Baptism, the first sacrament of the faith, the Holy Spirit in the Church communicates to us, intimately and personally, the life that originates in the Father and is offered to us in the Son. Baptism gives us the grace of new birth in God the Father, through his Son, in the Holy Spirit. For those who bear God's Spirit are led to the Word, that is, to the Son, and the Son presents them to the Father, and the Father confers incorruptibility on them. and it is impossible to see God's Son without the Spirit, and no one can approach the Father without the Son, for the knowledge of the Father is the Son, and the knowledge of God's Son is obtained through the Holy Spirit.

<sup>3</sup>

684 Through his grace, the Holy Spirit is the first to awaken faith in us and to communicate to us the new life,

which is to "know the Father and the one whom he has sent, Jesus Christ."

<sup>4</sup>

But the Spirit is the last of the persons of the Holy Trinity to be revealed. St. Gregory of Nazianzus, the Theologian, explains this progression in terms of the pedagogy of divine "condescension": The Old Testament proclaimed the Father clearly, but the Son more obscurely. the New Testament revealed the Son and gave us a glimpse of the divinity of the Spirit. Now the Spirit dwells among us and grants us a clearer vision of himself. It was not prudent, when the divinity of the Father had not yet been confessed, to proclaim the Son openly and, when the divinity of the Son was not yet admitted, to add the Holy Spirit as an extra burden, to speak somewhat daringly.... By advancing and progressing "from glory to glory," the light of the Trinity will shine in ever more brilliant rays.

<sup>5</sup>

685 To believe in the Holy Spirit is to profess that the Holy Spirit is one of the persons of the Holy Trinity, consubstantial with the Father and the Son: "with the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified."

<sup>6</sup>

For this reason, the divine mystery of the Holy Spirit was already treated in the context of Trinitarian

"theology." Here,  
however, we have to do with the Holy Spirit only in the divine "economy."  
686 The Holy Spirit is at work with the Father and the Son from the beginning to the completion  
of the plan for  
our salvation. But in these "end times," ushered in by the Son's redeeming Incarnation, the Spirit  
is revealed and  
given, recognized and welcomed as a person. Now can this divine plan, accomplished in Christ,  
the firstborn and  
head of the new creation, be embodied in mankind by the outpouring of the Spirit: as the  
Church, the communion  
of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.