

# *Catechesi Tradendae*

## Catechesis in Our Times: A Study Guide

### Module 3: *Catechesi Tradendae* §35-55

- V – Everybody Needs to be Catechised (§35-45)
- VI – Some Ways and Means of Catechesis (§46-50)
- VII – How to Impart Catechesis (§51-55)

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

“Everybody needs to be catechised.” These simple words are the heading of this section of *Catechesi Tradendae*. They are not hyperbole; there is not small print listing exclusions and exceptions. *Everybody* needs to be catechised. Because many of us identify catechesis solely with the parish-based sacramental preparation classes, this can be a puzzling statement. Partly this is because we think of catechesis as a collection of facts we need to internalise in order to receive the sacraments. As we have already seen, however, catechesis is something much more profound than simply transmitting information: it reveals deep and essential truths about the world and our place in it; it cultivates our hearts and minds so that the Gospel can be rooted deeply in us and bear fruit; it gives meaning and understanding to religious practice; and through all of this helps us to deepen our relationship with Christ. In short, catechesis is a vital element in the continuing conversion of all Christians, and because all are called to conversion, everybody needs to be catechised.

In this section of text, Pope St John Paul II looks not only at the internal dispositions of faith of the human person, but also at their cultural existence, their life in the world. He does not begin optimistically: the contemporary world is beset by anxiety, fear, uncertainty, indifference, escapism, addiction, violence, and nihilism. He writes about the essential formation of children by their parents, but acknowledges, too, that children arrive at parish catechesis completely unformed in the faith, and that many adults are “quasi-catechumens”, as unformed and immature in the fundamentals of the Catholic faith as any child. There is ample material in this passage to fuel the pessimism and frustration that many catechists feel. How can catechesis have any effect on people living under such conditions?

If there is any man qualified to offer hope and consolation, it is John Paul II. Growing up in a devout family—though he lost his mother and his elder brother at a young age—and surrounded by a devout Catholic culture in Poland in the early 20th century, changes in the politics and culture of his youth made his own formation anything but straightforward. His university was closed by the Nazis during the occupation before he could take his degree, and he ended up doing hard manual labour in a lime quarry during the day and training for the priesthood in an underground seminary run by the Archbishop of Krakow in the evenings. He was ordained and continued to study, but despite being assigned to teach and minister to university students, under Communism theology departments were closed and there were limits on public religious practice. It was, for example, illegal for priests to travel with groups of students, and so he had to be incognito when he accompanied them on pilgrimages.

Despite the hostility of the culture to the Faith, John Paul II never faltered in his desire to catechise and to form those entrusted to him in the faith. He continued to write and publish in theology, but also to publish poetry and plays, and to take the opportunities for formation offered by cultural activities like theatre and sport. He never gave up on the culture, nor despaired on making the Gospel speak within it. This history adds even more weight to his assertion that “The power of the Gospel everywhere transforms and regenerates. When that power enters into a culture, it is no surprise that it rectifies many of its elements. There would be no catechesis if it were the Gospel that had to change when it came into contact with culture.” (CT, 53)

Despite the tremendous adversity catechists face today, the example of perseverance and faithfulness offered by Pope St John Paul II is there to show a way forward, as is his perennial attitude of hope. Some of his most famous words are appropriate for catechists to keep in mind: “I plead with you — never ever give up on hope, never doubt, never tire, never ever become discouraged. Be not afraid.”

## (2) Outline

### **Everybody Needs to be Catechised (§35-45)**

#### I. The Importance of Children and the Young

- A. Young people are a significant proportion of the population
- B. Many young persons face uncertainty and fear, and are tempted to escapism, indifference, drugs, violence, and nihilism.
- C. Those who have pastoral care of young persons often wonder how to best to reveal Jesus to them and help them to develop a relationship with Him.

#### II. Infants

- A. The first, simple revelation of God to a young child can be decisive in forming his or her faith.
- B. The introduction to the faith offered in the family is crucial to children's Christian formation.
- C. This initial catechesis, given with love, is something children are entitled to receive.

#### III. Children

- A. In schools and parishes children are integrated into the Christian community through sacramental preparation.
- B. This catechesis must give a clear account of the Church's teaching, but always connected to the joyful witness of the catechist's own lived faith.

#### IV. Adolescents

- A. Catechesis for this age group must engage with the intense and changeable emotions of adolescents, but lead them to dialogue and a re-examination of their lives (including these characteristic emotions) in light of the Gospel.
- B. Catechesis of adolescents should deal with the questions these persons have, including those about relationships and the sexual expression of love, as such catechesis can be key in forming behaviour.
- C. In all cases this catechesis must present Christ as someone who can be imitated, as well as admired, and whose suffering may help them to better understand their own suffering.

#### V. The Young

- A. Young people are at an age when they can decisively assume responsibility for their own lives and beliefs.
- B. Catechesis of young people is an opportunity to present the teachings of the Church, religious reality, and those traits that distinguish disciples of Christ from their peers WITHOUT simplification, and WITH reference to the Church's documentary heritage.
- C. Catechesis of young person prepares them for the commitments of adult life, and may inspire vocations.
- D. Catechesis is a permanent school of faith for all persons and does not end before, or with, the catechesis of young people.

