

# *Catechesi Tradendae*

## Catechesis in Our Times: A Study Guide

### Module 2: *Catechesi Tradendae* §18-34

- Catechesis in the Church's Pastoral and Missionary Activity (§18-25)
- The Whole of the Good News Drawn from Its Source (§26-34)

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## (1) Meditation on the Themes of the Text

There is a cunning fallacy that is accepted without scrutiny by many persons both within and outside the Church: that faith consists in believing without proof, without reason, or without certainty. The fallacy goes like this: we can be certain that  $2+2=4$ , that the chances of being struck by lightning are one in ten million, and that zebras are black and white, but we cannot know for sure that God exists, that Jesus Christ is the son of God by whose suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension we are ransomed from sin and offered new life in the Spirit. This has the effect of reducing the contents of faith to a best guess or a personal feeling about what is true, and makes its claims seem less compelling than those of science, or any other branch of human knowledge. Once we accept the falsehood that everything we believe as Catholics is based on a supposition, a guess, or a feeling, the whole idea of catechesis becomes unimportant, even a nonsense. Why should we worry about how we teach what can't truly be known?

This is why it is essential that catechists truly understand, believe, and proclaim the knowability of God, and the certainty of faith. The proclamation of the Gospel is not an announcement of mere opinion, or something that the Church thinks might be true. It is the absolute truth: certain, unchanging, and knowable. Both the light of our own intellects and the reliable testimony of witnesses show us this. Countless pages of philosophy and theology testify to the intellectual respectability of faith. Belief in God is not one option amongst myriad viable choices: it is the only truth that makes sense of the whole of the reality. This is not the place to argue for this position, but it is important that catechists understand it. At the root of the Church's concern for sound, faithful catechesis, is the truth that God can be known — and known not in a purely subjective sense, but as the sure and certain object of reason and faith.

Knowing God is more than just understanding that He exists. It expands into all the other factors St John Paul II mentions as crucial to catechesis: knowing the divinity and humanity of Christ and the Salvation He offers us in the Paschal Mystery; knowing His presence in the Church; how human history, shaped by sin and grace, is ordered to God; and indeed the demands that such knowledge of the nature of reality places upon each person seeking to live as a Christian. These are certainly aspects of the faith that can cause deep feelings in each of us, that can stir us up and inspire us to evangelism, to share the cause of our joy. Catechists, however, must never be duped into believing that faith in the God they serve is exclusively, or even primarily, a feeling or an opinion: He is Truth, the same for all. Catechists help Him make Himself known.

St John Henry Newman is a great example for those who want to know the ultimate truth about God and the. Already a man of faith, indeed an Anglican cleric, he unceasingly studied and grappled with the teachings of the Church until he came to the point at which he had no rational alternative but to accept their truth. This commitment to knowing God and proclaiming the Gospel was not something he thought reserved for the clergy alone:

*"I want an intelligent, well-instructed laity; I am not denying you are such already: but I mean to be severe, and, as some would say, exorbitant in my demands, I wish you to enlarge your knowledge, to cultivate your reason, to get an insight into the relation of truth to truth, to learn to view things as they are, to understand how faith and reason stand to each other, what are the bases and principles of Catholicism, and where lie the main inconsistencies and absurdities of the [opposing] theory...In all times the laity have been the*

*measure of the Catholic spirit...You ought to be able to bring out what you feel and what you mean, as well as to feel and mean it; to expose to the comprehension of others the fictions and fallacies of your opponents; and to explain the charges brought against the Church, to the satisfaction, not, indeed, of bigots, but of [people] of sense, of whatever cast of opinion."*

Systematic and thorough catechesis is essential to the formation of such a laity. Both in how they themselves present the faith and in how they teach others to perceive and understand it, catechists can have a significant impact, for good or ill, on how the Gospel is understood in the world. St John Henry Newman, pray for catechists!

## (2) Outline

### Catechesis in the Church's Pastoral and Missionary Activity

#### I. Catechesis as a Stage in Evangelisation

- A. Catechesis is “an education of children, young people and adults in the faith, which includes especially the teaching of the Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view of initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life,” which is built on specific elements of the Church’s pastoral and missionary activity
  - 1. The initial proclamation of the faith (Kerygma)
  - 2. Apologetics (the examination of reasons for belief)
  - 3. Celebration of the sacraments
  - 4. Integration of the Christian into the faith community
  - 5. Apostolic and missionary witness.
- B. There is no opposition between evangelisation and catechesis, but they are not the same; they complement each other
- C. Catechesis is a crucial moment in the whole process of evangelisation.

#### II. Catechesis and the Initial Proclamation of the Gospel

- A. Catechesis has a specific character distinct from the initial proclamation:
  - 1. It brings maturity to initial faith.
  - 2. It offers deeper, systematic knowledge of the person and message of Jesus Christ
- B. However, in practice, catechists must remember that those they teach may not have been evangelised, and in this case catechesis must also concern itself with the initial proclamation of the Gospel and converting those they teach to Christ.

#### III. Specific Aims of Catechesis

- A. To develop an understanding of the mystery of Christ in light of God’s word that allows the Christian to follow Christ and to conform to him in thought, word, and action.
- B. Catechesis is the teaching and maturation stage of the process of evangelisation. It aims to allow the Christian to know better Christ, who was accepted in faith.

