

# *Catechesi Tradendae*

## Catechesis in Our Times: A Study Guide

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## (1) How to Use This Study Guide

This guide is designed to be a formation tool. It is not a purely academic study guide, but one aimed at supporting the vocation of catechists and their work for the Church. In describing his intention writing *Catechesi Tradendae*, Pope St John Paul II writes of his hope that:

*[T]his apostolic exhortation to the whole Church should strengthen the solidity of the faith and of Christian living, should give fresh vigor to the initiatives in hand, should stimulate creativity - with the required vigilance - and should help to spread among the communities the joy of bringing the mystery of Christ to the world."*

*The joy of spreading the Gospel is a favourite theme of Pope Francis. Indeed, his very first encyclical is entitled *Evangelii Gaudium*, or *The Joy of the Gospel*. This is a joy that catechists are called to share in special way, for catechesis is an important stage in the larger process of evangelization, but for many catechists today controversies or difficulties concerning curriculum, bewilderment about how to convey the faith to an increasingly secular world, or discouragement when they encounter apathy or hostility in those they catechise mean that catechists lose the sense of this joy. St John Paul II offers a remedy: a deep meditation on the connection between the practice of catechesis and the person of Christ. He examines this through the lenses of Scripture, of the Church's history and unchanging mission, of the dignity and needs of each human person, and of the challenges of modern secular culture. The world has changed, John Paul II acknowledges, but Christ has not. Again and again he reminds catechists of the joy they share when they make Him known, referencing the words of St Paul in his letter to the Philippians: "I believe nothing can happen that will outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For him I have accepted the loss of everything, and I look on everything as so much rubbish if only I can have Christ and be given a place in him." (Ph 3:8-9)*

This information pack contains an explanation of the content of each module of this resource, as well as some tips and suggestions for using it successfully. Please take the time to read through this information before you begin.

This resource is designed with parish catechists (both lay men and women and priests) in mind, with the hope that they will study *Catechesi Tradendae* in groups so that they can offer each other mutual support and assistance and benefit from the insights of their peers in group discussions. However, it may also be of interest and use for those who are simply interested in deepening their understanding of the Church's rich teachings, even if they have never considered themselves catechists. Although group discussions are usually beneficial to study, this guide can also be used for private study, either omitting the group discussion questions, or instead using them for further journaling prompts.

Whether working individually or as part of a group, we recommend taking about four weeks to complete this study guide, which allows a week for each module. This is to give you time to read or listen carefully to the content of *Catechesi Tradendae*, and then to integrate and deepen your understanding by completing the summary questions, praying with the *Lectio Divina* passages,

considering and writing about the journal prompts, and using the fruits of this study to engage in lively, productive, thought-provoking group discussions. It may not be possible for you or for your group to devote four consecutive weeks to this program: feel free to schedule it on alternate weeks, or even once a month. Each module is designed to take about a week to complete, but for busy people this can certainly be spread over a longer period of time.

Each module of the study guide can be downloaded or printed out for free from our website in PDF form. The modules contain everything you need, including the relevant section of *Catechesi Tradendae*, complete with the original footnotes. If you prefer to listen to the text in podcast form, a recording by Archbishop John Wilson is also available, again broken into four modules, and preceded by a brief meditation. The first step in starting this study program—after praying—is to read or listen to the text. After this simply take the various additional resources in order, using the specific instructions below to guide you.

It is more effective, and more achievable, to plan your time over the week, rather than trying to cram everything into a single session. Set aside one or two hours to read or listen to the text and work through the summary questions on the first day. After that try to devote about half an hour at a time to Lectio Divina and journaling, returning to the text as needed to refresh your memory or extend your understanding. By the end of the week you should hopefully feel confident participating in a discussion on the themes of the text you have been working with.

If you are working in a group and your schedules permit it, you could meet at the beginning of the week to listen to the recordings and work through the summary questions together, but this will not be possible for everyone. It will likely benefit your group more to devote its time together to discussion. As a sort of middle way, you might be able to study with a partner in the main, and to come together as a larger group only for discussion.

Please remember that all this guidance is a suggestion only. We hope that you will use this resource in a way that you find fruitful and helpful to you in your faith and ministry.

## (2) Prayers for Before and After Study

No matter what type of work you are doing in the study guide, always begin and end with prayer. The goal of this resource is not just to pour information into you, but to help you to grow closer to God and to flourish in your catechetical vocation. You can use any prayer you like that dedicates your study time to God. The suggestions below may be helpful:

### **St Thomas Aquinas's Prayer for Before Study**

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*Come, Holy Spirit, Divine Creator, true source of light and fountain of wisdom! Pour forth your brilliance upon my intellect, dissipate the darkness which covers me, that of sin and of ignorance. Grant me a penetrating mind to understand, a retentive memory, method and ease in learning, the lucidity to comprehend, and abundant grace in expressing myself. Guide the beginning of my work, direct its progress, and bring it to successful completion. This I ask through Jesus Christ, true God and true man, living and reigning with You and the Father, forever and ever.*

Amen.

