
Shifting Paradigms for Faith Formation: A Context



January 2009

from whence Catechesis?



from the Greek:

καταξειν (katachein)

“to sound forth”

“to resound”

“to echo”

The word implies *oral instruction*

The word “catechesis” was ‘recovered’ by the German-influenced schools at the beginning of the twentieth century. They used this word which derives from the greek καταξειν (katachein) meaning “to sound forth”, “to resound” or “to echo”.

from whence Catechesis?



NT References:

Apostolic Discourses in the Spirit:

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to **proclaim**.” (Acts 2:4)

“One night in a vision, the Lord said to Paul “Do not be afraid. Go on **speaking** and do not be silent, for I am with you.” (Acts 18:9-10a)

The word implies *oral instruction* and is used in the New Testament often referencing the discourses of Peter (Acts 2:14-36) and Paul, particularly, but also Philip (Acts 8:35).[1] It is also a word used of people who did not ultimately find favor in the scriptures, namely Apollos:

“A Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, an eloquent speaker, arrived in Ephesus. He was an authority on the scriptures. He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord and, with ardent spirit, spoke and taught accurately about Jesus, although he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the Way [of God] more accurately.” (Acts 18:24-27)

[1] “Brothers, I could not talk to you as spiritual people, but as fleshy people, as infants in Christ.” (1Cor 3:1) “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.” (Acts 2:4) One night in a vision, the Lord said to Paul “Do not be afraid. Go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you.” (Acts 18:9-10a)

from whence Catechesis?



Apostolic Discourses:

Peter (Acts 2:14-41)

Paul (1Cor 3:1)

Philip (Acts 8:35)

from whence Catechesis?



Catechesis
- the teaching -

Catechist
- the one who passes on the teaching -

Catechumen
- the one who receives the teaching -

In time, the word came to mean the teaching of the Church. Catechesis was understood to be the teaching, the catechist the one who passes on the teaching, the catechumen the one who receives the teaching.

from whence Catechesis?



“They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers... ..every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

(NAB, Acts 2:42-47)

Initially, catechesis was carried out in and through the life of the church community, the community of believers. As people gathered to praise and worship God, they retold the stories of Jesus and their encounters with him, or their encounters with those who encountered him. They lived their lives together in a particular way that set them apart from the wider milieu of which they were a part:

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

(NAB, Acts 2:42-47)

It would seem from this text that we can say that the very life of the believers provided a witness to a transformation of life and living that drew others to join them. This conversion process which was initiated in witness was sustained and nurtured, it would seem, from participating in the full life of the community. Ongoing formation was part and parcel of every day as the believers gathered together for praise and worship.

First Catechesis



- A process designed to introduce the would-be candidate for baptism to the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and to the gradual turning-over of their lives to God.
 - praying with the scriptures
 - an introduction to the liberation and salvation stories of the tradition.

As those early years passed, the Church grew in wisdom and in experience. While infant baptism was not precluded, the norm was the baptism of adults, which was prepared for engagement in a process designed to introduce the would-be candidate for baptism to the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and to the gradual turning-over of their lives to God. This process involved praying with the scriptures and an introduction to the liberation and salvation stories of the tradition.

First Catechesis



- Sponsors
 - available to assist the catechumen address questions, seek out answers, and learn more about the practices of the believers
 - the responsibility of training the catechumens in the process of reflecting in the light of the faith
- Formal Instruction
 - homilies shared by the presider of the community
 - readings from instructional texts that were available to the community such as the *Didache* (Instructions of the Apostles)

As it became more evident that these candidates were sincere in their desire to grow more deeply in the faith, they were assigned to people who would accompany them in their conversion journey. Together, sponsors and catechumens underwent a more intense time of preparation. The sponsors were available to assist the catechumen address questions, seek out answers, and learn more about the practices of the believers. Sponsors also had the responsibility of training the catechumens in the process of reflecting on their own life's experiences in the light of the faith into which they were journeying. In addition to the efforts of the sponsors, catechumens were formally instructed in the faith by the homilies shared by the presider of the community, as well as by readings from instructional texts that were available to the community such as the *Didache* (Instructions of the Apostles), and writings and homilies that were shared among the churches of those early centuries.

Early Catechetical Formation



Marked by

- communal prayer with and for the candidates and catechumens.
- Faith sharing by full members of the community
- Gradual sharing in rites that led to full initiation, and life in the community.

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Through all of this, readings from the scriptures and shared homilies were of primary importance in the education and formation of the catechumens, indeed along with the entire community of believers. This extended period of formation, often as long as three years in duration, was marked by communal prayer with and for the candidates and catechumens. Faith was shared with them by full members of the community, and they gradually shared in many rites that ultimately led to full initiation and life in the community.