#### IV. Need for Systematic Catechesis

- A. The systematic nature of catechesis fundamentally distinguishes it from all other ways of presenting the word of God.
- B. Four essential characteristics of catechesis:
  - 1. It must be **systematic** and oriented towards a precise goal, not improvised.
  - 2. It must deal with **essentials**, and not claim to tackle *all* disputed questions or encompass all theological or scientific research.
  - 3. It must be sufficiently **complete**, and not stop at the kerygma.
  - 4. It must be a broader integration into **Christian Life**, open to all its facets.

- C. There are many occasions in family, social and ecclesial life for less-systematic catechesis—and they should be seized—but it is essential not to minimise the importance of systematic Christian instruction.

#### V. Catechesis and Life Experience

- A. Christianity is not a choice between orthodoxy (right belief) and orthopraxy (right action): it is inescapably both. “Firm and well-thought-out-convictions lead to courageous and upright actions.”
- B. Likewise, catechesis is not a choice between systematic, traditional, doctrinal study and a concentration on life experience.
  - 1. No one can arrive at the whole of truth based on private revelation alone.
  - 2. Systematic catechesis is not opposed to or isolated from life, but concerned with its ultimate meanings; it illumines the whole of life.

#### VI. Catechesis and the Sacraments

- A. Catechesis is linked to liturgical and sacramental life
- B. Without the knowledge and understanding of the sacraments given in catechesis, sacramental practice can become devoid of meaning, “hollow ritualism”.
- C. Without sacramental and liturgical practice the truth conveyed in catechesis can become intellectualised and does not come alive in the life of the Christian.

#### VII. Catechesis and the Ecclesial Community

- A. Catechesis is linked to the activity of the Church and the Christian World
- B. Christian communities have a two-fold responsibility regarding catechesis:
  - 1. To provide catechetical training for its members
  - 2. To welcome those in catechesis into a community where they can fully live what they have learned
- C. If catechesis is done well Christians will be eager evangelists, sharing the Gospel with their children, others in the community, and those beyond the community.

#### VIII. Catechesis in the Wide Sense Necessary for Maturity and Strength of Faith

- A. The kerygma is “the initial ardent proclamation by which a person is one day overwhelmed and brought to the decision to entrust himself to Jesus by faith.”
- B. The effects of catechesis are that the kerygma is:
  - 1. Gradually deepened.
  - 2. Its implicit consequences are developed.
  - 3. Explained in language that includes an appeal to reason.
  - 4. The truths implicit in the kerygma are channelled towards Christian practice in the Church and the World.
- C. The truths studied in catechesis are the same expressed in the kerygma
- D. This account of catechesis is made from a pastoral, rather than a purely didactic perspective.
- E. Catechesis is necessary to allow the Christian to develop mature integrity of faith, knowledge, and action in God, and to make the Christian able to make a defence of the faith to any who asks the cause of their hope.

## The Whole of the Good News Drawn from Its Source

I. Content of the Message: the content of evangelisation as a whole; the Good News of salvation.

II. The Source

- A. Scripture & Tradition: the single deposit of the Word of God entrusted to the Church
- B. Catechesis must be formed by close contact with the texts of the Bible, specifically the Gospels.
- C. It will be further enriched and made more effective by drawing inspiration from the Church's 2000 years of intellectual reflection.

III. Factors that Must Not Be Neglected [in Catechesis]

- A. The **knowability of God**: “What you worship as unknown I proclaim to you.” (Acts 17:24)
  - 1. God is made known in the pascal mystery, the preaching and signs of Christ, and the sacraments that make him ever-present in our midst.
  - 2. Jesus Christ cannot be reduced to his humanity: through him we have access to the Father.
- B. The **presences of Christ in the Church**
  - 1. The Church is an assembly of sinful human beings who are sanctified by Christ.
  - 2. The Church is the family of God, gathered and guided by Christ and those whom the Holy Spirit has made its guardians.
- C. Human history in light of **sin and grace**
- D. The **demands of the Christian life**
  - 1. These include both self-denial and joy
  - 2. The formation of Christian attitudes based in the Gospel allows evangelical virtues to be lived in private and public life, both simply and heroically as required by the situation.
  - 3. Social concern, as expressed in Church teaching, especially since *Rerum Novarum* should be actively present in catechesis.

IV. Integrity of Content

- A. “In order that the sacrificial offering of his or her faith should be perfect, the person who becomes a disciple of Christ has the right to receive ‘the word of faith’ not in mutilated, falsified or diminished form, but whole and entire, in all its rigour and vigour.”
- B. Those who wish to know Christ better must not be denied any part of the deposit of faith the Church has received from him.
- C. Catechists have no lawful right, on their own initiative, to pick and choose what they consider important to convey, or to discard or neglect what they consider unimportant.

V. By Means of Suitable Pedagogical Methods

- A. In order to effectively transmit catechetical content catechists may decide that that they wish to organise the content in a particular way, or use certain language to convey it.
- B. These decisions are legitimate and valid, provided:
  - 1. These decisions are made to truly communicate the whole of the Gospel message, and do not stem from subjective prejudices or ideologies.
  - 2. The balance, organic hierarchy, and integrity of the content are maintained and conveyed.

#### VI. Ecumenical Dimension of Catechesis

- A. Catechesis has an ecumenical dimension if it:
  - 1. It maintains its teaching that the fulness of revealed truth and the means of salvation instituted by Christ is found in the Catholic Church.
  - 2. It also treats with sincere respect Christian communities not in perfect communion with the Catholic Church
  - 3. It creates and encourages a true desire for unity amongst all Christians.
  - 4. It prepares Catholic children (and indeed all Catholics) to live in contact with non-Catholics in a way that both affirms their Catholic identity and respects the faiths of others.
- B. It is important to give a correct and fair account of other Churches and ecclesial communities in order that:
  - 1. Catholics may grow in appreciation of their own faith.
  - 2. Catholics may grow in knowledge and esteem for other Christian brethren.
  - 3. Catholics and non-Catholic Christians may better search for a way towards full unity.
  - 4. Non-Catholic Christians may grow in their esteem of the Catholic Church.

