

CHAPTER 2

Catechesis Within the Church's Mission of Evangelization

Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. (Mk 16:15)

15. INTRODUCTION

Christ commissioned his apostles to "go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature."⁸⁵ As a result they "went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs."⁸⁶ Christ taught his apostles what he received from the Father: "What I heard from him I tell the world."⁸⁷ The apostles, in turn, were to echo this divine word faithfully and completely. This "echo" of the Word of God is catechesis.⁸⁸

Christ calls all the faithful to proclaim the Good News everywhere in the world and to hand his message on to successive generations by professing, living, and celebrating the faith in Liturgy and prayer. Evangelization and catechesis are among the principal means by which the Church hands on the faith. "Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize."⁸⁹ Catechesis is an indispensable stage in the rich, complex, and dynamic reality of

85 Mk 16:15.

86 Mk 16:20.

87 Jn 8:26.

88 Cf. Acts 18:25; Rom 2:18; Gal 6:6.

89 EN, no. 14

evangelization. It is a remarkable moment “in the whole process of evangelization.”⁹⁰ Other elements of evangelization include ecumenical collaboration among Christians and the promotion of their unity, since “the sign of unity among all Christians [is] the way and instrument of evangelization.”⁹¹

This chapter describes the proper role of catechesis within the Church’s mission of evangelization. Catechesis begins with the primacy of Revelation, presents the Church’s fundamental mission of evangelization, shows how catechesis is set within the context of evangelization, and identifies the source and sources of catechesis. The chapter then sets forth the purposes and tasks of catechesis and concludes by describing the dynamic relationship between the Gospel message and culture.

16. REVELATION

A. God’s Self-Disclosure in Salvation History

“It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will.”⁹² The divine will is that we should come to the Father through Christ, the Word made flesh, and, in the Holy Spirit, become sharers in the divine nature (*theosis*). Divine Revelation, then, is the supernatural manifestation of the inner life of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God’s desire to communicate himself to us is entirely his own initiative. God’s self-revelation aims to bring about our participation in the life of the Blessed Trinity, something so wondrous that it is impossible for us even to imagine.

From the beginning, God has made known the inexhaustible mystery of his love in order to give us a share in his own divine life. In doing so, God summons a response in faith from his people. So unimaginable is God’s gift of himself that our response can only be self-surrender, the obedience of faith. God reveals himself to us gradually and in stages, drawing us ever closer in order to prepare us to welcome the culmination of God’s self-revelation in the person and mission of the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. The pattern of this Revelation unfolds through “deeds and words, which are intrinsically [connected:] . . . the works performed by God in

the history of salvation show forth and bear out the doctrine and realities signified by the words; the words, for their part, proclaim the works, and bring to light the mystery they contain.”⁹³

God first revealed himself through creation and continually provides evidence of himself in the created order. God sustains and directs creation toward its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. God revealed himself in a special way through the history of Israel.⁹⁴ He created our first parents in communion with him. After their fall, he revealed his loving plan for redemption through covenants with Noah and Abraham. In the time of the patriarchs, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, he formed Israel as his people so that they would know him to be the one, true God. God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, established the covenant of Mount Sinai, and, through Moses, gave them his law. He spoke to his people through judges, priests, and prophets and continued to shape his people in hope for the promised Savior. God made a covenant with King David and promised that through David’s offspring, he would establish his kingdom for ever.⁹⁵ We see this covenant promise fulfilled in Mary, the virgin mother of God’s only-begotten Son. She was a unique vessel of God’s Revelation, obediently bringing forth his Word in human flesh in order to establish his kingdom for ever.

God revealed himself fully in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man. Jesus is the “mediator and the sum total of Revelation.”⁹⁶ In Christ, God has said everything in one, perfect, transcendent Word. Jesus Christ “completed and perfected Revelation. . . . He did this by the total fact 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.”⁹⁷ There will be no new public revelation until Christ returns in glory at the end of time.

The Spirit of truth continues to reveal God in the world and, especially, in the Church. The Holy Spirit inspired the sacred authors to preserve the message of salvation in writing and to ensure the authentic interpretation of the word of God contained in Sacred Scripture through the Magisterium. The Magisterium is the teaching authority of the

90 CT, no. 18.

91 EN, no. 77.

92 Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)* (DV), no. 2.

93 DV, no. 2.

94 Cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and Their Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002), Section II, 19-65.

95 Cf. 2 Sm 7:13.

96 DV, no. 2.

97 DV, no. 4.

Church that consists of the pope and bishops in union with the pope. Through the Holy Spirit, the Risen Christ is alive in those who believe, helping them to understand their experiences in the light of faith.

B. The Transmission of Revelation

God's Revelation is intended for all humanity because God "wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth."⁹⁸ To fulfill this divine plan, Jesus Christ founded the Church on the apostles, filled them with the Holy Spirit, and sent them to preach the Gospel to the whole world. This apostolic commission has been the life of the Church since her foundation. The Church has preserved the integrity and entirety of the Gospel since Christ entrusted it to her. The Gospel has been the source of her inspiration, the object of her contemplation, the subject of her proclamation, and the reason for her missionary activity. "The integral conservation of Revelation, the word of God contained in Tradition and Scripture, as well as its continuous transmission, are guaranteed in their authenticity"⁹⁹ by the Holy Spirit.

Through Tradition, "the Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes."¹⁰⁰ Handing on Divine Revelation to future generations of believers is a principal work of the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Christ commanded the apostles to preach the Gospel, which he himself proclaimed, and which he fulfilled in his own person. They did so through their own preaching, their example, and the institutions they established. They also communicated what they had seen and heard in writing, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. These sacred books held the message of salvation that Christ entrusted to them and that they were to safeguard until the end of time. "In order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the church the apostles left bishops as their successors. They gave them 'their own position of teaching authority.'"¹⁰¹

98 1 Tm 2:4.

99 Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC) (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 1998), no. 44.

100 DV, no. 8.

101 DV, no. 7.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ must be proclaimed to every person and to all nations in every age so that God's Revelation may reach the ends of the earth. "God, who spoke in the past, continues to converse with the spouse of his beloved Son [the Church]. And the Holy Spirit through whom the living voice of the Gospel rings out in the Church—and through her in the world—leads believers to the full truth, and makes the Word of Christ dwell in them in all its richness."¹⁰²

God's self-revelation given through his only Son in the Holy Spirit remains living and active in the Church. Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture together are the Deposit of Faith, which is guarded and protected by the Magisterium because it was given to us by Christ and can not change. The transmission of that Revelation, in its integrity, is entrusted, by Divine Commission, to the Magisterium, to the Successors of St. Peter and the Successors of the Apostles. In a harmonious collaboration with the Magisterium in the Church's mission of evangelization, all the members of the People of God, priests, deacons, men and women religious, and the lay faithful, hand on the faith by proclaiming the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ and communicating God's gift of his own divine life in the sacraments.

C. Faith

From the beginning, God has made known the inexhaustible mystery of his love in order to give us a share of his own divine life. In doing so, God summons a response in faith from his people, a response that itself is a gift. So unimaginable is God's gift of himself that our response can only be self-surrender, the obedience of faith,¹⁰³ of which Mary is the perfect embodiment.

Human beings are unique in creation because they alone can offer God a response of faith to his initiative of love. The response of faith has two integral dimensions: the faith *by which* one believes and the faith *which* one believes. Faith is a supernatural virtue. Faith is one's personal adherence to God who reveals himself; at the same time, faith is the free assent of one's intellect and will to the whole Truth that God has revealed.¹⁰⁴ The faith *by which* one believes is itself a gift from God. It is

102 DV, no. 8.

103 Cf. Rom 16:26.

104 Cf. CCC, no. 150.

God's grace that moves and assists the individual to believe. It is the interior help of the Holy Spirit that moves the heart and converts it to God.¹⁰⁵ The faith *which* one believes is also God's gift. It consists of the content of Divine Revelation. Faith, then, is the human response to a personal God, who has revealed himself, and to the Truth that God has revealed through the Catholic Church.

17. EVANGELIZATION AND THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

A. The New Evangelization

Pope John Paul II has summoned the Church to undertake the new evangelization of the world and has invited peoples everywhere to open wide the doors to Christ. "I sense," he said, "that the moment has come to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelization and to the mission *ad gentes*.¹⁰⁶ No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples."¹⁰⁷ The Good News of Jesus Christ must be carried forth to every person and every nation so that it may penetrate the heart of every person and renew the human race. We carry forward this task of proclaiming the Gospel with our fellow Christians, where possible. Such common witness is an integral dimension of our mission to evangelize.¹⁰⁸ An ardent longing to invite others to encounter Jesus is the spark that starts the evangelizing mission to which the whole Church is called. The Church can spare no effort in leading all humanity to Christ because in Christ all humanity discovers the deepest truths about itself.

To evangelize individuals is not sufficient. The Gospel is intended for every people and nation; it finds a home in every culture. Those who proclaim the Christian message must know and love the culture and the people to whom they bring the message in order for it to be able to transform the culture and the people and make them new in Christ. "The new

evangelization calls for a clearly conceived, serious and well organized effort to evangelize culture."¹⁰⁹ The dynamism inherent in the new evangelization demands both the inculturation of the Gospel and the transformation of the culture by the Gospel.