#### VI. Adaptation of Catechesis for Young People

- A. When adapting catechesis for young people it is important to remember that they typically have both an openness to Christ and a desire to know Him, even if this manifests in a confused way.
- B. The message of the Gospel can be given to young people in language that is true and complete, as well as being accessible to them.

#### VII. The Handicapped

- A. Those with physical or intellectual disabilities have the same right as everyone else to know the mystery of faith.
- B. Those dedicated to this type of catechesis deserve support and encouragement in their apostolate.

#### VIII. Young People Without Religious Support

- A. An increasing number of young people come from non-Christian, or non-practicing, homes, yet desire to know the Christian faith.
- B. Catechesis can be adapted to offer some of the support they lack at home.

#### IX. Adults

- A. The principle form of catechesis is catechesis for adult, because adults bear the greatest Christian responsibility.
- B. Because adults most directly shape the world their faith must be continually renewed and enlightened by catechesis, so that the impact they have on the world might be in accordance with their faith.
- C. To be successful catechesis must be permanent.

#### X. Quasi-Catechumens

- A. The primary missionary concern in catechesis is for those adults who grew up in a non-Christian culture.
- B. However, it must also direct its energies towards those adults who were not fully catechised in their youth, and whose faith consequently has remained childish, and also towards those who have drifted away from practice for whatever reason.
- C. Catechesis of a special kind is directed towards adults who were never educated in the faith despite growing up in a Christian culture.

#### XI. Diversified and Complementary Forms of Catechesis

- A. Catechesis is for *everyone*: children & adults
- B. Some groups merit special attention
  1. The Elderly
  2. Migrants
  3. Those living in cities without churches
- C. Catechesis cannot be in “water-tight” compartments with no shared interests, aims, or resources amongst different kinds.
- D. No one, not even seminarians, consecrated religious, pastors, or catechists, should consider themselves exempt from receiving ongoing catechesis.

## **Some Ways and Means of Catechesis (§46-50)**

### **I. Communications Media**

- A. The Church has always given attention to determining suitable means of delivering catechesis.
- B. Many modern means of communication have a hugely positive impact when combined with high aesthetic quality and rigorous fidelity to Church teachings.

### **II. Utilisation of Various Places, Occasions, and Gatherings**

- A. Many groups and gatherings provide excellent opportunities for catechesis
  - 1. Diocesan, regional, and national pilgrimages
  - 2. Traditional (parish) missions
  - 3. Bible study groups
  - 4. Youth groups
- B. JP II exhorts priests, catechists and young people not to neglect serious study in youth groups as a complement to the joy, solidarity, and friendship they offer.

### **III. The Homily**

- A. The journey of faith that catechesis aids finds its fulfilment in the Eucharist
- B. Preaching by ordained ministers centred on Scripture invites the faithful to renewal of their journey or faith and opens further the mysteries of faith.
- C. Such preaching, adapted to the audience, has a role at Mass, sacramental liturgies, penitential services, and funerals.

### **IV. Catechetical Literature**

- A. Catechetical books (resources) are of great importance and benefit to the faithful.
- B. However, works that are shaped by pedagogical fashions or socio-political ideologies, rather than exclusively by Church teachings are pernicious because they often omit, distort, or misemphasise essential elements of the faith.
- C. In order to be truly catechetical, resources must meet the following conditions:
  - 1. They must be sensitive to the real-life situations of their intended audience.
  - 2. They must use language comprehensible to their intended audience.
  - 3. They must present the whole message of Christ and His Church with correct order, structure, and emphasis.
  - 4. They must aim at true conversion.

### **V. Catechisms**

- A. Catechetical resources must be prepared with the approval of Church pastors who themselves have the authority to give it, with primary reference to the General Directory of Catechesis.
- B. JP II encourages Bishops' Conferences to undertake the writing of catechisms that are in keeping both with Church teachings and Modern Pedagogy.

## **How to Impart Catechesis (§51-55)**

### **I. Diversity of Methods**

- A. The diversity amongst the faithful of intellectual development, ecclesial & spiritual maturity, and personal circumstances means that an array of pedagogical methods are necessary for successful catechesis.

- B. However, diversity of method must not detract from the unity of the faithful or of the faith that is taught.

#### II. At the Service of Revelation and Conversion

- A. The temptation to present the Gospel through the filter of political or social ideology must be avoided.
- B. Catechesis must be the revelation of God in Christ, whose Incarnation places Him at the centre of both human and individual history.
- C. Conceived of and practiced in this way catechesis avoids moralism and political “messianism” and arrives at “man’s inmost being”.

#### III. Message Embodied in Cultures

- A. Because catechesis seeks to bring the Gospel to the very heart of cultures, it must seek to know the cultures it is working with in a deep way; in this way catechesis can lead to a living tradition of faith.
- B. Two factors must be kept in mind
  1. The Gospel cannot be wholly extracted from its original cultural setting (i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> century Judea), and therefore catechesis is always in some sense inter-cultural.
  2. The Gospel by its very nature transforms and regenerates, so it can correct and rectify disordered elements of a culture. *The Gospel does not have to change in order to be enculturated.*

#### IV. The Contribution of Popular Devotions

- A. Popular devotions can be useful in catechesis, even if elements of them are slightly misguided (i.e. superstitious, or done without understanding, but with a sincere fervour and desire to please God).
- B. Most popular devotions, if stripped of their problematic elements, have elements that can be used to guide people towards fuller knowledge and practice of the faith.