#### VII. Ecumenical Collaboration in the Field of Catechesis

- A. In the context of religious plurality, bishops may find it necessary to form catechetical collaborations with non-Catholic Christians.
  - 1. These collaborations have a valid theological foundation in the beliefs shared by all Christians.
  - 2. However, as Christians lack perfect communion this ecumenical collaboration is naturally limited.
  - 3. There must never be a reduction to a “common minimum” of content.
  - 4. Care must be taken to maintain the instruction necessary for Catholics in matters of doctrine and Christian living.

Secular textbooks and school lessons that present the Catholic religion in a truly objective historical context can contribute to greater understanding, but these are neither catechesis nor a substitute for it as they lack the witness of faith and an understanding of the Christian mysteries.

### (3) Text

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

#### III.

#### CATECHESIS IN THE CHURCH'S PASTORAL AND MISSIONARY ACTIVITY

##### *Catechesis as a Stage in Evangelization*

18. Catechesis cannot be dissociated from the Church's pastoral and missionary activity as a whole. Nevertheless it has a specific character which was repeatedly the object of inquiry during the preparatory work and throughout the course of the fourth general assembly of the synod of Bishops. The question also interests the public both within and outside the Church.

This is not the place for giving a rigorous formal definition of catechesis, which has been sufficiently explained in the General Catechetical Directory.(47) It is for specialists to clarify more and more its concept and divisions.

In view of uncertainties in practice, let us simply recall the essential landmarks - they are already solidly established in Church documents - that are essential for an exact understanding of catechesis and without which there is a risk of failing to grasp its full meaning and import.

All in all, it can be taken here that catechesis is an education of children, young people and adults in the faith, which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life. Accordingly, while not being formally identified with them, catechesis is built on a certain number of elements of the Church's pastoral mission that have a catechetical aspect, that prepare for catechesis, or that spring from it. These elements are: the initial proclamation of the Gospel or missionary preaching through the *kerygma* to arouse faith, apologetics or examination of the reasons for belief, experience of Christian living, celebration of the sacraments, integration into the ecclesial community, and apostolic and missionary witness.

Let us first of all recall that there is no separation or opposition between catechesis and evangelization. Nor can the two be simply identified with each other. Instead, they have close links whereby they integrate and complement each other.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of December 8, 1975, on evangelization in the modern world, rightly stressed that evangelization - which has the aim of bringing the Good News

to the whole of humanity, so that all may live by it - is a rich, complex and dynamic reality, made up of elements, or one could say moments, that are essential and different from each other, and that must all be kept in view simultaneously.(48) Catechesis is one of these moments - a very remarkable one - in the whole process of evangelization.

### ***Catechesis and the Initial Proclamation of the Gospel***

19. The specific character of catechesis, as distinct from the initial conversion - bringing proclamation of the Gospel, has the twofold objective of maturing the initial faith and of educating the true disciple of Christ by means of a deeper and more systematic knowledge of the person and the message of our Lord Jesus Christ.(49)

But in catechetical practice, this model order must allow for the fact that the initial evangelization has often not taken place. A certain number of children baptized in infancy come for catechesis in the parish without receiving any other initiation into the faith and still without any explicit personal attachment to Jesus Christ; they only have the capacity to believe placed within them by Baptism and the presence of the Holy Spirit; and opposition is quickly created by the prejudices of their non-Christian family background or of the positivist spirit of their education. In addition, there are other children who have not been baptized and whose parents agree only at a later date to religious education: for practical reasons, the catechumenal stage of these children will often be carried out largely in the course of the ordinary catechesis. Again, many pre-adolescents and adolescents who have been baptized and been given a systematic catechesis and the sacraments still remain hesitant for a long time about committing their whole lives to Jesus Christ - if, moreover, they do not attempt to avoid religious education in the name of their freedom. Finally, even adults are not safe from temptations to doubt or to abandon their faith, especially as a result of their unbelieving surroundings. This means that "catechesis" must often concern itself not only with nourishing and teaching the faith, but also with arousing it unceasingly with the help of grace, with opening the heart, with converting, and with preparing total adherence to Jesus Christ on the part of those who are still on the threshold of faith. This concern will in part decide the tone, the language and the method of catechesis.

### ***Specific Aim of Catechesis***

20. Nevertheless, the specific aim of catechesis is to develop, with God's help, an as yet initial faith, and to advance in fullness and to nourish day by day the Christian life of the faithful, young and old. It is in fact a matter of giving growth, at the level of knowledge and in life, to the seed of faith sown by the Holy Spirit with the initial proclamation and effectively transmitted by Baptism.

Catechesis aims therefore at developing understanding of the mystery of Christ in the light of God's word, so that the whole of a person's humanity is impregnated by that word. Changed by the working of grace into a new creature, the Christian thus sets himself to follow Christ and learns more and more within the Church to think like Him, to judge like Him, to act in conformity with His commandments, and to hope as He invites us to.

To put it more precisely: within the whole process of evangelization, the aim of catechesis is to be the teaching and maturation stage, that is to say, the period in which the Christian, having accepted by faith the person of Jesus Christ as the one Lord and having given Him complete adherence by sincere conversion of heart, endeavors to know better this Jesus to whom he has entrusted himself: to know His "mystery," the kingdom of God proclaimed by Him, the requirements and

promises contained in His Gospel message, and the paths that He has laid down for anyone who wishes to follow Him.

