

The General Directory for Catechesis (1997)

Some Excerpts Relevant to Ongoing Adult Faith Formation

The Church in the world

The faith of Christians

24. The disciples of Jesus are scattered in the world as leaven but, as in every age, they are not immune from the influences of human situations. It is therefore necessary to enquire into the current situation of the faith of Christians. Catechetical renewal, developed in the Church over the last decades, continues to bear very welcome fruit.(41) **The catechesis of children, of young people and of adults has given rise to a type of Christian who is conscious of his faith and who acts consistently with it in his life. In such Christians this catechesis has encouraged:**

- a new and vital experience of God as merciful Father;
- a more profound rediscovery of Jesus Christ, not only in his divinity but also in his humanity;
- a sense of co-responsibility on the part of all for the mission of the Church in the world;
- and a raising of consciousness with regard to the social obligations of the faith.

25. Nonetheless, in considering today's religious situation, the Church is also obliged to take into account the extent to which Christians "have been shaped by the **climate of secularism and ethical relativism?**" (42) A prime category requiring examination is that of the "**many people who have been baptized but lead lives entirely divorced from Christianity**".(43) This in fact constitutes a mass of "**non-practising Christians**" (44) even though in many hearts religious feeling has not been completely lost. **Re-awakening these to the faith is a real challenge for the Church.** Then there are "the simple people" (45) who express themselves, at times with sincere religious feeling and deep rooted "popular devotion".(46) They possess a certain faith, "but know little even of its fundamental principles".(47) There are, moreover, numerous other Christians, often highly educated, whose religious formation amounts solely to that which they received in childhood. These also need to re-examine and develop their faith "from a different standpoint".(48)

26. There is also a certain number of **baptized Christians who**, desiring to promote dialogue with various cultures and other religious confessions, or on account of a certain reticence on their part to live in contemporary society as believers, **fail to give explicit and courageous witness in their lives to the faith of Jesus Christ.** These concrete situations of the Christian faith call urgently on the sower to develop a new evangelization,(49) especially in those Churches of long-standing Christian tradition where secularism has made greater inroads. **In this new context of evangelization, missionary proclamation and catechesis, especially of the young and of adults, is an evident priority.**

56. Faith is a gift destined to grow in the hearts of believers. (156) Adhering to Jesus Christ, in fact, sets in motion a **process of continuing conversion, which lasts for the whole of life.** (157)

56 d) The profession of baptismal faith is but the foundation of a spiritual building which is destined to grow. **The baptized, moved always by the Spirit, nourished by the sacraments, by prayer and by the practise of charity, and assisted by multiple forms of ongoing education in the faith, seeks to realize the desire of Christ: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect".** (169) This is the call to the fullness of perfection which is addressed to all the baptized.

Socio-religious situations and evangelization

58. The evangelization of the world finds itself placed in a **very diversified and changing religious panorama**, in which it is possible to distinguish **three basic situations** (171) **requiring particular and precise responses.**

a) **The situation of those "peoples, groups and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known, or which lack Christian communities sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate the faith in their own environment and proclaim it to other groups".** (172) This situation **requires a "mission ad gentes",** (173) where missionary activity is concentrated preferably toward young people and adults. Its particular characteristic consists in the fact that it is **directed to non-Christians and invites them to conversion. In this context catechesis is usually developed within the baptismal catechumenate.**

b) There are, moreover, situations in which, in a definite socio-cultural context, "there are **Christian communities with adequate and solid ecclesial structures. They are fervent in their faith and in Christian living. They bear witness to the Gospel in their surroundings and have a sense of commitment to the Universal mission**". (174) These communities demand an intense "pastoral action of the Church" since they are made up of people and families of profound Christian outlook. In such contexts it is vital that catechesis for children, adolescents and young people develop various processes of well articulated Christian initiation which permit these to arrive at adulthood with mature faith which makes evangelizers of those who have been evangelized. Also in these situations adults are also in need of different types of Christian formation.

c) In many countries of established Christian tradition and sometimes in younger Churches there exists "**an intermediate situation**", (175) where "**entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel**". (176) **Such situations require "a new evangelization"**. The peculiar nature of this situation is found in the fact that missionary activity is directed towards the baptized of all ages, who live in a religious context in which Christian points of reference are perceived purely exteriorly. Here primary proclamation and basic catechesis are priorities.

