



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:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5: 43-48).

Article 9

Apprenticeship in the Christian Life

by Francoise Darcy-Berube

Based on paragraphs #30, 67, 56, 86, and 137 in the *General Directory for Catechesis*

Preparing to Read

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

1. How do you understand the word "apprentice" in relationship to your life as a Christian?
2. How do you see ongoing conversion as essential to your journey of faith as a Christian?



NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR CATECHETICAL LEADERSHIP

Life in the Holy Spirit fulfills the vocation of man. This life is made up of divine charity and human solidarity. It is graciously offered as salvation. (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], #1699)

This powerful and comprehensive statement should be the guiding light of any reflection on the apprenticeship in Christian life. It is obvious, however, that in such a short essay I can hardly do more than sketch out some of the most important points that need to be reflected upon and discussed if we want to guide those entrusted to our care on the way to a true Christian life, a life in the Spirit. I will try to bring some clarity to the complexity of the topic in sharing a few ideas around three key words or expressions that are recurrent in the *General Directory for Catechesis* as they were in the most recent Roman and national publications on catechesis. These key words are *apprenticeship*, *spiritual journey*, and *initiation* into the life of a *community*.

Apprenticeship In any domain of human experience apprenticeship requires a *model* that awakens in us the desire to reach a *goal*. It requires a *guide*, a master to lead us to that goal. It needs *time* to journey toward that goal. With regard to Christian life the goal, of course, as stated by the *Catechism*, is life in the Spirit made up of divine charity and human solidarity. The model is Jesus who exemplified that life in all its perfection: "He is the 'perfect man,' (GS 38; see Rom 15:5; Phil 2:5) who invites us to become his disciples and follow him" (CCC, #520).

However, to be truly attractive and awaken our desire, that goal must be "perceived as Good News" for the lives of people and of society (EN 63) (GDC, #30). Indeed Jesus himself was keenly aware of this. When describing on the mount the way to discipleship, he repeatedly talked about finding true happiness: "The Beatitudes respond to the natural desire for happiness. This desire is of divine origin: God has placed it in the human heart in order to draw man to the One who

alone can fulfill it" (CCC, #1718). The experience of the spiritual joy we feel when we have lovingly responded to God's call, either in prayer or in action, is the best stimulus for progressing in the Christian way of life. Let us then encourage people and especially children to discover that joy, to savor it and deepen it by taking time to share it and talk about it.

Apprenticeship also requires a guide who, of course, is Jesus himself: "You have but one master, the Messiah" (Matthew 23:10). Jesus presented himself to his disciples "as the only teacher and, at the same time, a patient and faithful friend" (see Jn 15:15; Mk 9:33-37; 10:41-45) (GDC, #137). One of the most important aspects of discipleship is the constant effort to know Jesus more intimately so as to follow him more closely. This can only happen through prayer and meditation on the Gospel.

There is a vital link between the experience of prayer and apprenticeship in Christian living. Experiencing communion with God in prayer, becoming aware of God's presence and call in our daily life, is what makes the difference between moral indoctrination and apprenticeship in Christian life. That is why the *GDC* requires that we "emphasize above all the relationship that the person has with God so that he can make it his own and allow himself to be guided by God" (#139). That is also why an ongoing education to prayer—personal, communal, and liturgical—is

such an important part of the apprenticeship in Christian life, as both the *GDC* and the *Catechism* so strongly stress. Part four of the *Catechism* is a magnificent resource for such an education. It should be studied in depth by all those in charge of religious education both for their personal life and for their ministry.

Finally, apprenticeship requires time. It is only over time that our relationship with God can blossom, that our ability to respond to God's call can develop. This leads us to the second word we should reflect upon, the word *journey*.

From the *General Directory for Catechesis*

"Conversion to Jesus Christ implies walking in his footsteps. Catechesis must, therefore, transmit to the disciples the attitudes of the Master himself. The disciples thus undertake a journey of interior transformation, in which, by participating in the paschal mystery of the Lord, 'they pass from the old man to the new man who has been made perfect in Christ' (*Decree on the Missionary Activity in the Church* [Ad Gentes], #13). The Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus takes up the Decalogue, and impresses upon it the spirit of the beatitudes (see LG 62; CCC 1965-1986), is an indispensable point of reference for the moral formation which is most necessary today . . . This moral testimony, which is prepared for by catechesis, must always demonstrate the social consequences of the demands of the Gospel" (see CT 29f) (GDC, #85).



Spiritual Journey Faith is both a gift and a call. It is "destined to grow in the hearts of believers (CT 20a). Adhering to Jesus Christ, in fact, sets in motion a process of continuing conversion, which lasts for the whole of life" (see RM 46b) (GDC, #56). The decision to follow Christ requires, of course, a certain amount of knowledge. But "the heart is the place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives. It is the place of encounter . . . it is the place of covenant" (CCC, #2563). Such a decision should never be coerced. It should be a free commitment, even for children, according to their stage of development, if their journey in faith is to be authentic. This holds true for their decision to enter the catechumenate, but it should also apply to baptized children who are invited to start a sacramental preparation: "Jesus never obliged anyone. He only invited. That is why the Christian community invites them too to follow Jesus, but wants them to decide freely to join the journey" (*On Our Way With Jesus, A Journey of Christian Initiation, Leader's Guide*, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1997, pgs. 48 and 64).

