

PART FIVE: CATECHESIS IN THE PARTICULAR CHURCH

**CHAPTER I**

**The ministry of catechesis in the particular Churches and its agents**

**The particular Church (129)**

217. The proclamation, transmission and lived experience of the Gospel are realized in the particular Church (130) or Diocese. (131) The particular Church is constituted by the community of Christ's disciples, (132) who live incarnated in a definite socio-cultural space. Every particular Church "makes present the universal Church together with all of its essential elements". (133) In reality the universal Church, made fruitful by the Holy Spirit on the first Pentecost, "brings forth the particular Churches as children and is expressed in them". (134) The universal Church, as the Body of Christ, is thus made manifest as "a Body of Churches". (135)

218. The proclamation of the Gospel and the Eucharist are the two pillars on which is built and around which gathers the particular Church. Like the universal Church she also "exists for evangelization". (136) Catechesis is a basic evangelizing activity of every particular Church. By means of it the Diocese gives to all its members, and to all who come with a desire to give themselves to Jesus Christ, a formative process which permits knowledge, celebration, living and proclamation within a particular cultural horizon. In this way the confession of faith—the goal of catechesis—can be proclaimed by the disciples of Christ "in their own tongues". (137) As at Pentecost, so also today, the Church of Christ, "present and operative" (138) in the particular Churches, "speaks all languages", (139) since like a growing tree she extends her roots into all cultures.

**The ministry of catechesis in the particular Church**

219. In all the ministries and services which the particular Church performs to carry out its mission of evangelization, catechesis occupies a position of importance. (140) In this the following traits are underlined:

- a) In the Diocese catechesis is a unique service (141) performed jointly by priests, deacons, religious and laity, in communion with the Bishop. The entire Christian community should feel responsible for this service. Even if priests, deacons, religious and laity exercise catechesis in common, they do so in different ways, each according to his particular condition in the Church (sacred ministers, consecrated persons and the Christian faithful). (142) Through them all and their differing functions, the catechetical ministry hands on the word in a complete way and witnesses to the reality of the Church. Were one of these forms absent catechesis would lose something of its richness as well as part of its proper meaning;
- b) On the other hand it is a fundamental ecclesial service, indispensable for the growth of the Church. It is not an action which can be realized in the community on a private basis or by purely personal initiative. The ministry of catechesis acts in the name of the Church by its participating in mission.
- c) The catechetical ministry—among all ministries and ecclesial services—has a proper character which derives from the specific role of catechetical activity within the process of evangelization. The task of the catechist, as an educator in the faith, differs from that of other pastoral agents (liturgical, charitable and social) even if he or she always acts in coordination with them.
- d) In order that the catechetical ministry in the Diocese be fruitful, it needs to involve other agents, not specifically catechists, who support and sustain catechetical activity by performing indispensable tasks such as: the formation of catechists, the production of catechetical material, reflection, organization and planning. These agents, together with catechists, are at the service of a single diocesan catechetical ministry even if all do not play the same roles or act on the same basis.

**The Christian community and responsibility for catechesis**

220. Catechesis is a responsibility of the entire Christian community. Christian initiation, indeed, "should not be the work of catechists and priests alone, but of the whole community of the faithful". (143) Continuing education in the faith is a question which concerns the whole community; catechesis, therefore, is an educational activity which arises from the particular responsibility of every member of the community, in a rich context of relationships, so that catechumens and those being catechized are

actively incorporated into the life of the community. The Christian community follows the development of catechetical processes, for children, young people and adults, as a duty that involves and binds it directly. (144) Again, at the end of the catechetical process, it is the Christian community that welcomes the catechized in a fraternal environment, "in which they will be able to live in the fullest way what they have learned". (145)

221. The Christian community not only gives much to those who are being catechized but also receives much from them. New converts, especially adolescents and adults, in adhering to Jesus Christ, bring to the community which receives them new religious and human wealth. Thus the community grows and develops. Catechesis not only brings to maturity the faith of those being catechized but also brings the community itself to maturity.