The mutual connection between the activities of evangelization which correspond to these socio-religious situations.

59. ... "Catechesis for adults, since it deals with persons who are capable of an adherence that is fully responsible, must be considered the chief form of catechesis. All the other forms, which are

indeed always necessary, are in some way oriented to it". (181) This implies that the catechesis of other age groups should have it for a point of reference and should be expressed in conjunction with it, in a coherent catechetical programme suitable to meet the pastoral needs of dioceses.

In this way catechesis, situated in the context of the Church's mission of evangelization and seen as an essential moment of that mission, receives from evangelization a missionary dynamic which deeply enriches it and defines its own identity. The ministry of catechesis appears, then, as a fundamental ecclesial service for the realization of the missionary mandate of Jesus.

Catechesis at the service of ongoing formation in the faith

Continuing education in faith within the Christian community

69. Continuing or on-going education in the faith follows upon basic education and presupposes it. Both fulfil two distinct but complementary functions of the ministry of the word while serving the process of continuing conversion. Initiatory catechesis lays the basis for the Christian life of the followers of Jesus. **The process of continuing conversion goes beyond what is provided by basic catechesis. In order to encourage this process, it is necessary to have a Christian community which welcomes the initiated, sustains them and forms them in the faith: "Catechesis runs the risk of becoming barren if no community of faith and Christian life welcomes the catechumen at a certain stage of his catechesis". (210) The accompaniment which a community gives to the initiated is eventually transformed into their being totally integrated by the same community.**

70. In the Christian community the disciples of Jesus Christ are nourished at a twofold table; "that of the word of God and that of the Body of Christ". (211) **The Gospel and the Eucharist are the constant food for the journey to the Father's House. The action of the Holy Spirit operates so that the gift of "communion" and the task of "mission" are deepened and lived in an increasingly intense way.**

Continuing formation in the faith is directed not only to the individual Christian, to accompany them in their journey towards holiness, but also to the Christian community as such so that it may mature also in its interior life of love of God and of the brethren as well as in its openness to the world as a missionary community. The desire of Jesus and his prayer to the Father are an unceasing appeal: "May they all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me". (212) Approaching this ideal, little by little, demands of the community a great fidelity to the action of the Holy Spirit, the constant nourishment of the Body and Blood of Christ and continuing education in the faith, listening all the time to the word.

Various forms of continuing catechesis

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

– The **study and exploration of Sacred Scripture**, read not only in the Church but with the Church and her living faith, which helps to discover divine truth, which it contains, in such a way as to arouse a response of faith. (214) The "**lectio divina**" is an eminent form of this vital study of Scripture.

– A **Christian reading of events**, which is required of the missionary vocation of the Christian community. In this respect the **study of the social teaching of the Church is indispensable, since "its main aim is to interpret these realities, determining their conformity with or divergence from the lines of the Gospel teaching"**. (215)

– **Liturgical catechesis**, prepares for the sacraments by promoting a deeper understanding and experience of the **liturgy**. This explains the contents of the **prayers, the meaning of the signs and gestures, educates to active participation, contemplation and silence**. It must be regarded as an "**eminent kind of catechesis**". (216)

– **Occasional catechesis** which seeks to interpret determined circumstances of personal, family, ecclesial or social life and to help live them in the prospect of faith.(217)

– Initiatives of **spiritual formation** which seek to **reinforce conviction, open new prospectives and encourage perseverance in prayer and in the duties of following Christ**.

– A systematic deepening of the Christian message by means of **theological instruction**, so as **truly to educate in the faith, encourage growth in understanding of it and to equip the Christian for giving the reason for his hope in the present world**. (218) In a certain sense, it is appropriate to call such instruction "perfective catechesis".

