

Catechesi Tradendae

Catechesis in Our Times: A Study Guide

Module 1: *Catechesi Tradendae* §1-17

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(1) Meditation on the Themes of the Text

This section of *Catechesi Tradendae* demonstrates how catechesis is a practice, a demonstration, and an experience of the unity of the Church in Jesus Christ. This unity is best displayed in the profound connection between what Christ did, what he taught, and who he is:

“The majesty of Christ the Teacher and the unique consistency and persuasiveness of His teaching can only be explained by the fact that His words, His parables and His arguments are never separable from His life and His very being. Accordingly, 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 fulfilment of revelation. Hence for Christians the crucifix is one of the most sublime and popular images of Christ the Teacher.” (CT, 9)

Christ himself is the model for catechists. Christ is the true teacher and author of what is taught in all catechesis, which is in essence the mystery of his own person. He gave the Church its catechetical mission.

Christ is the end, as well as the origin of the Church’s catechetical mission, which is to reach everyone and bring them all into profound union with him. Catechesis is an activity that unites *each* person with Christ, and also an activity that seeks to unite *every* person with Christ: Jesus commanded the apostles to “make disciples of all nations...and teach them” (Mt 29:19). This unity of all people with Christ, and therefore with each other, has a name: The Church. Catechesis, in forming Christians, builds up the Church.

When we think of the Church we might think of our own parishes, or perhaps the local Church (England and Wales, in our case), or maybe a world-wide Church as it is *today*. But in this document on “catechesis in our times”, John Paul II spends several long paragraphs telling us about catechesis in other times. He shows us what it was to the apostles, to the Church fathers, to the great catechists of the past. From the earliest days of the Church the Christian vocation has been a catechetical one, and has been anchored in Christ in the same way. Rather than being distant from us, the historical Church we see in *Catechesi Tradendae* is a familiar one: Scripture tells us that the apostles *annoyed* those outside the Church by catechising, and to many of us the hostility of secular culture to the Word of God is all too familiar. But the apostles persisted. John Paul II mentions the great catechists from the Patristic age like St John Chrysostom and St Augustine, and from later eras, like St Charles Borromeo and St Peter Canisius. We might also look to the example of one of our own local saints, Margaret Clitherow, a convert to the faith who was martyred for her Catholicism. She was an ordinary wife and mother with no great education and no charism for preaching. She is not remembered primarily as a catechist, but catechesis was at the heart of the practice of her faith: she set up a clandestine school to educate and catechise Catholic children. Her mission was the same as the apostles’. It is the one we catechists undertake today: St Margaret taught in order to spread the Word of God and to unite the faithful with Christ. It happens that in her times Catholic catechesis was illegal: her final catechetical witness was in her death, which expressed profound unity with Christ.

In our day, catechesis usually happens in a parish. In living out your vocation as a catechist, however, you are a part of a tradition as old as the Church, and part of a community as large as the number of

the baptised throughout all of history. Through your ministry – your teaching and your witness of charity – Christians can find deeper union with Christ, and with each other through him. A Church made strong through faithful, Christocentric catechesis can carry out the Great Commission to make disciples of all people, uniting the world the with Christ.

(2) Outline

Introduction (§1-4)

I. Christ's Final Command

- A. Catechesis is one of the main tasks of the Church because it forms a part of Christ's final command: to make disciples of all nations, to baptise, and to *teach all to observe the commands of God*. (Mt 29: 19-20)
- B. Christ gave the Church the authority to pass on his teachings, and sent his Spirit to guide us.
- C. Since the early Church, the term "catechesis" has been used to describe all the Church's efforts to help people to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and to educate and instruct them in how to live a Christian life.

II. Paul VI's Solitude & A Fruitful Synod

- A. Pope Paul VI gave catechesis a prominent place in his papacy and during the Second Vatican Council, for example by promulgating the first *General Directory for Catechesis* (1971), and making catechesis the theme of the fourth General Synod of Bishops (1977).
- B. The Synod Fathers saw modern catechetical renewal as a gift of the Holy Spirit, realised through the generosity and dedication of the people of God in all areas of the Church.

III. The Purpose of this Exhortation

- A. To take up again and disseminate the catechetical writings of Paul VI and John Paul I.
- B. To give to the Church fresh vigour, creativity, vigilance, and renewed joy in her mission to bring the mystery of Christ to the world.

We Have But One Teacher, Jesus Christ (§5-9)

I. We Have But One Teacher, Jesus Christ

- A. All authentic catechesis is "Christocentric", which has two meanings:
 1. It is centred on the Person of Christ, who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life", and who provides the rule of Christian living; therefore the primary objective of catechesis is to express the mystery of Christ.
 2. It also means that in catechesis, catechists do not express their own views, opinions, or teachings, but faithfully transmit those of Christ, both through their words and in how they live.