Yet, while the entire Christian community is responsible for Christian catechesis and all of its members bear witness to the faith, only some receive the ecclesial mandate to be catechists. Together with the primordial mission which parents have in relation to their children, the Church confers the delicate task of organically transmitting the faith within the community on particular, specifically called members of the people of God. (146)

### **The Bishop has primary responsibility for catechesis in the particular Church**

222. The Second Vatican Council gave much importance to the proclamation and transmission of the Gospel in the episcopal ministry. "Among the principal duties of Bishops, that of preaching the Gospel excels". (147) In carrying out this task, Bishops are, above all, "heralds of the faith", (148) seeking new disciples for Jesus Christ, and "authentic teachers", (149) transmitting the faith to be professed and lived to those entrusted to their care. Missionary proclamation and catechesis are two closely united aspects of the prophetic ministry of Bishops. To perform this duty Bishops receive "the charism of truth". (150) The Bishops are "beyond all others the ones primarily responsible for catechesis and catechists par excellence". (151) In the Church's history the preponderant role of great and saintly Bishops is evident. Their writings and initiatives mark the richest period of the catechumenate. They regarded catechesis as one of the most fundamental tasks of their ministry. (152)

223. This concern for catechetical activity will lead the Bishop to assume "the overall direction of catechesis" (153) in the particular Church, which implies among other things:

- that he ensure effective priority for an active and fruitful catechesis in his Church "putting into operation the necessary personnel, means and equipment, and also financial resources"; (154)
- that he exercise solicitude for catechesis by direct intervention in the transmission of the Gospel to the faithful, and that he be vigilant with regard to the authenticity of the faith as well as with regard to the quality of texts and instruments being used in catechesis; (155)
- "that he bring about and maintain... a real passion for catechesis, a passion embodied in a pertinent and effective organization", (156) out of a profound conviction of the importance of catechesis for the Christian life of the diocese;
- that he ensure "that catechists are adequately prepared for their task, being well instructed in the doctrine of the Church and possessing both a practical and theoretical knowledge of the laws of psychology and educational method"; (157)
- that he establish an articulated, coherent and global program in the Diocese in order to respond to the true needs of the faithful: it should be integrated into the diocesan pastoral plan and coordinated with the programs of the Episcopal Conference.

### **Priests, pastors and educators of the Christian community**

224. The function proper to the presbyterate in the catechetical task arises from the sacrament of Holy Orders which they have received. "Through that sacrament priests, by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are signed with a special character and so are configured to Christ the priest, in such a way that they are able to act in the person of Christ the head". (158) In virtue of this ontological configuration to Christ, the ministry of the priest is a service which forms the Christian community and co-ordinates and strengthens other charisms and services. In catechesis the sacrament of Holy Orders constitutes priests as "educators of the faith". (159) They work, therefore, to see that the faithful are properly formed and reach true Christian maturity. (160) Conscious, on the other hand, that their "ministerial Priesthood" (161) is at the service of "the common Priesthood of the faithful", (162) priests foster the vocation and work of

catechists and assist them in carrying out a function which springs from Baptism and is exercised in virtue of a mission entrusted to them by the Church. Thus priests put into effect the request which the Second Vatican Council made of them: "to recognize and promote the dignity of the laity and their specific role in the Church's mission". (163)

225. The catechetical tasks proper to the presbyterate and particularly to parish priests are: (164)

- to foster a sense of common responsibility for catechesis in the Christian community, a task which involves all, and a recognition and appreciation for catechists and their mission;
- to care for the basic orientation of catechesis and its planning by giving emphasis to active participation of catechists and by insisting that catechesis be "well structured and oriented"; (165)
- to promote and to discern vocations to the service of catechesis and, as catechist of catechists, attend to their formation by giving the greatest attention to this duty;
- to integrate catechetical activity into his program of community evangelization; and foster the link between catechesis sacraments and the liturgy;
- to secure the bonds between the catechesis of his community and the diocesan pastoral programme by helping catechists become active co-operators in a common diocesan program.

Experience bears out that the quality of catechesis in a community depends very largely on the presence and activity of the priest.

