

THE PRIORITY OF ADULT FORMATION

Foreword

The 1960s, with the Second Vatican Council, and the 1970s, with a series of key documents — *General Catechetical Directory*, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and *Catechesi Tradendae* - marked a watershed in the Church's understanding of the priority of adult formation. But the 1960s and 1970s are now an age away. So it is good to see the publication of this document on the **Priority of Adult Formation**, which was produced by the Committee for Catechetics and Adult Christian Education of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

It gives a succinct and very clear overview of the developments through Vatican II to the publication of the *Catechism* in 1992 and the *General Directory for Catechesis* in 1997, with a summary of the achievements and challenges of the present. For those involved in adult learning in the Church today it is necessary to have an awareness of these roots and to be aware of the importance the Church attaches to what they are doing.

The Church has been talking about 'Lifelong Learning' for a long time...

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Introduction

In Autumn 1997, the new *General Directory for Catechesis* was published. Its publication has far greater implications than might be considered at first glance. The *Directory* invites the entire Church to look again at strategies for evangelisation. Among these, catechesis - the formation of mature, responsible adult Christians - has a key role.

The *General Directory for Catechesis* sees catechesis as central to the task of evangelisation. It presumes that adult catechesis is given pre-eminence in the Church's provision for catechesis. It requires us to reevaluate the strategies for and priority of adult formation in the life of the Church in England and Wales. Furthermore, the need to become ever more effective in our mission to evangelise in the new millennium means greater efforts should be devoted to a coherent and coordinated strategy for the formation of all Christian adults.

Discussions over a period of years among the members of the committees for adult catechesis and catechetics have invariably led to recognition of the interrelated needs for formation. In the first place, clergy, religious and lay people - including teachers, parents, catechists and those in full-time ministry - are being formed simply and firstly as Christian adults. There is a particular need to form adults for lay leadership and additional responsible participation in the Church of the future.

In this paper, the phrases 'adult catechesis' and 'adult formation' are used interchangeably. Both phrases include all that has been intended by the phrase 'adult religious education', used when the word 'catechesis' was applied particularly to work with children and in schools. This paper acknowledges the long and distinguished tradition of adult religious education in this country that continues to this day.

1. An historical perspective

Adult formation in Church teaching since Vatican II

An outline of the development of adult formation in the teaching of the Church since Vatican II is offered as background and structure for a coherent understanding of the place and understanding of adult formation in the contemporary Church.

A. Documents of Vatican II

The *Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)* has a pivotal role. It has been described as ‘the jewel of the Council’ and is fundamental to its theology because the Church’s understanding of how God reveals Godself is essential to and informs the Church’s faith, life and mission. In scripture, liturgy, life and prayer the Church encounters God. It is this ‘uninterrupted conversation’ (8) which guides the Church to formulate doctrine and to express through its tradition and teaching the truths of God from generation to generation.

Dei Verbum, states that ‘easy access to sacred scripture should be provided for all the faithful’. The study of scripture is the soul of theology. it nourishes the people of God by enlightening their minds and setting them on fire with the love of God. From the one table of God’s word and Christ’s body the faithful receive the bread of life. This ministry of the ‘breaking of the word’ includes preaching, catechesis and prayerful reading and study in order that the treasure of revelation entrusted to the Church may fill human hearts ever more and more (21-26).

On the same day as *Dei Verbum* (18 November 1965), the Council published its *Decree on the Laity, Apostolicam Actuositatem*. This document asserts the right and duty of lay people to fulfil their mission in the world, to promote the common good, to educate their children as Christians and to engage in catechetical work (II). The apostolate, or mission, of the laity, to which all are called by virtue of baptism (2) ‘can attain maximum effectiveness only through a diversified and thorough formation’ (28). The document calls for a ‘certain human and well-rounded formation’ which would include sensitivity to the movement of the Holy Spirit, solid doctrinal formation, knowledge of the social teaching of the Church, communications skills and a firm grasp of the principles of ‘see, judge and act’. Lay groups and associations are seen to have a key role in promoting formation for mission. The need to learn how to bear witness to a Christian life in the context of materialism is acknowledged.