In summary, the new evangelization is primarily the "clear and unequivocal proclamation of the person of Jesus Christ, that is, the preaching of his name, his teaching, his life, his promises and the Kingdom which he has gained for us by his Paschal Mystery."¹¹⁰ It involves the active participation of every Christian in the proclamation and demonstration that the Christian faith is the only fully valid response to the problems and hopes that life poses to every person and society.¹¹¹ The new evangelization is directed to the Church herself: to the baptized who were never effectively evangelized before, to those who have never made a personal commitment to Christ and the Gospel, to those formed by the values of the secularized culture, to those who have lost a sense of faith, and to those who are alienated. It is also directed to all human cultures so that they might be open to the Gospel and live in harmony with Christian values.¹¹² The new evangelization is aimed at personal transformation through the development of a personal relationship with God, participation in sacramental worship, the development of a mature ethical and social conscience, ongoing catechesis, and a deepening integration of faith into all areas of life.

The purpose of this evangelization is to bring about faith and conversion to Christ. Faith involves a profound change of mind and heart, a change of life, a "*metanoia*."¹¹³ Such a change can only arise from deep within the interior of one's being, where one faces the truly important questions about human life. Such a change, engendered by the action of the Holy Spirit, shows itself in the transformation of one's life. One begins to live "in Christ" and is able to confess with St. Paul, "Yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me."¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁵ Cf. DV, no. 5.

¹⁰⁶ "*Ad gentes*" means "to the nations," meaning that this mission is to everyone in the world.

¹⁰⁷ RM, no. 3.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. John Paul II, *That They All May Be One (Ut Unum Sint)* (UUS) (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 1995), nos. 89-90.109

¹⁰⁹ EA, no. 70.

¹¹⁰ EA, no. 66.

¹¹¹ Cf. Pope John Paul II, *The Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World (Christifideles Laici)* (CL) (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 1988), no. 34.

¹¹² Cf. Pope John Paul II, Opening Address at Santo Domingo, 1992, no. 22.

¹¹³ EN, no. 10.

¹¹⁴ Gal 2:20.

B. Conversion

"The Christian faith is, above all, conversion to Jesus Christ."¹¹⁵ It is the fruit of God's grace and the free response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. It arises from the depths of the human person and involves such a profound transformation of heart and mind that it causes the believer to change radically both internally and externally. The Blessed Virgin Mary's perfect response to the grace of the Holy Spirit represents the primordial conversion to Christ and the "purest realization of faith."¹¹⁶

For the Christian, this *metanoia* reorients all aspects of the person's life to Christ. This conversion is the acceptance of a personal relationship with Christ, a sincere adherence to him, and a willingness to conform one's life to his. Conversion to Christ involves making a genuine commitment to him and a personal decision to follow him as his disciple. Through this discipleship the believer is united to the community of disciples and appropriates the faith of the Church. The faith of the Church "is a gift destined to grow in the hearts of believers."¹¹⁷

The process of conversion involves understanding who Christ is in order to change and follow him more closely. Conversion begins with an openness to the initial proclamation of the Gospel and a sincere desire to listen for its resonance within. This search arouses in those coming to Christ a desire to know him more personally and to know more about him. This knowledge of the person, message, and mission of Christ enables the believer to "make it into a living, explicit and fruitful confession of faith."¹¹⁸ This profession of faith forms the foundation for the continuing journey under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is nourished by the sacraments, prayer, and the practice of charity "until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God . . . to the extent of the full stature of Christ."¹¹⁹ "This is crucial: we must be converted—and we must continue to be converted! We must let the Holy Spirit change our lives! We must respond to Jesus Christ."¹²⁰

115 GDC, no. 53; Cf. Catholic Church and Lutheran World Federation, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999), no. 16, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html (accessed on August 29, 2003).

116 CCC, no. 149.

117 GDC, no. 56.

118 GDC, no. 82.

119 Eph 4:13.

120 USCCB, *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States (Tenth Anniversary Ed.)* (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 2002), no. 14.

C. The Process of Evangelization

The Church's evangelizing activity consists of several essential elements: proclaiming Christ, preaching Christ, bearing witness to Christ, teaching Christ, and celebrating Christ's sacraments.¹²¹

Evangelization aims at both the interior change of individuals and the external change of societies. It is the totality of the Church's efforts to bring "the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new."¹²² The essential elements of evangelization are distributed throughout a complex process of stages or moments.¹²³ These stages include the following: missionary activity directed toward non-believers or those who live in religious indifference; the initial proclamation of the Gospel, initial catechetical activity for those who choose the Gospel or need to complete or modify their initiation, and pastoral activity directed toward those of mature Christian faith.¹²⁴

The ministry of the word is a fundamental element of evangelization through all its stages because it involves the proclamation of Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God. "There is no true evangelization if the name of the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed."¹²⁵

The word of God nourishes both evangelizers and those who are being evangelized so that each one may continue to grow in his or her Christian life. From apostolic times the Church has exercised the ministry of the word in a variety of forms and functions that are closely linked to its practice. First, the listeners are prepared for the first proclamation of the Gospel, or *pre-evangelization*. Pre-evangelization ordinarily builds on basic human needs, such as security, love, or acceptance, and shows how those basic human needs include a desire for God and his word.

Then comes the initial announcement of the Gospel, or *missionary preaching*. This form of the ministry of the word is directed toward non-believers, those who have chosen not to believe, those who follow other religions, and the children of Christians. In our age it may also be addressed to those who may have been baptized but have little or no awareness of their Baptism and who consequently live on the margins of Christian life.

121 Cf. EN, no. 17.

122 EN, no. 18.

123 Cf. CT, no. 18.

124 Cf. AG, no. 6.

125 EN, no. 22.

Initiatory catechesis follows for catechumens, those who are coming to the Catholic faith from another Christian tradition, Catholics who need to complete their initiation, children, and the young. The function of initiatory catechesis is to introduce the life of faith, the Liturgy, and the charity of the People of God to those being initiated.¹²⁶

Mystagogical or post-baptismal catechesis is the form of the ministry of the word in which the implications for living a sacramental life are drawn out. The function of mystagogical catechesis is to lead the baptized deeper into the Christian life, celebration of the sacraments, prayer life of the Church, and her missionary activity.

Permanent or continuing catechesis involves the systematic presentation of the truths of the faith and the practice of Christian living. The function of permanent catechesis is to nourish the faith of believers throughout their lives.

While all Liturgy has a catechetical dimension, liturgical catechesis is most explicit in the form of the homily received during the celebration of the sacraments. As such, liturgical catechesis within the context of a sacred action is an integral part of that action.¹²⁷ Its function is “the immediate preparation for reception of the different sacraments, the celebration of sacraments and above all of the participation of the faithful in the Eucharist, as a primary means of education in the faith.”¹²⁸ Liturgical catechesis also includes reflection upon the ritual celebration.

Theological catechesis is the “systematic treatment and the scientific investigation of the truths of faith.”¹²⁹ It has a distinctly theological function: namely, to help Christians understand the faith by engaging in a dialogue with “philosophical forms of thought, various forms of humanism, and the human sciences.”¹³⁰

D. The Context of Evangelization

Evangelization in the United States occurs within diverse and rapidly changing social, religious, and cultural contexts. Some have never

126 Cf. AG, no. 14.

127 Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) (SC), no. 35.

128 GDC, no. 51.

129 Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *General Catechetical Directory* (1971), no. 17, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccclergy/documents/rc_con_ccclergy_doc_11041971_gcat_en.html (accessed on March 15, 2005).

130 GDC, no. 51.

encountered Christ and have never been baptized. They are in need of the initial announcement of the Gospel and the first call to conversion. Some have been baptized but were never formed in the faith after the childhood. Some have lost their faith, have drifted away from the Church because of one issue or another, and now live their lives at a considerable distance from Christ and the Gospel. Some feel alienated from the Church because of the way they perceive the Church or her teaching. Although many of them may say they are Catholic, they no longer work in communion with the community; and thereby they deprive themselves of the gift of God's Word and the sacraments of the Church.¹³¹ An enthusiastic new evangelization or new evangelization and a basic catechesis are needed. On the other hand, some of the baptized remain fervent in their faith and are vibrant in their Christian living. They know Christ and his Gospel and have committed themselves to the Church's universal mission. A permanent catechesis centered around continual conversion “makes evangelizers of those who have been evangelized.”¹³²

These diverse and rapidly changing social, religious, and cultural contexts and the Church's evangelical and catechetical responses to them coexist in the same communities in many parts of the United States. The boundaries between and among the diverse social, religious, and cultural contexts are not clearly definable. In addition, the initial announcement of the Gospel and a basic catechesis, the new evangelization and an initiatory catechesis, and a more permanent catechesis are stages not entirely distinct from one another as dimensions of the Church's mission of evangelization. Catechesis in the United States receives from evangelization a missionary dynamic that encourages us to continue to evangelize the culture, affirming what is compatible and challenging what is not.