### **Parents, primary educators of their children (166)**

226. The witness of Christian life given by parents in the family comes to children with tenderness and parental respect. Children thus perceive and joyously live the closeness of God and of Jesus made manifest by their parents in such a way that this first Christian experience frequently leaves decisive traces which last throughout life. This childhood religious awakening which takes place in the family is irreplaceable. (167) It is consolidated when, on the occasion of certain family events and festivities, "care is taken to explain in the home the Christian or religious content of these events". (168) It is deepened all the more when parents comment on the more methodical catechesis which their children later receive in the Christian community and help them to appropriate it. Indeed, "family catechesis precedes...accompanies and enriches all forms of catechesis". (169)

227. Parents receive in the sacrament of Matrimony "the grace and the ministry of the Christian education of their children", (170) to whom they transmit and bear witness to human and religious values. This educational activity which is both human and religious is "a true ministry", (171) through which the Gospel is transmitted and radiated so that family life is transformed into a journey of faith and the school of Christian life. As the children grow, exchange of faith becomes mutual and "in a catechetical dialogue of this sort, each individual both receives and gives". (172) It is for this reason that the Christian community must give very special attention to parents. By means of personal contact, meetings, courses and also adult catechesis directed toward parents, the Christian community must help them assume their responsibility—which is particularly delicate today—of educating their children in the faith. This is especially pressing in those areas where civil legislation does not permit or makes difficult freedom of education in the faith. (173) In this case "the domestic Church" (174) is virtually the only environment in which children and young people can receive authentic catechesis.

### **The role of religious in catechesis**

228. In a special way the Church calls those in consecrated life to catechetical activity and wishes that "religious communities dedicate as much as possible of what ability and means that they have to the specific work of catechesis". (175) The particular contribution to catechesis of religious and of members of societies of apostolic life derives from their specific condition. The profession of the evangelical counsels, which characterizes the religious life, constitutes a gift to the whole Christian community. In diocesan catechetical activity their original and particular contribution can never be substituted for by priests or by laity. This original contribution is born of public witness to their consecration, which makes them a living sign of the reality of the Kingdom: "it is the profession of these counsels, within a permanent state of life recognized by the Church that characterizes the life consecrated to God". (176) Although evangelical values must be lived by every Christian, those in consecrated life "incarnate the Church in her desire to abandon herself to the radicalism of the beatitudes". (177) The witness of

religious united to the witness of the laity shows forth the one face of the Church which is a sign of the Kingdom of God. (178)

229. "Many religious institutes for men and women came into being for the purpose of giving Christian education to children and young people, especially the most abandoned". (179) That same charism of the founders is such that many religious collaborate today in diocesan adult catechesis. Throughout history many men and women religious "have been committed to the Church's catechetical activity". (180) The founding charisms (181) are not a marginal consideration when religious assume catechetical tasks. While maintaining intact the proper character of catechesis, the charisms of the various religious communities express this common task but with their own proper emphases, often of great religious, social and pedagogical depth. The history of catechesis demonstrates the vitality which these charisms have brought to the Church's educational activity.

### **Lay catechists**

230. The catechetical activity of the laity also has a proper character which is due to their condition in the Church: "their secular character is proper and peculiar to the laity". (182) The laity engage in catechesis on the basis of their insertion in the world, sharing all the demands of humanity and bringing to the transmission of the Gospel specific sensitivity and nuances: "this evangelization, that is, the proclamation of Christ by word and the testimony of life, acquires a specific property and peculiar efficacy because it is accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world". (183) Indeed by sharing the same form of life as those whom they catechize, lay catechists have a special sensitivity for incarnating the Gospel in the concrete life of men and women. Catechumens and those receiving catechesis can find in them a Christian model for their future as believers.