Catechesis Responding to Needs



- Edict of Milan – 313
- Council of Nicea – 325
- The Patristic Age

This 'catechumenate' gradually fell into disuse following the Constantinian *Edict of Milan* which established Christianity as the religion of the empire in 313. The initial consequence for the Church was a tsunami of converts, often seeking social status rather than a new life in Christ. This incredible tidal wave of new members swept aside the catechumenate and called for new ways of initiating people into the church. The Council of Nicea (325) offered the church a creedal statement which essentially was a formulaic expression of key truths. This creed became an essential teaching tool beyond its original intent to combat heresies.

This age saw the emergence of such great minds in the life of the Church that it came to be known as the *Age of the Fathers of the Church*, or the *Patristic Age*. The writings of such great Christian thinkers as Cyril, Jerome, Ambrose and Augustine were to have a profound effect on Christian education and thought for centuries to come. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* (City of God), *De Doctrina Christina* (On Christian Education), and *De Magistro* (On The Teacher) were considered seminal works in the study of early Christian catechesis.

Catechesis Responding to Needs



- Catechetical instruction came to be reserved to the formation of Clergy

- General instruction consisted of
 - Our Father
 - Hail Mary
 - Creed
 - Ten Commandments

While the greatness of this age was marked by such lights as these, there was a shadow-side to accompany it. Loss of passion and zeal which was a mark of the earlier experience of the Church was accompanied by a diminishing of the radical faith commitment so evident in the earlier time. This lack ultimately led to the establishment of small radical fringe-groups which became the first monastic communities and which dedicated themselves to becoming centers of renewal and learning. These centers became crucial to the life of the church against the backdrop of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, but nonetheless they were unable to halt the inexorable movement of formal education and catechesis being directed primarily toward the formation of clergy. Liturgy became a matter of performance by the priest, a performance that was attended much as one would a theatrical drama. In the main, instruction for the vast majority of people consisted of learning to recite the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Creed and the Ten Commandments.

Catechesis Responding to Needs



- Dark Ages

- Middle Ages
 - The Scholastic Era

- The Age of Reformation

As the Dark Ages subsided and the schools of learning returned to continental Europe resourced by the missionary efforts from the Isles of the North, centers of learning were once more established and gave way to the Middle Ages and the flourishing monastic life which brought with it the founding of universities dedicated to advanced learning in Theology and Philosophy. Irrespective of one's course of studies, theology and philosophy were required. This was the age that gave us Thomas Aquinas, standing out as a giant among the many great and learned of his time.

As the World Turns...



- Reformation
 - Luther's Catechism

- CounterReformation
 - The Council of Trent
 - The Roman Catechism

Luther's catechisms, and the subsequent Roman Catechism of Trent set the scene for the following 400 years with respect to the form and content of catechesis.

from whence Catechism



Latin

- *catechizare*
The act of catechizing

- *catechismus*
The subject matter,
the teaching of the Church

It was also a time in which the paucity of Christian education became a great concern. It was a time when attention was directed once more at the education and formation of people of faith. The act of catechizing was translated in the Latin as *catechizare*, from which comes *catechismus*, originally a word used to designate the teaching given by the Church, but by the late middle ages was commonly used to refer to a book which contained the teaching in synthetic forms – a catechism.[1]
[1] Choondal, Gilbert S.D.B. Introducing the General Directory for Catechesis (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2004)

from whence Catechism



People

- 'attended' catechism,
- were 'instructed in' catechism,
- 'learned' their catechism
- enjoyed 'knowledge of' the catechism.

These texts which offered a synthesis of the faith in easily adaptable forms came to be the common mainstay of the catechetical ministry. People 'attended' catechism, were 'instructed in' catechism, 'learned' their catechism. A person's faith was often measured by their 'knowledge of' the catechism. Learning became a matter of book knowledge, and with the advent of the printing press, nothing short of a revolution in Christian religious education took place.

from whence Catechism



- Catechism Instruction consisted of
 - Our Father
 - Hail Mary
 - Creed
 - Ten Commandments
 - Lists
 - Sins
 - Virtues
 - Vices

Accompanying the earlier attention to the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Creed and the Ten Commandments, people were taught the sacraments as well as lists of sins, virtues and vices. Notably absent was any focus on the early Church's practice of attending to the salvation stories, the person of Jesus, or the experiences of the apostolic communities themselves.

As the World Turns...