B. Christ the Teacher & the One "Teacher"

1. The teaching of Christ does not convey abstract truth, but the living mystery of God.
2. Christ teaches in a way that surpasses all others because of the unique link between what he says, what he does, and who he is.

3. Teaching was the activity with which both Jesus' followers and accusers identified him.
 4. Jesus is often called "Teacher" by his disciples, and he claims this title for himself as well.
 5. The image of Christ as teacher (Christos Pantocrator) is common in iconography, and has been since the earliest days of the Church.
- C. Teaching Through His Life as a Whole
1. Christ's life was continual teaching, for his words were inseparable from his life and being. All he said and did teaches us. Indeed, the crucifix is a profound image of Christ as teacher.
 2. Catechists require deep communion with Christ to bring about authentic renewal of catechesis.

An Experience As Old As The Church (§10-17)

I. The Mission of the Apostles

A. The image of Christ the Teacher was stamped on the spirit of the original twelve Apostles and the first disciples.

1. The Great Commission ("Go...make disciples of all nations.") formed all the activity of their lives.
2. Jesus's followers did not choose to follow him; he called and commanded them, and gave them their vocation.

B. The whole book of the Acts of the Apostles is an account of how the Apostles lived their vocation.

1. The early Church was a community devoted to the teachings handed down to them by the Apostles through fellowship and prayer, the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, and the witness of charity they gave to the world.
2. The Acts of the Apostles also relate that the teaching of the Apostles "annoyed" people, but they continued with the work God commanded them to do, rather than yielding to human commands to cease teaching.

II. Catechesis in an Apostolic Age

- A. The Apostles shared their teaching ministry with many others, transmitting it to their successors and to newly-instituted deacons.
- B. "Simple Christians scattered by persecution" preached the Gospel after the example of St Paul.
- C. The epistles of Paul, Peter, John, James, and Jude are examples of catechesis happening in the apostolic age
- D. In the apostolic age the Gospel was an oral teaching. When the Gospels were written down they showed a certain developed catechetical structure.
- E. St Matthew's Gospel is called the "catechist's Gospel" and St Mark's the "catechumen's Gospel."

III. The Fathers of the Church

- A. In the post-apostolic era the Church came to be referred to as “Mother and Teacher”
- B. Many of the bishops of this era considered it a key part of their office to deliver catechesis and write treatises.
- C. Great names from this era include Clement of Rome, Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Augustine of Hippo

IV. Councils and Missionary Activity

- A. The Councils of the Church have often led to periods of renewal and development of catechesis.
- B. The councils have given organisation to catechesis that has allowed the publication of great catechisms.
- C. These catechisms have supported the missionary instruction in the faith that has spread the Gospel throughout the world, adapting it to the circumstances of all different believers.
- D. Catechesis is essential not only to the geographical spread of the faith, but to the internal growth of the Church: growth in Her likeness to God.
- E. Studying this Church history teaches several important lessons, four of which are noted below.

V. Catechesis as the Church’s Right and Duty (First Lesson)

- A. Catechesis is the responsibility of the Church in two senses:
 - 1. Catechesis is a duty of the Church arising from a command given by Jesus Christ himself.
 - 2. Catechesis is also the right of the faithful: all the baptised are entitled to receive formation in the faith that allow them to live a Christian life.
- B. The right of the faithful to receive catechesis is integral to the fundamental human right to seek and adhere to religious truth.
 - 1. This means catechesis should be accessible and attended without incurring penalty or persecution.
 - 2. The synod fathers vigorously protest the human rights offenses of States that do not recognise or allow access to catechesis.

VI. Priority of This Task (Second Lesson)

- A. The greater a priority the Church makes of Catechesis the more spectacular will be both the spiritual growth of her Christian community and her missionary activity in the world.
- B. The Church should give catechesis her best resources: in people, energy, material means, effort, and toil.
- C. Prioritising catechesis is an attitude of faith rather than a merely human calculation, for it trusts in the responsiveness of God who has given the Church her catechetical mission.

VII. Shared But Differentiated Responsibility (Third Lesson)

- A. Catechesis is the work of the whole Church: clergy and laity.
- B. Catechesis is an integral part of all particular Christian vocations, but the manner in which the responsibility to catechise forms each vocation differs (i.e. the responsibility of the pope is different from that of parents, teachers, ministers, social organisers, etc, but all have some catechetical role within the Church).

VIII. Continual Balanced Renewal (Fourth Lesson)

- A. Catechesis requires constant renewal whilst carefully navigating between two dangers:
 - 1. Strict adherence to catechetical routine for no reason apart from ‘this is how things have always been done’ can cause “stagnation, lethargy, and eventual paralysis.”
 - 2. However, improvisation leads to confusion regarding what the Church teaches, and also “all kinds of deviations,” regarding Church teachings, and the destruction of the unity of the faith.
- B. The Church is called today to demonstrate “evangelical wisdom, courage and fidelity” in her catechetical renewal.

