

## **CATECHESIS AND EVANGELIZATION**

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### **Introduction**

The Church exists to evangelize. After his resurrection, Jesus mandated his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations and baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19). Not only that but Jesus also sent the eleven to teach the people to observe whatever he had commanded them. Two aspects which are outstanding from the above reference are: ‘to make disciples’ and ‘to teach’. We can simply say to teach is the catechesis and to make disciples is evangelization. The Church consequently took this mandate from Christ, thus it became her vision and mission in the world. It is in this context therefore that this essay is focussing on the place of catechesis in evangelization. The main thrust here is to see the role played by catechesis in the whole work of spreading the gospel or the relationship which exist between the two. To make this possible this paper will begin by elaborating the key terms, this will be followed by various views from the Church teachings on the subject matter.

### **Clarifying Key Terms**

A vivid understanding of the terms: catechesis and evangelization, will help us to have a better explanation of the role which catechesis has in the work of evangelization. The word catechesis is from the Greek word *katēchein* which is used to signify teaching or instruction in the law of God.<sup>1</sup> The Church understands catechesis as “the 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”.<sup>2</sup> The General Directory for Catechesis holds catechesis as “the process of transmitting the Gospel, as the Christian community has received it, understands it, celebrates it, lives it and communicates it in many way”.<sup>3</sup> On the other side, evangelization is the “zealous proclamation of the Gospel in order to bring others to Christ and his Church” (Catholic Dictionary). In the words of Pope Paul VI, “evangelizing means to bring

the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new”.<sup>4</sup> In contemporary Christian understanding, evangelization is defined as the process by which a person is led to make a commitment to Christ, dedicate himself to a Christian way of life and become a vital member of the local Church.<sup>5</sup> Now we would want to see how these two concepts are related.

### **References to Catechesis and Evangelization in the Scriptures**

It is almost impossible to find clear references to catechesis and evangelization in the Old Testament. Nevertheless, the Jews as the people of the covenant, had a strong concern with passing on the fundamental beliefs of faith from one generation to the next.<sup>6</sup> They could memorize and reflect on the sacred passages from the Hebrew Scriptures and out of these texts they could get the core principles of their beliefs.<sup>7</sup> The Jewish people relied on the law from the Torah based on the covenant tradition. This is what they could abide with and impart it into their children. In a way, this was their form of catechesis and evangelization.

In the New Testament, the idea of evangelization and catechesis are clearer. The nuances surrounding these concepts indicate that where evangelization can be found, catechesis will soon follow.<sup>8</sup> Already the term ‘Gospel’ rooted in Greek word *evangelion* meaning ‘Good News’ is applied to four distinctive books, suggests positive spiritual benefits to the believers.<sup>9</sup> At the end of Matthew’s gospel, Jesus mandates his disciples for a great mission to all the nations to evangelize, to teach and baptize the people. Jesus said: “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me: Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28: 18-20). The task of evangelization here is directed to “all nations and the catechetical dimension is also set: it is necessary to teach what Jesus has taught.

It can be observed that from the early years of the Christian Church, the dual roles of evangelizing and catechizing were being worked together without one being a handmaid of the other.<sup>10</sup>

### **Catechesis and Evangelization**

A point of departure here is what has already been established that the mission of the Church is to help people to have an encounter with Jesus Christ in their lives. The effort to achieve this mission is made possible through the process of evangelization of which catechesis and theology are constitutive dimensions.<sup>11</sup> As a primary focus, catechesis endeavours to educate people to know the love of God who calls them to partake in his mysteries. In the book: *Introduction to Catechesis* edited by Peter De Rosa, Christ is at the centre of all Christian teaching.<sup>12</sup> Catechesis endeavours to communicate the salvation which was brought by God the Father through Christ. History of salvation unveils how God loved his people and brought them to the knowledge of the truth.<sup>13</sup> It is the catechetical work which has a role to introduce to the people, the message of the love of God. By so doing one may see that it is impossible to do evangelization without catechesis.