- Milan
- **C**onfraternity of **C**hristian **D**octrine
 - Charles Borromeo
 - > Rome
 - Papal Approval 1571

Within the great movements of the Reformation and Counter-reformation, an at-the-time insignificant movement grew in northern Italy. Under the care of Charles Borromeo there grew up structures that allowed for the flourishing of a process for the training of lay catechists, knowledgeable in the skills and practice of catechesis, with education in content and methodology, all for the purpose of providing age-appropriate catechesis to young people. Christian doctrine was the focus of these classes, small groups of 8-10 students who studied age-adapted instruction from catechisms, and who enjoyed discussion and prayer together. The movement, the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD), was formally approved by Pius V in 1571, who called for its adoption and establishment throughout the Church.

As the World Turns...



- Age of the Enlightenment
 - First Vatican Council
 - Franco Prussian War

■ **Second Vatican Council**

“[A] directory should be composed concerning the catechetical instruction of the Christian people...”

Vatican II, 1965
Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops
Christus Dominus n44

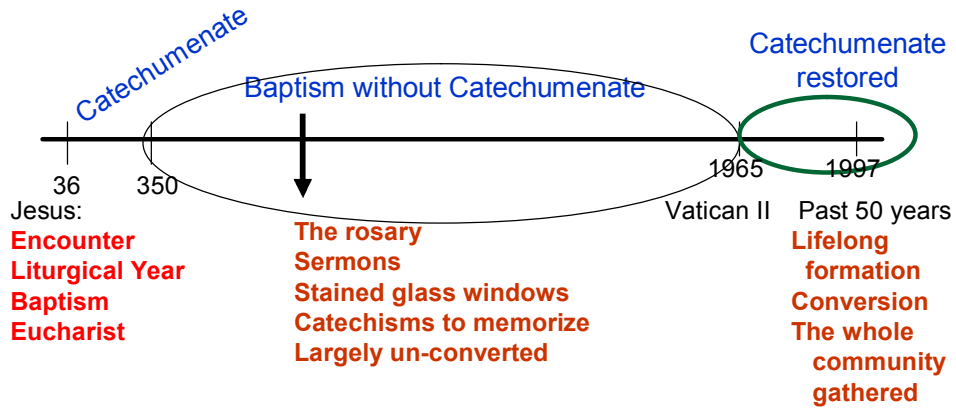
As seems to be the pattern of the Church's catechetical life, the initial success and fervor of the CCD waned through the centuries of the Age of Enlightenment. The first Vatican Council hoped to renew the effort and pump new life into it, but this was one of many initiatives stalled by the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war and the abrupt conclusion to the work of Vatican I. Unwilling and unable to wait for the efforts to recommence, local Churches took it upon themselves to develop their own local catechisms. This gave rise to the Baltimore Catechism, a product of the Third Council of Baltimore in 1884, and the primary resource which shaped catechesis in the United States until the work of the first Vatican Council was taken up once more with the convening of the Second Vatican Council.

Now more than forty years after the Second Vatican Council, it is increasingly difficult to understand the epochal shift that took place within the Church as she formally closed the business of the First Vatican Council, and took up its unfinished work. But in the hundred years or so that passed between these two Church councils, tremendous strides had been made in deepening our understanding of the scriptures. Technology allowed for greater appreciation of history; human and social sciences advanced our understanding of the person, and a wealth of learning informed and transformed the approach to the questions raised more than one hundred years before. Questions about the very nature of the Church and our presence in the world transformed our self-understanding as a Church. The self-defined *People of God* insisted upon a return to the sources of our faith in order that we could retrieve the wealth of our heritage in such a way as to give renewed witness to the liberating and salvific power of Christ in our modern world. Forty years later it might seem like no major shift... but for those who lived through the transition it wrought, the experience of Church was like night and day. To understand the event that it was in the simple terms of changing the language of public worship is to completely miss the point.

VIDEO – Civilization of Love

The renewed interest in scripture study and the patristic writings that flourished between the first and second Vatican councils brought about a refocusing on the kerygmatic message of the Good News of Jesus Christ. International seminars took place across four continents considering the roles of liturgy and catechesis in the mission of evangelization, and the implications of taking the liberation offered by Christ to the world seriously. It was painfully evident that knowledge of the catechism, however meaningful in itself, was inadequate in and of itself. It has shown itself to be but a part of a much richer and much more comprehensive enterprise.

A timeline to help...



