

EVANGELIZING

New Vision - New Directions

CATECHESIS

A SERIES OF ARTICLES ON THEMES FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTORY FOR CATECHESIS

"Catechesis is nothing other than the process of transmitting the Gospel, as the Christian community has received it, understands it, celebrates it, lives it and communicates it in many ways."
(GDC, #105)

"The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ."
(CT5) All evangelizing activity is understood as promoting communion with Jesus Christ."
(GDC, #80)

Excerpts taken from the *General Directory for Catechesis (GDC)* Copyright 1997 United States Catholic Conference, Inc, Washington, D.C.-Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Used with permission.

Opening Prayer

Take a moment to place yourself in the presence of God's Spirit, then prayerfully read and reflect on the following passage:

On another occasion he began to teach by the sea. A very large crowd gathered around him so that he got into a boat on the sea and sat down. And the whole crowd was beside the sea on land. And he taught them at length in parables, and in the course of his instruction he said to them, "Hear this! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep. And when the sun rose, it was scorched and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it and it produced no grain. And some seed fell on rich soil and produced fruit. It came up and grew and yielded thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold." He added, "Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear." (Mark 4:1-9)

Article 2

Evangelization and Catechesis

by Kate Dooley, O.P.

Based on paragraphs 50-52 and 63-68 in the *General Directory for Catechesis*

Preparing to Read

In preparing to read the following article, reflect on and discuss with others the following:

1. How would you define evangelization and catechesis and how they are related?
2. "The Church 'exists in order to evangelize' [EN 14], that is the 'carrying forth of the Good News to every sector of the human race so that by its strength it may enter into the hearts of men and renew the human race' [EN 18]" (GDC, #46). What is this statement saying to you? What is the "Good News" we have for the world?
3. Recall an experience in your life when you were the Good News for someone, or someone proclaimed the Good News to you. What was the impact on your life?
4. What role could your baptismal profession of faith play in your daily Christian life?



NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR CATECHETICAL LEADERSHIP

The 1997 *General Directory for Catechesis (GDC)* offers the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-9) as the source of inspiration for reflecting on the ministry of evangelization. The parable reminds us that Jesus' words and deeds reveal the mystery of God's kingdom; the disciple's task is to hand on this teaching in word and action. For this reason the *GDC* gives priority to evangelization and to the place of catechesis in this process of handing on the faith. This essay will explore the relationship between evangelization and catechesis as presented in the *GDC*.

Catechesis is generally described as a ministry of the Word that endeavors to develop in both individuals and communities a living, explicit, and active faith, enlightened by instruction and the experience of Christian living. Its fundamental tasks are to proclaim the mysteries of faith, to foster and share community, to lead to worship and prayer, and to motivate to service. These four aspects, taken together, are the essential components of catechesis, and they are always in the context of the mystery of Christ in the revealed message. The primary focus of catechesis, therefore, is "to show who Jesus Christ is, his life and ministry, and to present the Christian faith as the following of his person" (*GDC*, #41).

One definition of evangelization is that it is "the process by which the Church, moved by the Spirit, proclaims and spreads the Gospel throughout the entire world" (*GDC*, #48). The fundamental premise is that evangelization is the work of the Holy Spirit taking place through human persons and events. In the context of evangelization, catechesis is seen as an essential moment, a "remarkable" moment, within the "process of evangelization" (CT 18) (*GDC*, #63). It is the primary way in which the Church brings about the mandate of Jesus to go and teach all nations (see Matthew 28:19-20).

For some of us this understanding of catechesis as an essential moment within the Church's mission of evangelization will require a new mindset. We often see evangelization only in terms of the work of missionaries in faraway lands; or evangelization is equated with the preaching of television evangelists or with the zeal of the people who knock on our doors asking if we have been saved. It is often said that Catholics see their religion as something private and not to be discussed. The concept of evangelization, therefore, makes them uneasy.

The term "catechesis" is derived from a Greek word, which means "to resound" or "to echo." What is echoed is the Word made flesh and the Word of the Scriptures now heard in different times and different places. Catechesis, however, is frequently confused with catechism and with the memorization of basic dogmas of the faith. It is not seen in terms of an integrated process of formation that comprises liturgy, doctrine, community

life, and service. Thus it is important for catechists to explore the meaning of the words "evangelization" and "catechesis" in order to have a clear understanding of what is involved in the process of evangelizing catechesis.

The evangelizing catechesis described by the *GDC* has two aspects. The first is what Pope John Paul II calls the "mission *ad gentes*" (*Redemptoris Missio* 33b) ("to the nations"), which is directed to non-Christians and invites them to conversion. Evangelization *ad gentes* requires that there be an explicit proclamation of "the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God"

(EN 22) (*GDC*, #50), always taking into consideration the people within a particular culture to whom it is addressed. "In this context catechesis is usually developed within the baptismal catechumenate" (*GDC*, #58a).