It is true that being a Christian means saying "yes" to Jesus Christ, but let us remember that this "yes" has two levels: It consists in surrendering to the word of God and relying on it, but it also means, at a later stage, endeavoring to know better - and better the profound meaning of this word.

### **Need for Systematic Catechesis**

21. In his closing speech at the fourth general assembly of the synod, Pope Paul VI rejoiced "to see how everyone drew attention to the absolute need for systematic catechesis, precisely because it is this reflective study of the Christian mystery that fundamentally distinguishes catechesis from all other ways of presenting the word of God."(50)

In view of practical difficulties, attention must be drawn to some of the characteristics of this instruction:

- It must be systematic, not improvised but programmed to reach a precise goal;
- It must deal with essentials, without any claim to tackle all disputed questions or to transform itself into theological research or scientific exegesis;
- It must nevertheless be sufficiently complete, not stopping short at the initial proclamation of the Christian mystery such as we have in the *kerygma*;
- It must be an integral Christian initiation, open to all the other factors of Christian life.

I am not forgetting the interest of the many different occasions for catechesis connected with personal, family, social and ecclesial life - these occasions must be utilized and I shall return to them in Chapter VI - but I am stressing the need for organic and systematic Christian instruction, because of the tendency in various quarters to minimize its importance.

### **Catechesis and Life Experience**

22. It is useless to play off orthopraxis against orthodoxy: Christianity is inseparably both. Firm and well-thought - out convictions lead to courageous and upright action, the endeavor to educate the faithful to live as disciples of Christ today calls for and facilitates a discovery in depth of the mystery of Christ in the history of salvation.

It is also quite useless to campaign for the abandonment of serious and orderly study of the message of Christ in the name of a method concentrating on life experience. "No one can arrive at the whole truth on the basis solely of some simple private experience, that is to say, without an adequate explanation of the message of Christ, who is 'the way, and the truth, and the life' (Jn. 14:6)."(51)

Nor is any opposition to be set up between a catechesis taking life as its point of departure and a traditional doctrinal and systematic catechesis.(52) Authentic catechesis is always an orderly and systematic initiation into the revelation that God has given of Himself to humanity in Christ Jesus, a revelation stored in the depths of the Church's memory and in Sacred Scripture, and constantly communicated from one generation to the next by a living, active traditio. This revelation is not

however isolated from life or artificially juxtaposed to it. It is concerned with the ultimate meaning of life and it illumines the whole of life with the light of the Gospel, to inspire it or to question it.

That is why we can apply to catechists an expression used by the Second Vatican Council with special reference to priests: "Instructors (of the human being and his life) in the faith."(53)

### ***Catechesis and Sacraments***

23. Catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity, for it is in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, that Christ Jesus works in fullness for the transformation of human beings.

In the early Church, the catechumenate and preparation for the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist were the same thing. Although in the countries that have long been Christian the Church has changed her practice in this field, the catechumenate has never been abolished; on the contrary, it is experiencing a renewal in those countries(54) and is abundantly practiced in the young missionary Churches. In any case, catechesis always has reference to the sacraments. On the one hand, the catechesis that prepares for the sacraments is an eminent kind, and every form of catechesis necessarily leads to the sacraments of faith. On the other hand, authentic practice of the sacraments is bound to have a catechetical aspect. In other words, sacramental life is impoverished and very soon turns into hollow ritualism if it is not based on serious knowledge of the meaning of the sacraments, and catechesis becomes intellectualized if it fails to come alive in the sacramental practice.

### ***Catechesis and Ecclesial Community***

24. Finally, catechesis is closely linked with the responsible activity of the Church and of Christians in the world. A person who has given adherence to Jesus Christ by faith and is endeavoring to consolidate that faith by catechesis needs to live in communion with those who have taken the same step. Catechesis runs the risk of becoming barren if no community of faith and Christian life takes the catechumen in at a certain stage of his catechesis. That is why the ecclesial community at all levels has a twofold responsibility with regard to catechesis: it has the responsibility of providing for the training of its members, but it also has the responsibility of welcoming them into an environment where they can live as fully as possible what they have learned.

Catechesis is likewise open to missionary dynamism. If catechesis is done well, Christians will be eager to bear witness to their faith, to hand it on to their children, to make it known to others, and to serve the human community in every way.

### ***Catechesis in the Wide Sense Necessary for Maturity and Strength of Faith***

25. Thus through catechesis the Gospel kerygma (the initial ardent proclamation by which a person is one day overwhelmed and brought to the decision to entrust himself to Jesus Christ by faith) is gradually deepened, developed in its implicit consequences, explained in language that includes an appeal to reason, and channelled towards Christian practice in the Church and the world. All this is no less evangelical than the kerygma, in spite of what is said by certain people who consider that catechesis necessarily rationalizes, dries up and eventually kills all that is living, spontaneous and vibrant in the kerygma. The truths studied in catechesis are the same truths that touched the

person's heart when he heard them for the first time. Far from blunting or exhausting them, the fact of knowing them better should make them even more challenging and decisive for one's life.

In the understanding expounded here, catechesis keeps the entirely pastoral perspective with which the synod viewed it. This broad meaning of catechesis in no way contradicts but rather includes and goes beyond a narrow meaning which was once commonly given to catechesis in didactic expositions, namely, the simple teaching of the formulas that express faith.