#### V. Memorisation

- A. Having begun in a principally oral culture, catechesis has greatly relied on memorisation.
- B. Some worry that stressing memorisation reduces the faith to a formula that is all too easily recalled and repeated without being truly understood.
- C. However, the Synod exhorts not the abandonment of memorisation, but a careful balance between “reflection and spontaneity, between dialogue and silence, between written work and memory work.”
- D. JP II suggests that memorisation has a privileged and original use in catechesis, for the whole of the faith is in a sense a “memorial”.
- E. A certain amount of memorisation of the words of Jesus, of key Scriptural passages, of formulas of profession of the faith (i.e. the Creed), of liturgical texts, or essential prayers, and of key doctrinal ideas is essential to the assimilation of the faith, and in keeping with the dignity of young Christians.
- F. It is, however, essential that what is memorised is over time understood in depth in order to inform Christian life in both the individual and the Christian community.

### (3) Text

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

V.

**EVERYBODY NEEDS TO BE CATECHIZED**

***The Importance of Children and the Young***

35. The theme designated by my predecessor Paul VI for the fourth general assembly of the synod of Bishops was: "Catechesis in our time, with special reference to the catechesis of children and young people." The increase in the number of young people is without doubt a fact charged with hope and at the same time with anxiety for a large part of the contemporary world. In certain countries, especially those of the Third World, more than half of the population is under 25 or 30 years of age. This means millions and millions of children and young people preparing for their adult future. And there is more than just the factor of numbers: recent events, as well as the daily news, tell us that, although this countless multitude of young people is here and there dominated by uncertainty and fear, seduced by the escapism of indifference or drugs, or tempted by nihilism and violence, nevertheless it constitutes in its major part the great force that amid many hazards is set on building the civilization of the future.

In our pastoral care we ask ourselves: How are we to reveal Jesus Christ, God made man, to this multitude of children and young people, reveal Him not just in the fascination of a first fleeting encounter but through an acquaintance, growing deeper and clearer daily, with Him, His message, the plan of God that He has revealed, the call He addresses to each person, and the kingdom that He wishes to establish in this world with the "little flock"(87) of those who believe in Him, a kingdom that will be complete only in eternity? How are we to enable them to know the meaning, the import, the fundamental requirements, the law of love, the promises and the hopes of this kingdom?

There are many observations that could be made about the special characteristics that catechesis assumes at the different stages of life.

***Infants***

36. One moment that is often decisive is the one at which the very young child receives the first elements of catechesis from its parents and the family surroundings. These elements will perhaps be no more than a simple revelation of a good and provident Father in heaven to whom the child



learns to turn its heart. The very short prayers that the child learns to lisp will be the start of a loving dialogue with this hidden God whose word it will then begin to hear. I cannot insist too strongly on this early initiation by Christian parents in which the child's faculties are integrated into a living relationship with God. It is a work of prime importance. It demands great love and profound respect for the child who has a right to a simple and true presentation of the Christian faith.

### **Children**

37. For the child there comes soon, at school and in Church, in institutions connected with the parish or with the spiritual care of the Catholic or state school not only an introduction into a wider social circle, but also the moment for a catechesis aimed at inserting him or her organically into the life of the Church, a moment that includes an immediate preparation for the celebration of the sacraments. This catechesis is didactic in character, but is directed towards the giving of witness in the faith. It is an initial catechesis but not a fragmentary one, since it will have to reveal, although in an elementary way, all the principal mysteries of faith and their effects on the child's moral and religious life. It is a catechesis that gives meaning to the sacraments, but at the same time it receives from the experience of the sacraments a living dimension that keeps it from remaining merely doctrinal, and it communicates to the child the joy of being a witness to Christ in ordinary life.

### **Adolescents**

38. Next comes puberty and adolescence, with all the greatness and dangers which that age brings. It is the time of discovering oneself and one's own inner world, the time of generous plans, the time when the feeling of love awakens, with the biological impulses of sexuality, the time of the desire to be together, the time of a particularly intense joy connected with the exhilarating discovery of life. But often it is also the age of deeper questioning, of anguished or even frustrating searching, of a certain mistrust of others and dangerous introspection, and the age sometimes of the first experiences of setbacks and of disappointments. Catechesis cannot ignore these changeable aspects of this delicate period of life. A catechesis capable of leading the adolescent to re-examine his or her life and to engage in dialogue, a catechesis that does not ignore the adolescent's great questions - self-giving, belief, love and the means of expressing it constituted by sexuality - such a catechesis can be decisive. The revelation of Jesus Christ as a Friend, Guide and Model, capable of being admired but also imitated; the revelation of this message which provides an answer to the fundamental questions, the revelation of the loving plan of Christ the Saviour as the incarnation of the only authentic love and as the possibility of uniting the human race - all this can provide the basis for genuine education in faith. Above all, the mysteries of the passion and death of Jesus, through which, according to St. Paul, he merited His glorious resurrection, can speak eloquently to the adolescent's conscience and heart and cast light on his first sufferings and on the suffering of the world that he is discovering.

