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CHAPTER 4

Divine and Human Methodology

For just as from the heavens
the rain and snow come down
And do not return there
till they have watered the earth,
making it fertile and fruitful,
Giving seed to him who sows
and bread to him who eats,
So shall my word be
that goes forth from my mouth;
It shall not return to me void,
but shall do my will,
achieving the end for which I sent it.
(Is 55:10-11)

27. INTRODUCTION

God's word has mighty power; it effects the purpose for which it is intended. More than a message, it is an event that inspires, even compels, action. Christ's missionary command was just such an event. It impelled the apostles to carry God's word to the ends of the earth. God infused humanity with the grace of his Holy Spirit in order to bring forth the divine fruit of conversion to Christ and confession of faith—so powerful is the word of God in accomplishing his will.

God's word continues to achieve its end through the human word. "The communication of the faith in catechesis is an event of grace, realized in the encounter of the word of God with the experience of the person."²⁸⁷ Catechesis must express the word of God faithfully in the languages, signs, and cultures of those to whom it is directed. It should convey the whole word of God, as interpreted by the Church, in ways that can be easily understood. Just as God used a methodology to disclose his loving plan of salvation and prepare his people for the coming of his Son, so too does the Church employ a methodology that corresponds closely to God's original process of Revelation. This methodology for proclaiming the same Christian message to people in a variety of particular circumstances and conditions includes many different yet complementary means. All forms of the Church's methodology, however, are rooted in Christ.

This chapter describes God's self-revelation in Christ and through the Spirit as the norm for all catechetical methodology. It also addresses the human elements of catechetical methodology and the impact of communications technology on the proclamation of the Gospel.

28. GOD'S OWN METHODOLOGY

God's Revelation is the self-disclosure of the loving communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in which he makes known the mystery of his divine plan. Since the ultimate purpose of his plan is human salvation,²⁸⁸ God's own methodology engages persons and communities in light of their circumstances and their capacity to accept and interpret Revelation. God's self-communication is realized gradually through his actions and his words. It is most fully achieved in the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. The history of this self-revelation itself documents the method by which God transmits the content of Revelation as contained in Sacred Scripture and Tradition. This is the pedagogy of God. It is the source and model of the pedagogy of the faith.²⁸⁹

287 GDC, no. 130.
288 GDC, no. 139.
289 Cf. DV, no. 13.

A. The Pedagogy of God

God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: one God in three divine persons. The inner life of the Trinity and the actions of the divine persons are undivided and inseparable. Who God is and what he does form a unity of divine life and activity. The work of Revelation is the common work of the three divine persons. Each person of the Trinity, however, shows forth what is proper to him within the one divine nature. Therefore, the Church confesses "one God and Father from whom all things are, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things are, and one Holy Spirit in whom all things are."²⁹⁰ These properties of the divine persons within the Trinity are reflected in the pedagogy of God.

1. The Father

The Father made himself known in creation and in his eternal Word, Jesus Christ. Through the mystery of the incarnation, Jesus revealed God as Father and Creator: the eternal Father of his only-begotten Son and the Creator of all that exists. Out of nothing and through his eternal Word and Spirit, the Father created all things, and all creation is good. By his Word, who is his perfect image from all eternity, his "Son" the Father upholds and sustains the whole creation; he both transcends his creation and is present within it.

The Father bestowed his word on generation after generation of believers until in the fullness of time he communicated his one unsurpassable Word in the person of Jesus Christ. He made a covenant with his people that bound him to them and them to him in an everlasting pledge of love, liberating them from the bondage of slavery and sin. He transformed events in the life of his people into encounters with himself. He formed his people through victory and defeat, reward and punishment, happiness and sorrow, forgiveness and suffering. God the Father gave the Law to Moses as a means of leading the Chosen People to his son, Jesus. The moral law that derives from it "can be defined as fatherly instruction."²⁹¹ He showed himself throughout the history of Israel in many manifestations, "in which the cloud of the Holy Spirit both revealed him and concealed him in its shadow."²⁹²

290 Council of Constantinople II, no. 421. In Henricus Deninger and Adolph Schimmerer, eds., *Enchiridion Symbolorum (ES)* (Freiburg: Herder), 1300-1301.
291 CCC, no. 1950.
292 CCC, no. 107.

2. Jesus Christ

The redemptive mission of Jesus Christ continued the pedagogy of God in the history of salvation. Jesus Christ is the preeminent model for the communication of the faith and the formation of believers in the faith because he became truly human while remaining truly God. God's eternal Word became flesh to help us know God's love, to save us, to be our model of holiness, and to have us "share in the divine nature."²⁹³ In the mystery of his incarnation, Christ joins divinity with humanity in teaching the faith and forming disciples.

