

The National Catechetical Directory: Chapter Four

1. Pre-evangelization builds on the basic human needs for security, affection, acceptance, integration and growth.

2. Evangelization tries to alert the hearer to God's manifold revelation through nature and people, through the demands of conscience and the joy of creativity, through a feel for order in the world and a sense of one's inadequacy to explain the mysteries of life and death.

3. Catechesis is intended to make men's faith become living, conscious and active, through the light of instruction.

4. Catechesis is directed toward a growing maturity in faith.

5. Catechesis takes different forms depending on age, state in life, geographical locations, ethnic or racial background.

6. The focus of catechesis in the United States must be on adults who can respond most fully and freely to the call of Christ.

7. Sufficient personnel, resources, and finances must be given to adult catechesis.

8. Adult programs must emphasize self-direction, dialogue and mutual responsibility.

9. Catechesis must recognize and understand the world in which we live, its expectations, its longing, and its dramatic characteristics.

The first element of catechetical content is all

that comprises human life, past and present, in an evolving world.

10. In all catechesis it is necessary that the authentic teachings of the Church be presented.

11. The primary sources of Church teaching are Scripture and Tradition.

12. Religious educators within the parish need regular opportunities to celebrate the Eucharist together.

13. All catechetical programs should include planning, preparation and celebration of the Eucharist.

14. The experience of prayer is essential in the catechetical process. The Church's great prayers should be understood, memorized and said frequently. Informal prayer should be explained and encouraged.

15. Everyone in the community of believers is called upon to share his faith with others. All involved in catechesis, parents, catechists, coordinators, deacons, priests, and bishops need to work together cooperatively and in charity.

16. Parents are the primary educators of their children by their lives of faith, their values and attitudes.

17. Parish catechists need to be supported by the parish and diocesan communities with educational programs and opportunities to celebrate the Eucharistic liturgy.

18. Parish coordinators of religious education should be professionally prepared to plan, organize, motivate and evaluate the total parish religious education program.

19. Men and women religious have a unique opportunity to give themselves to study in preparation for catechetical ministry.

20. Catholic colleges, universities, and diocesan Catechetical Institutes ought to prepare study programs for those involved in the catechetical ministry.

21. Deacons (both transitional and permanent) should be adequately prepared to assume a catechetical responsibility in a parish.

22. Parish priests must exercise a role of leadership in religious education.

23. Continuing catechetical education should be provided for the clergy.

24. All who participate in the catechetical ministry of the Word need certain qualities: they should be persons of faith, witnesses of the Gospel and the Church, have a living relationship with God, be faithful to the message, and be sharers in the fellowship of the community and servants of the community.

25. All who participate in the catechetical ministry need educational preparation also, to fulfill their function competently.

Chapter IV: Catechesis and Catechists

By SISTER MICHAEL LAPPETITO

Prior to Vatican II, the drafting and publishing of Church documents had been relatively infrequent. Prior to Vatican II, there had been little proliferation of "theologies" within Roman Catholic thought. The sporadic publication of official Church documents was an occasion just rare enough to cause celebration. In the absence of conflicting or even differing theological perspectives, the occasion of a new Church document did not so much pique our curiosity as much as speak to the heart, inspiring and motivating its readers.

However, since Vatican II, many an eye has been trained to review critically the substance of a document. Many readers have been made acutely aware of the problems inherent in lengthy, multi-authored documents, evidenced in changing styles of expression, repetition of concepts and in serious overlap in content from chapter to chapter. This is particularly true in the field of religious education, especially with the advent of the General Catechetical Directory, Basic Teachings and To Teach as Jesus did along with the numerous commentaries written about these documents.

(It is interesting to note that all these documents together with the National Catechetical Directory were published within a five year period.) Consequently, readers familiar with and interested in the field of religious education have had a good deal of practice developing their skill in critical analysis. The fourth chapter of the N.C.D. will provide the alert reader with ample opportunity to exercise his skill.

Chapter IV of the National Catechetical Directory concerns itself with catechesis and catechists, the very real and practical questions of what is taught and who does the teaching. Chapter IV is one of the longest chapters in the document. Its length, choice of sub-topics and ordering of the content suggests that the authors opted for breadth of scope over in-depth development of a more limited area of content.