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### **A Prayer for After Study**

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*Holy Lord, I thank you for the opportunity you have given me to study your Word and to grow in knowledge and love of your wisdom. As I now return to other tasks I pray that you will continue to enlighten my mind to know you better and enflame my heart to grow in love of you. Help your holy Word to take root and blossom in my soul so that all that I have learned in study may shine forth in everything that I do. Help me to build up your kingdom here on earth and grant me many more opportunities to know you better through study. I ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, your living and true Word. Amen.*

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### (3) Reading (of Listening to) *Catechesi Tradendae*

If Church documents aren't your usual reading material, picking one up and starting to read might be slightly daunting. This is why we have designed this study guide to make the text as accessible as possible. The full text for each module, about ten pages per section, is included in the packet, and we have also produced audio recordings of each of them, read by Archbishop John Wilson. You can choose whether you find it easier to read or to listen to the text, or indeed to do both at once. Just be aware that the audio recording is lightly excerpted, whereas the text in the study guide is complete, meaning that you cannot in every case simply read along with the Archbishop. However, the differences are small. If you are working with a group you may wish to listen to the recordings together, but please be aware that each one runs for about 40 minutes, so if you are discussing the text at the same meeting this will create quite a long session.

Before you begin don't forget to pray! Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your reading and aid your comprehension. We have included prayers for before and after studying in this general guidance section.

You can get a feel for the text and some the themes you will encounter before you get started. We have included at the beginning of each module a meditation on one central theme of the document, and Archbishop Wilson includes this meditation in his readings. There is also an outline of the text, which is only included in the printed materials. This summarises the content in brief, section by section. You may wish to look at this first, or you may wish to use it for review afterwards.

Once you have read or listened to the text for the module you are working on, you can check that you have understood the central ideas in the text using the Summary Questions. These are questions about the content of the document, not reflection questions. After each one we have indicated where in the outline the answer can be found, and if you want more detail you can from this refer to the full text. Some people find it useful to write out the answers as though it was a mini quiz, and then check their answers, and some people might simply wish to glance at the questions to make sure they know the answers. If you are studying in a group you may wish to take turns answering these questions if going through them as a group would help you to feel more secure in the content, or you may wish to save group time for reflection and discussion. A middle-way would be to ask at the outset of a group section if anyone wants to discuss any of the summary questions that they found difficult to answer.

Documents like this apostolic exhortation are a way that the Church speaks to her members and teaches them, so do give yourself time to read or listen carefully, perhaps more than once, and don't be afraid to highlight and make notes. Developing and understanding of content of the text will make reflecting on it and working with it much more productive and rewarding.

When you are done with studying for the day finish with a prayer. (Again, we have provided one you can use.) Thank God for the opportunity to grow in truth and knowledge, and ask him to help your studies bear fruit in what you do. If you are struggling or frustrated with your studies, ask God to help you to understand. Studying is itself a spiritual activity if we allow God to guide us.

## (5) Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina, which means “divine reading”, is an ancient practice of the Church. It consists in reading and meditating in prayer on short passages of sacred scripture. The ultimate purpose of this study guide is to help catechists to know God better so that they can share this knowledge in their testimony to those they catechise. There is no better way to come to know God than to meditate on his Word. Indeed, Pope St John Paul II includes many references to the Bible in *Catechesi Tradendae*, both by quoting it directly and through footnote references. What he tells us about catechesis stems in large part from his meditation on scripture. And so, in each module we have selected a few of the passages from scripture cited in the document so that you too can read them and meditate upon them prayerfully, and allow God to speak to you with His own voice.

If you have never done Lectio Divina before, this is a wonderful opportunity to learn to pray with the Bible. It can help to do this in front of a crucifix or other holy image, or even in a Church, so that we are not visually distracted from God whilst trying to pray. As Lectio Divina is different from the other varieties of study included in this resource, you may not wish to use the prayers for before and after study, but there are four steps to lectio divina:

- ❖ **Lectio (Reading):** What does the scriptural passage itself say, i.e. what is its literal meaning of the passage? When reading the text it can be especially helpful to pick out and focus on the key words in the passage. You may wish to underline or circle bits of the text or make notes on what it means. You may wish to read it aloud. Find the means that helps you to understand the text the best.
- ❖ **Meditatio (Meditation):** Scripture is the Word of God, and it is addressed to you; what is it saying? Once you know what the text is saying think about how this speaks to your own life and relationship with God. What strikes you? Encourages you? Convicts you? Makes you think?
- ❖ **Oratio (Prayer):** What do I say to God in response to his Word? When you have prayerfully meditated upon the meaning of the Scripture passage and how it speaks to you, enter into conversation with God about his Word. Speak to Him about what you have read and listen in quiet for Him to speak to you.
- ❖ **Contemplatio (Contemplation):** What conversion of mind, heart, and life God is asking of me? Contemplate what you have learnt through prayerful conversation with God and on the power of God’s Word to transform your life and deepen your faith.