231. The vocation of the laity to catechesis springs from the sacrament of Baptism. It is strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation they participate in the "priestly, prophetic and kingly ministry of Christ". (184) In addition to the common vocation of the apostolate, some lay people feel called interiorly by God to assume the service of catechist. The Church awakens and discerns this divine vocation and confers the mission to catechize. The Lord Jesus invites men and women, in a special way, to follow him, teacher and formator of disciples. This personal call of Jesus Christ and its relationship to him are the true moving forces of catechetical activity. "From this loving knowledge of Christ springs the desire to proclaim him, to 'evangelize,' and to lead others to the 'Yes' of faith in Jesus Christ". (185) To feel called to be a catechist and to receive this mission from the Church acquires different levels of dedication in accordance with the particular characteristics of individuals. At times the catechist can collaborate in the service of catechesis over a limited period or purely on an occasional basis, but it is always a valuable service and a worthy collaboration. The importance of the ministry of catechesis, however, would suggest that there should be in a Diocese a certain number of religious and laity publicly recognized and permanently dedicated to catecheses who, in communion with the priests and the Bishop, give to this diocesan service that ecclesial form which is proper to it. (186)

### **Various types of catechists particularly necessary today**

232. The figure of the catechist in the Church, has different modes, just as, the needs of catechesis are varied.

– "The catechists in missionary countries", (187) to whom this title is applied in a special way: "Churches that are flourishing today would not have been built up without them". (188) There are those who have the "specific responsibility for catechesis"; (189) and there are those who collaborate in various forms of apostolate. (190)

– In some Churches of ancient Christian tradition but where there is a shortage of clergy, there is need for catechists in some way analogous to those of missionary countries. This requires confronting urgent needs: the community animation of small rural populations deprived of the constant presence of a priest, the helpfulness of a missionary presence "in areas of large cities". (191)

– In countries of Christian tradition which require a "new evangelization" (192) the catechist for young people and the catechist for adults become indispensable, in promoting the process of initiatory

catechesis. The catechists must provide for continuing catechesis. In such tasks the role of the priest is equally fundamental.

– The catechist for children and adolescents continues to be indispensable. This catechist has the delicate mission of giving "the first notions of catechism and preparation for the sacrament of Penance, for First Communion and Confirmation". (193) This responsibility is all the more pressing today if children and adolescents "do not receive adequate religious formation within the family". (194)

– A catechist who must also be formed is the catechist for pre-sacramental encounter, (195) for adults on occasions such as the Baptism or the First Holy Communion of their children or the celebration of the sacrament of Matrimony. It is a specific and original task comprising the welcome of the faithful, of primary proclamation to them and of accompanying them on the journey of faith.

– Other catechists urgently needed in delicate human situations include catechists for the old (196) who need a presentation of the Gospel adapted to their condition; for handicapped or disabled people who require a special pedagogy, (197) in addition to their total integration into the community; for migrants and those marginalized by the evolution of modern society. (198)

– Other types of catechists may also be advisable. Every local Church, by analysing her own cultural and religious situation, will discover her own needs and will realistically foster those kinds of catechists which she needs. The organization and orientation of the formation of catechists is a fundamental responsibility.

## CHAPTER II Formation for the service of catechesis

### **Pastoral care of catechists in a Particular Church**

233. To ensure the working of the catechetical ministry in a local Church, it is fundamental to have adequate pastoral care of catechists. Several elements must be kept in mind in this respect. Indeed efforts must be made:

– to encourage in parishes and Christian communities vocations for catechesis. Today, because the needs of catechesis are so varied, it is necessary to promote different kinds of catechists. "There is therefore a need for specialized catechists". (199) In this respect selection criteria must be established;

– to try to provide a certain number of full time catechists so that these can devote their time intensely and in a more stable way to catechesis, (200) in addition to fostering part-time catechists who are likely to be more numerous in the ordinary course of events;

– to organize a more balanced distribution of catechists, among the various groups who require catechesis. Awareness of the needs of adult catechesis and catechesis for young people, for example, can help to establish a greater balance in relation to the number of catechists who work with children and adolescents.

– to foster animators of catechetical activity with responsibility at diocesan level, in regions and in parishes. (201)

– to organize adequately the formation of catechists, both in relation to basic training and continuing formation.