(3) Text

APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION
CATECHESI TRADENDAE
OF POPE
JOHN PAUL II
ON CATECHESIS IN OUR TIME

INTRODUCTION

Christ's Final Command

1. The Church has always considered catechesis one of her primary tasks, for, before Christ ascended to His Father after His resurrection, He gave the apostles a final command - to make disciples of all nations and to teach them to observe all that He had commanded.(1) He thus entrusted them with the mission and power to proclaim to humanity what they had heard, what they had seen with their eyes, what they had looked upon and touched with their hands, concerning the Word of Life.(2) He also entrusted them with the mission and power to explain with authority what He had taught them, His words and actions, His signs and commandments. And He gave them the Spirit to fulfil this mission.

Very soon the name of catechesis was given to the whole of the efforts within the Church to make disciples, to help people to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, so that believing they might have life in His name,(3) and to educate and instruct them in this life and thus build up the Body of Christ. The Church has not ceased to devote her energy to this task.

Paul VI's Solicitude

2. The most recent Popes gave catechesis a place of eminence in their pastoral solicitude. Through his gestures, his preaching, his authoritative interpretation of the Second Vatican Council (considered by him the great catechism of modern times), and through the whole of his life, my venerated predecessor Paul VI served the Church's catechesis in a particularly exemplary fashion. On March 18, 1971, he approved the General Catechetical Directory prepared by the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, a directory that is still the basic document for encouraging and guiding catechetical renewal throughout the Church. He set up the International Council for Catechesis in 1975. He defined in masterly fashion the role and significance of catechesis in the life and mission of the Church when he addressed the participants in the first International Catechetical Congress on September 25, 1971,(4) and he returned explicitly to the subject in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*.(5) He decided that catechesis, especially that meant for children and young people, should be the theme of the fourth general assembly of the synod of Bishops,(6) which was held in October 1977 and which I myself had the joy of taking part in.

A Fruitful Synod

3. At the end of that synod the fathers presented the Pope with a very rich documentation, consisting of the various interventions during the assembly, the conclusions of the working groups, the message that they had with his consent sent to the People of God,(7) and especially the imposing list of "propositions" in which they expressed their views on a very large number of aspects of present-day catechesis.

The Synod worked in an exceptional atmosphere of thanksgiving and hope. It saw in catechetical renewal a precious gift from the Holy Spirit to the Church of today, a gift to which the Christian communities at all levels throughout the world are responding with a generosity and inventive dedication that win admiration. The requisite discernment could then be brought to bear on a reality that is very much alive and it could benefit from great openness among the People of God to the grace of the Lord and the directives of the magisterium.

Purpose of This Exhortation

4. It is in the same climate of faith and hope that I am today addressing this apostolic exhortation to you, venerable brothers and dear sons and daughters. The theme is extremely vast and the exhortation will keep to only a few of the most topical and decisive aspects of it, as an affirmation of the happy results of the synod. In essence, the exhortation takes up again the reflections that were prepared by Pope Paul VI, making abundant use of the documents left by the synod. Pope John Paul I, whose zeal and gifts as a catechist amazed us all, had taken them in hand and was preparing to publish them when he was suddenly called to God. To all of us he gave an example of catechesis at once popular and concentrated on the essential, one made up of simple words and actions that were able to touch the heart. I am therefore taking up the inheritance of these two Popes in response to the request which was expressly formulated by the Bishops at the end of the fourth general assembly of the synod and which was welcomed by Pope Paul VI in his closing speech.(8) I am also doing so in order to fulfil one of the chief duties of my apostolic charge. Catechesis has always been a central care in my ministry as a priest and as a Bishop.

I ardently desire that this apostolic exhortation to the whole Church should strengthen the solidity of the faith and of Christian living, should give fresh vigour 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.

I.

WE HAVE BUT ONE TEACHER, JESUS CHRIST

Putting Into Communion With the Person of Christ

5. The fourth general assembly of the synod of Bishops often stressed the Christocentricity of all authentic catechesis. We can here use the word "Christocentricity" in both its meanings, which are not opposed to each other or mutually exclusive, but each of which rather demands and completes the other.

In the first place, it is intended to stress that at the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, "the only Son from the Father...full of grace and truth,"(9) who suffered and died for us and who now, after rising, is living with us forever. It is Jesus who is "the way, and the truth, and the life,"(10) and Christian living consists in following Christ, the sequela Christi.

The primary and essential object of catechesis is, to use an expression dear to St. Paul and also to contemporary theology, "the mystery of Christ." Catechizing is in a way to lead a person to study this mystery in all its dimensions: "to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery...comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth ...know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge...(and be filled) with all the fullness of God."(11) It is therefore to reveal in the Person of Christ the whole of God's eternal design reaching fulfilment in that Person. It is to seek to understand the meaning of Christ's actions and words and of the signs worked by Him, for they simultaneously hide and reveal His mystery. Accordingly, the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity.