E. Pastoral Directives for Evangelization

In light of the social, cultural, and religious context of life in the United States, it is possible to suggest several pastoral directives to revitalize the Church's response to Pope John Paul II's call for a new evangelization. Dioceses and parishes are encouraged to study, reflect on, and adopt the goals of *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic*

131 Cf. *Go and Make Disciples*, no. 39.

132 GDC, no. 58.

Evangelization in the United States and integrate them into their respective missions. All dioceses and parishes, in the efforts and resources they focus on the new evangelization, should pursue the following fundamental objectives:

1. To foster in the heart of every believer an experience of personal conversion to Jesus Christ that leads to a personal renewal and greater participation in the Christian life in the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ
2. To encourage a greater knowledge of the Holy Scriptures and Sacred Tradition of the Church
3. To focus their efforts and resources on the conversion and renewal of every parish, especially through the implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults
4. To rededicate themselves to a liturgical renewal that develops a greater appreciation for the presence and power of Christ in the word of God and the sacraments of the Church, especially the Eucharist, and a stronger commitment to celebrating the Eucharist each Sunday
5. To make the evangelical and social justice dimensions of the Sunday Eucharist more explicit
6. To call their people to a more effective integration of daily prayer in their lives, especially the ancient practice of praying the Psalms and the Church's Liturgy of the Hours, contemplation of the mysteries of the life of Christ through the Rosary, and a greater reverence of the Eucharist through adoration of the Blessed Sacrament
7. To ensure that all Catholic institutions, especially parishes, are accessible and welcoming to all

(Other pastoral directives related to particular aspects of evangelization and catechesis will be outlined in subsequent chapters.)

These pastoral directives for evangelization give catechesis in the United States a missionary dynamic that encourages us to continue to evangelize the culture, affirming what is compatible and challenging what is not:

Seeing both the ideals and the faults of our nation, we Catholics need to recognize how much our Catholic faith, for all it has received from American culture, still has to offer to our nation.

On the level of truth, we have a profound and consistent moral teaching based on the dignity and destiny of every person created by God. On the practical level, we have the witness of American Catholics serving those most in need, educationally, socially, materially, and spiritually.¹³³

The ministry of catechesis, as an essential moment in the Church's mission of evangelization,¹³⁴ is a fundamental ecclesial service for the realization of the missionary mandate of Jesus here in the United States.

18. SOURCE AND SOURCES OF CATECHESIS

The source of catechesis is found in the word of God revealed by Jesus Christ. "Catechesis will always draw its content from the living source of the word of God transmitted in Tradition and the Scriptures, for 'sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the word of God, which is entrusted to the Church.'"¹³⁵ Together they make the mystery of Christ present and fruitful in the Church.

Sacred Scripture "is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit."¹³⁶ Sacred Tradition "transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound and spread it abroad by their preaching."¹³⁷

To refer to the word of God in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition as the principal source of catechesis means, on the one hand, that catechesis must be primarily based on the thought, spirit, and perspective of the Old and New Testaments. On the other, it means that the biblical texts from which catechesis proceeds must be read from within the Church's two-thousand-year experience of faith and life.

The Church, guided by the Holy Spirit in every age, must interpret the word of God. The Church performs this function authoritatively through

¹³³ *Go and Make Disciples*, no. 59.

¹³⁴ GDC, no. 63, citing CT, no. 18.

¹³⁵ CT, no. 27.

¹³⁶ DV, no. 9.

¹³⁷ DV, no. 9.

her living, teaching office, the Magisterium. The Magisterium ensures the Church's fidelity to the teaching of the apostles in matters of faith and morals. "The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ."¹³⁸ The Magisterium is the servant of the word of God. "It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith."¹³⁹ Thus, the word of God, contained and transmitted in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition and interpreted by the Magisterium, is the principal source of catechesis.

Catechesis has secondary sources as well. Catechesis is nourished when the word of God is more deeply understood and developed by the people exercising their faith under the guidance of the Magisterium. It is enlivened in the celebration of the Liturgy. Catechesis draws on theology as it seeks the fuller understanding of the Gospel message. Catechesis is enriched when the word of God shines forth in the life of the Church, especially in the lives of the saints and in the Christian witness of the faithful. And it is made more fruitful when the word of God is known from those genuine moral values that, by divine providence, are found in human society.

19. NATURE AND PURPOSE OF CATECHESIS: INITIATORY AND ONGOING

A. Nature and Purpose of Catechesis

"Catechesis is that particular form of the ministry of the word which matures initial conversion to make it into a living, explicit and fruitful confession of faith."¹⁴⁰

Catechesis aims to bring about in the believer an ever more mature faith in Jesus Christ, a deeper knowledge and love of his person and message, and a firm commitment to follow him. In many situations, however,

¹³⁸ DV, no. 10.

¹³⁹ DV, no. 10.

¹⁴⁰ GDC, no. 82.

catechesis must also be concerned with arousing initial faith and sustaining the gradual conversion to complete adherence to Jesus Christ for those who are on the threshold of faith. With God's grace, catechesis develops initial faith, nourishes the Christian life, and continually unfolds the mystery of Christ until the believer willingly becomes his disciple.

To put it more precisely: within the whole process of evangelization, the aim of catechesis is to be the teaching and maturation stage, that is to say, the period in which the Christian, having accepted by faith the person of Jesus Christ as the one Lord and having given him complete adherence by sincere conversion of heart, endeavors to know better this Jesus to whom he has entrusted himself: to know his "mystery," the Kingdom of God proclaimed by him, the requirements and promises contained in his Gospel message, and the paths that he has laid down for any one who wishes to follow him.¹⁴¹

B. The Object of Catechesis

The object of catechesis is communion with Jesus Christ. Catechesis leads people to enter the mystery of Christ, to encounter him, and to discover themselves and the meaning of their lives in him. "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,'¹⁴² who suffered and died for us and who now after rising, is living with us forever."¹⁴³ For in Christ the whole of God's eternal plan is revealed, a plan that begins with the Father's generation of his only Son and reaches its fulfillment in him. Christ is the living center of catechesis, who draws all persons to his Father through the Holy Spirit. "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."¹⁴⁴ St. Paul declared, "For to me life is Christ."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ CT, no. 20.

¹⁴² 1 Jn 1:3.

¹⁴³ CT, no. 5.

¹⁴⁴ CT, no. 5.

¹⁴⁵ Phil 1:21.

Jesus Christ himself is always the first and last point of reference in catechesis because he is “the way and the truth and the life.”¹⁴⁶

C. Catechesis and the Church

“Catechesis is an essentially ecclesial act”—an action of the Church:

The true subject of catechesis is the Church which, continuing the mission of Jesus the Master and, therefore animated by the Holy Spirit, is sent to be the teacher of the faith. The Church imitates the Mother of the Lord in treasuring the Gospel in her heart. She proclaims it, celebrates it, lives it, and she transmits it in catechesis to all those who have decided to follow Jesus Christ. This transmission of the Gospel is a living act of ecclesial tradition.¹⁴⁷

Thus, catechesis is a pivotal dimension of the Church’s pastoral activity and a significant element in all the Church does to hand on the faith. Every means that the Church employs in her overall mission to go and make disciples has a catechetical aspect. Catechesis gives form to the missionary preaching that is intended to arouse the first signs of faith. It shapes the initial proclamation of the Gospel. Catechesis assists the early examination of reasons for belief. It communicates the essential elements in the experience of Christian living. It prepares for the celebration of the sacraments. It facilitates integration into the ecclesial community. It urges apostolic activity and missionary witness. It instills a zeal for the unity of Christians and prepares one for the ecumenical understanding and mission of the Church. “Catechesis is intimately bound up with the whole of the Church’s life. Not only her geographical extension and numerical increase but even more her inner growth and correspondence with God’s plan depend essentially on catechesis.”¹⁴⁸

The Church is the historical realization of God’s gift of communion in Christ. As such she is the origin, *locus*, and goal of catechesis. Catechesis springs from the Church. “The profession of faith received by the Church (*traditio*), which germinates and grows during the catechetical process, is

given back (*redditio*), enriched by the values of different cultures.”¹⁴⁹ The Church depends on an effective catechesis to be faithful to Christ’s command to proclaim the Gospel. “The Christian community is in herself living catechesis.”¹⁵⁰

The Church is a natural environment for catechesis. She provides the primary setting for the proclamation of the Gospel, the point of welcome for those who seek to know the Lord, the place where men and women are invited to conversion and discipleship, the environment for the celebration of the sacraments, and the motivation for apostolic witness in the world.

The Church is also the goal of catechesis. Catechesis aims to build up the Body of Christ, the Church. “The more the Church, whether on the local or the universal level, gives catechesis priority over other works and undertakings the results of which would be more spectacular, the more she finds in catechesis a strengthening of her internal life as a community of believers and of her external activity as a missionary Church.”¹⁵¹

D. Initiatory Catechesis

Within the Church’s mission of evangelization, catechesis promotes and matures initial conversion, educates persons in the faith, and incorporates them into the life of the Christian community. Today, however, catechesis must often take the form of the primary proclamation of the Gospel because many who present themselves for catechesis have not yet experienced conversion to Jesus Christ. Some level of conversion is necessary, however, if catechesis is to be able to fulfill its proper task of education in the faith.¹⁵²

In some situations initial catechesis precedes Baptism, while in others it follows Baptism; but in all situations, catechesis serves initiation. In seeking to foster the initial faith of the catechumen in the person of Jesus Christ, catechesis leads to a genuine profession of faith. This profession of faith is the goal of catechesis and an inherent element in the sacraments of initiation. It forms the link between the catechesis and the sacraments

146 Jn 14:6.

147 GDC, no. 78.

148 CT, no. 13.

149 GDC, no. 78.

150 GDC, no. 141.

151 CT, no. 15.

152 Cf. International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) and USCCB Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 1988), no. 9.

of initiation, especially Baptism. The aim of catechetical activity is to encourage a living, explicit and fruitful profession of faith.¹⁵³

Initiatory catechesis “should be of a kind that while presenting Catholic teaching in its entirety also enlightens faith, directs the heart toward God, fosters participation in the liturgy, inspires apostolic activity, and nurtures a life completely in accord with the spirit of Christ.”¹⁵⁴ Such initiatory catechesis is a

comprehensive and systematic formation in the faith [that] . . . 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.¹⁵⁵

It is “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.”¹⁵⁶ Initiatory catechesis cultivates the roots of faith, nurtures a distinctively Christian spiritual life, and prepares the person to be nourished at the table of the Eucharist and in the ordinary life of the Christian community.