– to attend to the personal and spiritual needs of catechists as well as to the group of catechists as such. This activity is principally and fundamentally the responsibility of the priests of the respective Christian communities.

– to co-ordinate catechists with other pastoral workers in Christian communities, so that the entire work of evangelization will be consistent and to ensure that catechists will not be isolated from or unrelated to the life of the community.

### **Importance of the formation of Catechists**

234. All of these tasks are born of the conviction that the quality of any form of pastoral activity is placed at risk if it does not rely on truly competent and trained personnel. The instruments provided for catechesis cannot be truly effective unless well used by trained catechists. Thus the adequate formation of catechists cannot be overlooked by concerns such as the updating of texts and the re-organization of catechesis. (202)

Consequently, diocesan pastoral programs must give absolute priority to the formation of lay catechists. Together with this, a fundamentally decisive element must be the catechetical formation of priests both at the level of seminary formation as well as at the level of continuing formation. Bishops are called upon to ensure that they are scrupulously attentive to such formation.

### **Nature and purpose of the formation of catechists**

235. Formation seeks to enable catechists to transmit the Gospel to those who desire to entrust themselves to Jesus Christ. The purpose of formation, therefore, is to make the catechist capable of communicating: "The summit and centre of catechetical formation lies in an aptitude and ability to communicate the Gospel message". (203)

The Christocentric purpose of catechesis, which emphasizes the communion of the convert with Jesus Christ, permeates all aspects of the formation of catechists. (204) This aim is nothing other than to lead the catechist to know how to animate a catechetical journey of which, the necessary stages are: the proclamation of Jesus Christ; making known his life by setting it in the context of salvation history; explanation of the mystery of the Son of God, made man for us; and finally to help the catechumen, or those being catechized, to identify with Jesus Christ through the sacraments of initiation. (205) With continuing catechesis, the catechist merely tries to deepen these basic elements. This Christological perspective touches directly upon the identity of the catechist and his preparation. "The unity and harmony of the catechist must be read in this Christocentric light and built around a profound familiarity with Christ and the Father, in the Spirit". (206)

236. By virtue of the fact that formation seeks to make the catechist capable of transmitting the Gospel in the name of the Church, all formation has an ecclesial nature. The formation of catechists is nothing other than an assistance for them in identifying with the living and actual awareness that the Church has of the Gospel, in order to make them capable of transmitting it in his name.

In concrete terms, the catechist—in his formation—enters into communion with that aspiration of the Church which, like a spouse, "keeps pure and intact the faith of the Spouse" (207) and which, as "mother and teacher" desires to transmit the Gospel by adapting it to all cultures, ages, and situations. This truly ecclesial quality of the transmission of the Gospel permeates the entire formation of catechists and gives to that formation its true nature.

### **The inspiring criteria of the formation of catechists**

237. An adequate conception of the formation of catechists must always take prior note of some of the criteria which inspire and configure with varying emphases relevant to the formation of catechists:

– Firstly, it is a question of forming catechists for the need to evangelize in the present historical context, with its values, challenges and disappointments. To accomplish this task, it is necessary for catechists to have a deep faith, (208) a clear Christian and ecclesial identity; (209) as well as a great social sensitivity. (210) All formation programs must accommodate these points.

– In formation, account must also be taken of the concept of catechesis, proposed by the Church today. It is a question of forming catechists so as to be able to transmit not only a teaching but also an integral Christian formation, by developing "tasks of initiation, of education, and of teaching". (211) Catechists must be able to be, at one and the same time, teachers, educators and witnesses of the faith.

– The present catechetical moment being lived by the Church requires catechists who can "integrate", who are capable of overcoming "unilateral divergent tendencies" (212) and who are able to provide a full and complete catechesis. They must know how to link the dimension of truth and meaning of the faith, orthodoxy and orthopraxis, ecclesial and social meaning. Formation must contribute to the enrichment of these factors lest tensions arise between them.

– The formation of lay catechists cannot ignore the specific character of the laity in the Church, and cannot be regarded as merely a synthesis of the mission received by priests and religious. Rather, "their apostolic training acquires a special character precisely from the secular nature of the lay state and from its particular type of spirituality".