Christ's relationship with his disciples also reveals God's own methodology as the model for all catechetical methods. In a sign of basic human affirmation, Jesus chose his apostles; they did not choose him.²⁹⁴ He established a bond of friendship with them that was the context for his teaching. "I have called you friends," he said, "because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father."²⁹⁵ He engaged them in lively conversations by asking them probing questions: "Who do people say that I am?"²⁹⁶ He gave them hope: when they saw him coming toward them on the water, he said, "Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid!"²⁹⁷ After he taught the crowds, he explained the meaning of his teaching to his disciples "in private."²⁹⁸ Jesus said to them, "Knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven has been granted to you. . . ."²⁹⁹ He taught them to pray,³⁰⁰ He sent them out as his apprentices on mission,³⁰¹ he instructed them, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."³⁰² To sustain them on their mission, Jesus promised to send them the Spirit of Truth, who would lead the Apostles to all Truth.³⁰³

Christ's methodology was multi-dimensional. It included his words, his signs, and the wonders he worked. He reached out to the poor, to sinners, and to those on the margins of society. He proclaimed insistently the

293 2 Pt. 1:4.
294 Cf. Jn. 15:16.
295 Jn. 15:15.
296 Mk. 8:27.
297 Lk. 6:50.
298 Mk. 4:34.
299 Mt. 13:11.
300 Cf. Lk. 11:1-2.
301 Cf. Lk. 10:1-20.
302 Mk. 8:34.
303 Cf. Mt. 10:20; Jn. 16:13.

coming of the Kingdom of God, the forgiveness of sins, and reconciliation with the Father. Especially in his parables, Christ invited his listeners to a whole new manner of life sustained by faith in God and neighbor. He used every resource at his disposal to accomplish his redemptive mission. "The whole of Christ's life was a continual teaching: his silences, his miracles, his gestures, his prayer, his love for people, his special affection for the little and the poor, his acceptance of the total sacrifice on the Cross for the redemption of the world, and his Resurrection are the actualization of his word and the fulfillment of revelation."³⁰⁴

3. The Holy Spirit

The action of the Holy Spirit in the Church continues the pedagogy of God. The Holy Spirit unfolds the divine plan of salvation within the Church. With Christ, the Holy Spirit animates the Church and directs her mission. The Holy Spirit makes the Paschal Mystery of Christ present in the human mind to accept Christ, converts the human heart to love Christ, and encourages the human person to follow Christ. Thus, the Holy Spirit makes new life in Christ possible for the believers. "The Holy Spirit, the artisan of God's works, is the master of prayer."³⁰⁵ The Holy Spirit draws all humanity to Christ and, through Christ, into communion with the Trinity.

4. The Church

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church continues God's own methodology in a living catechesis. "From her very beginnings the Church, which 'in Christ, is in the nature of a Sacrament,' has lived her mission as a visible and actual continuation of the pedagogy of the Father and of the Son."³⁰⁶ The Church constantly seeks to discover the most fruitful way to announce the Good News and looks first to the method used by God. The Church's proclamation of the Gospel has been both progressive and patient, as was her Master's, respecting the freedom of individuals and taking into consideration their "slowness to believe."³⁰⁷

304 CT, no. 9.
305 CCC, no. 741.
306 GDC, no. 141.
307 EA, no. 29.

In the lives and teachings of the martyrs and saints, in the treasury of her teaching, in the witness of catechists, and in various examples of Christian life, the Church has reflected God's own methodology for communicating the faith. Those who wish to become disciples of Jesus today will pass through the same process of discovery and commitment.

B. Catechesis and Divine Methodology

"Catechesis, as communication of divine Revelation, is radically inspired by the pedagogy of God, as displayed in Christ and in the Church."³⁰⁸ It conveys God's loving plan of salvation in the person of Jesus Christ. It emphasizes God's initiative in this plan, his attentive disclosure of it, and his respect for individual liberty. It recognizes the dignity of the human person within this profound dialogue with God and the continual need for conversion. Catechesis acknowledges the gradual nature of God's self-revelation, the profound mystery of the growth of God's word in a person, and the need for adaptation to different persons and cultures. It keeps Christ, the incarnate Word of God, ever at its center in order to bring humanity to God and God to humanity. It constantly draws inspiration from the Holy Spirit, who unfolds the mystery of Christ in the Church.

The methods employed by catechesis aim to harmonize the personal adherence of the believer to God, on the one hand, and to the content of the Christian message, on the other. Catechesis attends to the development of all the dimensions of the faith: as it is known, as it is celebrated, as it is lived, and as it is prayed. It seeks to bring about a conversion to Christ that leads to a profession of faith in the Triune God and to a genuine personal surrender to him. It helps believers to become disciples and to discern the vocation to which God is calling them.

God's own methodology inspires a plurality of methods in contemporary catechesis. The method or methods chosen, however, must ultimately be determined by a law that is fundamental for the whole of the Church's life. Catechetical methodology must exhibit a twofold fidelity. On the one hand, it must be faithful to God and to his Revelation; on the other, it must respect the liberty and promote the active participation of those being catechized. From the beginning of time, God has adapted his message to earthly conditions³⁰⁹ so that we might be able to receive it.