Initiatory catechesis incorporates those preparing for the sacraments of initiation into the Christian community that knows, lives, celebrates, and bears witness to the faith. The richness of this initiatory catechesis should serve to inspire other forms of catechesis.¹⁵⁷

E. Ongoing Catechesis

Catechesis for those who have received the sacraments of initiation goes beyond that which was provided by initiatory catechesis. It serves the continuing conversion and ongoing formation of those who have been

153 Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church* (*Christus Dominus*) (CD), no. 14.

154 RCIA, no. 78.

155 GDC, no. 67.

156 GDC, no. 67.

157 GDC, no. 68.

initiated into the faith. Such continuing conversion and ongoing formation are the responsibility of the whole Catholic community and occur most fruitfully within the community. Ongoing catechesis fosters the growth of a more mature faith in the members of the community. It aims to make each person’s faith “living, explicit and active, . . . enlightened by doctrine.”¹⁵⁸ While catechesis seeks to enrich the faith life of people at every stage of their development, every form of catechesis is oriented in some way to the catechesis of adults who are capable of a full response to God’s word.¹⁵⁹ Ongoing catechesis is “a lifelong process for the individual and a constant and concerted pastoral activity of the Christian community.”¹⁶⁰ The most effective forms of this lifelong catechesis involve the study and praying of Sacred Scripture, a systematic catechesis that gradually leads people deeper into their relationship with Jesus because they grow in their understanding of who he is and what he has done for us, liturgical and sacramental catechesis, initiatives of spiritual formation, and thorough examination of the Church’s social teachings.

20. TASKS OF CATECHESIS

Jesus formed his disciples by making known to them the various dimensions of the Kingdom of God. He entrusted to them “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven”;¹⁶¹ he taught them how to pray;¹⁶² he opened his “meek and humble heart” to them;¹⁶³ and he sent them “ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit.”¹⁶⁴ The fundamental task of catechesis is to achieve this same objective: the formation of disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus instructed his disciples; he prayed with them; he showed them how to live; and he gave them his mission.

Christ’s method of formation was accomplished by diverse yet inter-related tasks. His example is the most fruitful inspiration for effective catechesis today because it is integral to formation in the Christian faith. Catechesis must attend to each of these different dimensions of faith;

158 CD, no. 14.

159 Cf. *General Catechetical Directory*, no. 20.

160 *National Catechetical Directory*, no. 32.

161 Mt 13:11.

162 Cf. Lk 11:2.

163 Mt 11:29.

164 Lk 10:1.

each becomes a distinct yet complementary task. Faith must be known, celebrated, lived, and expressed in prayer. So catechesis comprises six fundamental tasks, each of which is related to an aspect of faith in Christ. All efforts in evangelization and catechesis should incorporate these tasks.

1. *Catechesis promotes knowledge of the faith.* The initial proclamation of the Gospel introduces the hearers to Christ for the first time and invites conversion to him. By the action of the Holy Spirit, such an encounter engenders in the hearers a desire to know about Christ, his life, and the content of his message. Catechesis responds to this desire by giving the believers a knowledge of the content of God's self-revelation, which is found in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, and by introducing them to the meaning of the Creed. Creeds and doctrinal formulas that state the Church's belief are expressions of the Church's living tradition, which from the time of the apostles has developed "in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit."¹⁶⁵
2. *Catechesis promotes a knowledge of the meaning of the Liturgy and the sacraments.* Since Christ is present in the sacraments,¹⁶⁶ the believer comes to know Christ in the liturgical celebrations of the Church and is drawn into communion with him. Christ's saving action in the Paschal Mystery is celebrated in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, where the closest communion with Jesus on earth is possible as Catholics are able to receive his living Flesh and his Precious Blood in Holy Communion. Catechesis should promote "an active, conscious genuine participation in the liturgy of the Church, not merely by explaining the meaning of the ceremonies, but also by forming the minds of the faithful for prayer, for thanksgiving, for repentance, for praying with confidence, for a community spirit, and for understanding correctly the meaning of the creeds."¹⁶⁷ Sacramental catechesis prepares for the initial celebration of the sacraments and provides enrichment following their reception.

¹⁶⁵ DV, no. 8.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. SC, no. 7.

¹⁶⁷ *General Catechetical Directory*, no. 25.

3. *Catechesis promotes moral formation in Jesus Christ.* Jesus' moral teaching is an integral part of his message. Catechesis must transmit both the content of Christ's moral teachings as well as their implications for Christian living. Moral catechesis aims to conform the believer to Christ—to bring about personal transformation and conversion. It should encourage the faithful to give witness—both in their private lives and in the public arena—to Christ's teaching in everyday life. Such testimony demonstrates the social consequences of the demands of the Gospel.¹⁶⁸
4. *Catechesis teaches the Christian how to pray with Christ.* Conversion to Christ and communion with him lead the faithful to adopt his disposition of prayer and reflection. Jesus' entire life, death, and Resurrection were an offering to his Father. His prayer was always directed toward his Father. Catechesis should invite the believer to join Christ in the Our Father. Prayer should be the ordinary environment for all catechesis so that the knowledge and practice of the Christian life may be understood and celebrated in its proper context.
5. *Catechesis prepares the Christian to live in community and to participate actively in the life and mission of the Church.* Jesus said to his disciples, "Love one another. As I have loved you. . . ."¹⁶⁹ This command provides the basis for the disciples' life in community. Catechesis encourages an apprenticeship in Christian living that is based on Christ's teachings about community life. It should encourage a spirit of simplicity and humility, a special concern for the poor, particular care for the alienated, a sense of fraternal correction, common prayer, mutual forgiveness, and a fraternal love that embraces all these attitudes. Catechesis encourages the disciples of Jesus to make their daily conduct a shining and convincing testimony to the Gospel.¹⁷⁰ "He also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church, as it is written, 'the manifestation

¹⁶⁸ Cf. CT, nos. 29ff.

¹⁶⁹ Jn 13:34.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. CL, nos. 34, 51.

of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit' (1 Cor 12:7).¹⁷¹ Preparation for community life has an ecumenical dimension as well: "In developing this community sense, catechesis takes special note of the ecumenical dimension and encourages fraternal attitudes toward members of other Christian churches and ecclesial communities."¹⁷² It should always provide a clear exposition of all that the Church teaches and at the same time should foster a "true desire for unity"¹⁷³ and inculcate a zeal for the promotion of unity among Christians. Catechesis will have an ecumenical dimension as it prepares the faithful to live in contact with persons of other Christian traditions, "affirming their Catholic identity while respecting the faith of others."¹⁷⁴

6. *Catechesis promotes a missionary spirit that prepares the faithful to be present as Christians in society.* "The 'world' thus becomes the place and the means for the lay faithful to fulfill their Christian vocation."¹⁷⁵ Catechesis seeks to help the disciples of Christ to be present in society precisely as believing Christians who are able and willing to bear witness to their faith in words and deeds. In fostering this spirit of evangelization, catechesis nourishes the evangelical attitudes of Jesus Christ in the faithful: to be poor in spirit, to be compassionate, to be meek, to hear the cry of injustice, to be merciful, to be pure of heart, to make peace, and to accept rejection and persecution.¹⁷⁶ Catechesis recognizes that other religious traditions reflect the "seeds of the Word"¹⁷⁷ that can constitute a true "preparation for the Gospel."¹⁷⁸ It encourages adherents of the world's religions to share what they hold in common, never minimizing the real differences between and among them. "Dialogue is not in opposition to the mission *ad gentes*."¹⁷⁹

171 LG, no. 12.

172 GDC, no. 86.

173 CT, no. 32.

174 CT, no. 32.

175 LG, no. 16.

176 Cf. Mt 5:3-11.

177 AG, no. 11.

178 LG, no. 16.

179 RM, no. 55. Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate)* (NA).

These six tasks of catechesis constitute a unified whole by which catechesis seeks to achieve its objective: the formation of disciples of Jesus Christ. All these tasks are necessary in order to attain the full development of the Christian faith. Each task, from its own perspective, realizes the object of catechesis, and all the tasks are interdependent. Knowledge of the Christian faith, for example, leads to celebrating it in the sacramental Liturgy. Participation in the sacramental life encourages moral transformation in Christ. Christian moral living leads to prayer, enhances community life, and encourages a missionary spirit. To accomplish these tasks, catechesis depends on the "transmission of the Gospel message and experience of the Christian life."¹⁸⁰ "It is very important that catechesis retain the richness of these various aspects in such a way that one aspect is not separated from the rest to the detriment of others."¹⁸¹

21. INCULTURATION OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

A. The Mystery of the Incarnation: Model of Evangelization

Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit, became man—a particular man in space and time and within a specific culture. In the mystery of his incarnation, Jesus Christ is the human face of God and the divine face of humanity.¹⁸² The incarnation of the only Son of God is the original inculturation of God's word. The mystery of the incarnation is also the model of all evangelization by the Church. Every culture needs to be transformed by Gospel values because the Gospel always demands a conversion of attitudes and practices wherever it is preached. Cultures must often be purified and restored in Christ.