Transmitting Christ's Teaching

6. Christocentricity in catechesis also means the intention to transmit not one's own teaching or that of some other master, but the teaching of Jesus Christ, the Truth that He communicates or, to put it more precisely, the Truth that He is.(12) We must therefore say that in catechesis it is Christ, the Incarnate Word and Son of God, who is taught - everything else is taught with reference to Him - and it is Christ alone who teaches - anyone else teaches to the extent that he is Christ's spokesman, enabling Christ to teach with his lips. Whatever be the level of his responsibility in the Church, every catechist must constantly endeavour to transmit by his teaching and behaviour the teaching and life of Jesus. He will not seek to keep directed towards himself and his personal opinions and attitudes the attention and the consent of the mind and heart of the person he is catechizing. Above all, he will not try to inculcate his personal opinions and options as if they expressed Christ's teaching and the lessons of His life. Every catechist should be able to apply to himself the mysterious words of Jesus: "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me."(13) St. Paul did this when he was dealing with a question of prime importance: "I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you."(14) What assiduous study of the word of God transmitted by the Church's magisterium, what profound familiarity with Christ and with the Father, what a spirit of prayer, what detachment from self must a catechist have in order that he can say: "My teaching is not mine!"

Christ the Teacher

7. This teaching is not a body of abstract truths. It is the communication of the living mystery of God. The Person teaching it in the Gospel is altogether superior in excellence to the "masters" in Israel, and the nature of His doctrine surpasses theirs in every way because of the unique link between what He says, what He does and what He is. Nevertheless, the Gospels clearly relate occasions when Jesus "taught." "Jesus began to do and teach"(15) - with these two verbs, placed at the beginning of the book of the Acts, St. Luke links and at the same time distinguishes two poles in Christ's mission.

Jesus taught. It is the witness that He gives of Himself: "Day after day I sat in the temple teaching."⁽¹⁶⁾ It is the admiring observation of the evangelists, surprised to see Him teaching everywhere and at all times, teaching in a manner and with an authority previously unknown: "Crowds gathered to him again; and again, as his custom was, he taught them "⁽¹⁷⁾; "and they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority."⁽¹⁸⁾ It is also what His enemies note for the purpose of drawing from it grounds for accusation and condemnation: "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judaea, from Galilee even to this place."⁽¹⁹⁾

The One "Teacher"

8. One who teaches in this way has a unique title to the name of "Teacher." Throughout the New Testament, especially in the Gospels, how many times is He given this title of Teacher!⁽²⁰⁾ Of course the Twelve, the other disciples, and the crowds of listeners call Him "Teacher" in tones of admiration, trust and tenderness.⁽²¹⁾ Even the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the doctors of the law, and the Jews in general do not refuse Him the title: "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you"⁽²²⁾; "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"⁽²³⁾ But above all, Jesus Himself at particularly solemn and highly significant moments calls Himself Teacher: "You call me teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am"⁽²⁴⁾; and He proclaims the singularity, the uniqueness of His character as teacher: "You have one teacher,"⁽²⁵⁾ the Christ. One can understand why people of every kind, race and nation have for 2,000 years in all the languages of the earth given Him this title with veneration, repeating in their own ways the exclamation of Nicodemus: "We know that you are a teacher come from God."⁽²⁶⁾

This image of Christ the Teacher is at once majestic and familiar, impressive and reassuring. It comes from the pen of the evangelists and it has often been evoked subsequently in iconography since earliest Christian times,⁽²⁷⁾ so captivating is it. And I am pleased to evoke it in my turn at the beginning of these considerations on catechesis in the modern world.

Teaching Through His Life as a Whole

9. In doing so, I am not forgetful that the majesty of Christ the Teacher and the unique consistency and persuasiveness of His teaching can only be explained by the fact that His words, His parables and His arguments are never separable from His life and His very being. Accordingly, 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 fulfilment of revelation. Hence for Christians the crucifix is one of the most sublime and popular images of Christ the Teacher.

These considerations follow in the wake of the great traditions of the Church and they all strengthen our fervour with regard to Christ, the Teacher who reveals God to man and man to himself, the Teacher who saves, sanctifies and guides, who lives, who speaks, rouses, moves, redresses, judges, forgives, and goes with us day by day on the path of history, the Teacher who comes and will come in glory.

Only in deep communion with Him will catechists find light and strength for an authentic, desirable renewal of catechesis.

II.

AN EXPERIENCE AS OLD AS THE CHURCH

The Mission of the Apostles

10. The image of Christ the Teacher was stamped on the spirit of the Twelve and of the first disciples, and the command "Go...and make disciples of all nations"(28) set the course for the whole of their lives. St. John bears witness to this in his Gospel when he reports the words of Jesus: "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."(29) It was not they who chose to follow Jesus; it was Jesus who chose them, kept them with Him, and appointed them even before His Passover, that they should go and bear fruit and that their fruit should remain.(30) For this reason He formally conferred on them after the resurrection the mission of making disciples of all nations.

