

ORGANIZATION OF CATECHESIS

The modern catechetical movement in the Catholic Church in Greece was started about 1956 by a group of catechists (priests, religious and lay people) of the Archdiocese of Athens. These catechists, recently trained in catechetical institutes in France and knowing the great advances made by the French catechetical movement, decided to translate and adapt a series of manuals in Greek.

The "new pedagogy of the faith" with all that it implies made its appearance in Greece. A catechetical commission under the direction of the local episcopal conference was officially established on 17th June, 1965. From that date onwards a general interest began to make itself felt: catechists were trained, new textbooks were introduced into the schools and parishes and, as was to be expected, the first clashes occurred. Some questioned the new methods, others the content of the programme, others still the efficacy of both programme and methods...

Despite these suspicions the Commission went ahead with its work, sometimes stressing the need to employ scientific methods in catechesis, at other times paying more attention to the content of the programme, but always careful to produce a work which was not simply new but answering to the demands of faith, respectful of tradition and adapted to modern needs. After ten years' labour the Commission has succeeded in producing a series of books for children and catechists which have met with general acceptance and appreciation. After the books for children came others for adolescents and older students. These also are excellent productions. Though there still is room for improvement and renewal we can confidently say that something of value exists in the matter of catechetical textbooks and among teaching personnel in Greece.

For some years past the two most important dioceses have each a Catechetical Commission while the others have appointed animators for the work of catechesis. Once a year the Commissions and Animators meet to exchange views on the difficulties of the task, to learn of new publications, to study the evolution of catechesis and plan for the future. They also pray together and share the joys and hopes of a difficult apostolate.

WHERE CATECHESIS TAKES PLACE

In state secondary schools obligatory religious instruction is given by specialist teachers while in primary schools such instruction is given by the local schoolmaster. Catholic students do not attend these classes, except in villages with a large Catholic majority. The parish priest normally instructs Catholic children.

In private Catholic schools the students have religious instruction at the same time as Orthodox students have theirs. Priests, Brothers, Sisters or Catholic lay teachers take charge of their religious formation. Methods differ but an effort is being made to get away from mere instruction and develop a climate of growth in faith more open and more appealing.

In the parishes. Catechism classes are held once a week. These classes have a more ecclesial character and are aimed at a more definite commitment of the students to the local church. In many parishes there are also youth groups. Their meetings provide occasions for the religious formation of the members. There are no specialised groups such as the J.E.C. and J.O.C. in Greece.

In families. The family still maintains a generally Christian atmosphere which is shown by its adherence to certain religious practices, customs and habits. Popular religion holds a greater place in the lives of the people than Christian practices enlightened by faith.

SOME ASPECTS OF CATECHESIS IN GREECE

The following are some of the characteristics of catechesis in Greece:

Catechesis of a minority: Many instances recall the little communities of the early Church: the numbers, the places themselves and the problems are reminiscent of that era.

Traditional character of catechesis: The influence on Catholic children of their Orthodox friends is clearly evident in their attitude of "tradition - repetition - withdrawal". They lack the dynamism that western Catholics normally exhibit. The rather infrequent catechetical meetings are not always able to counteract this tendency. Nevertheless many catechists have the will and energy to go against this current.

A catechesis to be developed: A priori it is difficult to live Catholicism in an Orthodox country. In the minds of most Orthodox people Catholic: western i.e. French or Italian. Orthodox: Greek.

It is difficult for any non Orthodox person to have him or herself accepted as Greek. This is due to certain historical misunderstandings and the mishandling of Greeks by the West. For Catholics in Greece the future must follow a path which clearly shows in the Church diversity in the expression of the faith and acceptance of the contribution of other Churches to the work of evangelization. Dialogue with the Orthodox Church has still to be developed.

A catechesis which awakens faith. If the traditional character of catechesis makes it look rather out of date it must not blind us to the efforts being made to question and change it... Modern developments and the problems which they create demand a different style of life and thought. A desire for a more intense life of faith is making itself felt. Reflection and study groups are being formed which adopt a mode of life and expression free from abstractions.

A non clerical catechesis. More and more lay people are taking part in catechesis for children and young people. What is encouraging in this movement is that it is taking place, not in the sectors where priests and religious are few but where, objectively, there are sufficient priests for the work. In this movement we must stress the role of religious.

Ecumenical catechesis. Although the understanding of the Mystery of Christ and His Church is identical in the Eastern and Western Churches and the remaining differences arise from different and legitimate interpretations, nevertheless, we cannot, in the immediate future foresee collaboration between the Churches in the matter of catechesis. The reasons are:

1. The Catholic Church, very much a minority, must not allow itself to be absorbed by the Orthodox but must preserve its identity. Hence the (Roman) Catholic Church's reservations concerning everything connected with Eastern tradition.
2. The Orthodox Church, very much the majority, presses with all its weight on the small number of Catholics and is reluctant to enter into dialogue with the Catholic Church. Sometimes it puts obstacles in the way of dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Greek Government in order to maintain its position as the Church of the majority.

Between these two extremes there is a wide area of possible collaboration. Paths have been traced and efforts made towards greater mutual understanding. Hostility is giving way to a climate of mutual confidence.

LASALLIAN CONTRIBUTION TO CATECHESIS

The Brothers' schools are centres of catechesis in Greece. In the parishes the Brothers, and lay teachers trained by them, contribute to the animation of various catechetical groups. The Brothers are also in the forefront of publication of catechetical books and teaching material.

Some of the Brothers have been invited by local churches to take an active part in the organization of catechetical work in the dioceses.

SOME STATISTICS ON THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN GREECE

Population of Greece	10,000,000	inhabitants
Catholics	40,000	inhabitants
Number of dioceses	11	
Catholic Educational Establishments	23	
Catholic students in these establishments	1,316	
Orthodox students in these establishments	10,340	
Children catechised in parishes	2,000	(appx.)
Archdiocese of Athens	25,000	faithful
Diocese of Syros	7,000	faithful

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