Moreover, the third general assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1974 had evangelization as their main subject. The topic was “the proclamation of the gospel to the people of our time”.<sup>14</sup> In their reflections they realized that catechesis was at the centre of the whole work of evangelization. They went on to take note of Pope Paul VI’s Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*:

A means of evangelization that must not be neglected is that of catechetical instruction. The intelligence, especially that of children and young people, needs to learn through systematic religious instruction the fundamental teachings, the living content of the truth which God has wished to convey to us and which the Church has sought to express in an ever richer fashion during the course of her long history.<sup>15</sup>

In a way, catechesis is regarded as a unique way of evangelization. For this reason, the Synod on Evangelization in 1977 addresses many facets of catechesis in order to find better ways of doing catechism. It is not surprising why Pope Paul VI commended at the end of the Synod that “this orderly study of the Christian mystery is what distinguishes catechesis itself from all other forms of presentation of the word of God”.<sup>16</sup>

### **Catechesis as a Stage in Evangelization**

It is by no means that catechesis can be juxtaposed with evangelization. There is therefore a strong association of catechetical work and the Church's pastoral and missionary activities. For this reason, the General Directory for Catechesis has it that "the Church exists in order to evangelize, that is to carry forth the Good News to every sector of the human race so that by its strength the Good News may enter into the hearts of human beings and renew the human race."<sup>17</sup> In this way evangelization becomes a process through which the Church is inspired by the Spirit of God to go out to announce the Gospel of salvation. This process has catechesis at the centre. In *The Art of Catechesis*, Maureen Gallagher views catechesis as a way of helping people to understand the revelation of God in order that they may grow in faith.<sup>18</sup>

Evangelization calls for conversion of heart and mind and this is followed by Christian initiation which is done through catechesis. Through catechesis and sacraments of Christian initiation, evangelization opens the doors of Christian life and those converted to Christian life are incorporated into the community of believers.<sup>19</sup>

It is significant to note that catechesis has a substantial part in every part of the process of evangelization. During the stage of primary proclamation, those who are presented for catechesis need true conversion. This conversion is needed such that catechesis fulfils the crucial part of education in the faith.<sup>20</sup> The teaching which is done in catechesis educates the catechumen and nurtures them into the maturity from initial conversion.<sup>21</sup> During the stage of Christian initiation, catechesis is also a vital element owing to its closeness to the sacraments of initiation which include Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Communion. These are sacraments of faith as shown with the act of 'Profession of Faith' when Baptism is taking place.<sup>22</sup> Thus the faith which is called for by evangelization, it is inherent goal in the catechetical goals. In short therefore, catechesis has a place in laying the basis on which those who are evangelized are fully brought to the knowledge of their faith and are made partakers in the family of God.

## **Catechesis and Evangelisation in the light of Vatican Council II**

Previous to this council, the Church had a mission to go out to non-Christian regions in order to convert them and establish Church structures, schools and parishes. These efforts did not rather put emphasis at individual conversion to become disciples. Vatican Council II then took a new look at the mission of the Church. The conciliar decree *Ad Gentes* brought in the concept of evangelization not as a short term act but as a process that begins with proclamation catechesis and formation of communities. “The proper purpose of this missionary activity is evangelization, and the planting of the Church among those peoples and groups where it has not yet taken root.”<sup>23</sup> A significant shift took place from being a mission to evangelization as the nature of the Church and its purpose.<sup>24</sup> Ten years after the *Ad Gentes*, Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* hinted that the Church exists in order to evangelise, that is, to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace.”<sup>25</sup> As such, Vatican II unveiled a new dimension of evangelization which realized that “evangelization would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the gospel and of man’s concrete life, both personal and social.”<sup>26</sup>

True evangelization takes place when the Good News is proclaimed by the witnesses of life and by the word of life; these should include teaching the life, promises, the kingdom and mystery of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the Son of God.<sup>27</sup> Apparently, the name of Jesus, teaching, the life, and the kingdom are all subjects of catechesis. Pope Paul VI asserts that effective catechesis is therefore necessary in order to accomplish the work of evangelization. Thus it means that catechesis enables Christians to build up stronger relationship with Christ whom they follow.