308 GDC, no. 143.
309 Cf. DV, no. 13.

"This implies for catechesis the never ending task of finding a language capable of communicating the word of God and the creed of the Church, which is its development, in the various circumstances of those who hear it."³¹⁰ In this light, genuine catechesis employs methodology that

- Emphasizes God's loving initiative and the person's free response
- Accepts the progressive nature of Revelation, the transcendence and mysterious nature of the word of God, and the word's adaptation to different persons and cultures
- Recognizes the centrality of Jesus Christ
- Values the community experience of faith
- Is rooted in interpersonal relations and makes its own the process of dialogue
- Utilizes signs, which link words and deeds, teaching and experience
- Draws its power of truth, and its task to bear witness to the truth, from the Holy Spirit!"

As the believer progresses on the journey toward the Father in the footsteps of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, catechists should deepen the believer's understanding of the mystery of Christ. A strengthening of faith, in turn, leads to a change of heart (conversion) in order to be more committed and follow Christ more closely.³¹¹ Catechesis should promote a synthesis of the faith by which we have been taught to believe and the faith which we enact in our everyday lives. It develops all dimensions of faith: knowledge, liturgical celebration, Christian living, and prayer. It challenges persons to abandon themselves completely and freely to God. It helps individuals to discern the vocation to which the Lord calls them. In short, catechesis "carries out [the] complete work of initiation, education and teaching."³¹²

29. ELEMENTS OF HUMAN METHODOLOGY

In the transmission of the faith, the Church does not rely on any single human method. Rather, she uses God's own methodology as the paradigm

310 GDC, no. 146.
311 Cf. GDC, no. 143.
312 Cf. CT, no. 20.
313 GDC, no. 144.

and, with that divine pedagogy as the reference point, chooses diverse methods that are in accord with the Gospel. "Although certain norms or criteria apply to all catechesis, they do not determine a fixed methodology."¹¹⁴ A variety of methods is required in order to ensure that the Gospel is proclaimed "to all the nations."¹¹⁵ "The variety in the methods used is a sign of life and a resource."¹¹⁵

The situation of those to whom catechesis is addressed is not a peripheral concern in the proclamation of the Gospel—rather, it is integral to its successful transmission. "The age and the intellectual development of Christians, their degree of ecclesial and spiritual maturity and many other personal circumstances"¹¹⁶ must be carefully considered in choosing the appropriate methodologies. A diversity of methods in catechesis does not detract from its primary objective—evangelization and conversion to Jesus Christ—not does it dilute the unity of faith. "Perfect fidelity to Catholic doctrine is compatible with a rich diversity of presentation."¹¹⁷

Effective catechesis should feature no opposition or artificial separation between content and method. Similar to the dynamic present in the pedagogy of God, catechetical methodology serves to transmit both the content of the entire Christian message and the source of that message, the Triune God. Catechetical methodology must be able to communicate that message, together with its sources and language, to particular ecclesial communities while always bearing in mind the particular circumstances of those to whom the message is addressed. Content and method interact and harmonize in the communication of the faith.

The communication of faith in catechesis is, first of all, "an event of grace" under the action of the Holy Spirit, "realized in the encounter of the word of God with the experience of the person. It is expressed in sensible signs and is ultimately open to mystery. It can happen in diverse ways, not always completely known to us."¹¹⁸ An individual hears the word of God through catechesis and is moved by the Holy Spirit to listen, consider, assent to the truth, and respond through the obedience of faith. Catechetical methods employ two fundamental processes that organize the human element in the communication of the faith: the *inductive*

method and the *deductive method*. "The inductive approach proceeds from the sensible, visible, tangible experiences of the person, and leads, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to more general conclusions and principles."¹¹⁹ Since faith may be known through signs, the inductive method reflects the economy of Revelation insofar as we come to know God through his self-disclosure in the particular events of salvation history. The "inductive method consists of presenting facts (biblical events, liturgical acts, events in the Church's life as well as events from daily life) so as to discern the meaning these might have in divine Revelation."¹²⁰ The deductive method proceeds in the opposite manner, beginning with the general principles or truths of the faith and applying them to the concrete experiences of those to whom the catechesis is addressed. This method is used to interpret and explain the facts by proceeding from their causes. The deductive method, however, has full value only when the inductive process is completed.¹²¹

In the context of catechesis, the deductive method corresponds to the "kerygmatic" approach. This catechetical method begins with the proclamation of the faith as it is expressed in the principal documents of the faith, such as Sacred Scripture, the Creeds, or the Liturgy, and applies it to particular human experiences. This methodology begins with the principles and moves to the specifics in a descending direction. The inductive method, on the other hand, corresponds to a more "existential" approach, beginning with the specifics of human experience and examining them in the light of the word of God in an ascending direction. Both are legitimate approaches when properly applied and are distinct yet complementary methods for communicating the faith.

A. Learning Through Human Experience

Human experience is a constituent element in catechesis. It is the human element in the person's encounter with the word of God. Human experiences provide the sensible signs that lead the person, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, to a better understanding of the truths of the faith. They are the means through which human beings come to know themselves, one another, and God. They "give rise to concerns and questions, hopes and anxieties, reflections and judgments, which increase one's desire to penetrate more

314 National Catechetical Directory, no. 176.

315 CT, no. 51.

316 CT, no. 51.

317 GDC, no. 122.

318 GDC, no. 150.

319 National Catechetical Directory, no. 176.

320 GDC, no. 150.

321 Cf. General Catechetical Directory, no. 72.

deeply into life's meaning."³²³ Human experience "serves in the examination and acceptance of the truths which are contained in the deposit of revelation."³²⁴

Jesus consistently used the ordinary human experiences of daily life to form his disciples, to point to the end of time, and to show the transcendent dimension of all of life and of God's eternal presence in it. Because the eternal Word assumed human nature, human experience is the locus for the manifestation and realization of salvation in him. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, persons come to know Christ, to know that he was sent from the Father, and to know that he died to save them in the midst of their human experience.