In the final analysis, catechesis is necessary both for the maturation of the faith of Christians and for their witness in the world: It is aimed at bringing Christians to "attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"(55); it is also aimed at making them prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls them to account for the hope that is in them.(56)

#### IV.

### THE WHOLE OF THE GOOD NEWS DRAWN FROM ITS SOURCE

#### *Content of the Message*

26. Since catechesis is a moment or aspect of evangelization, its content cannot be anything else but the content of evangelization as a whole. The one message - the Good News of salvation - that has been heard once or hundreds of times and has been accepted with the heart, is in catechesis probed unceasingly by reflection and systematic study, by awareness of its repercussions on one's personal life - an awareness calling for ever greater commitment - and by inserting it into an organic and harmonious whole, namely, Christian living in society and the world.

#### *The Source*

27. Catechesis will always draw its content from the living source of the Word of God transmitted in Tradition and the Scriptures, for "sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God, which is entrusted to the Church," as was recalled by the Second Vatican Council, which desired that "the ministry of the word - pastoral preaching, catechetics and all forms of Christian instruction . . . - (should be) healthily nourished and (should) thrive in holiness through the word of Scripture."(57)

To speak of Tradition and Scripture as the source of catechesis is to draw attention to the fact that catechesis must be impregnated and penetrated by the thought, the spirit and the outlook of the Bible and the Gospels through assiduous contact with the texts themselves; but it is also a reminder that catechesis will be all the richer and more effective for reading the texts with the intelligence and the heart of the Church and for drawing inspiration from the 2,000 years of the Church's reflection and life.

The Church's teaching, liturgy and life spring from this source and lead back to it, under the guidance of the pastors and, in particular, of the doctrinal magisterium entrusted to them by the Lord.

### **The Creed, an Exceptionally Important Expression of Doctrine**

28. An exceptionally important expression of the living heritage placed in the custody of the pastors is found in the Creed or, to put it more concretely, in the Creeds that at crucial moments have summed up the Church's faith in felicitous syntheses. In the course of the centuries an important element of catechesis was constituted by the *traditio Symboli* (transmission of the summary of the faith), followed by the transmission of the Lord's Prayer. This expressive rite has in our time been reintroduced into the initiation of catechumens.(58) Should not greater use be made of an adapted form of it to mark that most important stage at which a new disciple of Jesus Christ accepts with full awareness and courage the content of what will from then on be the object of his earnest study?

In the Creed of the People of God, proclaimed at the close of the 19th centenary of the martyrdom of the Apostles Peter and Paul, my predecessor Paul VI decided to bring together the essential elements of the Catholic Faith, especially those that presented greater difficulty or risked being ignored.(59) This is a sure point of reference for the content of catechesis.

### **Factors That Must Not Be Neglected**

29. In the third chapter of his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the same Pope recalled "the essential content, the living substance" of evangelization.(60) Catechesis, too, must keep in mind each of these factors and also the living synthesis of which they are part.(61)

I shall therefore limit myself here simply to recalling one or two points.(62) Anyone can see, for instance, how important it is to make the child, the adolescent, the person advancing in faith understand "what can be known about God"(63); to be able in a way to tell them: "What you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you"(64); to set forth briefly for them(65) the mystery of the Word of God become man and accomplishing man's salvation by His Passover, that is to say, through His death and resurrection, but also by His preaching, by the signs worked by Him, and by the sacraments of His permanent presence in our midst. The synod fathers were indeed inspired when they asked that care should be taken not to reduce Christ to His humanity alone or His message to a no more than earthly dimension, but that He should be recognized as the Son of God, the Mediator giving us in the Spirit free access to the Father.(66)

It is important to display before the eyes of the intelligence and of the heart, in the light of faith, the sacrament of Christ's presence constituted by the mystery of the Church, which is an assembly of human beings who are sinners and yet have at the same time been sanctified and who make up the family of God gathered together by the Lord under the guidance of those whom "the Holy Spirit has made...guardians, to feed the Church of God."(67)

It is important to explain that the history of the human race, marked as it is by grace and sin, greatness and misery, is taken up by God in His Son Jesus, "foreshadowing in some way the age which is to come."(68)

Finally, it is important to reveal frankly the demands - demands that involve self-denial but also joy - made by what the Apostle Paul liked to call "newness of life,"(69) "a new creation,"(70) being in Christ,(71) and "eternal life in Christ Jesus,"(72) which is the same thing as life in the world but lived in accordance with the beatitudes and called to an extension and transfiguration hereafter.

Hence the importance in catechesis of personal moral commitments in keeping with the Gospel and of Christian attitudes, whether heroic or very simple, to life and the world - what we call the Christian or evangelical virtues. Hence also, in its endeavor to educate faith, the concern of catechesis not to omit but to clarify properly realities such as man's activity for his integral liberation,(73) the search for a society with greater solidarity and fraternity, the fight for justice and the building of peace.

Besides, it is not to be thought that this dimension of catechesis is altogether new. As early as the patristic age, St. Ambrose and St. John Chrysostom - to quote only them - gave prominence to the social consequences of the demands made by the Gospel. Close to our own time, the catechism of St. Pius X explicitly listed oppressing the poor and depriving workers of their just wages among the sins that cry to God for vengeance.(74) Since *Rerum Novarum* especially, social concern has been actively present in the catechetical teaching of the Popes and the Bishops. Many synod fathers rightly insisted that the rich heritage of the Church's social teaching should, in appropriate forms, find a place in the general catechetical education of the faithful.