Another Apostolic Exhortation which explains the relationship between catechesis and evangelization is Pope John Paul II’s *Catechesi Tradendae* published in 1979. In this document, Pope John Paul II describes evangelization as a rich, complex and dynamic reality, made up of essential elements having catechesis as one of the indispensable aspects; noting that catechesis is a remarkable one in the whole process of evangelization.<sup>28</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI in January 2013 signed a *motu proprio* known as *Fides per Doctrinum*. By this document he transferred the task of catechesis from the Congregation of the Clergy to the Pontifical Council for the New

Evangelization. The reason for this transfer was that the teachings of the later council was to given a responsibility to establish a connection of catechism ever more closely to the process of evangelization (*Fides per Doctrinum*). For Pope Benedict XVI, faith needs to be strengthened through teaching, so that it can enlighten the minds and hearts of believers (*Fides per Doctrinum*). The new Pontifical Council for evangelization had a task to care for catechism which is the relevant instrument of evangelization along with catechetical teaching in all its forms, in order to bring more organic and effective pastoral outreach. Therefore, catechism becomes a significant step in the daily life of the Church through announcing and communicating the Word of God in a way that is living and effective (*Fides per Doctrinum*). In this manner believers are trained and educated in Christ to build his body, the Church (*Fides per Doctrinam*). Thus Pope Benedict XVI views catechism as a tool for evangelization.

### **Conclusion**

It can therefore be concluded that, the above assertion highlighted that the Church has evangelization as her mission and purpose; catechesis being one of the core elements in this mission. This being the case, the essay has noted how the Church understands catechesis and evangelization not as two separate activities but both are essential and closely connected elements. Their process is not a single day activity but an ongoing process. Catechesis is at the core of the Church's self-realization of her mission in the world; thus, leading the people to become true followers of Christ. So, there is no disunity or antagonism between catechesis and evangelization; these two integrate and complement each other. Catechesis is to be viable if at all evangelization is to be fruitful.

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<sup>1</sup> Obielosi 22

<sup>2</sup> Obielosi 22

<sup>3</sup> The General Directory for Catechesis. N\* 105. [www.intratext.com](http://www.intratext.com) > ENG0159. Accessed: 08 October 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Paul VI. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. n\* 28

<sup>5</sup> Obielosi 23

<sup>6</sup> Crawford 2.

<sup>7</sup> Crawford 2.

<sup>8</sup> Crawford. P. 7.

- <sup>9</sup> Crawford. P. 3.
- <sup>10</sup> Crawford. P. 6.
- <sup>11</sup> Wuerl, Donald. *Catechesis and Theology in The Service of the New Evangelization*. P. 1.
- <sup>12</sup> De Rosa, Peter. *Introduction to Catechetics*. London: Geofferey Champman, 1968. P. 7.
- <sup>13</sup> De Rosa, Peter. *Introduction to Catechetics*. London: Geofferey Champman, 1968. P. 8.
- <sup>14</sup> Marthaler, L Berard. *Introducing The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. New York: Paulist Press, 1994. P. 8.
- <sup>15</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. n\* 44.
- <sup>16</sup> Marthaler, L Berard. P. 9.
- <sup>17</sup> *The General Directory for Catechesis*. N\* 46
- <sup>18</sup> Gallagher, Maureen. *The Art of Catechesis: What You Need to Be and to Do*. New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1998. P. 9.
- <sup>19</sup> *The General Directory for Catechesis*. N\* 46
- <sup>20</sup> *The General Directory for Catechesis*. N\* 62.
- <sup>21</sup> *The General Directory for Catechesis*. N\* 62.
- <sup>22</sup> *The General Directory for Catechesis*. N\* 65.
- <sup>23</sup> Vatican II (1965) *Ad Gentes Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*. P. 6.
- <sup>24</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. n\* 14.
- <sup>25</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. n\* 14.
- <sup>26</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. 29.
- <sup>27</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. 22
- <sup>28</sup> John Paul II. *Catechesi Tradendae*. N\* 18