### **The Young**

39. With youth comes the moment of the first great decisions. Although the young may enjoy the support of the members of their family and their friends, they have to rely on themselves and their own conscience and must ever more frequently and decisively assume responsibility for their destiny. Good and evil, grace and sin, life and death will more and more confront one another within them, not just as moral categories but chiefly as fundamental options which they must accept or reject lucidly, conscious of their own responsibility. It is obvious that a catechesis which

denounces selfishness in the name of generosity, and which without any illusory oversimplification presents the Christian meaning of work, of the common good, of justice and charity, a catechesis on international peace and on the advancement of human dignity, on development, and on liberation, as these are presented in recent documents of the Church,(88) fittingly completes in the minds of the young the good catechesis on strictly religious realities which is never to be neglected. Catechesis then takes on considerable importance, since it is the time when the Gospel can be presented, understood and accepted as capable of giving meaning to life and thus of inspiring attitudes that would have no other explanation, such as self-sacrifice, detachment, forbearance, justice, commitment, reconciliation, a sense of the Absolute and the unseen. All these are traits that distinguish a young person from his or her companions as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Catechesis thus prepares for the important Christian commitments of adult life. For example, it is certain that many vocations to the priesthood and religious life have their origin during a well-imparted catechesis in infancy and adolescence.

From infancy until the threshold of maturity, catechesis is thus a permanent school of the faith and follows the major stages of life, like a beacon lighting the path of the child, the adolescent and the young person.

### ***The Adaptation of Catechesis for Young People***

40. It is reassuring to note that, during the fourth general assembly of the synod and the following years, the Church has widely shared in concern about how to impart catechesis to children and young people. God grant that the attention thus aroused will long endure in the Church's consciousness. In this way the synod has been valuable for the whole Church by seeking to trace with the greatest possible precision the complex characteristics of present-day youth; by showing that these young persons speak a language into which the message of Jesus must be translated with patience and wisdom and without betrayal; by demonstrating that, in spite of appearances, these young people have within them, even though often in a confused way, not just a readiness or openness, but rather a real desire to know "Jesus...who is called Christ" (89); and by indicating that if the work of catechesis is to be carried out rigorously and seriously, it is today more difficult and tiring than ever before, because of the obstacles and difficulties of all kinds that it meets; but it is also more consoling, because of the depth of the response it receives from children and young people. This is a treasure which the Church can and should count on in the years ahead.

### ***The Handicapped***

41. Children and young people who are physically or mentally handicapped come first to mind. They have a right, like others of their age, to know "the mystery of faith." The greater difficulties that they encounter give greater merit to their efforts and to those of their teachers. It is pleasant to see that Catholic organizations especially dedicated to young handicapped people contributed to the synod a renewed desire to deal better with this important problem. They deserve to be given warm encouragement in this endeavour.

### ***Young People Without Religious Support***

42. My thoughts turn next to the ever increasing number of children and young people born and brought up in a non-Christian or at least non-practicing home but who wish to know the Christian

faith. They must be ensured a catechesis attuned to them, so that they will be able to grow in faith and live by It more and more, in spite of the lack of support or even the opposition they meet in their surroundings.

### **Adults**

43. To continue the series of receivers of catechesis, I cannot fail to emphasize now one of the most constant concerns of the synod fathers, a concern imposed with vigour and urgency by present experiences throughout the world: I am referring to the central problem of the catechesis of adults. This is the principal form of catechesis, because it is addressed to persons who have the greatest responsibilities and the capacity to live the Christian message in its fully developed form.(90) The Christian community cannot carry out a permanent catechesis without the direct and skilled participation of adults, whether as receivers or as promoters of catechetical activity. The world, in which the young are called to live and to give witness to the faith which catechesis seeks to deepen and strengthen, is governed by adults. The faith of these adults too should continually be enlightened, stimulated and renewed, so that it may pervade the temporal realities in their charge. Thus, for catechesis to be effective, it must be permanent, and it would be quite useless if it stopped short at the threshold of maturity, since catechesis, admittedly under another form, proves no less necessary for adults.

### **Quasi-Catechumens**

44. Among the adults who need catechesis, our pastoral missionary concern is directed to those who were born and reared in areas not yet Christianized, and who have never been able to study deeply the Christian teaching that the circumstances of life have at a certain moment caused them to come across. It is also directed to those who in childhood received a catechesis suited to their age but who later drifted away from all religious practice and as adults find themselves with religious knowledge of a rather childish kind. It is likewise directed to those who feel the effects of a catechesis received early in life but badly imparted or badly assimilated. It is directed to those who, although they were born in a Christian country or in sociologically Christian surroundings, have never been educated in their faith and, as adults are really catechumens.

### **Diversified and Complementary Forms of Catechesis**

45. Catechesis is therefore for adults of every age, including the elderly-persons who deserve particular attention in view of their experience and their problems - no less than for children, adolescents and the young. We should also mention migrants, those who are by-passed by modern developments, those who live in areas of large cities which are often without churches, buildings and suitable organization, and other such groups. It is desirable that initiatives meant to give all these groups a Christian formation, with appropriate means (audio-visual aids, booklets, discussions, lectures), should increase in number, enabling many adults to fill the gap left by an insufficient or deficient catechesis, to complete harmoniously at a higher level their childhood catechesis, or even to prepare themselves enough in this field to be able to help others in a more serious way.