The whole of the book of the Acts of the Apostles is a witness that they were faithful to their vocation and to the mission they had received. The members of the first Christian community are seen in it as "devoted to the apostles" teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."(31) Without any doubt we find in that a lasting image of the Church being born of and continually nourished by the word of the Lord, thanks to the teaching of the apostles, celebrating that word in the Eucharistic Sacrifice and bearing witness to it before the world in the sign of charity.

When those who opposed the apostles took offense at their activity, it was because they were "annoyed because (the apostles) were teaching the people"(32) and the order they gave them was not to teach at all in the name of Jesus.(33) But we know that the apostles considered it right to listen to God rather than to men on this very matter.(34)

Catechesis in the Apostolic Age

11. The apostles were not slow to share with others the ministry of apostleship.(35) They transmitted to their successors the task of teaching. They entrusted it also to the deacons from the moment of their institution: Stephen, "full of grace and power," taught unceasingly, moved by the wisdom of the Spirit.(36) The apostles associated "many others" with themselves in the task of teaching,(37) and even simple Christians scattered by persecution "went about preaching the word."(38) St. Paul was in a pre-eminent way the herald of this preaching, from Antioch to Rome, where the last picture of him that we have in Acts is that of a person "teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly."(39) His numerous letters continue and give greater depth to his teaching. The letters of Peter, John, James and Jude are also, in every case, evidence of catechesis in the apostolic age.

Before being written down, the Gospels were the expression of an oral teaching passed on to the Christian communities, and they display with varying degrees of clarity a catechetical structure. St. Matthew's account has indeed been called the catechist's Gospel, and St. Mark's the catechumen's Gospel.

The Fathers of the Church

12. This mission of teaching that belonged to the apostles and their first fellow workers was continued by the Church. Making herself day after day a disciple of the Lord, she earned the title of "Mother and Teacher."⁽⁴⁰⁾ From Clement of Rome to Origen,⁽⁴¹⁾ the post-apostolic age saw the birth of remarkable works. Next we see a striking fact: Some of the most impressive Bishops and pastors, especially in the third and fourth centuries considered it an important part of their episcopal ministry to deliver catechetical instructions and write treatises. It was the age of Cyril of Jerusalem and John Chrysostom, of Ambrose and Augustine, the age that saw the flowering, from the pen of numerous Fathers of the Church, of works that are still models for us.

It would be impossible here to recall, even very briefly the catechesis that gave support to the spread and advance of the Church in the various periods of history, in every continent, and in the widest variety of social and cultural contexts. There was indeed no lack of difficulties. But the word of the Lord completed its course down the centuries; it sped on and triumphed, to use the words of the Apostle Paul.⁽⁴²⁾

Councils and Missionary Activity

13. The ministry of catechesis draws ever fresh energy from the councils. The Council of Trent is a noteworthy example of this. It gave catechesis priority in its constitutions and decrees. It lies at the origin of the Roman Catechism, which is also known by the name of that council and which is a work of the first rank as a summary of Christian teaching and traditional theology for use by priests. It gave rise to a remarkable organization of catechesis in the Church. It aroused the clergy to their duty of giving catechetical instruction. Thanks to the work of holy theologians such as St. Charles Borromeo, St. Robert Bellarmine and St. Peter Canisius, it involved the publication of catechisms that were real models for that period. May the Second Vatican Council stir up in our time a like enthusiasm and similar activity.

The missions are also a special area for the application of catechesis. The People of God have thus continued for almost 2,000 years to educate themselves in the faith in ways adapted to the various situations of believers and the many different circumstances in which the Church finds herself.

Catechesis is intimately bound up with the whole of the Church's life. Not only her geographical extension and numerical increase, but even more, her inner growth and correspondence with God's plan depend essentially on catechesis. It is worthwhile pointing out some of the many lessons to be drawn from the experiences in Church history that we have just recalled.

Catechesis as the Church's Right and Duty

14. To begin with, it is clear that the Church has always looked on catechesis as a sacred duty and an inalienable right. On the one hand, it is certainly a duty springing from a command given by the Lord and resting above all on those who in the new covenant receive the call to the ministry of being pastors. On the other hand, one can likewise speak of a right: from the theological point of view every baptized person, precisely the reason of being baptized, has the right to receive from the Church instruction and education enabling him or her to enter on a truly Christian life; and from the viewpoint of human rights, every human being has the right to seek religious truth and adhere to it freely, that is to say, "without coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and any

human power," in such a way that in this matter of religion, "no one is to be forced to act against his or her conscience or prevented from acting in conformity to it."(43)

That is why catechetical activity should be able to be carried out in favourable circumstances of time and place, and should have access to the mass media and suitable equipment, without discrimination against parents, those receiving catechesis or those imparting it. At present this right is admittedly being given growing recognition, at least on the level of its main principles, as is shown by international declarations and conventions in which, whatever their limitations, one can recognize the desires of the consciences of many people today.(44) But the right is being violated by many States, even to the point that imparting catechesis, having it imparted, and receiving it become punishable offenses. I vigorously raise my voice in union with the synod fathers against all discrimination in the field of catechesis, and at the same time I again make a pressing appeal to those in authority to put a complete end to these constraints on human freedom in general and on religious freedom in particular.