– Finally, the pedagogy used in this formation is of fundamental importance. As a general criterion, it is necessary to underline the need for a coherence between the general pedagogy of formation of catechists and the pedagogy proper to the catechetical process. It would be very difficult for the catechist

in his activity to improvise a style and a sensibility to which he had not been introduced during his own formation.

### **The dimensions of formation: being, knowing, and savoir-faire**

238. The formation of catechists is made up of different dimensions. The deepest dimension refers to the very being of the catechist, to his human and Christian dimension. Formation, above all else, must help him to mature as a person, a believer and as an apostle. This is what the catechist must know so as to be able to fulfill his responsibilities well. This dimension is permeated by the double commitment he has to the message and to man. It requires the catechist to have a sufficient knowledge of the message that he transmits and of those to whom he transmits the message and of the social context in which they live. This then is the dimension of savoir-faire, of knowing how to transmit the message, so that it is an act of communication. The formation of the catechist tends to make of him an "educator of man and of the life of man". (213)

### **The human, Christian and apostolic maturity of catechists.**

239. On the basis of this initial human maturity, (214) the exercise of catechesis, by constant consideration and evaluation, allows the catechist to grow in a balanced and in a critical outlook, in integrity, in his ability to relate, to promote dialogue, to have a constructive spirit, and to engage in group work. (215) It will cause him to grow in respect and in love for catechumens and those being catechized: "What is this love? It is the love, not so much of a teacher as of a father, or rather of a mother. It is the Lord's wish that every preacher of the Gospel, every builder up of the Church should have this love". (216) Formation also assumes that the faith of the catechist is fostered and nourished by the exercise of catechesis, making him thus to grow as a believer. The formation, above all, nourishes the spirituality of the catechist, (217) so that his activity springs in truth from his own witness of life. Every theme covered by formation should feed, in the first place, the faith of the catechist. It is true that catechists catechize others by firstly catechizing themselves. Formation also constantly nourishes the apostolic consciousness of the catechist, that is, his sense of being an evangelizer. For this reason he should be aware of and live out the concrete evangelization efforts being made in his own diocese, as well as those of his own parish so as to be in harmony with the awareness that the particular Church has of its own mission. The best way to feed this apostolic awareness is by identifying with the figure of Jesus Christ, teacher and formator of disciples by seeking to acquire the zeal which Jesus had for the Kingdom. Beginning with the exercise of catechesis, the apostolic vocation of the catechist—constantly fostered by continuing formation—will progressively mature.

### **The biblico-theological formation of the catechist**

240. Besides being a witness, the catechist must also be a teacher who teaches the faith. A biblico-theological formation should afford the catechist an organic awareness of the Christian message, structured around the central mystery of the faith, Jesus Christ.

The context of this doctrinal formation should be drawn from the various areas that constitute every catechetical program;

– the three great eras in the history of Salvation: the Old Testament, the life of Christ and the history of the Church.

– the great nuclei of the Christian message: the Creed, the Liturgy, the moral life and prayer.

In its own level of theological instruction, the doctrinal content of the formation of a catechist is that which the catechist must transmit. For its part, "Sacred Scripture should be the very soul of this formation". (218) The Catechism of the Catholic Church remains the fundamental doctrinal reference point together with the catechism proper to the particular Church.

**241. This biblico-theological formation must contain certain qualities:**

- a) In the first place, it should be of a summary nature and correspond to the message to be transmitted. The various elements of the Christian faith should be presented in a well structured way and in harmony with each other by means of an organic vision that respects the "hierarchy of truths".
- b) This synthesis of faith should be such as to help the catechist to mature in his own faith and enable him to offer an explanation for the present hope in this time of mission: "The situation today points to an ever-increasing urgency for doctrinal formation of the lay faithful, not simply for a better understanding which is natural to faith's dynamism, but also in enabling them to give a reason for their hope' in view of the world and its grave and complex problems". (219)
- c) It must be a theological formation that is close to human experience and capable of correlating the various aspects of the Christian message with the concrete life of man "both to inspire it and to judge it in the light of the Gospel". (220) While remaining theological it must in some fashion adopt a catechetical style.
- d) It must be such that the catechist "will be able not only to communicate the Gospel accurately, but also able to make those being taught capable of receiving it actively and of discerning what in their spiritual journey agrees with the faith". (221)