It is important also that the catechesis of children and young people, permanent catechesis, and the catechesis of adults should not be separate watertight compartments. It is even more important that there should be no break between them. On the contrary, their perfect complementarity must be fostered: adults have much to give to young people and children in the

field of catechesis, but they can also receive much from them for the growth of their own Christian lives.

It must be restated that nobody in the Church of Jesus Christ should feel excused from receiving catechesis. This is true even of young seminarians and young religious, and of all those called to the task of being pastors and catechists. They will fulfil this task all the better if they are humble pupils of the Church, the great giver as well as the great receiver of catechesis.

## VI.

### SOME WAYS AND MEANS OF CATECHESIS

#### ***Communications Media***

46. From the oral teaching by the apostles and the letters circulating among the churches down to the most modern means, catechesis has not ceased to look for the most suitable ways and means for its mission, with the active participation of the communities and at the urging of the pastors. This effort must continue.

I think immediately of the great possibilities offered by the means of social communication and the means of group communication: television, radio, the press, records, tape recordings-the whole series of audio-visual means. The achievements in these spheres are such as to encourage the greatest hope. Experience shows, for example, the effect had by instruction given on radio or television, when it combines a high aesthetic level and rigorous fidelity to the magisterium. The Church now has many opportunities for considering these questions - as, for instance, on Social Communications Days - and it is not necessary to speak of them at length here, in spite of their prime importance.

#### ***Utilization of Various Places, Occasions and Gatherings***

47. I am also thinking of various occasions of special value which are exactly suitable for catechesis: for example, diocesan, regional or national pilgrimages, which gain from being centred on some judiciously chosen theme based on the life of Christ, of the Blessed Virgin or of the saints. Then there are the traditional missions, often too hastily dropped but irreplaceable for the periodic and vigorous renewal of Christian life - they should be revived and brought up to date. Again there are Bible-study groups, which ought to go beyond exegesis and lead their members to live by the Word of God. Yet other instances are the meetings of ecclesial basic communities, in so far as they correspond to the criteria laid down in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.<sup>(91)</sup> I may also mention the youth groups that, under varying names and forms but always with the purpose of making Jesus Christ known and of living by the Gospel, are in some areas multiplying and flourishing in a sort of springtime that is very comforting for the Church. These include Catholic action groups, charitable groups, prayer groups and Christian meditation groups. These groups are a source of great hope for the Church of tomorrow. But, in the name of Jesus, I exhort the young people who belong to them, their leaders, and the priests who devote the best part of their ministry to them: no matter what it costs, do not allow these groups-which are exceptional occasions for meeting others, and which are blessed with such riches of friendship and solidarity among the young, of joy and enthusiasm, of reflection on events and facts - do not allow them to lack serious study of Christian doctrine. If they do, they will be in danger - a danger that has unfortunately proved only too real - of disappointing their members and also the Church.

The catechetical endeavour that is possible in these various surroundings, and in many others besides, will have all the greater chance of being accepted and bearing fruit if it respects their individual nature. By becoming part of them in the right way, it will achieve the diversity and complementarity of approach that will enable it to develop all the riches of its concept, with its three dimensions of word, memorial and witness-doctrine, celebration and commitment in living - which the synod Message to the People of God emphasized.(92)

### ***The Homily***

48. This remark is even more valid for the catechesis given in the setting of the liturgy, especially at the Eucharistic assembly. Respecting the specific nature and proper cadence of this setting, the homily takes up again the journey of faith put forward by catechesis, and brings it to its natural fulfilment. At the same time it encourages the Lord's disciples to begin anew each day their spiritual journey in truth, adoration and thanksgiving. Accordingly, one can say that catechetical teaching too finds its source and its fulfilment in the Eucharist, within the whole circle of the liturgical year. Preaching, centered upon the Bible texts, must then in its own way make it possible to familiarize the faithful with the whole of the mysteries of the faith and with the norms of Christian living. Much attention must be given to the homily: it should be neither too long nor too short; it should always be carefully prepared, rich in substance and adapted to the hearers, and reserved to ordained ministers. The homily should have its place not only in every Sunday and feast-day Eucharist, but also in the celebration of baptisms, penitential liturgies, marriages and funerals. This is one of the benefits of the liturgical renewal.

### ***Catechetical Literature***

49. Among these various ways and means - all the Church's activities have a catechetical dimension - catechetical works, far from losing their essential importance, acquire fresh significance. One of the major features of the renewal of catechetics today is the rewriting and multiplication of catechetical books taking place in many parts of the Church. Numerous very successful works have been produced and are a real treasure in the service of catechetical instruction. But it must be humbly and honestly recognized that this rich flowering has brought with it articles and publications which are ambiguous and harmful to young people and to the life of the Church. In certain places, the desire to find the best forms of expression or to keep up with fashions in pedagogical methods has often enough resulted in certain catechetical works which bewilder the young and even adults, either by deliberately or unconsciously omitting elements essential to the Church's faith, or by attributing excessive importance to certain themes at the expense of others, or, chiefly, by a rather horizontalist overall view out of keeping with the teaching of the Church's magisterium.