Human experience is affected by the fallen state of human nature; human beings are in need of redemption in Jesus Christ, and their experiences can lead to errors in judgment and action. However, human experience has been enlightened by Christ; for that reason, it can connect the person intimately with the Christian message and "is a necessary medium for exploring and assimilating the truths which constitute the objective content of Revelation."³²⁴

Catechesis links human experience to the revealed word of God, helping people ascribe Christian meaning to their own existence. It enables people to explore, interpret, and judge their basic experiences in light of the Gospel. Catechesis helps them relate the Christian message to the most profound questions in life: the existence of God, the destiny of the human person, the origin and end of history, the truth about good and evil, the meaning of suffering and death, and so forth. By recalling God's salvific action in human history, catechesis helps people to recognize their need for conversion and leads them to conversion in Christ.

B. Learning by Discipleship

An integral element in catechesis is learning by discipleship. The Christian faith is, above all, conversion to Jesus Christ, full adherence to his person and the decision to walk in his footsteps.³²⁵ Discipleship is thus centered on the person of Jesus Christ and the kingdom he proclaims. "By following the

example of his self-giving love, we learn to be Christian disciples in our own time, place, and circumstances."³²⁶ In learning to follow Christ, we become aware that there exist "facets of Christian life that come to full expression only by means of development and growth toward Christian maturity."³²⁷ For disciples, saying "yes" to Jesus Christ means that they abandon themselves to God and give loving assent to all that he has revealed.

Mary is the first disciple, a unique instrument of Revelation and a model for all disciples. From all eternity the Father chose her, a young Jewish woman of Nazareth in Galilee, to conceive within her body, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the human body of his divine Son. God prepared her by his grace to cooperate freely with his will and to share her humanity with the divine Savior for whom she and all Israel confidently hoped. The Blessed Virgin Mary, by a singular grace from God, was preserved from sin from the first moment of her own conception until the end of her earthly life. "Most blessed among all women," Mary was "full of grace" and was a fitting vessel in which the word of God became flesh. Her faith, her sinlessness, her perpetual virginity, and her divine motherhood converged to cooperate with God's will to make her the perfect disciple.

Catechesis nourishes a living, explicit, and fruitful faith lived in discipleship to Jesus Christ. The disciple is brought to intimate communion with Jesus Christ and a deeper understanding that "by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God."³²⁸

Here it is notable that, while children do not have the capacity to understand and articulate the content of the faith in the same way as do adults, they have a unique ability to absorb and celebrate the most profound truths of the faith. Children with cognitive disabilities often have an unusual intuitive understanding of the sacred. God's self-revelation unfolds in children in extraordinary ways, and his grace often develops within them a deep spirituality that continues to grow as they mature. Children are capable of being formed as disciples of the Lord from an early age. Their ongoing formation, which includes learning the basic truths of the Christian faith, increases their capacity to understand and articulate those truths more deeply later in life and disposes them to live Christ's message more faithfully.

322 National Catechetical Directory, no. 176.

323 General Catechetical Directory, no. 74.

324 CDC, no. 152.

325 Cf. ODC, no. 152.

326 USCCB, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States* (OH:WV), (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 1999), no. 46.

327 USCCB, *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium* (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 1995), 20.

328 Eph 2:8.

C. Learning Within the Christian Community

The witness of the Christian community—particularly the parish, family, group, and school—is an important element in catechetical methodology.

The effectiveness of catechesis depends to a great extent on the vitality of the Christian community in which it is given. In either a parish or a school, the Christian community is the context in which individuals undergo their journey in faith toward conversion to Christ and discipleship in His name.

For most people, the parish, under the leadership of the pastor, is the door to participate in the ordinary Christian community. Therefore, "it is the responsibility of pastors and lay to ensure that those doors are always open."³²⁹ It is the place where the Christian faith is first received, expressed, and nourished. It is where the Christian faith deepens and where the Christian community is formed. In the parish the members of the Christian community "become aware of being the people of God."³³⁰ In the parish the faithful are nurtured by the word of God and nourished by the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. From the parish the faithful are sent on their apostolic mission in the world. "The parish is still a major point of reference for the Christian people, even for the non-practicing."³³¹ The parish serves as an effective catechetical agent precisely to the extent that it is a clear, living, and authentic sacrament of Christ. On the other hand, where a parish is lifeless and stagnant, it undermines both evangelization and catechesis. In such a situation, no catechetical "program" can be expected to overcome the catechetical message of the parish as a whole. Because of all this, it is the responsibility of the parish as a whole and its leadership to ensure that the faith that it teaches, preaches, and celebrates is alive and that it is a true sign, for all who come in contact with it, that this truly is the living Body of Christ.