B. The Evangelization of Culture

Just as "the Word became flesh / and made his dwelling among us,"¹⁸³ so too the Good News, the word of God proclaimed to the nations, must

180 GDC, no. 87.

181 *General Catechetical Directory*, no. 31.

182 Cf. EA, no. 67.

183 Jn 1:14.

take root in the life situation of the hearers of the word. Inculturation is precisely the insertion of the Gospel message into cultures. Inculturation is a requirement for evangelization, a path toward full evangelization. It is the process by which “catechesis ‘takes flesh’ in the various cultures.”¹⁸⁴

“The new evangelization calls for a clearly conceived, serious and well organized effort to evangelize culture.”¹⁸⁵ The inculturation of the faith is a complex and deliberate process. It “needs to take place gradually, in such a way that it really is an expression of the community’s Christian experience.”¹⁸⁶ “It is not simply an external adaptation designed to make the Christian message more attractive or superficially decorative.”¹⁸⁷

C. The Process of Inculturation

The inculturation of the Gospel occurs within a dynamic process that has several interactive elements. Inculturation involves listening to the culture of the people for an echo of the word of God. It involves the discernment of the presence of authentic Gospel values or openness to authentic Gospel values in the culture. This discernment is governed by two basic principles: “compatibility with the Gospel and communion with the universal Church.”¹⁸⁸ It involves, when necessary, the purification of the elements in the culture that may be hostile or adverse to the Gospel. And it involves an invitation to conversion.

True inculturation occurs when the gospel penetrates the heart of cultural experience and shows how Christ gives new meaning to authentic human values. However, the Church must never allow herself to be absorbed by any culture, since not all cultural expressions are in conformity with the gospel. The Church retains the indispensable duty of testing and evaluating cultural expressions in the light of her understanding of revealed truth. Cultures, like individual human beings and societies, need to be purified by the blood of Christ.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ CT, no. 53.

¹⁸⁵ EA, no. 70.

¹⁸⁶ RM, no. 54.

¹⁸⁷ GDC, no. 109.

¹⁸⁸ RM, no. 54.

¹⁸⁹ USCCB, *To the Ends of the Earth: A Pastoral Statement on World Mission* (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 1986), no. 44.

The inculturation of the Gospel message is an urgent mission for the dioceses in the United States because it correlates faith and life. It seeks to dispose the people of the United States, who live in a multicultural and pluralistic society, to receive Jesus Christ in every dimension of their life. The process of inculturation must involve the people to whom the Gospel is addressed, so that they can receive the faith and reflect it. It touches them on the personal, cultural, economic, and political levels so that they can live a holy life in total union with God the Father, through the action of the Holy Spirit. “It is necessary to inculturate preaching in such a way that the Gospel is proclaimed in the language and in the culture of its hearers.”¹⁹⁰

In the inculturation of the faith, catechesis has several specific tasks:

- To discover the seeds of the Gospel that may be present in the culture
- To know and respect the essential elements and basic expressions of the culture of the persons to whom it is addressed
- To recognize that the Gospel message is both transcendent and immanent—it is not bound by the limitations of any single human culture, yet it has a cultural dimension, that in which Jesus of Nazareth lived
- To proclaim the transforming and regenerating force that the Gospel works in every culture
- To promote a new enthusiasm for the Gospel in accordance with evangelized culture
- To use the language and culture of the people as a foundation to express the common faith of the Church
- To maintain the integral content of faith and avoid obscuring the content of the Christian message by adaptations that would compromise or diminish the deposit of faith

Within the ecclesial community, the catechist is an important instrument of inculturation. The catechist has encountered Christ, has been converted by Christ, follows Christ, and shares in Christ’s life and mission. The catechist also possesses a living social conscience and is well rooted in the cultural environment. Thus, the catechist needs to be alert to all these tasks that incarnate the Gospel in a particular culture and

¹⁹⁰ EA, no. 70.

likewise introduce the culture into the life of the Church. At the same time, the faithful have a right to receive the whole deposit of faith; catechists “must take diligent care faithfully to present the entire treasure of the Christian message.”¹⁹¹

Effective catechesis presents the authentic Gospel message, “the words of eternal life.”¹⁹² The genuine deposit of faith given by Christ to his apostles and preserved by them for more than two thousand years must be faithfully handed on to future generations of Christians.

Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life. But on the other hand, evangelization risks losing its power and disappearing altogether if one empties or adulterates its content under the pretext of translating it.¹⁹³

The evangelization of culture through the communication of the complete and authentic Gospel message, and the inculturation of that message through a profound dialogue between it and the language, customs, and practices of a people, constitute what Pope Paul VI termed the “drama of our time.”¹⁹⁴

D. Inculturation and the Media

Especially in the United States, “the very evangelization of modern culture depends to a great extent on the influence of the media.”¹⁹⁵ In fact, the mass media are so influential that they have a culture of their own, which has its own language, customs, and values. Heralds of the Gospel must enter the world of the mass media, learn as much as possible about that culture, evangelize that culture, and determine how best to employ the media to serve the Christian message.

If the new evangelization of the mass media is going to be effective, however, the Church must deepen her understanding of the culture in which the communications media are so consequential and learn how to make proper use of the media to proclaim Christ’s message. Pastoral ministers need to be trained as specialists in communications technology; state-of-the-art production centers need to be set up; communication networks need to be developed; and the faithful need to learn how to be more discriminating in their use of the media, especially in their homes. “Using the media correctly and competently can lead to a genuine inculturation of the Gospel.”¹⁹⁶

22. CONCLUSION

Evangelization is so central to the life of the Church that, should she neglect her sacred responsibility of bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ to all of humanity, she would be faithful neither to the mission entrusted to her by her Lord nor to her identity as mother and teacher. As it is, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church’s ministry of evangelization animates her life. The pastoral and missionary activity that constitute the Church’s resolute commitment to evangelize comprises certain elements that have distinctly catechetical aspects: the initial proclamation of the Gospel that awakens faith, the examination of reasons for belief, the celebration of the sacraments, the experience of Christian living and integration into the ecclesial community, and apostolic witness. The Church’s mission of evangelization is permeated by catechesis. While catechesis and evangelization cannot be simply identified with one another, “there is no separation or opposition between catechesis and evangelization. . . . Instead, they have close links whereby they integrate and complement each other.”¹⁹⁷

Catechesis is so central to the Church’s mission of evangelization that, if evangelization were to fail to integrate catechesis, initial faith aroused by the original proclamation of the Gospel would not mature, education in the faith through a deeper knowledge of the person and message of Jesus Christ would not transpire, and discipleship in Christ

191 *General Catechetical Directory*, no. 38, cited in GDC, no. 112.

192 Jn 6:68.

193 EN, no. 63.

194 EN, no. 20.

195 RM, no. 37.

196 EA, no. 72.

197 CT, no. 18.

through genuine apostolic witness would not be fostered. Catechesis nurtures the seed of faith sown by the Holy Spirit through the initial proclamation of the Gospel. It gives growth to the gift of faith given in Baptism and elaborates the meaning of the sacraments. Catechesis develops a deeper understanding of the mystery of Christ, encourages more profound incorporation into the Church, and nourishes Christian living. It encourages discipleship in Christ and instructs in Christian prayer. Just as the mission of evangelization enlivens the Church's pastoral and missionary activity, catechesis makes concrete her mission of evangelization. It constitutes the "good news" that Christ commissioned his apostles to spread throughout the whole world and announce to every person.¹⁹⁸ This good news, which is the faith of the Church, will be presented in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

This Is Our Faith; This Is the Faith of the Church

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. (1 Cor 15:3-5)

23. INTRODUCTION

In expressing and handing on the faith that Jesus entrusted to them before he ascended to his Father, the apostles made use of brief summaries by which all could come to know the fundamental content of Christian belief and preaching. These initial creedal statements synthesized the Christian faith and became the original catechetical reference points for the apostolic Church. They were the first professions of faith; they were intended especially for candidates for Baptism; and they have preserved the substance of the Christian message for people of all the nations for more than two thousand years.

Since the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is a catechesis of the Creed, this chapter presents a brief introduction to it in order to facilitate its better understanding and use in the catechetical ministry. This chapter also provides the criteria for the authentic presentation of the Christian message in the United States at this time in history.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Mk 16:15.

24. THE SYMPHONY OF THE FAITH

A. Normative Instruments of Catechesis

Sacred Scripture, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the *General Directory for Catechesis*, and this *National Directory for Catechesis* are distinct yet complementary instruments that serve the Church's catechetical activity. The *General Directory for Catechesis* provides "the basic principles of pastoral theology taken from the Magisterium of the Church, and in a special way from the Second Vatican Council, by which pastoral action in the ministry of the word can be more fittingly directed and governed."¹⁹⁹ This *National Directory for Catechesis* contains the general guidelines for catechesis in the United States and has been prepared by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* gives a plan and strategies for development of an effective ministry of adult faith formation in parish life.