### ***Integrity of Content***

30. With regard to the content of catechesis, three important points deserve special attention today.

The first point concerns the integrity of the content. In order that the sacrificial offering of his or her faith(75) should be perfect, the person who becomes a disciple of Christ has the right to receive "the word of faith"(76) not in mutilated, falsified or diminished form but whole and entire, in all its rigor and vigor. Unfaithfulness on some point to the integrity of the message means a dangerous weakening of catechesis and putting at risk the results that Christ and the ecclesial community have a right to expect from it. It is certainly not by chance that the final command of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel bears the mark of a certain entirety: "All authority...has been given to me...make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all...I am with you always." This is why, when a person first becomes aware of "the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus,"(77) whom he has encountered by faith, and has the perhaps unconscious desire to know Him more extensively and better," hearing about Him and being taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus,(78) there is no valid pretext for refusing Him any part whatever of that knowledge. What kind of catechesis would it be that failed to give their full place to man's creation and sin; to God's plan of redemption and its long, loving preparation and realization; to the incarnation of the Son of God; to Mary, the Immaculate One, the Mother of God, ever Virgin, raised body and soul to the glory of heaven, and to her role in the mystery of salvation; to the mystery of lawlessness at work in our lives(79) and the power of God freeing us from it; to the need for penance and asceticism; to the sacramental and liturgical actions; to the reality of the Eucharistic Presence; to participation in divine life here and hereafter, and so on? Thus, no true catechist can lawfully, on his own initiative, make a selection of what he considers important in the deposit of faith as opposed to what he considers unimportant, so as to teach the one and reject the other.

### ***By Means of Suitable Pedagogical Methods***

31. This gives rise to a second remark. It can happen that in the present situation of catechesis reasons of method or pedagogy suggest that the communication of the riches of the content of catechesis should be organized in one way rather than another. Besides, integrity does not dispense from balance and from the organic hierarchical character through which the truths to be

taught, the norms to be transmitted, and the ways of Christian life to be indicated will be given the proper importance due to each. It can also happen that a particular sort of language proves preferable for transmitting this content to a particular individual or group. The choice made will be a valid one to the extent that, far from being dictated by more or less subjective theories or prejudices stamped with a certain ideology, it is inspired by the humble concern to stay closer to a content that must remain intact. The method and language used must truly be means for communicating the whole and not just a part of "the words of eternal life"(80) and the "ways of life."(81)

### ***Ecumenical Dimension of Catechesis***

32. The great movement, one certainly inspired by the Spirit of Jesus, that has for some years been causing the Catholic Church to seek with other Christian Churches or confessions the restoration of the perfect unity willed by the Lord, brings me to the question of the ecumenical character of catechesis. This movement reached its full prominence in the Second Vatican Council(82) and since then has taken on a new extension within the Church, as is shown concretely by the impressive series of events and initiatives with which everyone is now familiar.

Catechesis cannot remain aloof from this ecumenical dimension, since all the faithful are called to share, according to their capacity and place in the Church, in the movement towards unity.(83)

Catechesis will have an ecumenical dimension if, while not ceasing to teach that the fullness of the revealed truths and of the means of salvation instituted by Christ is found in the Catholic Church,(84) it does so with sincere respect, in words and in deeds, for the ecclesial communities that are not in perfect communion with this Church.

In this context, it is extremely important to give a correct and fair presentation of the other Churches and ecclesial communities that the Spirit of Christ does not refrain from using as means of salvation; "moreover, some, even very many, of the outstanding elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church herself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church."(85) Among other things this presentation will help Catholics to have both a deeper understanding of their own faith and a better acquaintance with and esteem for their other Christian brethren, thus facilitating the shared search for the way towards full unity in the whole truth. It should also help non-Catholics to have a better knowledge and appreciation of the Catholic Church and her conviction of being the "universal help toward salvation."

Catechesis will have an ecumenical dimension if, in addition, it creates and fosters a true desire for unity. This will be true all the more if it inspires serious efforts - including the effort of self-purification in the humility and the fervor of the Spirit in order to clear the ways - with a view not to facile irenics made up of omissions and concessions on the level of doctrine, but to perfect unity, when and by what means the Lord will wish.

Finally, catechesis will have an ecumenical dimension if it tries to prepare Catholic children and young people, as well as adults, for living in contact with non-Catholics, affirming their Catholic identity while respecting the faith of others.

### ***Ecumenical Collaboration in the Field of Catechesis***

33. In situations of religious plurality, the Bishops can consider it opportune or even necessary to have certain experiences of collaboration in the field of catechesis between Catholics and other Christians, complementing the normal catechesis that must in any case be given to Catholics. Such experiences have a theological foundation in the elements shared by all Christians.<sup>(86)</sup> But the communion of faith between Catholics and other Christians is not complete and perfect; in certain cases there are even profound divergences. Consequently, this ecumenical collaboration is by its very nature limited: it must never mean a "reduction" to a common minimum. Furthermore, catechesis does not consist merely in the teaching of doctrine: it also means initiating into the whole of Christian life, bringing full participation in the sacraments of the Church. Therefore, where there is an experience of ecumenical collaboration in the field of catechesis, care must be taken that the education of Catholics in the Catholic Church should be well ensured in matters of doctrine and of Christian living.

During the synod, a certain number of Bishops drew attention to what they referred to as the increasingly frequent cases in which the civil authority or other circumstances impose on the schools in some countries a common instruction in the Christian religion, with common textbooks, class periods, etc., for Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Needless to say, this is not true catechesis. But this teaching also has ecumenical importance when it presents Christian doctrine fairly and honestly. In cases where circumstances impose it, it is important that in addition a specifically Catholic catechesis should be ensured with all the greater care.