D. Learning Within the Christian Family

The Christian family is ordinarily the first experience of the Christian community and the primary environment for growth in faith. Because it

is the "church of the home,"³³² the family provides a unique focus for catechesis. It is a place in which the word of God is received and from which it is extended. Within the Christian family, parents are the primary educators in the faith and "the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children."³³³ But all the members make up the family, and each can make a unique contribution to creating the basic environment in which a sense of God's loving presence is awakened and faith in Jesus Christ is confessed, encouraged, and lived. Within the Christian family, the members first begin to learn the basic prayers of the tradition and to form their consciences in light of the teachings of Christ and the Church. Family members learn more of the Christian life by observing each other's strengths or weaknesses than by formal instruction. They learn intermitently rather than systematically, occasionally rather than in structured periods. Often extended family members take on a primary responsibility in transmitting the faith to the younger members. Their shared wisdom and experience often constitute a compelling Christian witness.

E. Learning Through the Witness of the Catechist

Next to home and family, the witness of the catechist may be pivotal in every phase of the catechetical process. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, catechists powerfully influence those being catechized by their faithful proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the transparent example of their Christian lives. For catechesis to be effective, catechists must be fully committed to Jesus Christ. They must firmly believe in his Gospel and its power to transform lives.

Catechists must hand on the teachings of Christ to those being catechized; they must prepare them for the sacraments instituted by Christ; they must orient them toward life lived according to the moral teaching of Christ; and they must lead them to pray with Christ. Catechists must make the words of Christ their own: "My teaching is not my own but is from the one who sent me,"³³⁴ and they confess with St. Paul, "I handed on to you . . . what I also received."³³⁵

329 USCCB, *Welfare and Justice for Persons with Disabilities* (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 1999), no. 6.
330 GDC, no. 257.
331 CT, no. 67.

332 FC, no. 28.
333 LG, no. 11.
334 Jn 7:16.
335 1 Cor 15:3.

E. Learning by Heart

RECEIVE catechesis and incorporate learning "by heart." For centuries the living tradition of the faith was handed on principally through the oral tradition. From the earliest times catechism has relied on the Creed, the Gospels, the Godefects and prayers, especially the Our Father, as primary instruments of transmitting the faith. In order to learn the principal truths of the faith, these instruments were easily committed to memory in the form of short, simple, and easily recalled material and could be recalled, often in the form of catechetical instruction. "Use of memory, therefore, forms a constitutive aspect of the pedagogy of the faith since the beginning of Christianity."¹¹⁶

The principal formulations of the faith, basic prayers, key biblical themes, personalities, and expressions; and factual information regarding worship and Christian life should be learned by heart. These ensure an accurate exposition of the faith and foster a common language of the faith among all the faithful. The ability to express the one faith in a language that can be understood by all within the cultural diversity of the Church in the United States not only deepens the common understanding of the faith but also forms an indispensable condition for living that faith. Receiving the formulations of the faith, professing and internalizing them, and, in turn, sharing them with the community encourage the individual's participation in the received truth. "Faith is a personal act—the free response of the human person to the initiative of God who reveals himself. But faith is not an isolated act. No one can believe alone, just as no one can live alone. You have not given yourself faith as you have not given yourself life. The believer has received faith from others and should hand it on to others."¹¹⁷

While the content of the faith cannot be reduced to formulas that are repeated without being properly understood, learning by heart has had a special place in catechesis and should continue to have that place in catechesis today. "The blossoms, if we may call them that, of faith and piety do not grow in the desert places of a memory-less catechesis. What is essential is that the texts that are memorized must at the same time be taken in and gradually understood in depth, in order to become a source of Christian life on the personal level and the community level."¹¹⁸ It should

be introduced through a process that, begun early, continues gradually, flexibly, and never slavishly. In this way certain elements of the Catholic faith, tradition, and practice are learned for a lifetime, form a basis for communication, allow people to pray together in a common language, and contribute to the individual's continued growth in understanding and living the faith. Among those formulations that should be learned by heart are the following:

1. Prayers such as the Sign of the Cross; Lord's Prayer; Hail Mary; Apostles' Creed; Acts of Faith, Hope, and Charity; and the Act of Contrition
2. Factual information contributing to an appreciation of the place of the word of God in the Church and the life of the Christian through an awareness and understanding of the key themes of the history of salvation; the major personalities of the Old and New Testaments; and certain biblical texts expressive of God's love and care
3. Formulas providing factual information regarding the Church, worship, the church year, and major practices in the devotional life of Christians including the parts of the Mass; the list of the sacraments; the liturgical seasons; the holy days of obligation; the major feasts of our Lord and our Blessed Mother; the lives of the saints (especially those newly canonized or those special to particular regions); the corporal and spiritual works of mercy; the various Eucharistic devotions; the mysteries of the rosary; of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Stations of the Cross
4. Formulas and practices dealing with the moral life of Christians including the Ten Commandments; the Beatitudes; the gifts of the Holy Spirit; the theological and moral virtues; the precepts of the Church; the principles of Catholic social teaching; and the examination of conscience¹¹⁹

In addition to the memorization of basic prayers and formulations of the faith, memorization of favorite psalms, songs, prayers, and poetry in praise of Christ our Savior is an effective form of catechesis that nourishes the human heart and helps to form the human spirit in Christ.