72. It is fundamentally important that initiatory catechesis for adults, whether baptized or not, initiatory catechesis for children and young people and continuing catechesis are closely linked with the catechetical endeavour of the Christian community, so that the particular Church may grow harmoniously and that its evangelizing activity may spring from authentic sources. "It is important also that the catechesis of children and young people, permanent catechesis and the catechesis of adults should not be separate watertight compartments... it is important that their perfect complementarity be fostered". (219)

87. The tasks of catechesis, consequently, constitute a totality, rich and varied in aspect. On this point it is opportune to make some observations.

– "All of these tasks are necessary. As the vitality of the human body depends on the proper function of all of its organs, so also **the maturation of the Christian life requires that it be cultivated in all its dimensions: knowledge of the faith, liturgical life, moral formation, prayer, belonging to community, missionary spirit. When catechesis omits one of these elements, the Christian faith does not attain full development.**

...

– **Every dimension of the faith, like the faith itself as a whole, must be rooted in human experience and not remain a mere adjunct to the human person.** Knowledge of the faith is significant. It gives light to the whole of existence and dialogues with culture. In the liturgy, all personal life becomes a spiritual oblation. The morality of the Gospel assumes and elevates human values. Prayer is open to all personal and social problems. (277)

As the 1971 Directory indicates, "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 the others". (278)

The role of the catechist (17)

156. No methodology, no matter how well tested, can dispense with the person of the catechist in every phase of the catechetical process. **The charism given to him by the Spirit, a solid spirituality and transparent witness of life, constitutes the soul of every method. Only his own human and Christian qualities guarantee a good use of texts and other work instruments.**

The catechist is essentially a mediator. He facilitates communication between the people and the mystery of God, between subjects amongst themselves, as well as with the community. For this reason, **his cultural vision, social condition and lifestyle must not be obstacles to the journey of faith. Rather, these help to create the most advantageous conditions for seeking out, welcoming and deepening the Christian message. He does not forget that belief is a fruit of grace and liberty. Thus, he ensures that his activities always draw support from faith in the Holy Spirit and from prayer.** Finally, the personal relationship of the catechist with the subject is of crucial importance.

Adults to whom catechesis is directed (51)

172. The discourse of faith with adults must take serious account of their experience, of their conditioning and of the challenges which they have encountered in life. Their questions of faith as well as their needs are many and varied.(52) Consequently, the following categories may be distinguished:

- **adult Christians who consistently live their faith option and sincerely desire to deepen it;**
- **adults who have been baptized but who have not been sufficiently catechized, or have not brought to fulfilment the journey begun at Christian initiation, or who have fallen away from the faith, to such a degree that they may be called 'quasi catechumens'; (53)**
- **non-baptized adults, to whom the catechumenate truly and properly corresponds.(54)**

Mention must also be made of those adults who come from Christian confessions which are not in full communion with the Catholic Church.

Elements and criteria proper to adult catechesis (55)

173. Adult catechesis concerns persons who have a right and a duty to bring to maturity the seed of faith sown in them by God.(56) It is addressed to individuals who are charged to fulfill social responsibilities of various types and to those who are also prey to all kinds of changes and crises, sometimes profound. **The faith of adults, therefore, must be continually enlightened, developed and protected, so that it may acquire that Christian wisdom which gives sense, unity, and hope to the many experiences of personal, social, and spiritual life.** Adult catechesis requires the accurate identification of the typical characteristics of Christian adults. It must translate them into objectives and content, and determine certain constants of presentation. It must establish the most effective methodological approaches and choose formats and models. The role and identity of the catechists who work with adults and their formation—**the people who are responsible for the catechesis of adults in the community—are vitally important.**(57)

175. So as to respond to the more profound needs of our time, adult catechesis must systematically propose the Christian faith in its entirety and in its authenticity, in accordance with the Church's understanding. **It must give priority to the proclamation of salvation, drawing attention to the many difficulties, doubts, misunderstandings, prejudices and objections of today. It must introduce adults to a faith-filled reading of Sacred Scripture and the practice of prayer.** A fundamental service to adult catechesis is given by the Catechism of the Catholic Church and by those adult catechisms based on it by the particular Churches. **In particular, the tasks of adult catechesis are:**