B. Sacred Scripture

Sacred Scripture, the word of God written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has the preeminent position in the life of the Catholic Church and especially in the ministry of evangelization and catechesis. The earliest forms of Christian catechesis made regular use of the Old Testament and the personal witness of the apostles and disciples that would become the New Testament. Much of the catechesis of the patristic period took the form of commentary on the word of God contained in Sacred Scripture. Through all the ages of the Church, the study of Sacred Scripture has been the cornerstone of catechesis. The Second Vatican Council advised that catechesis, as one form of the ministry of the word, should be nurtured and should thrive in holiness through the word of the Scripture.²⁰⁰ Catechesis should take Sacred Scripture as its inspiration, its fundamental curriculum, and its end because it strengthens faith, nourishes the soul, and nurtures the spiritual life. "Scripture provides the starting point, foundation, and norm of catechetical teaching."²⁰¹ Catechesis

199 GDC, no. 120.

200 Cf. DV, no. 12.

201 Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 1994), 39.

should assume the thought and perspective of Sacred Scripture and make frequent direct use of the biblical texts themselves. "The presentation of the Gospels should be done in such a way as to elicit an encounter with Christ, who provides the key to the whole biblical revelation and communicates the call of God that summons each one to respond."²⁰²

C. The Catechism of the Catholic Church

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is an act of the Magisterium promulgated by Pope John Paul II by virtue of his apostolic authority.²⁰³ It is "a statement of the Church's faith and of catholic doctrine, attested to or illumined by Sacred Scripture, the Apostolic Tradition, and the Church's Magisterium."²⁰⁴ It "aims at presenting an organic synthesis of the essential and fundamental contents of Catholic doctrine, as regards both faith and morals, in the light of the Second Vatican Council and the whole of the Church's Tradition."²⁰⁵ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion; it is a sure norm for teaching the faith and an authentic reference text for teaching Catholic doctrine and particularly for preparing local catechisms. However, the *Catechism* is not just an authentic reference text; it is a beautiful collection of the truths of the Catholic faith, following in the footsteps of the early Church. The foundation of the *Catechism* is Sacred Scripture, and it includes writings of the Fathers, doctors, and saints of the Church. It is not intended to replace local catechisms, but rather to encourage the preparation of new local catechisms that take into account particular cultures and preserve the unity of faith and fidelity to Catholic doctrine.²⁰⁶

This *National Directory for Catechesis*, as far as the content of the Christian message is concerned, presumes and refers to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The following exposition of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* seeks not to summarize its content but instead to facilitate its better understanding and use in the catechetical ministry in the United States.

202 *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 39.

203 Cf. John Paul II, *On the Publication of the "Catechism of the Catholic Church" (Fidei Depositum)* (FD), no. 3. In CCC.

204 FD, no. 3.

205 CCC, no. 11.

206 Cf. FD, no. 3.

Pope John Paul II has called the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* “the ‘symphony’ of the faith”²⁰⁷ because it is the result of the collaboration of the whole Episcopate of the Catholic Church throughout the world and because it expresses the harmony of their confession of the faith.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is structured around four fundamental dimensions of the Christian life: (1) the profession of faith, (2) the celebration of the Liturgy, (3) Christian moral life, and (4) prayer. These four parts correspond to the essential aspects of the Christian mystery: (1) belief in the Triune God and his saving plan in Jesus Christ, (2) celebration of Christ’s saving actions in the sacramental life, (3) living life in Christ, and (4) expression of the Christian faith in prayer. This structure in turn derives from the profound unity of the Christian life.

The Church professes this mystery [of the faith] in the Apostles’ Creed (*Part One*) and celebrates it in the sacramental liturgy (*Part Two*), so that the life of the faithful may be conformed to Christ in the Holy Spirit to the glory of God the Father (*Part Three*). This mystery, then, requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and that they live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is prayer (*Part Four*).²⁰⁸

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is the doctrinal point of reference for education in the basic tasks of catechesis.²⁰⁹ However, it does not impose a predetermined format for the presentation of doctrine.

The inspiration of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* derives from the person of Jesus Christ as he reveals the mystery of the Holy Trinity and the mystery of the human person. Through Jesus Christ, we come to know God and his divine plan for our salvation, we come to know ourselves and our destiny, and we come to know how to live. These are the four golden threads of the *Catechism*: the Blessed Trinity; Jesus as God and Man; the Paschal Mystery of Jesus’ passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension into heaven attaining our salvation; the dignity of the human person.

As the central mystery of the Catholic faith, the mystery of the Triune God animates and orders the presentation of the Christian message

in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The profession of faith is precisely a confession of faith in the Holy Trinity. It is divided into the fundamental doctrinal formulations that state Christian belief in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It presents the sacraments and the Liturgy as the “work of the Holy Trinity.”²¹⁰ It presents the Christian life as directed by the Trinity: “Everyone who follows Christ does so because the Father draws him and the Spirit moves him.”²¹¹ The profession of faith presents the prayer of the believer as “a communion with the Holy Trinity.”²¹²

The mystery of the human person is woven throughout the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as well. Every human person longs to know God. “‘Believing’ is a human act, conscious and free, corresponding to the dignity of the human person.”²¹³ The celebration of the Christian mystery in the Church’s Liturgy and sacraments expresses the faith in words and signs that make sense to the human person. “It is with and through their own human culture, assumed and transfigured by Christ, that the multitude of God’s children has access to the Father, in order to glorify him in the one Spirit.”²¹⁴ In seeking to conform their lives to Christ, Christians are called to lead a life “worthy of the gospel of Christ.”²¹⁵ “The vocation of humanity is to show forth the image of God and to be transformed into the image of the Father’s only Son.”²¹⁶ By deliberate actions, the human person “does, or does not, conform to the good promised by God and attested by moral conscience.”²¹⁷ Christian prayer is “the life of the new heart. It ought to animate us at every moment.”²¹⁸

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is a catechism for the universal Church. As a catechism, it is “an organic presentation of the Catholic faith in its entirety.”²¹⁹ It is universal in scope because it presents the “events and fundamental salvific truths which express the faith common to the People of God and which constitute the indispensable basic reference for

207 FD, no. 1.

208 CCC, no. 2558.

209 See Chapter 2 of this *Directory*.

210 CCC, no. 1077.

211 CCC, no. 259.

212 CCC, no. 2655.

213 CCC, no. 180.

214 CCC, no. 1204.

215 Phil 1:27.

216 CCC, no. 1877.

217 CCC, no. 1700.

218 CCC, no. 2697.

219 CCC, no. 18.

catechesis.”²²⁰ It seeks “to link the wondrous unity of the Christian mystery with the varied needs and conditions of those to whom this message is addressed.”²²¹ However,

by design, this *Catechism* does not set out to provide the adaptation of doctrinal presentations and catechetical methods required by the differences of culture, age, spiritual maturity, and social and ecclesial condition among all those to whom it is addressed. Such indispensable adaptations are the responsibility of particular catechisms and, even more, of those who instruct the faithful.²²²

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* presents and preserves the deposit of faith. The deposit of faith is the heritage of faith contained in Sacred Scripture and Tradition and handed on in the Church from the time of the apostles—a heritage from which the Magisterium draws all that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed. “Catechesis will find in this genuine, systematic presentation of the faith and of Catholic doctrine a totally reliable way to present, with renewed fervor, each and every part of the Christian message to the people of our time. This text will provide every catechist with sound help for communicating the one, perennial deposit of faith within the local Church.”²²³

Sacred Scripture has a preeminent position in catechesis because Sacred Scripture “present[s] God’s own Word in unalterable form” and “make[s] the voice of the holy Spirit resound again and again in the words of the prophets and apostles.”²²⁴ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is intended to complement Sacred Scripture. Together with Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture constitutes the supreme rule of faith.

In practice, this means that catechesis must be permeated with biblical and evangelical thought, spirit, and attitudes through constant use of and reference to the word of God. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is not superior to the word of God but is, rather, at its service. Each nourishes the

²²⁰ GDC, no. 124.

²²¹ John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter in Which the Latin Typical Edition of the “Catechism of the Catholic Church” Is Approved and Promulgated (Laetamur Magnopere)* (LM) (1997), xv. In CCC.

²²² CCC, no. 24.

²²³ LM, p. xv.

²²⁴ DV, no. 21.

ministry of catechesis: “Both Sacred Scripture and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* must inform biblical as well as doctrinal catechesis so that they become true vehicles of the content of God’s word.”²²⁵

In addition, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* retrieves several important aspects of the catechetical tradition of the Church Fathers, who placed a high priority on the baptismal catechumenate in the life of the local churches. They emphasized the gradual and progressive movement of Christian initiation and formation through a series of stages and rituals. This was acknowledged when the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council called for the restoration of the adult catechumenate largely as it was celebrated and preserved in the patristic tradition.²²⁶

25. CRITERIA FOR THE AUTHENTIC PRESENTATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE

The word of God contained in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition is the single source of the fundamental criteria for the presentation of the Christian message. The presentation of the Christian message

- Centers on Jesus Christ
- Introduces the Trinitarian dimension of the Gospel message
- Proclaims the Good News of salvation and liberation
- Comes from and leads to the Church
- Has a historical character
- Seeks inculturation and preserves the integrity and purity of the message
- Offers the comprehensive message of the Gospel and respects its inherent hierarchy of truths
- Communicates the profound dignity of the human person
- Fosters a common language of the faith

A. The Christian Message, Centered on Christ

The Christian message concentrates on the person of Jesus Christ. Above all, catechesis must transmit this centrality of Christ in the Gospel message.

²²⁵ GDC, no. 128.

²²⁶ Cf. SC, no. 64.

