



CATECHESIS IN OUR LIFE

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1) FAILURE OF THE "CATECHISM"?

For many long years the immense treasures of CATECHESIS was reduced to the CATECHISM due to historical circumstances, to a book containing a short summary of the Christian doctrine, of the principal truths of the Christian faith, presented in the name of the ecclesiastical authorities, to be memorised by means of question and answer. The term also serves to remind us of a systematic organization and time table aimed at the communication and assimilation of this summary. The whole being destined above all for preparing children to receive the sacraments of Christian initiation.

Catechism thus applied took no account of the social and cultural changes in the world such as the conquests of science, the process of secularization, pluralism, atheism or oecumenism. It consequently took no account either of the changes in the Church itself, of the fact that the structures which produced and crystallized the catechism were those of the Church of the Middle Ages, of the Counter Reformation of the 16th Century or of colonial Christianity. Catechism is not suited to the complex realities of the 20th Century, soon to become the 21st, because its horizons, its content, its methods, its language, and the point of view from which it starts and to which it wishes to arrive are no longer suited to the context of the modern world. Learning by heart a summarized Thomist doctrine of the principal truths of faith does not lead to conversion, does not meet the needs of modern man or present day challenges and does not commit man to the transformation of the world.

The failure of the catechism and the consequent search for the true meaning of catechesis are the result of profound biblical, spiritual, theological and pastoral renewal on the one hand, and, on the other, of the demands resulting from social, economic and cultural changes which affect man and the community in their very being, their way of organizing themselves and of acting, and their destiny.

2) SEARCHING FOR THE MEANING OF CATECHESIS

A knowledge of the first five centuries of Christianity is fundamental for the understanding of the true meaning and significance of catechesis. The circumstances which obliged the Christians to organize themselves clandestinely into communities of faith, of brotherhood and hope, led to the main preoccupation being with adults. Option for Jesus Christ was a gesture of radical human liberty responding to a gratuitous call of God and entailing a recognized risk of martyrdom. The change in life style, from the religious point of view, (abandoning the gods, pagan customs and attaching oneself to Jesus Christ and his plans) led to a social change (the establishment of a different kind of community, giving testimony to Christian values, a challenging of political and religious systems, etc.).

When describing the primitive Christian community, the Acts of the Apostles (Acts, II, 4... IV, 35) enumerates the basic elements of true catechesis. They are the doctrine of the Apostles, prayer, the eucharist, witness to the resurrection, brotherhood which unites the community, the sharing of gifts and possessions, infectious joy. That is to say that CATECHESIS IS A COMMUNITARIAN PROCESS OF CONTINUING EDUCATION, using divers means, WHICH LEADS TO THE CHRISTIAN'S PROGRESSIVE COMING TO MATURITY IN THE FAITH SO THAT WITH JESUS CHRIST HE ASSUMES CO-RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE SALVATION OF THE WORLD, AS AN ACTIVE MEMBER, in communion and participation WITH THE COMMUNITY OF THE CHURCH.

Over the last few years the Church has thought long over the need for a new kind of catechesis. The current of biblical, patristic, liturgical, theological, anthropological and pastoral renewal traced out new paths during the first half of the 20th Century and led to the Vatican II Council which brought about important renewal "ad intra" and "ad extra" to the Church. Catechesis did not lag behind on this path. Without overlooking the significant progress in catechetical research and reflection which preceded the Council, especially in international Congresses and Weeks, one must refer in the first place to the Council documents themselves (1962-1965) the international Week in Medellin (1968), the International Catechesis Congress (Rome, 1971), the General Catechesis Directory of the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy (1971), the Synod on "Evangelization" followed by the apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii Nuntiandi" (Paul VI, 1974), the Synod on "Catechesis" (1977) with its "Message to

the People of God" followed by the apostolic Exhortation "Catechesi Tradendae" (Jean Paul II, 1979), the Puebla Document (CELAM, 1979), a whole series of declarations by the bishops of different countries on the Renewal of Catechesis following all these proceedings.

3) SOME NECESSARY CHANGES IN CATECHESIS

a) *As regards those who practice it.* It is the Christian community itself which is responsible for the education in the faith of those who compose it.