336 GDC, no. 154
337 CCC, no. 166
338 CT, no. 55

339 Cf. National Catechetical Directory, no. 176.

G. Making a Commitment to Live the Christian Life

In addition, learning by Christian living is an essential component of catechetical methodology. The active participation of all the catechized in their Christian formation fosters learning by doing. As a general condition of Christian life, the faithful actively respond to God's loving initiative through praying; celebrating the sacraments and the Liturgy; living the Christian life; fostering works of charity (meeting the immediate needs of those who are poor and vulnerable) and works of justice (working to address the injustices that exist in the systemic and institutional organizations of society); and promoting virtues from the natural law such as liberty, solidarity, justice, peace, and the protection of the created order. The participation of adults in their own catechetical formation is essential, since they have the fullest capacity to understand the truths of the faith and live the Christian life.

In the United States, Christian beliefs, practices, and values are often challenged by the dominant secular culture. The prevailing culture tends to trivialize, marginalize, or privatize the practice of religious faith. Both the private practice and the public witness of knowledgeable and committed Christians are indispensable factors in the sanctification of the world, a responsibility to which all the baptized are called. In such an environment, living an active Christian life becomes a crucial element in effective catechetical methodology.

H. Learning by Apprenticeship

Learning by apprenticeship is also an important human element in catechetical methodology. It links an experienced Christian believer, or mentor, with one who seeks a deeper relationship with Christ and the Church. The relationship that normally grows between a catechist and a catechumen provides a workable model of learning by apprenticeship.

All catechesis includes more than instruction. "It must be an integral Christian initiation."³⁴⁰ Learning by apprenticeship ordinarily includes the profession of faith, education in the knowledge of the faith, celebration

of the mysteries of the faith, practice of the Christian moral virtues, and dedication to the daily patterns of Christian prayer. It is a guided encounter with the entire Christian life, a journey toward conversion to Christ. It is a school for discipleship that promotes an authentic following of Christ based on the acceptance of one's baptismal responsibilities, the internalization of the word of God, and the transformation of the whole person to "life in Christ."

30. MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

The elements of human methodology in catechesis must be considered within the context of the revolution in communications technology. Much of what people today know and think about is conditioned by the various means of mass communications. In fact, for many people, experience itself is an experience of the media. The power of the mass media is so great that it largely determines not only what people perceive but also how people judge their perceptions. As the mass media become more dominant in people's lives, they influence how people understand the meaning of life itself. "Reality, for many, is what the media recognizes as real; what media do not acknowledge seems of little importance."³⁴¹

The Church does not stand aside from these problems. Her mission requires her to be "in the very midst of human progress, sharing the experiences of the rest of humanity, seeking to understand and interpret them in the light of faith."³⁴² For the Church, "communication" is essentially the communication of the Good News of Jesus Christ. It is a proclamation of the Gospel of salvation and liberation to every human being. It articulates divine truth in an extremely secularized world in which truth is often an arbitrary and relative construct. Communication is a powerful witness for the transcendent nature and destiny of every person in the midst of a global culture that dehumanizes and diminishes the value of human life. It is a prophetic voice for the solidarity of all humanity against the radical individualism so typical of contemporary cultures. It holds out poverty of spirit as the desirable alternative to the lure of excessive materialism.

340 CT, no. 21.

341 Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *On Social Communication on the Twentieth Anniversary of "Communio et Progressio" (Acquis Novae) (ANN) (1992)*, no. 4, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/psccs/index.html (accessed on August 19, 2003).

342 John Paul II, *Message for World Communications Day 1990*.

Pope John Paul II has said that

the first Ancestrals of the modern age is the world of communication, which is transforming humanity and turning it into what is known as a "global village." The means of social communication have become indispensable tools for many the chief means of information and education of guidance and inspiration in their behavior and mental, families and within society at large."³⁴³

For this reason, the effective use of mass media has become essential for evangelization and catechesis.³⁴⁴

In addition to the numerous traditional means used in catechesis, all the various instruments of the mass media should be employed to proclaim the Gospel message. Those to whom the Gospel message is addressed today, both young and old, are, in a sense, children of the media. They have been reared in the media age and have a high level of comfort with using media:

[For many,] the Internet, unknown to most until quite recently, is now an essential tool for business, education, and other kinds of communication. CD-ROM technology puts at our fingertips whole libraries and creates learning paths that enable users to grasp complex and unfamiliar subjects. Through satellite delivery and cable systems, consumers have access to many more TV channels, resulting in the availability of entertainment and information "on demand."³⁴⁵

Catechists must seriously commit themselves to learning how to use these media to bring people to Christ. But that will not be enough.

Catechists also must learn the culture created by the mass media. "It is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the "new culture" created by modern communications . . . with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology."³⁴⁶ Catechists

³⁴³ RM, no. 37. (The Areopagus was a public place in Athens where ideas were openly expressed and debated.)