Experience shows that children who have truly made a personal decision about their sacramental journey commit themselves to it and benefit from it much more fully. This, of course, is even more true for the adolescent's journey toward Confirmation. Evidently these initial decisions to follow Jesus during childhood and adolescence will have to be confirmed and renewed all along the journey toward Christian maturity; this is what "continuing conversion" is about. Children and adolescents will be constantly challenged by new experiences and problems, by developing talents and abilities, by a diversity of relationships and opportunities, good and bad, and by new responsibilities. It is quite clear then that over the years of our lifelong journey, we need mentoring and companionship, which we are entitled to find in our Christian communities.

Initiation into the Life of a Community The responsibility of the community in sharing its faith and initiating new generations into the Christian way of life cannot be overstated. The community has the obligation to provide a "comprehensive formation [that] includes more than instruction: it is an apprenticeship of the entire Christian life, it is a 'complete Christian initiation'" (CT 21) (GDC, #67). "Being initiatory, it incorporates into the community, which lives, celebrates and bears witness to the faith" (GDC, #68). Moreover the GDC rightly states that "Christian community life is not realized spontaneously. It is necessary to educate it carefully" (GDC, #86).

It is through a great diversity of ministries that the community is called to carry out its mission. Unfortunately I can only mention them here, but each one deserves careful reflection: Parents, teachers, and catechists have a prominent role of course. But many more adults in the community should be challenged to take some responsibility in the apprenticeship of the young in the spiritual, liturgical, social, and missionary aspects of our Christian vocation. This will only be possible if there is a real community spirit among all

these ministries, if, as Patrick Brennan suggests in his remarkable book *Re-Imagining the Parish*, "structures charged with coordination, facilitation and animation envision themselves as communities and act as such" (Crossroads, 1990). Practical suggestions to do that can be found in *Religious Education at a Crossroads* (Paulist Press, 1995, pgs. 33 to 39). Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) offers a host of interesting insights on this need for cooperation in the catechetical mission of the Church.

Christian life, life in the Spirit, is often counter-cultural. Many of the values ruling our society are profoundly opposed to the Gospel values, to the Beatitudes. Many attitudes

Reflection Questions for Individuals and Groups

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

1. What new insight about apprenticeship and its role in the Christian life did you gain from this article?
2. If the concept of apprenticeship in the Christian life was understood and accepted in our parishes, what would be some implications?
3. What is the relationship between prayer and apprenticeship in the Christian life?
4. How can you foster in your parish a spirit of collaboration among all those who share responsibility for the apprenticeship in Christian life for youth and adults?
5. What kind of spiritual, liturgical, and social experiences could you provide the people you are serving according to their age and culture to foster their apprenticeship in the Christian life?

and endeavors in our world are incompatible with discipleship. Therefore it is only with the ongoing guidance and help of personal mentoring and community support that those on the Christian journey from childhood to old age will be able to live up to the challenge of true Christian life.

However, if fundamental Gospel values are the same for all, the way we are called to live them out will differ according to the different types of societies. It is important to reflect on this fact and to provide people of all ages with the kind of experiences and apprenticeships that will enable them to face those specific challenges in their society and culture.

Perhaps we could conclude these brief reflections with the following statements: The real challenge of apprenticeship in Christian life is not to moralize, indoctrinate, or

coerce people into certain behaviors. It is to awaken and nourish in them a personal, loving relationship with God. It is through that relationship that they will progressively develop an awareness of God's call. It is that loving relationship that will motivate them to embrace and persevere in the Christian way of life, made up of "divine charity and human solidarity" (CCC, #1699), and enable them to discover it is indeed the way to true happiness.

Francoise Darcy-Berube is a noted author and catechist, born in France, and now residing in Montreal, Canada. Her most recent book is *Religious Education at a Crossroads*.

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.

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 right reserved. No part of the *New American Bible* may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for the United States of America copyright © 1994, United States Catholic Conference, Inc. - Libreria Editrice Vaticana. English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Modifications from the Editio Typica* copyright © 1997, United States Catholic Conference, Inc. — Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

For Further Reading

- Brennan, Patrick. *Re-Imagining the Parish*. New York: Crossroad, 1995.
- Darcy-Berube, F. and Berube, J.P. *Growing Up a Friend of Jesus: A Guide to Discipleship for Children*. Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2000.
- Luling, Haughton R. *Images for Change: The Transformation of Society*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997.

Copyright © 2001, 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 3021 Fourth St., NE Washington, DC 20017-1102
 Telephone: 202.636.3826 Fax: 202.832.2712 www.nccl.org email: nccl@nccl.org