The *family* is the first community, the little "domestic Church", in which our Lord is imitated and honoured and where Christian values are assimilated in the context of words, gestures and actions and confirmed by the living testimony of the parents. The *Community of the Church* bringing the faithful together in the faith and in action, nourishing them, convincing them, organizing them and pledging them to the service of God and of the community with the aim of transforming the world. The *Catechists* are called and sent by the community to carry the word of God and of the Church, the cooperators with the family: people who participate closely in the life of the community, having an extensive culture and an intense spiritual life. They are the primary witnesses of Our Lord and his message. They lead those who are catechized to participate in the development of the catechesis and in the progress of the community.

b) *As regards those who are the object of catechesis.* This is the Christian throughout his life, especially as an adult, for he has the power to influence decisions in society. Hence, besides the strictly doctrinal ideas of the Church, the adult tries to organize his life, his family, his profession, his participation in the destinies of society: in this respect he challenges the real Church of which he does not always feel himself an integral part, but rather a passive member. It is to this freedom that the renewed catechesis gives priority. While granting its due place to the catechesis of children who are easily malleable because they are receptive but not always capable of discernment, the Church needs to channel the best of its energies in favour of adults and, logically, of young people.

c) *As to its content.* This is the Bible, the great and permanent manual of catechesis, since the whole of Christian Life depends profoundly on the Word of God who summons, judges, challenges and sends (DV 8, 21, 24, 26). The great themes of the Christian faith always remain the same, but they are studied and lived in the framework of the preaching of salvation in the "kerygma" within the community of faith and commitment and in the actual human situations of the present moment. If these conditions are lacking, the content remains within the context of doctrinal "synthesis" without any effect on personal, community and social life.

d) *As to method:* the various psychological and pedagogical methods are useful in the process of education in the faith if they are suitably adapted. They must, however, follow the methodical principles of CHALLENGE or interaction, that is to say: a mutual and efficacious relationship between life with its ever occurring problems and formation in the faith, which provides solutions based on revelation or argues the experiences of life by pointing out directions. Without this actual confrontation between THE EXPERIENCE OF LIFE and the FORMULATION OF THE FAITH, conversion or liberating action will be difficult even if the well-tried methods of SEE, JUDGE, ACT are used.

4) WE, LASALLIANS, AND CATECHESIS

Be convinced personally and community wise, about the MESSAGE OF SALVATION (The person of Our Lord, his teaching, his mission) and make it reverberate (catechesis comes from Kate-echeo to make to echo), by making it vibrate till it enters the fibres of our being, converting and transforming us (conversion-metanoia), till it overflows with actual signs of mature faith (community-koinonia, liberating service-diakonia; liturgy, etc.) which is the continuing process of Education in the Faith which renewed Catechesis proposes to bring about. Not only does it radically modify the traditional "catechism" for children, it places every Christian in a continuing situation of being catechised as well as an agent of catechesis and an educator in the faith, because of his place in history and the requirements of the communitarian process.

To be Lasallian is to live in the spirit of faith and apostolic zeal: "Signum Fidei", in brotherhood: "indivisa manent". Therefore, to become this SIGNUM FIDEI, this sign of faith as proposed by De La Salle, every Lasallian must assume for himself and others a radical catechesis: A COMMUNITARIAN EDUCATION IN THE FAITH WHICH IS CONTINUING, PROGRESSIVE, ORGANIC, ORDERED and SYSTEMATIC, always aiming at ever-greater maturity expressed in actual and specific signs of a change in life style, in human relationships, in the construction of society and relationship with God, sights fixed on the plenitude which will be manifested in the Eschatology.

Called by God to a vocation and quite specific mission among the people of God, "CHRISTIAN EDUCATION", the Lasallian is intrinsically a CATECHIST, an AGENT OF EDUCATION IN THE FAITH, through his testimony, his word, his personal and community activity. From this point of view his zeal is creative in opening the paths, by all means possible, to the prophetic SIGN of denunciation and annunciation, taking as reference the inheritance of the Christian faith in confrontation with the social, economic, political, cultural and religious realities which have to be transformed so as to be in harmony with the divine plan of a fraternal, united and just society.

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