Catechesis that is centered on Christ presents Christ first and presents everything else with reference to him,²²⁷ for he is the center of the Gospel message. "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.'"²²⁸

Catechesis that is centered on Christ presents Christ as "the center of the history of salvation."²²⁹ He came "in the fullness of time."²³⁰ As the definitive Revelation of God, he is the point in salvation history toward which the created order proceeds from the beginning of time and the final event toward which it converges. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."²³¹ He is "the key, the center and the purpose of the whole of man's history."²³²

Christ-centered catechesis presents the Gospel message as the word of God written down by human authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.²³³ It transmits "the teaching of Jesus Christ, the Truth that he communicates or, to put it more precisely, the Truth that he is."²³⁴

Because the Gospels narrate the life of Jesus and the mystery of our redemption after Christ and the Reign of God that he proclaimed, catechesis will also be centered on Christ if the Gospels occupy a pivotal place within it. They "are our principal source for the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our Savior."²³⁵ They transmit the life, message, and saving actions of Jesus Christ and express the teaching that was proposed to the first Christian communities. Catechesis must be centered in the Gospels, because "Jesus Christ is their center."²³⁶

In presenting catechesis that is centered on Christ, dioceses and parishes should

227 Cf. CT, no. 6.

228 CT, no. 5.

229 *General Catechetical Directory*, no. 41.

230 Eph 1:10.

231 Heb 13:8.

232 Second Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* (GS), no. 10.

233 CCC, nos. 105-106.

234 CT, no. 6.

235 DV, no. 18.

236 CCC, no. 139.

- Explicitly and consistently proclaim the name, teaching, promises, and mystery of Jesus Christ, as well as his announcement of the coming of the Reign of God
- Develop, through effective preaching, teaching, adult faith formation, and catechist formation programs, the personal relationship that Christ has initiated with each of his disciples
- Promote conversion to Jesus Christ and communion with him through the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist
- Teach, in a way that can be understood by specific cultures, that Christ is the ultimate meaning and purpose of history; and provide programs that help all who catechize to present the teachings of Christ "about God, man, happiness, the moral life, death, etc. without in any way changing his thought"²³⁷
- Help all who catechize to understand that, like Jesus, their teaching is not their own but, rather, comes from God²³⁸

B. The Trinitarian Character of the Christian Message

The Christian message is inherently Trinitarian because its source is the incarnate Word of the Father, Jesus Christ, who speaks to the world through his Holy Spirit.²³⁹ Anointed by the Holy Spirit, Jesus' life is constantly oriented to the Father. He teaches in communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He leads us to the mystery of God in himself: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Christian life and the Christian message are radically Trinitarian.

In presenting catechesis that is Trinitarian in nature, dioceses and parishes should help all who catechize to

- Understand that their presentation of the Gospel message must always proceed "through Christ, to the Father, in the Holy Spirit"²⁴⁰ and "lead to [a] confession of faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit"²⁴¹

237 GDC, no. 98.

238 Cf. Jn 7:16.

239 The witness of the Eastern Catholic Churches to the explicitly Trinitarian character of Christian theology, liturgy, and spirituality has been a fruitful source of inspiration for the whole Church.

240 *General Catechetical Directory*, no. 41.

241 GDC, no. 99.

- Present God's plan of loving kindness, which was conceived by the Father, was fulfilled in the Son, and is directed by the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church
- Understand that the primary subject of catechesis is the mystery of the Holy Trinity, "the central mystery of Christian faith and life"²⁴²
- Present the fact that the innermost being of God, in whose image all are made, is a communion of love with vital implications for Christian living
- Draw out the moral implications for Christians who are called to be a people gathered in the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

C. The Christian Message That Proclaims the Good News of Salvation and Liberation from Sin

The Christian message proclaims the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. Jesus' announcement of the Kingdom of God marks a new and definitive intervention by God "with a transforming power equal and even superior to his creation of the world."²⁴³ Christ's proclamation of salvation is the "center of his Good News."²⁴⁴

The Good News of the Kingdom of God, which proclaims salvation, includes a message of liberation for all, but especially for the poor. Jesus addressed his announcement of the kingdom principally to the frail, the vulnerable, the disabled, and the poor—not only the economically poor, but the culturally and religiously poor as well.²⁴⁵ The Beatitudes proclaim the liberation that the kingdom brings. It is not merely a liberation from all the forms of injustice that oppress people; it is especially a liberation from sin.

Liberation from sin is the fundamental form of freedom from which all liberation emerges. Christ's message of liberation brought "glad tidings to the poor." He was sent "to proclaim liberty to captives / and recovery of sight to the blind, / to let the oppressed go free, / and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord,"²⁴⁶ precisely so that the oppressed might be open to the action of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

²⁴² CCC, no. 234.

²⁴³ GDC, no. 101.

²⁴⁴ EN, no. 9.

²⁴⁵ Cf. John Paul II, *On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum (Centesimus Annus)* (CA) (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 1991), no. 57.

²⁴⁶ Lk 4:18-19.

In presenting catechesis that proclaims the Good News of salvation, dioceses and parishes should transmit the fundamental message of the Kingdom of God by emphasizing several basic points that Jesus made throughout his preaching:

1. God is a loving Father who abides with his people.
2. With the coming of the kingdom, God offers us salvation, frees us from sin, brings us into communion with him and all humanity, and promises eternal salvation.
3. The Kingdom of God is one of justice, love, and peace, in the light of which we shall be judged.
4. The Kingdom of God is inaugurated in the person of Jesus Christ;²⁴⁷ it is in mystery present now on the earth and will be perfected when the Lord returns.
5. The Church, the community of disciples, "is, on earth, the seed and the beginning of that kingdom"²⁴⁸ and "is effectively and concretely at the service of the Kingdom."²⁴⁹
6. The Church offers a foretaste of the world to come, and human life is a journey back to God.

Catechesis helps the Christian faithful to integrate Christ's message of liberation in several important ways. It first situates his message of liberation within the "specifically religious objective of evangelization."²⁵⁰ Therefore, dioceses and parishes should help the Christian faithful to integrate Christ's message of liberation by

- Situating his message of liberation within the "specifically religious finality of evangelization"²⁵¹
- Ensuring that the message of liberation "cannot be contained in the simple and restricted dimension of economics, politics, social or cultural life"²⁵²

²⁴⁷ Cf. LG, no. 3.

²⁴⁸ LG, no. 5.

²⁴⁹ RM, no. 20.

²⁵⁰ EN, no. 32.

²⁵¹ EN, no. 32.

²⁵² EN, no. 33.

- Presenting Christian social morality as a demand of the Gospel's message of liberation and a consequence of the great commandment of love
- Arousing "a love of preference for the poor"²⁵³ in those being catechized
- Emphasizing that "what is already due in justice is not to be offered as a gift of charity"²⁵⁴

D. The Ecclesial Character of the Christian Message

Catechesis has a distinctly ecclesial character because the Christian community transmits the Gospel essentially as it has received it, understands it, celebrates it, lives it and communicates it.²⁵⁵ Apostles received the Gospel message directly from Christ under the action of the Holy Spirit and preached it to the first Christian communities. Martyrs bore witness to it by their blood. Saints have lived it deeply. Fathers and Doctors of the Church have taught it wisely. Bishops have carefully preserved it with zeal and love and interpreted it authentically. Missionaries have proclaimed it courageously. Theologians have helped others understand it.²⁵⁶ The People of God have applied it more fully in their daily lives. All continue these efforts today.

Although the community of the disciples of Jesus Christ is spread throughout the world, the Gospel message that binds them together is one; it is the same faith that is transmitted in many different languages and through many cultures. The Church has constantly and consistently confessed this: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."²⁵⁷

"Catechesis originates in the Church's confession of faith and leads to the profession of faith of the catechumen and those to be catechized."²⁵⁸ In presenting catechesis, dioceses and parishes should ensure that catechesis

²⁵³ John Paul II, *On Social Concern (Sollicitudo Rei Socialis)* (SRS) (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 1988), no. 42.

²⁵⁴ Second Vatican Council, *Decree on the Apostolate of the Lay People (Apostolicam Actuositatem)* (AA), no. 8.

²⁵⁵ Cf. CCC, no. 2558.

²⁵⁶ Cf. GDC, no. 105.

²⁵⁷ Eph 4:5-6.

²⁵⁸ GDC, no. 105.

- Transmits the one faith to all peoples
- Introduces catechumens and those to be catechized to the unity of the profession of faith
- Nourishes the unity of the Body of Christ

E. The Historical Character of the Christian Message

The Gospel message of salvation in Jesus Christ has a distinctly historical character. Jesus Christ is a historical figure who preached the Good News of the coming of the Kingdom of God in time. The Incarnation, passion, death, and Resurrection of Christ are real historical events. Jesus Christ poured out his Holy Spirit and established the Church on Pentecost, thereby ushering in a new era of salvation history: the age of the Church. During this era, Christ is revealing the work of salvation in the life of the Church "until he comes" again.²⁵⁹

While the Church transcends history, she is also part of it. For her part, the Church remembers the saving events of the past and makes them known in every age. These events constitute the "constant 'memory'" of the Church.²⁶⁰ Christ lives now and acts now in and with his Church. His gift to the Church, the Holy Spirit, continues to "renew the face of the earth"²⁶¹ as the Church awaits the return of her Lord and Savior.

In presenting the historical character of the Christian message, dioceses and parishes should ensure that catechesis

- Proclaims the words and deeds of God throughout history
- Presents salvation history as it is set forth in Sacred Scripture through
 1. The various stages of Revelation in the Old Testament
 2. The fulfillment of Revelation in the life and teaching of Jesus
 3. The history of the Church whose responsibility it is to transmit Revelation to future generations
- Helps to interpret the meaning of the events of salvation history for the present age in light of Revelation

²⁵⁹ 1 Cor 11:26.