– **to promote formation and development of life in the Risen Christ by adequate means: pedagogy of the sacraments, retreats, spiritual direction...**

– **to educate toward a correct evaluation of the socio-cultural changes of our societies in the light of faith:** thus the Christian community is assisted in discerning true values in our civilization, as well as its dangers, and in adopting appropriate attitudes;

– **to clarify current religious and moral questions,** that is, those questions which are encountered by the men and women of our time: for example, public and private morality with regard to social questions and the education of future generations;

– **to clarify the relationship between temporal actions and ecclesial action,** by demonstrating mutual distinctions and implications and thus due interaction; to this end, the **social doctrine of the Church is an integral part of adult catechesis;**

– **to develop the rational foundations of the faith: that the right understanding of the faith and of the truths to be believed are in conformity with the demands of reason and the Gospel is always relevant;** it is therefore necessary to promote effectively the pastoral aim of Christian thought and culture: **this helps to overcome certain forms of fundamentalism as well as subjective and arbitrary interpretations;**

– to encourage adults to assume responsibility for the Church's mission and to be able to give Christian witness in society:

The adult is assisted to discover, evaluate and activate what he has received by nature and grace, both in the Christian community and by living in human society; in this way, he will be able to overcome the dangers of standardization and of anonymity which are particularly dominant in some societies of today and which lead to loss of identity and lack of appreciation for the resources and qualities of the individual.

Anthropological environments and cultural tendencies

211. The Gospel seeks a catechesis which is open, generous and courageous in reaching people where they live, especially in encountering those nuclei in which the most elementary and fundamental cultural exchanges take place, such as the family, the school, the work environment and free time.

It is important for catechesis to discern and penetrate these environments, as it is there that the major cultural tendencies have greater impact in creating and popularizing such models of life as urban life, migratory or tourist influxes, the world of youth and other socially relevant phenomena. Indeed "there are so many sectors to enlighten with the light of the Gospel", (125) especially those cultural areas denominated 'modern areopagi' like communications; civil campaigns for peace, development and liberation of peoples; the protection of creation; the defence of human rights, especially of minorities, women and children; scientific research and international relations.

Lay catechists

230. The catechetical activity of the laity also has a proper character which is due to their condition in the Church: "their secular character is proper and peculiar to the laity". (182) The laity engage in catechesis on the basis of their insertion in the world, sharing all the demands of humanity and bringing to the transmission of the Gospel specific sensitivity and nuances: "this evangelization, that is, the proclamation of Christ by word and the testimony of life, acquires a specific property and peculiar efficacy because it is accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world". (183) **Indeed by sharing the same form of life as those whom they catechize, lay catechists have a special sensitivity for incarnating the Gospel in the concrete life of men and women. Catechumens and those receiving catechesis can find in them a Christian model for their future as believers.**

Catholic schools

259. The Catholic school (267) is a most important locus for human and Christian formation. The declaration of the Second Vatican Council, *Gravissimum Educationis* "makes a decisive change in the history of Catholic schools: the move from school as institution to school as community". (268) Catholic schools "are no less zealous than other schools in the promotion of culture and in the human formation of young people. **It is however, the special function of the Catholic school to:**

– develop in the school community an atmosphere animated by a spirit of liberty and charity;

– enable young people, while developing their own personality, to grow at the same time in that new life which has been given them in baptism;

– orientate the whole of human culture to the message of salvation"; (269)

The educational task of Catholic schools is bound to be developed along the basis of this concept proposed by the Second Vatican Council. It is accomplished in the school community, to which belong all of those who are directly involved in it: "teachers, management, administrative and auxiliary staff, parents—central in that they are the natural and irreplaceable educators of their own children—and pupils, who are participants and active subjects too of the educational process". (270)