### ***The Question of Textbooks Dealing with the Various Religions***

34. At this point another observation must be made on the same lines but from a different point of view. State schools sometimes provide their pupils with books that for cultural reasons (history, morals or literature) present the various religions, including the Catholic religion. An objective presentation of historical events, of the different religions and of the various Christian confessions can make a contribution here to better mutual understanding. Care will then be taken that every effort is made to ensure that the presentation is truly objective and free from the distorting influence of ideological and political systems or of prejudices with claims to be scientific. In any case, such schoolbooks can obviously not be considered catechetical works: they lack both the witness of believers stating their faith to other believers and an understanding of the Christian mysteries and of what is specific about Catholicism, as these are understood within the faith.

#### **Endnotes:**

46. Synodus Episcoporum, De catechesi hoc nostro tempore tradenda praesertim pueris atque iuvenibus, Ad Populum Dei Nuntius, ., 6: loc. cit., pp. 7-8.

47. Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, Directorium Catechisticum Generale, 17-35; AAS 64 (1972), pp. 110-118.

48 . Cf. 17-24: AAS 68 (1976), pp. 17-22 .

49. Cf. Synodus Episcoporum, De catechesi hoc nostro tempore tradenda praesertim pueris atque invenibus, Ad Populum Dei Nuntius, 1: loc. cit., pp. 3-4, cf. L'Osservatore Romano, October 30, 1977, p. 3.
50. Concluding Address to the Synod, October 29, 1977: AAS 69 (1977), p. 634.
51. Ibid.
52. Directorium Catechisticum Generale, 40 and 46: AAS 64 (1972), pp. 121 and 124-125.
53. Cf. Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, Presbyterorum Ordinis, 6: AAS 58 (1966), p. 999.
54. Cf. Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum.
55. Eph. 4:13.
56. Cf. 1 Pt. 3:15.
57. Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum, 10 and 24: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 822 and 828-829; cf. also Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, Directorium Catechisticum Generale 45 (AAS 64 [1972], p. 124), where the principal and complementary sources of catechesis are well set out.
58. Cf. Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum, 25-26; 183-187.
59. Cf. AAS 60 (1968), pp. 436-445. Besides these great professions of faith of the magisterium, note also the popular professions of faith, rooted in the traditional Christian culture of certain countries; cf. what I said to the young people at Gniezno, June 3, 1979, regarding the Bogurodzica song-message: "This is not only a song: it is also a profession of faith, a symbol of the Polish Credo, it is a catechesis and also a document of Christian education. The principal truths of Faith and the principles of morality are contained here. This is not only a historical object. It is a document of life. (It has even been called 'the Polish catechism'" [AAS 71,1979], p. 754.)
60. 25: AAS 68 (1976), p. 23.
61. Ibid., especially 26-39: loc. cit., pp. 23-25; the "principal elements of the Christian message" are presented in a more systematic fashion in the Directorium Catechisticum Generale, 47-69 (AAS 64 [1972] pp. 125-141), where one also finds the norm for the essential doctrinal content of catechesis.
62. Consult also on this point the Directorium Catechisticum Generale, 37-46 (loc. cit., pp. 120-125).
63. Rom. 1:19.
64. Acts 17:23.
65. Cf. Eph. 3:3.

66. Cf. Eph. 2:18.

67. Acts 20:28.

68. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 39: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1056-1057.

69. Rom. 6:4.

70. 2 Cor. 5:17.

71. Cf. *ibid.*

72. Rom. 6:23.

73. Cf. Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 30-38: AAS 68 (1976), pp. 25-30.

74. Cf. *Catechismo Maggiore*, Fifth Part, chap. 6. 965-966.

75. Cf. Phil. 2:17.

76. Rom. 10:8.

77. Phil. 3:8.

78. Cf. Eph. 4:20-21.

79. Cf. 2 Thes. 2:7.

80. Jn. 6:69; cf. Acts 5:20; 7:38.

81. Acts 2:28, quoting Ps. 16:11.

82. Cf. the entire Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*: AAS 57 [1965], pp. 90-112.

83. Cf. *ibid.*, 5: loc. cit., p. 96; cf. also Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 15: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 963-965; Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *Directorium Catechisticum Generale* 27: AAS 64 (1972), p. 115.

84. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3-4: AAS 57 (1965), pp. 92-96.

85. *Ibid.*, 3: loc. cit., p. 93.

86. Cf. *ibid.*; cf. also Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* 15: AAS 57 (1965), p. 19.

## (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 is Catechesis?**

Answer: Catechesis in the Church's Pastoral and Missionary Activity I.A

### **2. How is Catechesis related to Evangelisation and the Initial Proclamation (Kerygma)?**

Answer: Catechesis in the Church's Pastoral and Missionary Activity I.B-C; II.A-B; VIII.B.1-4

### **3. What are the specific aims of Catechesis?**

Answer: Catechesis in the Church's Pastoral and Missionary Activity III.A-B

### **4. What are some essential characteristics of all catechesis?**

Answer: Catechesis in the Church's Pastoral and Missionary Activity IV.B.1-4

### **5. How does catechesis support sacramental practice and vice versa?**

Answer: Catechesis in the Church's Pastoral and Missionary Activity VI.A-C

### **6. What are the catechetical obligations of the Church community?**

Answer: Catechesis in the Church's Pastoral and Missionary Activity VII.B.1-2

### **7. Why is catechesis necessary?**

Answer: Catechesis in the Church's Pastoral and Missionary Activity VIII.E

### **8. What is the content of catechesis? What is its source?**

Answer: The Whole of the Good News Drawn from its Source I; II.A

### **9. What are some factors that catechesis must always take into account?**

Answer: The Whole of the Good News Drawn from its Source III.A-D

### **10. What does it mean for catechetical content to have integrity? Why is it important?**

Answer: The Whole of the Good News Drawn from its Source IV.A-B

### **11. What aspects of their work do catechists have the freedom to shape creatively? What are some factors they must keep in mind when making these decisions?**

Answer: The Whole of the Good News Drawn from its Source V.A-B

**12. What features can make catechesis an ecumenical activity?**

Answer: The Whole of the Good News Drawn from its Source VI.A.1-4

**13. What is the difference between Religious Education in a secular sense and catechesis?**

Answer: The Whole of the Good News Drawn from its Source VII.B

## (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 14:6**

Jesus said: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through me.