³⁴⁴ CR, AN, no. 11.

³⁴⁵ *Renewing the Mind of the Media*, 2.

³⁴⁶ RM, no. 37.

must also develop a critical sense with which to evaluate the media and be able to recognize the "shadow side" of the media, which at times promote "secularism, consumerism, materialism, dehumanization and lack of concern for the plight of the poor and neglected."³⁴⁷

31. CONCLUSION

The transmission of the Gospel message through the Church has always been and will always be the work of the Trinity. The Father's Word made flesh in Christ through the Holy Spirit bears witness to this truth and is the paradigm for all catechetical methodology. His word goes forth from his mouth and does not return to him without having realized the Father's objective. His divine command empowers and energizes humanity to put fear aside and to accomplish his intent, the announcement of the Good News to all peoples.

By God's grace, some people are called to proclaim the Gospel and to receive an apostolic mission as catechists. These catechists are the instruments of God's own methodology. Catechists do not merely transmit human knowledge; they transmit knowledge of the faith and, respecting "the absolute originality of faith,"³⁴⁸ they do so according to "a pedagogy of faith"³⁴⁹ that is patterned after God's own methodology. While catechists rightly employ a variety of methods and techniques in the transmission of the knowledge of faith, God's own methodology—the Father's self-revelation in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit—always remains the model for all human methodologies.

Whatever method is used, all catechesis occurs within the life of a worshipping community. Drawn together by the Holy Spirit, this community gives praise and thanks to God. The next chapter will provide guidance on catechesis for worship, including sacramental catechesis.

³⁴⁷ AN, no. 13.

³⁴⁸ CT, no. 58.

³⁴⁹ CT, no. 58.

CHAPTER 5

Catechesis in a Worshipping Community

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. (Acts 2:42)

32. INTRODUCTION

The Jerusalem community of disciples concentrated on adherence to the teachings of the Twelve, the Eucharistic Liturgy, living the way of Christ, and prayer. These fundamental elements of ecclesial life have remained constant for more than two thousand years. Faith and worship are as closely related to one another as they were in the early Church: faith gathers the community for worship, and worship renews the faith of the community.

The Holy Spirit draws together the community of the faithful as the Church, the Body of Christ, and leads the Church in giving praise and thanks to the Father. The Church, then, is a worshipping community of believers in the Lordship of Jesus Christ—believers who, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, acknowledge their absolute dependence on God, the Father. The Liturgy is the official worship of the Church. In her Liturgy, the Church celebrates what she professes and lives, above all the Paschal Mystery, by which Christ accomplished the work of our salvation.

The rites of the Church are now—more than before the Second Vatican Council—clearly identified with the Paschal Mystery of Christ, adequately integrated with the Eucharist as the principal celebration of that mystery, and directly related to the experiences of individual Christians and communities of faith. The retrieval of Sacred Scripture in the Lectionary and the restoration of the liturgy of the word are an integral component in all sacramental celebrations and other liturgical rites. This

recreation is a significant achievement in the renewal of the Liturgy. Liturgical renewal has also brought the Christian ecclesial communities closer to one another in their faith and forms of worship and has emphasized the common riches that they share on the road to full communion.

This chapter describes the relationship between catechesis and Liturgy. It also treats liturgical and personal prayer, catechesis for the sacramental life, sacred time and space, and sacramentals, popular piety, and popular devotions.

33. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CATECHESIS AND LITURGY

In the Church's mission of evangelization, catechesis and Liturgy are intimately connected. "Catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity."³⁵⁰ Catechesis and Liturgy originate in the faith of the Church; they proclaim the Gospel; they call its hearers to conversion to Christ; they initiate believers into the life of Christ and his Church; and they look for the coming of the kingdom in its fullness when "God may be all in all."³⁵¹ "The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows."³⁵² The history of salvation, from the creation of the world to its redemption and eschatological fulfillment in Jesus Christ, is celebrated in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist. That is why the Liturgy is "the privileged place for catechizing the People of God."³⁵³

Catechesis both precedes the Liturgy and springs from it. It prepares people for a full, conscious, and active participation in the Liturgy by helping them understand its nature, rites, and symbols. It stems from the Liturgy insofar as it helps people to worship God and to reflect on their experience of the words, signs, rituals, and symbols expressed in the Liturgy; to discern the implications of their participation in the Liturgy; and to respond to its missionary summons to bear witness and offer service. And Liturgy itself is inherently catechetical. As the Scriptures are proclaimed and reflected upon and as the Creed is articulated, the truths

of the faith shape more and more profoundly the faith of the People of God. Through the Eucharist, the People of God come to know the Paschal Mystery ever more intimately and experientially. They come not simply to the knowledge of God—they come to know the living God.