Modern Catechetical Documents



For the Universal Church

- 1971 – General Catechetical Directory
- 1975 – Evangelization in the Modern World
- 1979 – On Catechesis in Our Time
- 1986 – Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults
- 1990 – Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community
- 1992 – The Catechism of the Catholic Church
- 1997 – General Directory for Catechesis
- 2006 – Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church

In 1971 the Congregation for the Clergy produced the *General Catechetical Directory*, originally on the agenda of Vatican I, and taken up at Vatican II. The initiative was almost lost, but for the intervention of a French bishop supported by over 2000 of the council fathers. In the concluding paragraph of the *Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops* we find:

“Another directory should be composed concerning the catechetical instruction of the Christian people; this directory will consider the fundamental principles of such instruction, its disposition and the composition of books on the subject.” (CD 44)

This was followed in 1975 with *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, an exhortation of Paul VI written at the behest of the 1974 Synod of Bishops which gathered from around the world to consider the topic of evangelization in the modern world.

In the United States, the national bishop's conference published *To Teach as Jesus Did* (1972), and *Basic Teaching for Catholic Religious Education* (1973), which provided the guide for the *National Catechetical Directory: Sharing the Light of Faith* (1979).

John Paul II's document *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979) further explored the relationship between evangelization and catechesis, and he reaffirms that one of the Church's primary tasks is that of catechesis, which is the responsibility of the entire baptized community of believers.

In 1985, the Synod of Bishops reiterated a two-hundred-year-old call for a revision of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. A Universal catechism was desired as a reference for those involved in teaching. It was also to serve as a reference point for catechetical texts and for the ministry of catechesis in general. The final draft was published in French in 1992.

The publication of the Catechism necessitated a revision of the 1971 General Catechetical Directory. The new document from the Congregation of the Clergy was published in 1997 as the *General Directory for Catechesis*. Subsequently, the U.S. Bishops revised their national directory, and following extensive consultation around the country it received Vatican approval, and the *National Directory for Catechesis* was published in May of 2005. All of these documents seek to deepen our understanding of catechesis and its place in the church's mission of evangelization.

Modern Catechetical Documents



From the Bishops of the United States

1972 – To Teach as Jesus Did

1973 – Basic Teaching for Catholic
Religious Education

1979 - National Catechetical Directory:
Sharing the Light of Faith

1999 – Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us

2005 – National Directory for Catechesis

2006 – Adult Catechism

Introducing the National Directory for Catechesis



■ Purposes of NDC

- To provide fundamental theological and pastoral principles
- To apply principles to pastoral activity
- To offer guidelines for the application of principles
- To set forth the nature, purpose, object, tasks, basic content, and methodology of catechesis

Situating the NDC



- Audience
 - Those who have primary responsibility for catechesis in dioceses, parishes, and schools in the United States
 - Authority
 - Official document of the USCCB
 - Received *recognitio* from Congregation of the Clergy in December 2004
-

Characteristics of Catechesis



- Authentic
- Complete
- Systematic
- Integral
- Divine Pedagogy
- Lifelong
- Inculturated

Catechesis that is Authentic



- The Message is centered on Christ (i.e. Christocentric)
- Introduces the Trinitarian character of the Message
- Proclaims the Good News of the Kingdom
(i.e. news of salvation and liberation)
- Has an Ecclesial Character
- Has an Historical Character
- Actively Seeks Inculturation
- Is Comprehensive and Hierarchical in Nature
- Is Oriented to the Meaning of the Person
- Fosters a Common Language of Faith

Catechesis that is Complete



- Complete catechesis presents the doctrines of the faith as an integrated whole and should present the complete content of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
 - the articles of the Creed,
 - the seven sacraments,
 - the Ten Commandments
 - the petitions of the Lord's Prayer

Catechesis that is Systematic



- The core or basic teachings of the faith need to be taught in a planned manner and be continually reinforced throughout the lifelong learning cycle
- A variety of methods is required ... (NDC 29)

Catechesis that is Integral



- The teachings of the Church are interrelated and complement one another, forming an organic whole
 - Single Source – Jesus Christ
 - Scripture
 - Tradition

Divine Pedagogy in Catechesis



- All that we teach comes from God as gift.
- Divine Revelation is intrinsically pedagogical
- In teaching the faith, we teach about the very nature of the God who loves us
- Catechesis is ordered to bring about a response to this love: a conversion to Christ that leads to a living of the faith as it is celebrated, lived, and prayed.

Catechesis that is Lifelong



- “Catechesis is that particular form of the ministry of the word which matures initial conversion to make it into a living, explicit, and fruitful confession of faith.” (GDC 82)
- Formation for Transformation
- Conversion to Christ is a lifelong process

Catechesis that is Inculturated



- “The Word of God became man, a concrete man, in space and time and rooted in a specific culture...”