Therefore, it is not enough to multiply catechetical works. In order that these works may correspond with their aim, several conditions are essential:

- a) they must be linked with the real life of the generation to which they are addressed, showing close acquaintance with its anxieties and questionings, struggles and hopes;
- b) they must try to speak a language comprehensible to the generation in question;

c) they must make a point of giving the whole message of Christ and His Church, without neglecting or distorting anything, and in expounding it they will follow a line and structure that highlights what is essential;

d) they must really aim to give to those who use them a better knowledge of the mysteries of Christ, aimed at true conversion and a life more in conformity with God's will.

### **Catechisms**

50. All those who take on the heavy task of preparing these catechetical tools, especially catechism texts, can do so only with the approval of the pastors who have the authority to give it, and taking their inspiration as closely as possible from the General Catechetical Directory, which remains the standard of reference.(93)

In this regard, I must warmly encourage episcopal conferences of the whole world to undertake, patiently but resolutely, the considerable work to be accomplished in agreement with the Apostolic See in order to prepare genuine catechisms which will be faithful to the essential content of revelation and up to date in method, and which will be capable of educating the Christian generations of the future to a sturdy faith.

This brief mention of ways and means of modern catechetics does not exhaust the wealth of suggestions worked out by the synod fathers. It is comforting to think that at the present time every country is seeing valuable collaboration for a more organic and more secure renewal of these aspects of catechetics. There can be no doubt that the Church will find the experts and the right means for responding, with God's grace, to the complex requirements of communicating with the people of today.

## **VII.**

### **HOW TO IMPART CATECHESIS**

#### ***Diversity of Methods***

51. The age and the intellectual development of Christians, their degree of ecclesial and spiritual maturity and many other personal circumstances demand that catechesis should adopt widely differing methods for the attainment of its specific aim: education in the faith. On a more general level, this variety is also demanded by the social and cultural surrounding in which the Church carries out her catechetical work.

The variety in the methods used is a sign of life and a resource. That is how it was considered by the fathers of the fourth general assembly of the synod, although they also drew attention to the conditions necessary for that variety to be useful and not harmful to the unity of the teaching of the one Faith.

#### ***At the Service of Revelation and Conversion***

52. The first question of a general kind that presents itself here concerns the danger and the temptation to mix catechetical teaching unduly with overt or masked ideological views, especially

political and social ones, or with personal political options. When such views get the better of the - central message to be transmitted, to the point of obscuring it and putting it in second place or even using it to further their own ends, catechesis then becomes radically distorted. The synod rightly insisted on the need for catechesis to remain above one-sided divergent trends - to avoid "dichotomies" - even in the field of theological interpretation of such questions. It is on the basis of revelation that catechesis will try to set its course, revelation as transmitted by the universal magisterium of the Church, in its solemn or ordinary form. This revelation tells of a creating and redeeming God, Whose Son has come among us in our flesh and enters not only into each individual's personal history but into human history itself, becoming its centre. Accordingly, this revelation tells of the radical chance of man and the universe, of all that makes up the web of human life under the influence of the Good News of Jesus Christ. If conceived in this way, catechesis goes beyond every form of formalistic moralism, although it will include true Christian moral teaching. Chiefly, it goes beyond any kind of temporal, social or political "messianism." It seeks to arrive at man's innermost being.

### ***The Message Embodied in Cultures***

53. Now a second question. As I said recently to the members of the Biblical Commission: "The term 'acculturation' or 'inculturation' may be a neologism, but it expresses very well one factor of the great mystery of the Incarnation."(94) We can say of catechesis, as well as of evangelization in general, that it is called to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures. For this purpose, catechesis will seek to know these cultures and their essential components; it will learn their most significant expressions; it will respect their particular values and riches. In this manner it will be able to offer these cultures the knowledge of the hidden mystery(95) and help them to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought. Two things must however be kept in mind.

On the one hand the Gospel message cannot be purely and simply isolated from the culture in which it was first inserted (the biblical world or, more concretely, the cultural milieu in which Jesus of Nazareth lived), nor, without serious loss, from the cultures in which it has already been expressed down the centuries; it does not spring spontaneously from any cultural soil; it has always been transmitted by means of an apostolic dialogue which inevitably becomes part of a certain dialogue of cultures.

On the other hand, the power of the Gospel everywhere transforms and regenerates. When that power enters into a culture, it is no surprise that it rectifies many of its elements. There would be no catechesis if it were the Gospel that had to change when it came into contact with the cultures.

To forget this would simply amount to what St. Paul very forcefully calls "emptying the cross of Christ of its power."(96)

It is a different matter to take, with wise discernment, certain elements, religious or otherwise, that form part of the cultural heritage of a human group and use them to help its members to understand better the whole of the Christian mystery. Genuine catechists know that catechesis "takes flesh" in the various cultures and milieux: one has only to think of the peoples with their great differences, of modern youth, of the great variety of circumstances in which people find themselves today. But they refuse to accept an impoverishment of catechesis through a renunciation or obscuring of its message, by adaptations, even in language, that would endanger the "precious deposit" of the faith,(97) or by concessions in matters of faith or morals. They are

convinced that true catechesis eventually enriches these cultures by helping them to go beyond the defective or even inhuman features in them, and by communicating to their legitimate values the fullness of Christ.(98)

### ***The Contribution of Popular Devotion***

54. Another question of method concerns the utilization in catechetical instruction of valid elements in popular piety. I have in mind devotions practiced by the faithful in certain regions with moving fervour and purity of intention, even if the faith underlying them needs to be purified or rectified in many aspects. I have in mind certain easily understood prayers that many simple people are fond of repeating. I have in mind certain acts of piety practiced with a sincere desire to do penance or to please the Lord. Underlying most of these prayers and practices, besides elements that should be discarded, there are other elements which, if they were properly used, could serve very well to help people advance towards knowledge of the mystery of Christ and of His message: the love and mercy of God, the Incarnation of Christ, His redeeming cross and resurrection, the activity of the Spirit in each Christian and in the Church, the mystery of the hereafter, the evangelical virtues to be practiced, the presence of the Christian in the world, etc. And why should we appeal to non-Christian or even anti-Christian elements refusing to build on elements which, even if they need to be revised or improved, have something Christian at their root?