Three further documents of the Council make specific reference to adult formation:

- *Christus Dominus* (13-14) states the bishops’ responsibility for catechesis, which should ‘even’ extend to adults. This catechesis should be adapted to the age, natural ability and circumstances of the listener. In the same paragraph we find a mention of the ‘catechumenate’. ‘Bishops should also strive to re-establish and better adapt the instruction of adult catechumens’.
- The decree on the ministry and life of priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, places the priest’s responsibility for education in the faith in the context of his pastoral responsibilities. As head and shepherd in union with the bishop he will ‘gather God’s family together in unity and lead it through Christ and in the Spirit to God the Father’. In seeking to support the lay person’s vocation to charity and freedom the priest must recognise that ‘ceremonies however beautiful, or associations however flourishing, will be of little value if they are not directed toward educating adults in the attainment of Christian maturity’ (6). *Presbyterorum Ordinis* also states that priests are responsible for the formation of a genuine Christian community centred on celebration of the Holy Eucharist.
- The decree on the missions, *Ad Gentes*, calls for the revival of the adult catechumenate,

which is the responsibility of all the faithful. It should lead people by stages, celebrated in liturgical rites, into the 'life of faith, liturgy and love' (14). The status of the catechumens is to be codified in the new canon law called for by the Council - but not, of course, promulgated until 1983, nearly twenty years later. *Ad Gentes* described the role of the catechist as that of 'co-workers' with the priest and as 'of maximum importance', and called for proper formation and remuneration of full-time catechists.

To sum up, therefore, Vatican II lays the groundwork for themes that will recur in the following thirty years:

- the need for all the faithful to have easy access to the inspiration of scripture,
- the emerging importance of the catechesis of adults for Christian maturity and a missionary church;
- the shared responsibility of priests, bishops and lay faithful for adult formation;
- the revival of the adult catechumenate;
- the importance of formation by the community for the community and for mission;
- the need to support the need for adult catechesis in canon law.

B. 1970-1979

This emerging vision was given structure and shape in four key documents promulgated by Rome between 1970 and 1977: the *General Catechetical Directory* (1971), the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (1972), *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) and *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979).

Both the *General Catechetical Directory* and *Catechesi Tradendae* asserted the priority of adult formation. The *General Catechetical Directory* said that all forms of catechesis should be directed towards adult catechesis (20),- it also re-echoed the need to re-establish the catechumenate for adults. The Directory went on to explain (92-94) that the catechesis of adults is a priority because it is in adulthood that persons achieve a developed personality and are able, as adults, to fully establish relationships and build community: 'Adulthood is characterised principally by awareness of a fully developed personality' (94). Catechesis for maturity 'aims at the attainment of Christian wisdom'.

Catechesi Tradendae (43) repeats the assertion that the catechesis of adults is the principal form of catechesis and calls it the 'central problem': 'for catechesis to be effective, it must be permanent, and it would be quite useless if it stopped short just at the threshold of maturity.'

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA), published in 1972, was 'designed for adults who, after hearing the mystery of Christ proclaimed, consciously and freely seek the living God' (1). It recognised that conversion is 'a gradual process' and a 'spiritual journey' which should be marked, as in the early Church, by a series of liturgical rites (4-5). It stated that all catechesis should bear a 'markedly paschal character' and that it was 'the responsibility of all the baptised' who, by joining with the catechumens in reflecting on the paschal mystery, 'renew their own conversion' (4, 8, 9).

Authentic catechesis, says the RCIA, presents Catholic teaching in its entirety and 'enlightens faith, directs the heart towards God, fosters participation in the liturgy and nurtures a life completely in accord with the spirit of Christ' (78).

Evangelii Nuntiandi (1975) states that lay people have a vocation to evangelise in the wide and complex arena of the world. For this task, they must be involved, competent and aware of their Christian potential (70). Lay people are 'called to cooperate with their pastors in the service of the ecclesial community, to extend and invigorate it with the exercise of different kinds of ministries' (73). Preparation and education are needed for all those who work for evangelisation.

At this stage the themes that emerge are:

- the priority of adult catechesis;
- the importance of the role of the community;
- the relationship of catechesis to mission and evangelisation.

C. 1980-1989

In *The Easter People* (1980) (145-151) the bishops of England and Wales reiterated the crucial importance of lifelong formation: 'The continuing Christian education and formation of adult members of the Church must become a priority in our Church's educational labours. ... We willingly accept the practical implications of this decision, including the allocation of personnel and resources that may be proved necessary' (145). This formation, must fulfil real needs for adults to 'develop their talents to the utmost,' to meet with others for prayer and study, to support their children's preparation for the sacraments, to respond to their 'puzzlement about change in the Church' and their daily anxieties about work and housing (146). This formation should have as its main emphasis formation for mission. 'at the heart of all education and formation is community' (150). Continuing formation is needed by all adult Christians, whether clergy, religious or lay; the RCIA might offer the basis for a 'coherent catechesis' (148). 'There can be no priority more urgent' (146).