²⁶⁰ GDC, no. 107.

²⁶¹ Ps 104:30.

- Situates the sacraments within the history of salvation and helps those being catechized to “re-read and re-live the great events of salvation history in the ‘today’ of [the Church’s] liturgy”²⁶²
- Helps those being catechized to understand the mystery at work in the historical events of salvation: the mystery of the Son of God at work in his humanity, the mystery of salvation at work in the history of the Church, and the evidence of God’s presence at work in the signs of the times²⁶³
- Contributes to a healing of memories, to the reevaluation of past animosities and stereotypes among Christians, and to the interpretation of the past in a new way in the light of ecumenical developments

F. The Inculturation of the Christian Message

The inculturation of the Gospel is also a key criterion for the pastoral presentation of the Christian message because the Good News of Jesus Christ is intended for people of all cultures. It is not a superficial adaptation designed to make the Gospel more pleasing to its hearers. It is, rather, a process that brings the transforming power of the Gospel to touch persons in their hearts and cultures at their deepest levels.

In presenting catechesis that is both an inculturation of the Christian message and a careful preservation of the authenticity of that message, dioceses and parishes are encouraged to

- Present the same Gospel message that was given by Jesus Christ in its integrity and purity, avoiding any division, subtraction, or distortion of it
- Look to the Church as the principal agent of inculturation and involve persons of various cultures in planning the catechetical mission
- Gather information on the diverse cultural makeup of the community
- Develop and use culturally appropriate catechetical methods, tools, texts, and resources

²⁶² CCC, no. 1095.

²⁶³ Cf. GDC, no. 108.

- Cultivate catechetical leadership that reflects the cultural diversity of the locality
- Prepare catechists in their native language and cultural situations
- Rely on catechists who not only have “a profound religious sense [but] also possess a living social conscience and [are] well rooted in [their] cultural environment”²⁶⁴
- Ensure that catechesis is grounded in the cultural environment in which it is presented
- Respond to the various requirements of diverse cultures
- Ensure that catechesis employs popular devotions and the distinctive symbols of faith common to various cultural groups
- Ensure that catechetical initiatives work toward making the catechumenate and catechetical formation programs into centers of inculturation that employ, with proper discernment, the language, symbols, and values of the catechumens and those being catechized
- Enable those being catechized to become more able to explain the faith to others in the culture in which they live and to be able to give “reason for [their] hope”²⁶⁵

G. The Comprehensive Hierarchical Character of the Christian Message

The “organic hierarchical character”²⁶⁶ of the Christian message is another vital criterion for the presentation of the Gospel. The harmony and coherence of the Christian message require that the different truths of the faith be organized around a center, the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity: “the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them.”²⁶⁷

“In Catholic doctrine there exists an order or ‘hierarchy’ of truths, since they vary in their relation to the foundation of the Christian faith.”²⁶⁸ The existence of a hierarchy of truths does not provide the grounds for ignoring or eliminating some truths of the faith. Neither should such a hierarchy be confused with the assignment of degrees of

²⁶⁴ GDC, no. 110.

²⁶⁵ 1 Pt 3:15.

²⁶⁶ CT, no. 31.

²⁶⁷ CCC, no. 234.

²⁶⁸ Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis Redintegratio)* (UR), no. 11.

certainty to the individual truths of the faith: “This hierarchy does not mean that some truths pertain to faith itself less than others, but rather that some truths are based on others as of a higher priority, and are illumined by them.”²⁶⁹

All levels of catechesis should carefully consider the hierarchy of truths in the presentation of the Christian message. All aspects and dimensions of the Christian message are related to these principle truths. In presenting the comprehensive hierarchical character of the Christian message, dioceses and parishes should ensure that catechesis presents

- The Christian message, organized around its central truths: “the mystery of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Creator of all things; the mystery of Christ the incarnate Word, who was born of the Virgin Mary, and who suffered, died, and rose for our salvation; the mystery of the Holy Spirit, who is present in the Church, sanctifying it and guiding it until the glorious coming of Christ, our Savior and Judge; and the mystery of the Church, which is Christ’s Mystical Body, in which the Virgin Mary holds the preeminent place”²⁷⁰
- Baptism as the foundational sacrament of Christian life, which celebrates the saving action of Christ’s life, death, and Resurrection; which grafts us onto the vine that is Christ; and which gives us a share in his mission to realize the Reign of God
- The history of salvation, organized in reference to Jesus Christ, the “center of the history of salvation”²⁷¹
- The Apostles’ Creed as “a synthesis of and a key to reading all of the Church’s doctrine, which is hierarchically ordered around it”²⁷²
- The sacraments as “an organic whole in which each particular sacrament has its own vital place”²⁷³
- The Eucharist as the “Sacrament of sacraments,” to which all the other sacraments are ordered as to their end²⁷⁴

- The double commandment of love of God and neighbor as the centerpiece of Jesus’ moral teaching, summing up the Decalogue and lived in the spirit of the Beatitudes—“the whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments”²⁷⁵
- The Our Father as the synthesis of prayer contained in Sacred Scripture and in the life of the Church²⁷⁶

H. The Communication of Profound Meaning for the Human Person

Another criterion for the presentation of the Christian message is that it must convey a profoundly meaningful message for the human person. Jesus Christ is “the image of the invisible God, / the firstborn of all creation.”²⁷⁷ In the mystery of his incarnation, Christ has united himself to every human being. He is the perfect man who reveals to all human beings their own true nature and their eternal destiny in communion with God. If we seek to know ourselves and the meaning of our lives, we should look to Christ, for “he worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved.”²⁷⁸

In presenting catechesis that communicates profound meaning for the human person, dioceses and parishes should ensure

- That catechesis not only reveals God’s identity but, in doing so, reveals the deepest truths about human beings: that we are made in God’s image, that we are religious beings by nature, that the desire for God is written on our hearts, that God never ceases to draw us to himself, and that we are made to live in communion with him
- That catechesis is concerned with the ultimate meaning of life and its deepest questions
- That catechesis examines the more significant experiences of life in light of the Gospel

269 *General Catechetical Directory*, no. 43.

270 *General Catechetical Directory*, no. 43.

271 *General Catechetical Directory*, no. 41.

272 GDC, no. 115.

273 CCC, no. 1211.

274 Cf. CCC, no. 1211.

275 Mt 22:40.

276 Cf. GDC, no. 115.

277 Col 1:15.

278 GS, no. 22.

- That the initial proclamation of the Gospel is done with an awareness of human nature and shows how the Gospel fully satisfies the aspirations of the human heart²⁷⁹
- That biblical catechesis helps to interpret human experiences in the light of the experiences of the people of Israel and of Jesus Christ and his Church
- That doctrinal catechesis, based on the Creed, shows how the great themes of the faith are sources of life and enlightenment for human beings
- That moral catechesis is a “catechesis of the beatitudes, for the way of Christ is summed up in the beatitudes, the only path that leads to the eternal beatitude for which the human heart longs”²⁸⁰
- That liturgical catechesis explains the signs and symbols of the sacred rites corresponding to human experiences²⁸¹
- That ecumenical catechesis helps all the faithful who are called upon to make a personal commitment toward promoting increasing communion with other Christians²⁸²
- That catechesis seeks to dispose people “to hope in the future life that is the consummation of the whole history of salvation”²⁸³

I. The Promotion of a Common Language of Faith in Transmitting the Christian Message

The final criterion for the presentation of the Christian message is that it should foster a common language of the faith so that it may be proclaimed, celebrated, lived, and prayed in words familiar to all the faithful. “We do not believe in formulas, but in those realities they express, which faith allows us to touch.”²⁸⁴ But as Catholics we do rely on the formulations of the faith to express and probe the meanings of the mysteries that the formulas attempt to describe. We also need familiar formulations of the faith in order to hand it on to future generations of believers. The

279 Cf. AG, no. 8.

280 CCC, no. 1697.

281 Cf. GDC, no. 117.

282 Cf. UUS, no. 8.

283 Col 1:23.

284 CCC, no. 170.

Church has guarded the words of the Lord since he spoke them and since apostolic times has preserved the formulations of the faith.

In presenting catechesis that fosters a common language of the faith, dioceses and parishes should ensure that catechesis

- Respects and values “the language proper to the message, especially biblical language, as well as the historical-traditional language of the Church (*creed, liturgy*) and doctrinal language (*dogmatic formulations*)”²⁸⁵
- Uses the technical language of the faith while also demonstrating the contemporary relevance of the traditional formulas for communicating the faith
- Enters into dialogue with the particular people to whom the Christian message is being presented
- Avoids terminology that would alter the substance of faith
- Employs language suited to today’s children, young people, and adults in general, as well as to many other categories of people: for example, students, intellectuals and scientists, those who are illiterate, and persons with disabilities²⁸⁶

26. CONCLUSION

The sacred duty and the joy of each succeeding generation of Christian believers has been to hand on the deposit of faith that was first entrusted to the apostles by Christ himself. We have received this gift, the deposit of faith—we have not conceived it. It is the heritage of the whole Church. It is our privilege and our responsibility to preserve the memory of Christ’s words and the words themselves and to teach future generations of believers to carry out all that Christ commanded his apostles.

Sound catechesis, however, involves more than the presentation of the content of Christ’s message according to the criteria outlined above. The effective presentation of the content of the Christian faith also depends on the methodology employed in the transmission of the Good News. That methodology is the subject of the next chapter.

285 Cf. GDC, no. 208.

286 Cf. CT, no. 59.