(GDC 109, citing AG 10, 22)

- Evangelizing catechesis seeks to transform the culture.

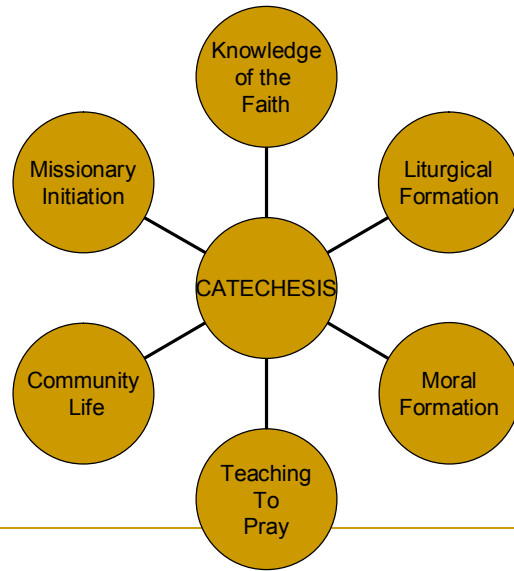
Catechesis that is Inculturated



Catechesis is:

- ❑ To discover the seed of the gospel within the culture
- ❑ To know and respect the essentials of the culture
- ❑ To recognize that no single culture can contain the gospel
- ❑ To proclaim the transforming, regenerating power of the gospel in every culture
- ❑ To use the language and culture of the people
- ❑ To maintain the integral content of the faith and to avoid obscuring the Christian message

Six Tasks of Catechesis



6 Tasks of Catechesis

(GDC 85-86, NDC 20)



1. Catechesis promotes knowledge of the faith

It develops a knowledge of the content of divine revelation in Scripture and in Tradition



Upon hearing the message and good news of Jesus for perhaps the first time (and sometimes for the first time – again!) people are drawn by the Spirit into a deeper desire to know about Christ, his life and the content of what Jesus taught in his words and actions.

Scripture studies, opportunities to share the meaning of our beliefs (creeds) and our history as a people of faith, are powerful ways of assisting people in deepening this relationship with Christ in their own lives.

6 Tasks of Catechesis

(GDC 85-86, NDC 20)



2. Catechesis promotes a knowledge of the meaning of the Liturgy & the Sacraments

It not only explains what happens, but forms people for fuller sharing in the mysteries

Liturgical
Formation

6 Tasks of Catechesis

(GDC 85-86, NDC 20)



3. Catechesis promotes moral formation in Jesus Christ

Encourages people to give witness to Christ's teaching both in their public and private lives.

Moral
Formation

6 Tasks of Catechesis

(GDC 85-86, NDC 20)



4. Catechesis teaches the Christian how to pray with Christ

Leads people to adopt Christ's own disposition of reflection and prayer to the Father which is the context for

Christian action

Teaching
To
Pray

6 Tasks of Catechesis

(GDC 85-86, NDC 20)



5. Catechesis prepares the Christian to live in community and to participate actively in the life of the Church

Concern for the poor, care for the alienated, common prayer, simplicity & humility are characteristic of the Christian life

Communal
Life

6 Tasks of Catechesis

(GDC 85-86, NDC 20)



6. Catechesis promotes a missionary spirit that prepares the faithful to be present as Christians in society

Our 'world' is the place wherein we give witness to our faith in word and in deed

Missionary
Initiation

Situating the NDC



Defining The Scope of Catechesis

“...*the whole of the efforts* within the **Church** to make **disciples**, to help people to believe that **Jesus** is the Son of God, so that believing they might have **life** in His name (cf Jn 20:31), and to educate and instruct them in this life and thus **build up the Body of Christ.**”

John Paul II, 1979
Catechesi Tradendae n1

Situating the NDC



- Catechesis in a Nutshell

The primary goal of catechesis is to pass along the faith, with which we have been entrusted, to the generations who follow us...

...it is the faith of the people of God, the Church, which we are determined to share in the catechetical ministry.

Catechesis is...



“...an education of children, young people and adults in the faith, which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life.”

John Paul II, 1979
On Catechesis in the Modern World
Catechesi Tradendae n18

Catechesis is...



“intended to make the faith, as illumined by teaching, a vital, explicit and effective force in the lives of [people].”

Vatican II, 1965
Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops
Christus Dominus n14

Catechesis is...



That work which always “aims at putting
people... in communion... with Jesus
Christ”

1992
Catechism of the Catholic Church 426

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