The document acknowledges: 'Disappointments and frustrations will abound, but nothing should deflect bishops or priests from the task of calling, forming and sustaining Christians who are deeply committed to Christ and who will express this commitment in the whole of their lives' (147).

The 1983 *Code of Canon Law* asserts that formation is both a right and a duty of adults. This right 'genuinely teaches them to strive for the maturity of the human person and at the same time to know and live the mystery of salvation' (217). The clergy, meanwhile, have the duty to promote the mission of lay people in both Church and world (529.2, 275.2). The priest is responsible for 'ensuring that the word of God is proclaimed in its entirety,' by means of instruction, homilies and catechesis. Catechesis is a collaborative endeavour (528, 773, 774, 776, 777). Furthermore, canon law affirms the RCIA as the normal means of preparation for non-baptised adults (85.1.1).

In these more recent documents, a coherent emphasis begins to emerge of the necessity of formation of adults for mission, for communion and community, and for their vocation or ministry in church and world - the theme of *Christifideles Laici* (1987). This formation is necessary for reevangelisation and the formation of mature ecclesial communities (34). *Christifideles Laici* echoes the rights asserted in canon law: 'We all ought to be aware of the rights that each baptised person has to being instructed, educated and supported in the faith and the Christian life.' The Synod Fathers described Christian formation as 'a continual process of maturation in faith and in likening to Christ.' Because of its importance to the vision of communion, mission and collaborative ministry they have 'clearly affirmed that the formation of the lay faithful must be placed among the priorities of a diocese' and 'within a plan of pastoral action' (57). Christian formation is, itself, a deeply collaborative process: 'the lay faithful are formed in the Church and by the Church in a mutual communion and collaboration of all her members, clergy, religious and lay'. Priests must be carefully prepared to foster the vocation and mission of lay people; meanwhile, the lay faithful 'can and should help priests in the course of their spiritual and pastoral journey' (61).

The themes that emerge at this stage are:

- adult formation is essential, a right and a duty for all Christians;
- it is a collaborative task, the shared responsibility of priest, religious and lay;
- it should be part of the strategy of the Church.

D. 1990 - present

In 1990, the International Council for Catechesis in Rome (COINCAT), published *Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community*. It is not possible to do full justice to this inspirational document here. It stated that 'to become an adult and live as an adult is a vocation given by God to human beings' (10). However, it recognised that 'one must admit that in various communities, the formation of adults has been taken for granted or perhaps carried out in connection with certain events not infrequently in an infantile way' (21). 'It is not only legitimate but necessary to acknowledge that a fully Christian community can exist only when a systematic catechesis of all its members takes place and when an effective and well-developed catechesis of adults is regarded as the central task in the catechetical enterprise' (25).

This task can only be effective 'within the overall pastoral plan of local church communities'; furthermore it must be 'integrated with liturgical formation' and coordinated with catechesis for other age groups in order to become 'the catechesis of Christian maturity' (29).

Adult catechesis must present a systematic and comprehensive exposition of the faith, the ethical implications of Christian living and an introduction to the reading and use of scripture. It must 'lead to a knowledge and evaluation, in the light of faith, of the socio-cultural order and of the changes that are taking place in the world today and in the life of individuals, affirming what is good but also pointing out what is harmful and contrary to the gospel' (45).

Two documents call for seminarians and priests to be recognised as adults in need of formation themselves: the *Charter for Priestly Formation* (1991) and *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992). 'The whole programme of priestly formation should be seen as a journey of faith undertaken within the Christian community' (Charter, 41). The programme of priestly formation should attend to the student's experience and respect the principles and insights of adult formation outlined elsewhere. Detailed reference to *Pastores Dabo Vobis* is made below.

In October 1992, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was published a further major event in the development of adult catechesis. The *Catechism* 'aims at presenting an organic synthesis of the essential and fundamental contents of Catholic doctrine, as regards both faith and morals' (II). As such, it constitutes 'the indispensable basic reference for catechesis' (*General Directory for Catechesis*, 124). The role of the *Catechism* is further examined in Part 3: the way forward.

These documents offer a comprehensive and developing understanding of the importance and nature of Christian formation from Vatican II to the present time. The single most recurrent word or theme is that of maturity. The documents make it clear that the all-encompassing purpose of adult catechesis is the formation of mature, responsible adult Christians. The mature adult is aware of his or her journey through life with God. His or her potential and God-given gifts and talents will be developed. she or he will be enabled by the community, within the community to contribute to the life of the community. This call to maturity may lead individuals into distinct roles, vocations and ministries at various times - and the call is for all.