Priority of This Task

15. The second lesson concerns the place of catechesis in the Church's pastoral programs. The more the Church, whether on the local or the universal level, gives catechesis priority over other works and undertakings the results of which would be more spectacular, the more she finds in catechesis a strengthening of her internal life as a community of believers and of her external activity as a missionary Church. As the 20th century draws to a close, the Church is bidden by God and by events - each of them a call from Him - to renew her trust in catechetical activity as a prime aspect of her mission. She is bidden to offer catechesis her best resources in people and energy, without sparing effort, toil or material means, in order to organize it better and to train qualified personnel. This is no mere human calculation; it is an attitude of faith. And an attitude of faith always has reference to the faithfulness of God, who never fails to respond.

Shared But Differentiated Responsibility

16. The third lesson is that catechesis always has been and always will be a work for which the whole Church must feel responsible and must wish to be responsible. But the Church's members have different responsibilities, derived from each one's mission. Because of their charge, pastors have, at differing levels, the chief responsibility for fostering, guiding and coordinating catechesis. For his part, the Pope has a lively awareness of the primary responsibility that rests on him in this field: In this he finds reasons for pastoral concern but principally a source of joy and hope. Priests and religious have in catechesis a pre-eminent field for their apostolate. On another level, parents have a unique responsibility. Teachers, the various ministers of the Church, catechists, and also organizers of social communications, all have in various degrees very precise responsibilities in this education of the believing conscience, an education that is important for the life of the Church and affects the life of society as such. It would be one of the best results of the general assembly of the synod that was entirely devoted to catechesis if it stirred up in the Church as a whole and in each sector of the Church a lively and active awareness of this differentiated but shared responsibility.

Continual Balanced Renewal

17. Finally, catechesis needs to be continually renewed by a certain broadening of its concept, by the revision of its methods, by the search for suitable language, and by the utilization of new means of transmitting the message. Renewal is sometimes unequal in value; the synod fathers realistically recognized, not only an undeniable advance in the vitality of catechetical activity and promising initiatives, but also the limitations or even "deficiencies" in what has been achieved to date.⁽⁴⁵⁾ These limitations are particularly serious when they endanger integrity of content. The message to the People of God rightly stressed that "routine, with its refusal to accept any change, and improvisation, with its readiness for any venture, are equally dangerous" for catechesis.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Routine leads to stagnation, lethargy and eventual paralysis. Improvisation begets confusion on the part of those being given catechesis and, when these are children, on the part of their parents; it also begets all kinds of deviations, and the fracturing and eventually the complete destruction of unity. It is important for the Church to give proof today, as she has done at other periods of her history, of evangelical wisdom, courage and fidelity in seeking out and putting into operation new methods and new prospects for catechetical instruction.

Endnotes:

1. Cf. Mt. 28:19-20.
2. Cf. 1 Jn. 1
3. Cf. Jn. 20:31.
4. Cf. AAS 63 (1971), pp. 758-764.
5. Cf. 44; cf. also 45-48 and 54: AAS 68 (1976), pp. 34-35; 35-38; 43.
6. According to the *Motu Proprio Apostolica Sollicitudo* of Sept. 15, 1965, the Synod of Bishops can come together in General Assembly, in extraordinary Assembly or in special assembly. In the present apostolic exhortation the words "synod," "synod fathers" and "synod hall" always refer, unless otherwise indicated, to the fourth general assembly of the Synod of Bishops on catechesis, held in Rome in October 1977.
7. Cf. *Synodus Episcoporum, De catechesi hoc nostro tempore tradenda praesertim pueris atque iuuenibus, Ad Populum Dei Nuntius, e Civitate Vaticana, 28-X-1977*; cf. "L'Osservatore Romano," October 30, 1977, pp. 3-4.
8. Cf. AAS 69 (1977), p. 633.
9. Jn. 1:14.
10. Jn. 14:6.
11. Eph. 3:9, 18-19.

12. Cf. Jn. 14:6.

13. Jn. 7:16. This is a theme dear to the fourth Gospel: cf. Jn. 3:34; 8:28, 12:49-50; 14:24; 17:8,14.

14. 1 Cor. 11:23: the word "deliver" employed here by St. Paul was frequently repeated in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* to describe the evangelizing activity of the Church, for example 4, 15, 78, 79.