The authors spill a full tabloid page of ink in developing the primary elements of catechesis. In many ways this appears to be a waste of energy (and ink) especially at the expense of developing other vitally needed concepts. This is not to imply that

In the box above is a synopsis of the fourth chapter of the proposed National Catechetical Directory as prepared by the directory staff. Diocesan officials will give a critique of each of the nine chapters of the directory weekly in the Courier-Journal. The fourth chapter is analyzed by Sister Michael Lappetito, diocesan director, Religious Education Division. Extra copies of the directory are available from the Office of Religious Education, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624. Any comments, suggestions or criticism also should be sent to that office.

the primary elements of catechesis are unimportant. All of Chapter V, entitled Catechetical Criteria, is precisely the theological content of catechesis. This may account for the fact that there is little emphasis stressing the importance of presenting the organic whole of catechesis, that the whole Christian message must be proclaimed. Another structural weakness within this sub-topic is the emphasis upon Scripture, Tradition and Liturgy. Each of these areas are well developed in other chapters. The repetition and overlap tend to diffuse the impact of the message.

Of paramount importance, however, is the mode of theological expression. The authors vacillate between two differing theological perspectives. There is a dynamic elaboration of the content of catechesis: human life and the message. The focus is upon man, human values, the immanence of God, His presence within our world, "... all that is human falls within the matter and content of catechesis. A basic element of catechetical content is therefore all that comprises human life, past and present, in an evolving world." However, such a religious but humanistic approach apparently creates a degree of discomfort within the author. The inability to trust in the "wonderful acts of love experienced in relationship with the God Who is Love" is expressed by reverting to the security and predictability inherent in the methodology of static theology. The theological foundations for the catechetical content vacillate between reflecting a paternalistic and authoritarian attitude and encouraging authentic human responsibility, subjected to the judgment of the Gospel.

The development of what vitally needed concepts suffers at the expense of this "over-exposure" of catechesis? The chapter is introduced by a few summary paragraphs on pre-evangelization, evangelization and the missionary work of the Church. The development of the material is good, but altogether too brief, especially since ours is

an age and culture which is experiencing the need for pre-evangelization and evangelization. In view of the number of persons in our present society who are without religious affiliation or convictions, the Church's work is missionary. More specifically, the global approach to proclamation includes the United States. Evangelization provides both the invitation and challenge to respond freely to the demands of Christ's call to conversion.

One of the outstanding strengths of the chapter is its focus upon the catechetical ministers of the Word. A long list of ministers is cited: parents, catechists, religious education coordinators, members of religious congregations, deacons, priests and bishops. The order of placement is significant of itself. Correct emphasis is placed upon parents, their need for enrichment first as unique persons, then as married partners, then as parents. Parents generally are eager to learn for the sake of parenthood often to the impoverishment of their own personal growth. The text goes on to applaud the generous service of catechists and rightfully so. "In a particular way they fulfill the promise which the Church makes at every baptism when godparents and the congregation offer support to the parents in fostering the faith of their children."

Each category of persons involved in the teaching mission of the Church is addressed and responsibilities owed them by parish or diocesan structures is outlined. True, it is imperative that parishes provide assistance to parents instructing their children in religious education. True, it is imperative that parishes provide adequate instruction for their catechists in order to inspire self-confidence and facilitate their teaching endeavors. True, diocesan offices of religious education should support religious education coordinators, provide in-service programs and promote the ministry of teaching.

However, responsibility is not unilateral but reciprocal! Parents owe to their children responsible

adulthood and to their faith community a willing and cooperative spirit. Catechists owe their students enthusiasm for the Gospel and diligence in preparation. Coordinators owe their parishes dedication and responsible leadership. The substance of this section of the chapter would be more meaningful if it were cast in the context of mutual responsibilities and reciprocal relationships.

In listing the qualities of religious educators, although borrowing directly from the NCEA booklet, The Qualities and Competencies of the Religion Teacher, the authors are careful

to stress that such "lists should communicate a sense of challenge and guidance to all who participate in this ministry." Human experience has taught us that expectations that are too idealistic or unrealistic tend to either heighten the teachers' frustration or give cause to ignore guidelines entirely.

There are many solid ideas and ideals explicitly and simply expressed in the NCD on catechetical ministers. The test of the quality of its worth will come from the reactions of the catechetical ministers who have developed their perception from the lived experience.

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