2. The present situation

A. Achievements and challenges

Much can be affirmed in the many initiatives for adult formation already taking place:

- the sustained commitment to parish RCIA programmes which develop skills and commitment in lived witness, deeper understanding of the faith and a stronger sense of community;

- the work of diocesan religious education centres and teams to form adults for discipleship, witness, and engagement in mission as catechists, key catechists, teachers, pastoral leaders and for ministries in the parish;
- diocesan summer schools and the processes which lead up to and from such summer schools,
- the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies, reaching many adult Christians including teachers and catechists, and systematic formation courses for key catechists;
- the diploma and degree courses offered by various institutions including the seminaries and colleges;
- provision of distance-learning and supported open-learning courses designed to meet the needs of people with family or work commitments; parish and diocesan initiatives for scripture based group processes, liturgical formation and programmes for social justice and parish development - there has been a significant growth in ecumenical involvement in such processes.
- the work of the National Project since 1983;
- clergy in-service programmes; a renewed approach to parish missions, weeks of guided prayer, the retreat movement and retreats in daily life;
- contributions of movements and associations which are seen to be open and are integrated with the life and mission of the local Church; methodological developments within all the above areas, a growing understanding of the value of group and experiential processes including the pastoral cycle.
- addition, the discussions of the committee for adult catechesis have highlighted the following areas as opportunities for development:
- continuing development of work in the RCIA - the summer schools movement is a significant trend in the formation of adults but work on the RCIA needs continual support and consolidation, at local, diocesan and national levels;
- national and diocesan initiatives for all adults to receive education for Christian maturity proper to their stage and situation in life.
- provision for sacramental preparation that includes the parents' own needs for formation and recognises that parents (in the first instance) and then children require formation in basic Christian beliefs and faith experience to precede any specifically sacramental formation;
- provision for the ongoing formation of those responsible for leading others into deeper faith: parents, catechists, teachers, those involved in leadership and ministries in the parish, seminarians and priests;
- formation for leadership so that responsibility for the maintenance and development of the Christian community can be shared by priests and lay people;
- collaborative formation for collaborative ministry. Where formation of priests and for lay ministry must be separate, it needs nonetheless to be formation for a collaborative church. Greater consideration needs to be given to a strategy for leadership of the church in the next millennium and to formation for that leadership at local, diocesan and national levels.

Formation needs, always, to be based in an understanding of evangelisation, mission and collaboration, seen always as integrated, coherent and oriented to one another, with their foundation in baptism.

We are aware that there remain areas of concern and wish to highlight the following:

- Despite the many valuable developments and initiatives in adult formation in recent years, the work remains under-funded, under-resourced, under-supported and under-valued - relative to the priority given to it in the teaching of the Church.
- In addition to the work of diocesan institutes, there is need for national and/or regional institutes for adult formation and catechetics and research into these issues. There is provision for distance learning, but for advanced formation some people are still travelling abroad. This requires time, freedom and money, rarely available to lay people.
- Many adults feel that their own formation effectively ended as children. Some remain unaware of the need for ongoing formation.
- The homily too often fails to fulfil its potential as a vehicle for adult catechesis.
- Established groups in parishes do not spend enough time on their own continuing formation.

B. The ongoing formation of clergy

The ongoing formation of the clergy is particularly urgent today because of rapid changes in the social and cultural conditions of individuals and people and the demands of the new evangelisation, a pressing task for the Church at the end of the second millennium.

The 1983 *Code of Canon Law* states: 'By virtue of his office, the parish priest is bound to ensure the catechetical formation of adults, young people and children.' He must do this with the help of other priests, religious and the lay faithful (776). There is a clear need for priests to become more aware of their prime responsibility for catechesis, and for ongoing formation for them to develop their own gifts in catechesis and to animate the gifts of others.

'The proper foundation and original motivation for ongoing formation is contained in the dynamism of the sacrament of orders' (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 70). 'The idea that priestly formation ends on the day one leaves the seminary is false and dangerous and needs to be totally rejected' (76). But ongoing formation for the priest and deacon is also demanded:

- in faithfulness to the priestly ministry and his own process of continuing conversion and growth towards maturity as an adult Christian;
- because priestly ministry is seen as a service towards others, taken 'in common with other professions', requiring constant updating in order to remain current and effective (70)
- because the priest owes it to God's people: 'it is an act of love for the people of God', whose fundamental right is to receive the word of God'.