15. Acts 1:1.

16. Mt. 26:55; cf. Jn. 18:20.

17. Mk. 10:1.

18. Mk. 1:22; cf. Mt. 5:2; 11:1; 13:54; 22:16; Mk. 2:13; 4:1; 6:2, 6; Lk. 5:3, 17; Jn. 7:14; 8:2, etc.

19. Lk. 23:5.

20. In nearly 50 places in the four Gospels, this title, inherited from the whole Jewish tradition but here given a new meaning that Christ Himself often seeks to emphasize, is attributed to Jesus.

21. Cf., among others, Mt. 8:19; Mk. 4:38; 9:38; 10:35; 13:1; Jn.11:28.

22. Mt. 12:38.

23. Lk. 10:25; cf. Mt. 22:16.

24. Jn. 13:13-14; cf. also Mt. 10:25; 26:18 and parallel passages.

25. Mt. 23:8. St. Ignatius of Antioch takes up this affirmation and comments as follows: "We have received the faith; this is why we hold fast, in order to be recognized as disciples of Jesus Christ, our only Teacher" (*Epistola ad Magnesios*, IX, 2 Funk 1, 198).

26. Jn. 3:2.

27. The portrayal of Christ as Teacher goes back as far as the Roman Catacombs. It is frequently used in the mosaics of Romano-Byzantine art of the third and fourth centuries. It was to form a predominant artistic motif in the sculptures of the great Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals of the Middle Ages.

28. Mt. 28:19.

29. Jn. 15:15.

30. Cf. Jn. 15:16.

31. Acts 2:42.

32. Acts 4:2.
33. Cf. Acts 4:18; 5:28.
34. Cf. Acts 4:19.
35. Cf. Acts 1:25.
36. Cf. Acts 6:8ff.; cf. also Philip catechizing the minister of the Queen of the Ethiopians: Acts 8:26ff.
37. Cf. Acts 15:35.
38. Acts 8:4.
39. Acts 28:31.
40. Cf. Pope John XXIII, Encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (AAS 53 [1961], p. 401): the Church is "mother" because by baptism she unceasingly begets new children and increases God's family; she is "teacher" because she makes her children grow in the grace of their baptism by nourishing their *sensus fidei* through instruction in the truths of faith.
41. Cf., for example the letter of Clement of Rome to the Church of Corinth, the *Didache*, the *Epistola Apostolorum*, the writings of Irenaeus of Lyons (*Demonstratio Apostolicae Praedicationis* and *Adversus Haereses*), of Tertullian (*De Baptismo*), of Clement of Alexandria (*Paedagogus*), of Cyprian (*Testimonia ad Quirinum*), of Origen (*Contra Celsum*), etc.
42. Cf. 2 Thes. 3:1.
43. Second Vatican Council, Declaration on Religious Liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2: AAS 58 (1966), p. 930.
44. Cf. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UNO), December 10, 1948, Art. 18, *The International Pact on Civil and Political Rights* (UNO), December 16, 1966, Art. 4; *Final Act of the Conference on European Security and Cooperation*, Para. VII.
45. Cf. *Synodus Episcoporum, De catechesi hoc nostro tempore tradenda praesertim pueris atque iuvenibus, Ad Populum Dei Nuntius*, 1: loc. cit., pp. 3-4; cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, October 30, 1977, p. 3.
46. *Ibid.*, 6: loc. cit., pp. 7-8.

(4) Summary Questions

These questions are to allow you to do a self-assessment on how well you have understood the key points of the text. You may find it helpful to write out the answers, but this is not required. When you have a good grasp of the content of the text you will find it easier and more fruitful to contemplate the meaning and implications of Catechesi Tradendae. Answers direct you to sections in the text outline, and this will give you an indication of where in the text to look for a fuller account.

1. What does the Church understand catechesis to be? What is the source of her catechetical mission?

Answer - Introduction: I.A-C

2. What is the purpose of this apostolic exhortation?

Answer - Introduction: III.A-B

3. What does it mean for catechesis to be “Christocentric”?

Answer - We Have But One Teacher, Jesus Christ: I.A.1-2

4. What is distinctive about how Jesus taught?

Answer: We Have But One Teacher, Jesus Christ: I.B.2 and I.C.1

5. What are some examples of catechetical practices in Church history (the Apostolic age, the post-apostolic age, in the councils of the Church)?

Answer: An Experience as Old as the Church II-IV

6. What are the two senses in which the Church has a duty to give catechesis?

Answer: An Experience as Old as the Church V.A.1-2

7. Why do the baptised faithful have a right to receive catechesis from the Church?

Answer: An Experience as Old as the Church V.A.2, V.B

8. What are the results of the Church prioritising the task of catechesis?

Answer: An Experience as Old as the Church: VI.A

9. Whose responsibility is Catechesis?

Answer: An Experience as Old as the Church: VII.A-B

10. What are two dangers to keep in mind when undertaking a project of catechetical renewal?

Answer: An Experience as Old as the Church: VIII.A.1-2

(5) Lectio Divina

All of these scriptural passages are referenced in the text you just read, meaning that these are some of the verses John Paul II was thinking about when he wrote Catechesi Tradendae. One insight he offers is that “catechesis will be all the richer and more effective for reading the texts [i.e. Scripture] with the intelligence and heart of the Church” (§27). The practice that the Church has long recommended for this kind of deep reading is lectio divina, which simply means ‘divine reading’. If you have never done lectio divina before, or would like a refresher on how to get started, please refer to the section on ‘Lectio Divina’ in the general information and guidance provided with this study guide (page 19).