**The human sciences and the formation of catechists**

242. The catechist also acquires a knowledge of man and the reality in which he lives through the human sciences which have greatly developed in our own time. "In pastoral care sufficient use should be made, not only of theological principles, but also of secular findings, especially in the fields of psychology and sociology: in this way the faithful will be brought to a more mature living of the faith". (222)

It is necessary for the catechist to have some contact, with at least some of the fundamental elements of psychology: the psychological dynamics motivating man; personality structure; the deepest needs and aspirations of the human heart; progressive psychology and the phases of the human life-cycle; the psychology of religion and the experiences which open man to the mystery of the sacred.

The social sciences provide an awareness of the socio-cultural context in which man lives and by which he is strongly influenced. It is therefore necessary that in the formation of catechists that there take place "an analysis of the religious situation as well as of the sociological, cultural and economic conditions to the extent that these facts of collective life can greatly influence the success of evangelization". (223)

In addition to these sciences, explicitly recommended by the Second Vatican Council, other human sciences should be used in one way or another in the formation of catechists, particularly the sciences of education and communication.

**Various criteria which can inspire the use of human sciences in the formation of catechists**

243. These are:

- a) Respect for the autonomy of the sciences: "the Church... affirms the legitimate autonomy of culture and especially of the sciences". (224)
- b) Evangelical discernment of the different tendencies or schools in psychology, sociology, and pedagogy: their values and their limitations.
- c) The study of the human sciences—in the formation of catechists—is not an end in itself. Acquiring awareness of the existential, psychological, cultural and social situation of man is accomplished in the light of the faith in which man must be educated. (225)
- d) In forming catechists, theology and the human sciences should mutually enrich each other. Consequently it is necessary to avoid a situation in which these materials are converted into the only norm for the pedagogy of the faith apart from the theological criteria deriving from the divine pedagogy. While these are fundamental and necessary disciplines, they are always at the service of evangelization which is more than a human activity. (226)

## **Pedagogical formation**

244. Together with those dimensions which refer to being and knowledge, the formation of catechists must also cultivate technique. The catechist is an educator who facilitates maturation of the faith which catechumens and those being catechized obtain with the help of the Holy Spirit. (227) The first reality of which account must be taken in this decisive area of formation is that concerning the original pedagogy of faith. The catechist is prepared or formed so as to facilitate a growth in the experience of faith, which he himself has not implanted for it is God who has sown it in the heart of man. The responsibility of the catechist is merely to cultivate this gift by nourishing it and by helping it to grow. (228) Formation seeks to mature an educational capacity in the catechist which implies: an ability to be attentive to people, an ability to interpret or respond to educational tasks or initiatives in organizing learning activities and the ability of leading a human group toward maturity. As with any other art the most important factor is that the catechist should acquire his own style of imparting catechesis by adapting the general principles of catechetical pedagogy to his own personality. (229)

245. More concretely: it must enable the catechist and particularly the full-time catechist to know how to organize in the group of catechists, educational activity by carefully considering the circumstances, by elaborating a realistic catechetical plan and—having drawn it up—to know how to evaluate it critically. (230) It must be capable of animating a group by applying with discernment the techniques of group dynamics offered by psychology. This educational capacity and this "know-how" along with the knowledge, attitudes and techniques which it involves "can be better acquired if they are taught simultaneously while the apostolic works are being performed (for example, during sessions when lessons of catechesis are being prepared and tested)". (231) The goal or ideal is that catechists should be the protagonists of their own learning by being creative in formation and not by just applying external rules. This formation must be closely related to praxis: one must start with praxis to be able to arrive at praxis. (232)