Pope John Paul II also speaks about "new evangelization" (*Mission of the Redeemer: On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate [Redemptoris Missio]*, #33, 34). "New evangelization" is a very broad term that views evangelization as the work of the whole community and not just certain groups of clergy and religious. It is directed to those who are baptized but uncatechized; to those who have lost a living sense of faith or who have removed themselves from the

Church; and to those who are committed Christians (*GDC*, #49, 58). The most important factor in the "new evangelization" is the witness of a Christian life. "New evangelization" is also characterized by religious freedom, by dialogue with other Christians as well as non-Christians. It is marked by action on behalf of human dignity and participation in the transformation of unjust structures as a constitutive dimension of preaching the Gospel. "New evangelization" calls for an ongoing formation inspired by the baptismal catechumenate, which is the model for all catechesis (see *GDC*, #59).

The key to understanding the relationship between evangelization and catechesis lies in the global vision that catechesis receives from evangelization. This means that:

- evangelization has to be understood as an entire process whereby individual and communal life is transformed in the light of the Gospel.
- evangelization is the work of the whole Church. Since the primary form of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life, then ultimately it is the faith of the Church that brings others to faith. The faith of the Church is the faith that comes to us from the apostles, through the Scriptures, tradition, liturgy, and lives of Christian women and men through the centuries. The faith of the Church is what is believed, celebrated and lived by our families and local communities. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that "you have not

From the General Directory for Catechesis

"The Christian faith is, above all, conversion to Jesus Christ, full and sincere adherence to his person and the decision to walk in his footsteps. Faith is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, making of oneself a disciple of him. This demands a permanent commitment to think like him, to judge like him and to live as he lived. In this way the believer unites himself to the community of disciples and appropriates the faith of the Church." (CCC 166-167) (#53)



given yourself faith as you have not given yourself life. The believer has received faith from others and should hand it on to others. . . . Each believer is thus a link in the great chain of believers" (#166).

- a catechesis of evangelization, permeated with the spirit of the Gospel, "seeks to educate Christians in a sense of their identity as baptized, as believers, as members of the Church, who are open to dialogue with the world" (*GDC*, #194);
- the global vision of evangelization calls for openness to both ecumenical and interfaith dialogue. Catechesis has a responsibility to dispel "prejudice and ignorance" about other faith traditions and to prepare believers to enter into a mutual witness to one's beliefs and an exchange of one's respective religious convictions (see *GDC*, #198).
- Christians today live in multicultural and multireligious contexts. A global vision of evangelization gives attention to the actual situation of people, their language and customs, and their questions. The purpose is to proclaim the Gospel in such a way that it can be understood and appropriated by the hearers within their own culture.
- the global vision of evangelization will be given life and substance by a liturgical/sacramental orientation. A liturgical/sacramental orientation means a different way of "seeing." It includes a sense of sacrament (the presence of God in all created reality); an understanding of mediation (God is present to us through persons, communities, events, etc.); and an understanding of communion [we come to faith through a community of faith].
- a catechesis of evangelization fosters a real process of conversion, and helps Christians to discern Gospel values and live them out in everyday life. "It enables them to give the reasons for the hope that is theirs. It encourages them to exercise their missionary vocation by witness, dialogue and proclamation" (*GDC*, #194).

The *GDC* further develops the relationship of catechesis with evangelization by stressing the importance of catechesis in primary proclamation and initial formation. The initial formation of the unbaptized takes place within the catechumenate, which expresses the gradual character of conversion through definite stages marked by liturgical rites. The formation includes the elements of initiation, catechesis, and instruction. The catechumenate is initiation in that its purpose is incorporation into the community. The

formation takes place in and through the community. The process is catechesis in that it is a critical reflection and interpretation of experience in the light of the Christian Scriptures and tradition. It is instructional in that a comprehensive and systematic formation in the faith enables the catechumen to acquire a knowledge of Catholic doctrine attested to and enlightened by the Scriptures, the apostolic traditions, the Church's magisterium, and the witness of countless Christians down through the ages. Comprehensive formation "comprises but surpasses mere instruction" (*GDC*, #68); it is "an apprenticeship of the entire Christian life" (#67).

Initiatory catechesis is the bridge between the primary proclamation that calls one to faith and the ongoing catechesis that continually fosters the faith of the Christian community. Ongoing or lifelong catechesis is inspired by and based on these principles of the catechumenate (see *GDC*, #59, 68):

- the importance of the sacraments of initiation as the foundation of the Christian life
- the responsibility of the whole Christian community in the process of evangelizing catechesis
- the paschal mystery of Christ as the foundation of the whole process of catechesis
- catechesis based on the catechumenate as the locus of inculturation
- the process of formation as gradual and marked by definite stages, in the context of the liturgical year

- a liturgical catechesis that prepares for the celebration of the Christian liturgy and reflects back upon that experience so that the symbols, the rites, and the environment of the liturgy lead the community to full, conscious, and active participation
- a comprehensive formation in doctrine that nourishes a life of faith but enables the person to articulate and to live that faith

The fundamental difference between prebaptismal catechesis and postbaptismal catechesis is that with the latter, individuals are not preparing for Baptism but rather Baptism empowers their ongoing conversion (see *GDC*, #90). The *GDC* is clear that the structures of the catechumenate are not to be slavishly imitated in lifelong catechesis but rather lifelong catechesis is to be enriched by the principles of the catechumenate.