John 1:14

And the Word became flesh
and dwelt among us,
and we have seen his glory,
glory as of the only Son from the Father,
full of grace and truth.

Ephesians 3:16-19

Out of his infinite glory, may he give you the power through his Spirit for your hidden self to grow strong, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith, and then, planted in love and built on love, you will with all the saints have strength to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and depth; until knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, you are filled with the utter fullness of God.

Mark 1:22

And his teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes, [Jesus] taught them with authority.

Matthew 28:19

Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.

Acts 4:1-4

While they were still talking to the people the priests came up to them, accompanied by the Sadducees. They were extremely annoyed at their teaching the people the doctrine of the resurrection from the dead by proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus. They arrested them, but as it was already late, they held them till the next day. But many of those who had listened to their message became believers, the total number of whom had now risen to something like five thousand.

(6) Journaling

Use the following prompts to consider the themes of the text in connection to your own life and experience. It may be helpful to write down your thoughts, or you may prefer simply to contemplate. You do not need to use all the prompts, but don't shy away from a question that is difficult to answer at first. You will find prayers for before and after private study in the general information and guidance provided with this study guide (page 4, as well as some tips for journaling (page 21).

1. What are some ways you are called to be a catechist? (There may be more than one answer: you may be both a parent and a parish catechist, for example.) How do you live out your catechetical vocation? What challenges do you encounter in your vocation to catechesis? How might they be overcome?
2. How is the catechesis you are involved in Christocentric? Is there anything you could do better to keep Christ at the centre of what you do? What skills, knowledge and formation do you need as a catechist to make your catechesis Christocentric?
3. As a baptised Catholic you are not simply called to be a catechist, but are entitled to receive catechesis from the Church. What are some ways in which you have been catechised? Do you think that you are well-catechised? Why or why not? What is the best experience you have had of catechesis? What made it a good experience? Are there any bad experiences of catechesis it is helpful to recall? What made them inadequate or unsuccessful?
4. Is there a particular passage from this module's reading that particularly caught your attention? What is it and why did it jump out at you? What does it mean? Why is it important? If you are writing down your answers you may want to copy out the passage at the top of the page and write about its meaning and why you find it significant underneath.

(7) Discussion Questions

Use the following questions to guide your discussion, tailoring them to the make-up of your group; or if you are using this guide for private study these questions can continue your journaling or private reflection. If you would like some suggestions concerning how to run a productive discussion session, please see the general information and guidance provided along with this study guide (page 22).

1. *“The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy with Jesus Christ.”* (CT, 5)

Why is the distinction between “being in touch” and “being in communion” important? Does the catechesis you are involved in create communion with Jesus Christ? What are some features of catechesis that puts people in communion with Christ? What are some practical ways to integrate these features into the catechesis you are involved in?

2. *“When those who opposed the apostles took offense at their activity, it was because they were ‘annoyed because the apostles were teaching the people’ and the order they gave them was not to teach at all in the name of Jesus. But we know that the apostles considered it right to listen to God rather than to men on this very matter.”* (CT, 10)

As in the Apostolic age, the teachings of Christ sometimes seem to annoy or upset people outside the Church. Have you ever annoyed others by teaching the faith? How should Catechists respond to opposition to their catechesis?

3. *“The more the Church, whether on the local or universal level, gives catechesis priority... the more she finds in catechesis a strengthening of her internal life as a community of believers and of her external activity of a missionary Church.”* (CT, 15)

How does catechesis strengthen the internal life of the Church? What signs might you see of a vibrant catechetical culture in a parish or other Christian community? How does catechesis strengthen the missionary activity of the Church? Does the catechesis your group is involved in support the internal spiritual life and external missionary work of the Church? How?

4. *“The message to the People of God rightly stressed that “routine, with its refusal to accept any change, and improvisation, with its readiness for any venture, are equally dangerous” for catechesis. Routine leads to stagnation, lethargy and eventual paralysis. Improvisation begets confusion on the part of those being given catechesis and, when these are children, on the part of their parents; it also begets all kinds of deviations, and the fracturing and eventually the complete destruction of unity.”* (CT, 17)

How do you ensure that your catechesis is faithful to Church teachings? How do you adapt your catechesis to your audience? What are some challenges you have encountered in these areas? What are some ways these challenges might be faced?