### ***Memorization***

55. The final methodological question the importance of which should at least be referred to-one that was debated several times in the synod-is that of memorization. In the beginnings of Christian catechesis, which coincided with a civilization that was mainly oral, recourse was had very freely to memorization. Catechesis has since then known a long tradition of learning the principal truths by memorizing. We are all aware that this method can present certain disadvantages, not the least of which is that it lends itself to insufficient or at times almost non-existent assimilation, reducing all knowledge to formulas that are repeated without being properly understood. These disadvantages and the different characteristics of our own civilization have in some places led to the almost complete suppression - according to some, alas, the definitive suppression - of memorization in catechesis. And yet certain very authoritative voices made themselves heard on the occasion of the fourth general assembly of the synod, calling for the restoration of a judicious balance between reflection and spontaneity, between dialogue and silence, between written work and memory work. Moreover certain cultures still set great value on memorization.

At a time when, in non-religious teaching in certain countries, more and more complaints are being made about the unfortunate consequences of disregarding the human faculty of memory, should we not attempt to put this faculty back into use in an intelligent and even an original way in catechesis, all the more since the celebration or "memorial" of the great events of the history of salvation require a precise knowledge of them? A certain memorization of the words of Jesus, of important Bible passages, of the Ten Commandments, of the formulas of profession of the faith, of the liturgical texts, of the essential prayers, of key doctrinal ideas, etc., far from being opposed to the dignity of young Christians, or constituting an obstacle to personal dialogue with the Lord, is a real need, as the synod fathers forcefully recalled. We must be realists. The blossoms, if we may call them that, of faith and piety do not grow in the desert places of a memory - less catechesis. What is essential is that the texts that are memorized must at the same time be taken in and gradually understood in depth, in order to become a source of Christian life on the personal level and the community level.



The plurality of methods in contemporary catechesis can be a sign of vitality and ingenuity. In any case, the method chosen must ultimately be referred to a law that is fundamental for the whole of the Church's life: the law of fidelity to God and of fidelity to man in a single loving attitude.

**Endnotes:**

87. Lk. 12:32.

88. Cf., for example, Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1025-1120; Pope Paul VI, Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*: AAS 59 (1967), pp. 257-299; Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*: AAS 63 (1971), pp. 401-441; Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: AAS 68 (1976), pp. 5-76.

89. Mt.1:16.

90. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Bishop's Pastoral Office in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 14: AAS 58 (1966), p. 679; Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 14: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 962-963; Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *Directorium Catechisticum Generale* 20: AAS 64 (1972), p. 112; cf. also *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum*.

91. Cf. 58: AAS 68 (1976), pp. 46-49.

92. Cf. *Synodus Episcoporum, De catechesi hoc nostro tempore tradenda praesertim pueris atque iuuenibus, Ad Populum Dei Nuntius*, 7-10: loc. cit., pp. 9-12; cf. "L'Osservatore Romano," October 30, 1977, p. 3.

93. Cf. Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *Directorium Catechisticum Generale*, 119-121; 134: AAS 64 (1972), pp. 166-167; 172.

94. Cf. AAS 71 (1979), p. 607.

95. Cf. Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:5.

96. 1 Cor. 1:17.

97. Cf. 2 Tm. 1:14.

98. Cf. Jn. 1:16; Eph. 1:10.

## (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 are some factors that make the catechesis of young people a particular concern in the modern world?**

Answer: Everybody Needs To Be Catechised, I.A-C

**2. Why is the initial revelation of God to young children within the family important?**

Answer: Everybody Needs To Be Catechised, II.A-C

**3. What are some essential features of catechesis for children?**

Answer: Everybody Needs To Be Catechised, III.B

**4. What are some special consideration to keep in mind in delivering catechesis for adolescents.**

Answer: Everybody Needs To Be Catechised, IV.A-C

**5. What are some necessary features of catechesis for young people?**

Answer: Everybody Needs To Be Catechised, V.B, VI.A-B

**6. Why is catechesis for young people especially important?**

Answer: Everybody Needs To Be Catechised, V.A, C

**7. Why is catechesis of *adults* the principle form of catechesis?**

Answer: Everybody Needs to be Catechised, IX.A-B

**8. Who is exempt from receiving catechesis?**

Answer: Everybody Needs to be Catechised, V.D, IX.C, XI.D

**9. What are some occasions that offer opportunities for catechesis?**

Answer: Some Ways And Means Of Catechesis, II.A, III

**10. What characteristics must written resources have in order to be truly catechetical?**

Answer: Some Ways and Means Of Catechesis, IV.C

**11. What message is central to all catechesis? How can it become distorted?**

Answer: How To Impart Catechesis, II.A-C

**12. Why is culture an important factor in catechesis?**

Answer: How To Impart Catechesis, III.B

**13. What two factors must be kept in mind regarding culture and catechesis?**

Answer: How To Impart Catechesis, III.B

**14. What are some perceived dangers of excessive reliance on memorisation in catechesis?**

Answer: How To Impart Catechesis, V.B

**15. In what aspects of catechesis is memorisation still important?**

Answer: How To Impart Catechesis, V.D-E

## (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).*

### **Luke 12:32-34**

[Jesus said to his disciples] “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