"Liturgical catechesis aims to initiate people into the mystery of Christ . . . by proceeding from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the thing signified, from the 'sacraments' to the 'mysteries.'"³⁵⁴ It promotes a more informed knowledge and a more vital experience of the Liturgy. Liturgical catechesis fosters a deeper sense of the meaning of the Liturgy and the sacraments. "In other words, sacramental life is impoverished and very soon turns into hollow ritualism if it is not based on serious knowledge of the meaning of the sacraments, and catechesis becomes intellectualized if it fails to come alive in sacramental practice."³⁵⁵

34. LITURGICAL AND PERSONAL PRAYER

God draws every human being toward himself, and every human being desires communion with God. Prayer is the basis and expression of the vital and personal relationship of a human person with the living and true God: "God tirelessly calls each person to that mysterious encounter known as prayer."³⁵⁶ His initiative comes first; the human response to his initiative is itself prompted by the grace of the Holy Spirit. That human response is the free self-surrender to the incomprehensible mystery of God. In prayer, the Holy Spirit not only reveals the identity of the Triune God to human persons, but also reveals the identity of human persons to themselves. It has been expressed throughout the history of salvation in the words and actions of prayer.

Liturgical prayer is the participation of the People of God in Christ's work. "Every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the Priest and of his Body, which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others. No other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree."³⁵⁷ The sacraments, especially the Eucharist, are the Church's preeminent experiences of liturgical prayer.

³⁵⁰ CT, no. 23.

³⁵¹ 1 Cor 15:28.

³⁵² SC, no. 10, cf. CCC, no. 1069.

³⁵³ CCC, no. 1074.

³⁵⁴ CCC, no. 1075.

³⁵⁵ CT, no. 23.

³⁵⁶ CCC, no. 2567.

³⁵⁷ SC, no. 7.

"In the liturgy, all Christian prayer finds its source and goal."³⁵⁸ The rhythms of prayer within the life of the Church are both liturgical and personal. Liturgical prayer is the public prayer of the Church. It is the work of Christ, and as such it is the work of the Church. Personal prayer is an essential aspect of the human person's relationship with God, which can find expression in and be nourished by various devotional prayers, such as the Holy Rosary, Stations of the Cross, and novenas.

Since the time of the apostles, the Church has abided by the exhortation "to pray constantly" (1 Th 5:17) The Liturgy of the Hours, or the Divine Office, is the daily public prayer of the Church; in it "the whole course of the day and night is made holy by the praise of God."³⁵⁹ Catechists especially would benefit greatly from participating in the Liturgy of the Hours. "Pastors of souls should see to it that the principal hours, especially Vespers, are celebrated in common in church on Sundays and on the more solemn feasts. The laity, too, are encouraged to recite the divine office, either with the priests, or among themselves, or even individually."³⁶⁰

The living Tradition of the Church, however, contains more than the great treasury of liturgical prayer. Personal prayer is God's gift to the "humble and contrite heart."³⁶¹ It expresses the covenant relationship that binds God to the person and the person to God. The connection is Christ, the Son of God made flesh. He is the new and eternal covenant whose blood "will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins"³⁶² so that humanity may be redeemed and restored to communion with God. Personal prayer expresses communion with the life of the Blessed Trinity. The Holy Spirit inspires hearts to pray, removes obstacles to living life in Christ, and leads humanity into communion with the Father and the Son. Personal prayer permeates the daily life of the Christian and disposes him or her toward liturgical, communal, or public prayer.

Because catechesis seeks to lead persons and communities to deeper faith, it is oriented to prayer and worship. Catechesis for prayer emphasizes

the major purposes for prayer—adoration, thanksgiving, petition, and contrition—and includes various prayer forms: communal prayer, private prayer, traditional prayer, spontaneous prayer, gesture, song, meditation, and contemplation. Catechesis for prayer accompanies a person's continual growth in faith. It is most effective when the catechist is a prayerful person who is comfortable leading others to prayer and to participation in liturgical worship. "When catechesis is permeated by a climate of prayer, the assimilation of the entire Christian life reaches its summit."³⁶³

Catechesis for prayer begins when children see and hear others praying and when they pray with others, especially in the family. Young children seem to have a special sense of wonder, a recognition of God's presence in their lives, and a capacity for prayer. They should be encouraged by parents and catechists to call upon the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as well as the Mother of God, the angels, and the saints. From infancy they should be inculcated into the daily prayer life of the family, thereby learning the prayers and prayer forms of the Catholic tradition and becoming accustomed to praying daily: e.g., morning and evening prayer, prayer before and after meals, and prayer at special moments in the life of the family.

35. CATECHESIS FOR THE SACRAMENTS IN GENERAL

A. Sacraments as Mysteries

The liturgical life of the Church revolves around the sacraments, with the Eucharist at the center. "The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church," by which divine life is given to us and celebrated.³⁶⁴ The Church celebrates seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation or Chrismation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony.³⁶⁵

358 CCC, no. 1073.

359 SC, no. 84.

360 SC, no. 100.

361 Ps 51:19.

362 Mt 26:28.

363 CDC, no. 85.

364 CCC, no. 1131.

365 Many Eastern "Traditions call this sacrament of Matrimony the mystery of 'Holy Crowning.'" Cf. *Fieldwork in this Direction*, no. 36 ("Catechesis for the Particular Sacraments"), section C ("The Sacraments of the Service of Communion"), subsection 2 ("Catechesis for the Sacrament of Matrimony").