Lectio Divina cannot be rushed. It is advisable to take one passage at a time, and to start with one from the passages provided that you think will speak to you strongly and provide substance for meditation. (There is no need to use all of them or take them in order!) Lectio Divina always uses a short passage from Scripture, sometimes a single verse, sometimes two or three. This means you can read the words several times slowly and carefully, and perhaps even to memorise the

passage. It is a very different experience than reading an entire chapter or even an entire epistle. Some people find it difficult to learn this kind of close meditative reading: often in our lives we are trying to internalize as much information as we can as quickly as possible, and Lectio Divina asks us to slow down and look closely, to stop and listen, rather than rushing on to the next verse, the next chapter, or the next book. Learning to do Lectio Divina requires patience, both with yourself and in the actual activity, so even if it is difficult at first we recommend perseverance. Anyone who learns to still his or her mind and listen to God will grow closer to Him.

## (6) Journaling

The prompts for journaling are provided to help you to reflect on your own experience in light of what you have read in *Catechesi Tradendae*. They focus on your memories of receiving catechesis and formation, and on your broader experience of Christian life and faith. How many of these questions you work on, and how you go about it—writing or typing your responses, writing in paragraph form or simply noting down key ideas or words, or even illustrating or illuminating your ideas—is entirely up to you. We have a few recommendations to help you get the most out of this exercise.

- ❖ Start with prayer. Use the prayers for study provided and ask God to guide your contemplation to know Him better.
- ❖ Don't overload yourself: you needn't do all the questions at once, or indeed at all. Give yourself time to absorb what you have read before starting on the journal questions and focus on one or two questions at a time.
- ❖ If there is a theme not asked about in the prompts that you really want to write about, go for it! The prompts are provided to help you think about the text, not constrain you.
- ❖ Make a mess! Don't be afraid to write in a stream of consciousness, to cross out, draw arrows, doodle in the margins, highlight, circle, or underline the important parts, or leave out bits you don't know how to articulate at the time. You can always write a summary at the end if you find it helpful, but these journals are for your sole benefit, so do it your way.
- ❖ Keep all your journaling together in one place so you can read it over at the end of your study guide. Looking at all your journals together can show you themes and growth that you might not see whilst in the midst of study.
- ❖ If you are doing the study guide on your own you may wish to use the Group Discussion Prompts in journaling as well. The prompts focus less on the personal experience of faith and more of the practice of giving catechesis, so they may produce journal entries that are a bit different in tone or focus, but nonetheless helpful and worthwhile.



## (7) Discussion Questions

Each of the group discussion questions is based on a passage from *Catechesi Tradendae*. This passage is printed in italics above the bolded discussion questions. The questions focus on the practice of providing catechesis. If your group is not made up of catechists there may still be much of interest in the passages of text highlighted, but you may need to slightly change the focus questions to have a productive discussion.

We have some advice for groups to make the most of their discussion time.

- ❖ Keep the focus on God! Always begin with prayer. You can use the prayers for study we have provided, or pray the *Veni Sancte Spiritus*. You may wish to add ask members of the group to share their prayer intentions. You can also begin with a short reading from Scripture, perhaps the day's Gospel.
- ❖ An ideal size for a discussion group is about eight to ten persons. This number usually includes persons of varied enough experiences, views, and observations to make a conversation interesting, and still gives enough time for everyone to participate. If you have many more than ten you might want to break into smaller groups of at least five to have smaller discussions and report back to the larger group afterwards so that there is enough time for everyone to participate.
- ❖ An hour to an hour and a half is usually the right amount of time for a group study session. Any more than two hours tends to be too long unless it is broken up by a shared meal, or is being treated as a retreat or study day.
- ❖ It is often helpful to have a discussion leader or facilitator. The role of this person is not to pronounce on which views are right or wrong, but to keep discussion moving and on-topic, and to steer the group on to a new topic or new question if discussion is becoming unfruitful, or if time is short. It is possible to have a new leader or facilitator for each question.
- ❖ It may be helpful to ask someone to record what is said so that the group can have these notes to refer to later on. This is not necessary for everyone, and may be too formal for some groups.
- ❖ It may not be possible to discuss all the questions during the group meeting, and some groups may simply prefer to allow a longer time to discuss just one or two questions. Before beginning the group should decide which questions will be discussed and how long each will be given.
- ❖ Depending on what the group hopes to get out of its time together it can be fruitful to offer members the opportunity to ask questions about the text, if, for example, there was something they are struggling with, or to share from their journaling. Some groups may wish to review the summary questions together or talk about broader themes before settling into a focused discussion. All different formats can work, but we advise

that you consider ahead of time how long each activity will need so that you schedule the right amount of time for the activities and the right number of activities for the time.

- ❖ The aim of a discussion is to help all the participants deepen their understanding of the text. From time to time this will involve disagreements between members of the group. All group members should be encouraged to listen closely and with charity to the views of others. If discussion becomes uncomfortably confrontational the group can set that topic aside and return to prayer before moving on to a new question.