### **Romans 1:19-20a**

For what can be known about God is perfectly plain to them since God himself has made it plain. Ever since God created the world his everlasting power and deity – however invisible – have been there for the mind to see in the things he made.

### **Acts 17: 22-23**

So Paul stood before the whole Council of Areopagus and made this speech: “Men of Athens, I have seen for myself how extremely scrupulous you are in religious matters, because I noticed, as I strolled round admiring your sacred monuments, that you had an altar inscribed: To An Unknown God. Well, the God whom I proclaim is in fact the one whom you already worship without knowing it.

### **2 Corinthians 5:17-18**

And for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old creation has gone, and now the new one is here. It is all God’s work. It was God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the work of handing on this reconciliation.

### **Philippians 3:8-9a**

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.

## (6) Journaling or Private Meditation Prompts

*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. Do you remember how the Gospel was first proclaimed to you, or can you think of a time when you heard the Good News and it deeply impacted you? How did it happen? Did that instance lead you to want to know Christ better? Why or why not? Has the catechesis you have received in your life deepened, matured, or concretised what happened in that initial proclamation? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. How has the catechesis you received prepared you to live a Christian life? If it hasn't, what was lacking? How do the demands and realities of what it means to live as a Christian shape the catechesis you offer?
3. How has the catechesis you have received integrated you into a Christian community? If it hasn't, why do you think that is? How does the need for integration into a Church community shape the catechesis you offer?
4. Think about your relationship to Scripture. Do you read & study the Bible regularly? Do you have favourite books or passages? How does Scripture influence your faith? How do you integrate Scripture into the catechesis you provide?
5. 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. *“Catechetical practice... must allow for the fact that the initial evangelization has often not taken place. A certain number of children baptized in infancy come for catechesis in the parish without receiving any other initiation into the faith and still without any explicit personal attachment to Jesus Christ; they only have the capacity to believe placed within them by Baptism and the presence of the Holy Spirit ... This means that "catechesis" must often concern itself not only with nourishing and teaching the faith, but also with arousing it unceasingly with the help of grace, with opening the heart, with converting, and with preparing total adherence to Jesus Christ on the part of those who are still on the threshold of faith.”* (CT, 19)

**Are the persons who come to you for catechesis, in general, already evangelised (i.e. have they heard the Gospel proclamation)? Does this effect how you teach? How can you incorporate the kerygma into the catechesis you offer?**

2. *“Anyone can see, for instance, how important it is to make...the person advancing in faith understand "what can be known about God"; to be able in a way to tell them: "What you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you" ... It is important to display before the eyes of the intelligence and of the heart, in the light of faith, the sacrament of Christ's presence constituted by the mystery of the Church... It is important to explain that the history of the human race, marked as it is by grace and sin, greatness and misery, is taken up by God in His Son Jesus, ... Finally, it is important to reveal frankly the demands - demands that involve self-denial but also joy - made by what the Apostle Paul liked to call "newness of life," "a new creation," being in Christ, and "eternal life in Christ Jesus," which is the same thing as life in the world but lived in accordance with the beatitudes and called to an extension and transfiguration hereafter.”* (CT, 29)

**This passage describes four factors essential to convey in catechesis: the knowability of God, Christ’s presence in the Church, The relationship between God and human history in light of sin and grace, and the demands implicit in a Christian life. How do these essentials feature in the catechesis you provide? Are some more difficult than others to convey? What are some challenges you encounter to teaching them effectively? How might these be overcome?**

3. *“In order that the sacrificial offering of his or her faith should be perfect, the person who becomes a disciple of Christ has the right to receive "the word of faith" not in mutilated, falsified or diminished form but whole and entire, in all its rigor and vigor.”*(CT, 30)

**This section of the text has a strong focus on the relationship between catechesis and the demands of a Christian life. The above passage speaks of the Christian making a ‘sacrificial offering of his or her faith,’ and highlights deep and faithful catechesis as something that enables this action. How does the catechesis you offer take account of the lived reality of being a Christian? What are some practical ways that catechesis supports Christian living?**

4. *“It can also happen that a particular sort of language proves preferable for transmitting this content to a particular individual or group. The choice made will be a valid one to the extent that, far from being dictated by more or less subjective theories or prejudices stamped with a certain ideology, it is inspired by the humble concern to stay closer to a content that must remain intact. The method and language used must truly be means for communicating the whole and not just a part of “the words of eternal life” and the “ways of life.”” (CT, 31)*

**How catechesis is given (pedagogy) can be as important as its content. How do you think about pedagogy when you are offering catechesis? When you look at resources do you consider how they present the material, as well as their content? What factors are most important in your consideration? Are there times where you have found it hard to fit the necessary content into an appropriate pedagogy? If so, how have you dealt with this issue? Was it successful?**