Different dimensions of ongoing formation

Pastores Dabo Vobis (71) states that the aim of ongoing formation must be that of promoting a general and integral process of constant growth. It names the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral aspects.

- Human. Mass communication, loneliness, stress or overwork may lead a priest to fail to give priority to direct personal contact with people (72). By reflecting - particularly with the help of a pastoral supervisor on his engagement with people, the priest can learn to be lovingly alongside people as they struggle to make sense of their existence. He will thus develop qualities such as 'faithfulness, integrity, consistency, wisdom, a welcoming spirit', etc. (26).
- Spiritual. The claiming of space, inner stillness and silence is essential especially in today's world if the life of the Spirit is to flourish. Many people are trapped in a kind of treadmill.

Mass and the sacraments do not seem to give them life or connect with any meaning. The priest 'is called in all his relationships to fraternity, service and a common quest for the truth, as well as a concern for the promotion of justice and peace' (18). However, access to truth is not always easy: 'it is not always easy ... to distinguish good from evil or sign of hope from threats' (10).

- Intellectual. The intellectual dimension needs to be continually fostered through the priests' entire life, especially by a commitment to study and a 'serious and disciplined familiarity with modern culture' (72). This will require a growing appreciation of the varied forces in our society, which claim the attention of people, whether adults or children, from the earliest age.
- Pastoral. 'As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace' (1 Peter 4:10). Priests need to equip themselves for pastoral activity that is 'relevant, credible and effective' (72). By baptism the priest is a brother among brothers and sisters. 'His consciousness of his communion leads to a need to awaken and deepen co-responsibility in the common mission of salvation, with a prompt and heartfelt esteem for all the charisms and tasks which the Spirit gives believers for the building up of the Church' (74). 'He must give witness to the profound communion with all'.

3. The way forward

The way forward must be approached in the context of the Church's mission to evangelise. The two most recent Church documents that point the way forward are the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992) and the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997). The Church is encouraged to see them as complementary companions so that the content of faith and the methodology of education in and to faith together serve the work of formation.

A. Catechism of the Catholic Church

The publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992, English edition 1994) was of major significance. It presented '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' (11). In *Fidei Depositum* Pope John Paul II wrote: 'Therefore, I ask of all the Church's pastors and the Christian faithful to receive this *Catechism* in a spirit of communion and to use it assiduously in fulfilling their mission of proclaiming the faith and calling people to the gospel life.'

The *Catechism* gave further impetus to the growing emphasis on adult catechesis because:

- it recognises the importance of adult growth in faith and its own role in this process (1231, 1700)¹
- in itself the *Catechism* requires and invites a certain level of intellectual understanding;
- in providing a synthesis of the content of the faith it presumes a vehicle for that content: in other words, the *Catechism* calls for a broad base of understanding about catechetical methodology and process in order for the *Catechism* to be well appropriated.

The publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* made necessary the revision of the 1971 *General Catechetical Directory*.

B. General Directory for Catechesis

The new *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997) gives both impetus and shape to calls for a renewed and coherent strategy to support the priority of adult catechesis. This document is published by the Congregation for the Clergy and is remarkable for its fidelity to the following key themes:

- A breadth of theology, scope and vision which flows naturally from, but considerably deepens, the teaching of the Church since Vatican II, particularly as expressed in the *General Catechetical Directory*, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Catechesi Tradendae* and *Christifideles Laici*. This is a vision for the proclamation of the gospel which affirms our past and our present experience and offers hope and direction for the future. The *Directory* is an inspirational document which deserves considered attention by all those in the Church who are committed to spreading the word - not only those who would narrowly define their task or enterprise as 'catechesis'.
- An integrated and coherent approach to catechesis which will not permit simplistic or one-dimensional thinking. This coherence revolves around the four dimensions of faith: 'in virtue of its own internal dynamic, the faith demands to be known, celebrated, lived and translated into prayer.' Formation in doctrine and scripture, liturgy, the commitment to justice and discipleship, and prayer are thus seen as the 'diverse, interrelated tasks' of catechesis, 'inspired in the manner in which Jesus formed his disciples' (84).
- At the centre of the document lies a systematic theological exposition of catechesis. This is underpinned by the 'Trinitarian Christocentricity of the gospel': 'The presentation of the innermost being of God, revealed by Jesus, the mystery of being one in essence and three in person, has vital implications for the lives of human beings'. This demands that people should not submit their God-given liberty to any earthly power, and that 'humanity, made in the image and likeness of God who is a communion of persons, is called to be a fraternal society ... equal in dignity' (100-106).
- Faith is presented as a journey towards maturity, and to a deeper relationship with God. 'Thus catechesis takes the form of a process or a journey of following the Christ of the gospel in the Spirit towards the Father. It is undertaken to reach the maturity of the faith 'given as Christ allotted it' (Ephesians 4:7) and according to the possibilities and needs of everyone' (143). The catechist is a facilitator of this journey: 'The catechist facilitates communication between the people and the mystery of God, between subjects amongst themselves, as well as with the community' (156).
- The *Directory* integrates theology and spirituality. Faith involves a change of life, a metanoia, a profound transformation of mind and heart; it causes the believer to live that conversion. Faith and conversion arise from the 'heart'; that is, they arise from the depth of the human person and involve all that he or she is (55). Catechesis is 'the necessary nourishment of which every baptised adult has need in order to live' (57).
- The *Directory* 'seeks to arrive at a balance between two principle requirements: on the one hand the contextualisation of catechesis in evangelisation as envisaged by *Evangelii Nuntiandi*; on the other the appropriation of the content of the faith as presented in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*' (7). The *Catechism* and the *Directory* are seen as 'distinct but complementary' (120).
- The indispensable role and context of community is stressed, together with the shared responsibility of all in the Church for the ministry of catechesis. 'Catechetical pedagogy will be effective to the extent that the Christian community becomes a point of concrete reference for the faith journey of individuals. This happens when the community is proposed as a source, locus and means of catechesis' (158).

- The *Directory* calls for an emphasis in catechesis on the social teaching of the Church, human rights and a preferential option for the poor (17, 71, 175). It states that too little emphasis has been given in the past to social doctrine (30).
- The necessity of a robust approach to the gospel discernment of contemporary culture and the need to adapt catechesis to the conditions and needs of people and local situations. Catechesis proposes 'a dynamic process' consisting of listening to the culture, discerning echoes or signs of the word of God, discerning what is open to the gospel and what bears the mark of evil or sin, and offers an attitude of radical conversion and dialogue.
- The theology of communion inherent in the document leads to a deep concern for the causes of Christian unity and ecumenism: 'Catechesis will possess an ecumenical dimension in the measure which it arouses and nourishes a true desire for unity' (86).
- Formation for initiation, specifically the catechumenate as understood in the *Rite of Christian initiation of Adults*, is seen as fundamental: 'The model for all catechesis is the baptismal catechumenate when, by specific formation, an adult converted to belief is brought to explicit profession of baptismal faith during the paschal vigil. This catechumenal formation should inspire the other forms of catechesis in both their objectives and their dynamism' (59).

Catechesis, according to the *Directory*, is 'situated in the context of the Church's mission of evangelisation and seen as an essential moment of that mission. ... The ministry of catechesis appears, then, as a fundamental ecclesial service for the realisation of the missionary mandate of Jesus' (59). The document recognises catechesis as a ministry and states that its publication is 'testimony of the Apostolic See's solicitude for catechetical ministry' (13).

The *Directory* affirms that 'the vocation of the laity to catechesis springs from the sacrament of baptism. ... In addition to the common vocation of the apostolate, some lay people feel called interiorly by God to assume the service of catechist' (231).

The document calls for a number of strategies in order to implement the central importance of catechesis:

- the writing of local Catechisms and directories of catechesis,
- coordination among all the different agencies and places where education in the faith takes place (278);
- the founding of diocesan and national institutes for the advanced formation of priests, religious and lay people in catechesis (250-251). Such institutes might become 'centres of formation for pastoral workers' and should also be devoted to research in catechetics,
- a new focus on the formation of lay catechists and priests in current developments in catechesis. 'Diocesan pastoral programmes must give absolute priority to the formation of lay catechists. Together with this a fundamentally decisive element must be the catechetical formation of priests both at the level of seminary formation as well as at the level of continuing formation. Bishops are called upon to ensure that they are scrupulously attentive to such formation' (234).

For all these reasons, the document calls for a new analysis of the situation, evaluating the state of catechesis and evangelisation, the sense of the sacred and religious among people in a given situation, and a social-cultural analysis. At the core of the reflection and examination that such analysis requires lies the conviction that the object of catechesis is communion with Jesus Christ. Faith is a gift destined to grow (56). The formation envisaged by the *General Directory for Catechesis* must enable the Christian to mature as a person, a believer and an apostle (248).

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