## **The formation of catechists within the Christian community**

246. Among the ways of forming catechists, those of their own Christian community are all important. It is in this community that catechists test their own vocation and continually nourish their own apostolic awareness. The figure of the priest is fundamental in the task of assuring their progressive maturation as believers and witnesses. (233)

247. A Christian community can develop various types of formative activities for their own catechists:

- a) One of these is the constant fostering of the ecclesial vocation of catechists by keeping alive in them an awareness of being sent by the Church;
- b) It is also important to ensure catechists have a mature faith, through the usual means by which the Christian community educates in the faith its own pastoral workers and its more committed lay members. (234) When the faith of catechists is not yet mature it is advisable that they should participate in a catechumenal program designed for young people and adults. This can be organized by the community itself, or one specifically created for them.
- c) Immediate preparation for catechesis, done with a group of catechists, is an excellent means of formation especially when accompanied with an evaluation of all that has been experienced in the sessions of catechesis.
- d) Within the community other formative activities can also be realized: courses in awareness of catechesis, for example, at the beginning of the pastoral year; retreats and living in community at the important liturgical times of the year; (235) dissertations on more pressing and necessary themes; systematic doctrinal formation, for example, studying the Catechism of the Catholic Church. These are activities of continuing formation, which together with the personal work of the catechist, would appear very useful. (236)

### **Schools for catechists and centers for higher learning for experts in catechesis**

248. Attendance at a school for catechists (237) is a particularly important moment in the formation of a catechist. In many places such schools are organized on two levels: one for catechists who are "ordinary"; (238) the other for those who have "responsibility for catechesis".

#### **Schools for ordinary catechists**

249. The purpose of such schools is to give an comprehensive and systematic catechetical formation of a basic nature over a period of time during which the specifically catechetical dimensions of formation are promoted: the Christian message; knowledge of man and his socio-cultural situation; the pedagogy of the faith. Such a systematic formation has notable advantages amongst which the following can be numbered:

- its systematic nature which is not so absorbed in the immediate concerns of catechetical activity;
- its quality which is assured by trained specialists;
- integration with catechists from other communities, which promotes ecclesial communion.

#### **Institutes for those with responsibility for catechesis**

250. So as to prepare those who have responsibility for catechesis, in parishes and vicariates as well as full time catechists (239) it is useful to provide catechetical institutes either at diocesan or inter-diocesan level. Clearly, standards in these institutes will be more demanding. In addition to the courses of basic catechetical formation they will promote those specializations regarded as necessary for the particular circumstances in which they are located. It may prove opportune, even for reasons of rationalizing resources, that the orientation of such institutes be directed towards those with responsibility for various pastoral activities. In this event they can be transformed into centres of formation for pastoral workers. Commencing with a general basic formation (doctrinal and anthropological) those areas in which specialization is required should be determined in relation to the particular demands made on the various pastoral and apostolic works of the diocese in which its pastoral workers are involved.

#### **Higher institutes for experts in catechesis**

251. A higher level of catechetical formation to which priests, religious and laity might have access is of vital importance for catechesis. In this regard it is hoped that "higher institutes for training in pastoral catechetics should be promoted or founded, so that catechists capable of directing catechesis at the diocesan level, or within the area of activities to which religious congregations are dedicated, may be prepared. These higher institutes can be national or even international. They ought to function as a university so far as curriculum, length of course and requisites for admission are concerned". (240) In addition to the formation of those who must assume responsibility for catechesis, these institutes will also form those who teach catechesis in seminaries, houses of formation and in the catechetical schools. These institutes should devote themselves to a congruent level of research in catechesis.

252. At this level of formation there is much opportunity for fruitful co-operation between the Churches: "Here also the material aid provided by the richer Churches to their poorer sisters can show the greatest effectiveness, for what better assistance can one Church give to another than to help it to grow as a Church with its own strength?" (241) Obviously such collaboration has due respect for the particular circumstances of poorer Churches and their responsibilities. At diocesan and inter-diocesan levels it is most useful when there is an awareness of the need to form people at a higher level, just as there is a similar need for such in other ecclesiastical activities as well as in the teaching of other disciplines.