The purpose of ongoing catechesis is to help us inte-

Reflection Questions for Individuals and Groups

Select some of the following questions to help you assimilate your understanding of this article.

1. The key to understanding the relationship between catechesis and evangelization is a global vision that catechesis receives from evangelization. How do you understand "global vision"?
2. To continue the dialogue on catechesis and evangelization, what has changed in your understanding of these terms and their relationship after having read the article?
3. What do you think evangelization means when it is directed to baptized Christians? What are some obstacles to evangelization for those already baptized?
4. A catechesis of evangelization fosters a real process of conversion, and helps Christians to discern Gospel values and live them out in everyday life (*GDC*, #53, 194). What fosters and hinders the process of conversion to Gospel values in our Christian lives today? How do you live and practice the ongoing process of conversion to Gospel values in your life (see *GDC*, #56)?
5. "The focus of catechesis and baptism is the profession of faith; therefore, the model of all catechesis is the baptismal catechumenate." How do you understand this statement and what is its implication for your ministry?
6. What do you find most challenging in this article for your parish or ministry?

riorize the mystery of Christ's death, resurrection, and glorification not only as the core of our faith but also as the paradigm of our lives. The paschal mystery enables us to look at the ordinary events of our lives from the perspective of faith. It is celebrated in our liturgy and enables us to connect liturgy, life, and doctrine. It demands that the Christian community respond not only to selfishness, abuse, divisiveness, infirmity, injustice, or prejudice but also to efforts at reconciliation, forgiveness, solidarity, and human courage in the face of adversity. This response is witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ expressed in works of justice, charity, and mercy in whatever circumstances Christians might find themselves. This Christian witness is evangelization.

The formative nature of the liturgy in both the baptismal catechumenate and in ongoing formation is given great prominence in the *GDC*. Catechesis has an integral relationship with the sacraments of initiation, especially Baptism. The focus of catechesis and Baptism is the profession of faith; therefore, the model of all catechesis is the baptismal catechumenate, a specific process by which those seeking Christ are led to the baptismal confession of faith.

In summary, an evangelizing catechesis communicates the mystery of salvation through proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord, through the liturgy, the witness of Christians, and the efforts of the community in the struggle for justice for all peoples (see *GDC*, #50).

Scripture excerpts are taken from the *New American Bible with Revised New Testament and Psalms* Copyright © 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No part of the *New American Bible* may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

These elements are interdependent and necessary. When one of these elements is omitted, "the Christian faith does not attain full development" (#87).

An evangelizing catechesis may appear to be an overwhelming challenge. Indeed, it is a challenge to know for oneself what it means to be a Catholic Christian. Evangelization requires study so that one may articulate beliefs and thus enter into dialogue with other traditions. Study dispels prejudice and ignorance. Evangelization requires a global vision. This vision, this Christian spirit, is fostered and shaped by participation in the community life of a parish and especially through the celebration of the paschal mystery in the liturgy. This vision demands a response.

How do we act in the face of injustice or bigotry? What is our response to poverty or to environmental destruction? to the infirm and the aged? to the needs of children and youth? The parable of the sower is a story of hope and encouragement. It is a reminder that evangelization is the action of God working through the Spirit. The Word of God calls for a response freely given. The disciple is the one "who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold" (Matthew 13:23).

Kate Dooley, O.P., teaches Catechetics and Sacraments in the Department of Religion and Religious Education at the Catholic University of America.

Closing Prayer



Good and gracious God, you call us to be your people, echoing your Word and presence through our ordinary lives as we strive to bring about your reign in our world today. We pray that we will continue to recognize and respond to your presence as we go forth to evangelize our world with your good news and promote a new vision and new direction for the catechetical ministry of all people. We ask for your blessing and intimate presence on our ongoing journey of conversion, becoming disciples who will transform the world through proclaiming and living Gospel values. We ask this in your name. Amen.

For Further Reading

Dooley, Catherine. "Evangelization and Catechesis: Partners in the New Millennium," in *The Echo Within: Emerging Issues in Religious Education*, ed. C. Dooley and M. Collins. Allen, TX: Thomas More, 1997.

National Conference of Catholic Bishops. "Go and Make Disciples," in *Origins* 22, no. 25 (3 December 1992): 423-432.

Pope John Paul II. *On Catechesis in Our Time (Catechesi Tradendae)*. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1979.

Pope Paul VI. *On Evangelization in the Modern World (Evangelii Nuntiandi)*. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1975.

Copyright © 2000, National Conference for Catechetical Leadership, Washington, DC. All rights reserved. This article may be reproduced for use within a parish, school or diocesan training program after a copy of the article has been purchased. The copyright prohibits dioceses from reproducing the article in part or in its entirety for distribution to parishes. This resource is primarily intended to help catechetical personnel to become better acquainted with the key themes presented in the *General Directory for Catechesis*. Produced by the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership with the aid and cooperation of the Department of Education of the United States Catholic Conference.



National Conference for Catechetical Leadership 302I Fourth St., NE Washington, DC 20017-1102
Telephone: 202.636.3826 Fax: 202.832.2712 www.nccl.org email: nccl@nccl.org