### **Romans 16: 25-27**

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

### **2 Timothy 1:14**

By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

### **John 1:16-17**

For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

### **Ephesians 1:7-10**

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

## (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. Was there any time when catechesis profoundly impacted your faith or life (for good or ill)? Why was that? How has it influenced you as a catechist?
2. What challenges does modern secular culture pose for catechesis? How have you, or could you, address them? How do you, as a Christian witness and catechist, make the Gospel message real, compelling, and heard in a culture that neglects religious truth?
3. Pope Saint John Paul II urges us not to neglect memorisation in catechesis. Consider the things you have memorised in the course of catechesis and practicing your faith—prayers, scripture passages, formulas of the faith. How did you learn them? How does knowing them shape your faith?
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. My thoughts turn next to the ever increasing number of children and young people born and brought up in a non-Christian or at least non-practicing home but who wish to know the Christian faith. They must be ensured a catechesis attuned to them, so that they will be able to grow in faith and live by it more and more, in spite of the lack of support or even the opposition they meet in their surroundings.

Among the adults who need catechesis, our pastoral missionary concern is directed to those who were born and reared in areas not yet Christianized, and who have never been able to study deeply the Christian teaching that the circumstances of life have at a certain moment caused them to come across. It is also directed to those who in childhood received a catechesis suited to their age but who later drifted away from all religious practice and as adults find themselves with religious knowledge of a rather childish kind. It is likewise directed to those who feel the effects of a catechesis received early in life but badly imparted or badly assimilated. It is directed to those who, although they were born in a Christian country or in sociologically Christian surroundings, have never been educated in their faith and, as adult are really catechumens.

**Many catechists today find that a significant proportion of the children who come to them for catechesis do not have families that know or practice the faith. What is your experience? How do you find the experience of working with children whose faith formation is not supported in the home? How do you involve their families in their formation? What are some of the biggest challenges? How might you approach this issue in the future?**

2. It must be restated that nobody in the Church of Jesus Christ should feel excused from receiving catechesis. This is true even of young seminarians and young religious, and of all those called to the task of being pastors and catechists. They will fulfil this task all the better if they are humble pupils of the Church, the great giver as well as the great receiver of catechesis.

**What are some ways in which you, as a catechist, receive formation and catechesis from the Church? What instances of receiving catechesis have been the most fruitful for you? Are there opportunities you wish you had to receive catechesis? What are some ways you might seek out catechesis for yourself?**

3. Therefore, it is not enough to multiply catechetical works. In order that these works may correspond with their aim, several conditions are essential:

- a) they must be linked with the real life of the generation to which they are addressed, showing close acquaintance with its anxieties and questionings, struggles and hopes;*
- b) they must try to speak a language comprehensible to the generation in question;*
- c) they must make a point of giving the whole message of Christ and His Church, without neglecting or distorting anything, and in expounding it they will follow a line and structure that highlights what is essential;*
- d) they must really aim to give to those who use them a better knowledge of the mysteries of Christ, aimed at true conversion and a life more in conformity with God's will.*

**Do you periodically review the way in which you give catechesis? What questions do you ask yourself? How do you respond to changes? Do the criteria in the passage above highlight any areas for potential growth or development in your programs of catechesis? What are they? How might you pursue them?**

4. *On the other hand, the power of the Gospel everywhere transforms and regenerates. When that power enters into a culture, it is no surprise that it rectifies many of its elements. There would be no catechesis if it were the Gospel that had to change when it came into contact with the cultures.*

**What are some challenges involved in proclaiming the truth of the Gospel to persons formed by a non-Christian, or even anti-Christian, culture? What does it mean to claim that the Gospel can rectify elements of culture? How would you like to see the Gospel rectify the culture we live in? How might catechesis support this transformation?**

5. *A certain memorization of the words of Jesus, of important Bible passages, of the Ten Commandments, of the formulas of profession of the faith, of the liturgical texts, of the essential prayers, of key doctrinal ideas, etc., far from being opposed to the dignity of young Christians, or constituting an obstacle to personal dialogue with the Lord, is a real need, as the synod fathers forcefully recalled. We must be realists. The blossoms, if we may call them that, of faith and piety do not grow in the desert places of a memory - less catechesis. What is essential is that the texts that are memorized must at the same time be taken in and gradually understood in depth, in order to become a source of Christian life on the personal level and the community level.*

**Are there prayers or bits of Scripture lodged in your memory that are vital to your experience of faith, perhaps something that easily comes to you in joy or in troubles? What prayers, scripture passages, and elements of the faith do you think it is necessary for those you catechise to commit to memory? How do you make these “real” and “alive” to them? Would you consider using memorisation more if you could avoid the feeling of dry, rote learning?**