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Catechetics - Catholic Church

Synod of Bishops

CATECHETICS IN OUR TIME WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO CATECHETICS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE



Synod of Bishops

CATECHETICS IN OUR TIME WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO CATECHETICS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

For the use of the Episcopal Conferences

THEME FOR 1977
INTERNATIONAL SYNOD OF BISHOPS

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PART ONE

1. Significance of the Theme

The theme proposed for the study of the next synod of bishops is of lively interest for the life of the Church. On many counts it can also have a great effect on the whole of modern society.

A. The purpose is to reflect on catechetics, with a view to a useful exchange of information and experiences, and for a united commitment to renewal.

Catechetics is an original aspect of the announcement of the gospel.

From the beginning, the Church has always been concerned not only with preaching and awakening faith but also with constantly guiding the faithful to that maturity which is measured according to the fullness of Christ (cf. Eph 4:13).

Christians are in fact born to new life through conversion to the gospel and by means of baptism. Then in the Church they are daily called by the Spirit of the risen Lord to realize the greatness of their vocation, to grow in charity and to give to the world the reason for their hope. Their life is thus a journey which involves the permanent and ever fuller listening to what the Spirit of Christ says and does and commands to be done for peace among men to the glory of God the Father. It is this constant and ever more attentive listening to the Word of God in the Church which sustains believers in the daily situations of life and fits them for the exercise of faith, of charity and of hope.

B. The purpose is to reflect on the catechetics of the Church in our time.

Desirous of being faithful to her Lord, the Church has always sought to exercise her mission according to the needs of different cultures and different periods of history.

One should consider, for example, the "apostolic tradition," the catechetics of the Fathers of the East and of the West, the missionary preaching in Europe, Africa, Asia, North America, Latin America and Oceania. One should consider also the catechisms of the Tridentine period, and subsequently the more recent ones. Each particular church, it could be said, can learn and can recount its own history and thus draw therefrom, on the one hand, the teaching that comes from secure experience and, on the other hand, the incentive for effecting that renewal which today is responsibly requested.

If the Church wishes now to reflect on catechetics, it is because she desires to question herself on the problems which the contemporary world—in such rapid and complex transformation—poses to catechetics itself; and it is because she wishes to devote herself with greater awareness to the service of the people of our time.

A vast gamut of considerations will thus emerge from the next synod, which can shed light on, for example, the following:

—The need to discern the signs of the times, in the light of the Word of God, for a renewal of catechetics;

—The contributions, tensions and even risks to catechetical activity that spring from various cultures;

—The difficulties that catechetics encounters in certain parts of the world, either by reason of the denial of religious liberty or by reason of the serious conditions to which such liberty is subjected;

—The defects, attempts at renewal and the prospects for catechetics at present existing in various countries.

C. It is proposed to reflect in particular on catechetics for the rising generation.

As is happening in the wider sphere of civil society, it is in fact from the problems and needs of the rising generation that there emerges more concretely in the Church also the urgent need for an attentive reflection and a responsible renewal. It is among children and young people, for example, that there is especially noticed, not without contradictions at times, the need for a more knowledgeable and consistent faith. These are the persons who, under many aspects, call more insistently upon the Church.

If therefore the next synod intends to devote particular attention to children and young people, it is not because catechetics can be an activity almost exclusively directed toward them. It is rather because, in this way, the whole Church can question herself with greater precision and realize better her proper responsibilities.

In this way, moreover, the synod will in due manner take account of the future prospects of the Church.

2. Motives for Interest

Besides the motives for interest already noted in the rapid review of the significance of the theme, there are others which better permit the preparation of the work of the next synod.

A. There can be usefully noted, for example, *the continuity with the 1974 Synod*, which examined the theme “Evangelization of the Modern

World." The term "evangelization" was then understood principally in a broad sense, "as the activity with which the church proclaims the Gospel, so that it can take root, develop and increase faith" (cf. Synod of Bishops, 1974, "Evangelization of the Modern World": Introduction, no. 4). It is now a question of considering a more specific ecclesial commitment: that of catechetics.

We can be helped to understand the continuity and the difference between the two synods, in the first place, by Saint Paul's distinction between planting and watering; between the laying of the foundations and the building upon them; between rudimentary knowledge and deepened knowledge; between first spiritual food, compared to milk, and the solid food of perfect teaching (cf. 1 Cor 3:6-10; Acts 13:16-44; 18:26; cf. also Heb 5:12; 6:1; Eph 3:18, etc.).

Also the comments which will be made about our time can subsequently in the next synod be referred not only to problems which derive therefrom for evangelization understood in a wider sense, but to the more precise problems of catechetics.

Finally, another specific aspect of the study of the next synod will be the particular attention given to the rising generation.

B. Above all after the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, throughout the world *catechetics has experienced new ferments which are interesting and at times filled with questions and tensions*. It is as well to speak not only of the organized and in some way official catechetical movement but also, and perhaps above all, of so many humble experiments taking place today in the whole Church.

The catechetical publishing industry is growing, and by facilitating the relationships between the various countries is giving rise to common interest, showing new prospects and spreading new problems.

Even commentaries diffused by the means of social communication frequently touch upon this subject and not without the risks to public opinion from incomplete and distorted information.

Particularly active is the sector of catechetics for children and young people. And it is precisely in this sector that there often occur many hopes for ecclesial renewal, and exhausting discussions that can paralyze pastoral commitment.

By dealing with these problems, the synod of bishops can clarify many questions through a more precise exchange of information; and it can make, when needed, an authoritative contribution to the whole Church, in order to favor more securely new means for the ministry of the Word.

C. *One of the principal problems of our time is the problem of*

education. The whole world is concerned in it. The traditional educational patterns seem inadequate and the new patterns of education do not yet give that sureness that can only come from the test of time.

The Church too, like civil society, feels this uneasiness in her own sphere, in particular in the sphere of catechetics for the rising generation.

The next synod, by showing how the Church is facing this problem, will also make it possible to assume the preoccupations of the people and society of our time. And this can be the means of prolonging the Holy Year and its program of renewal and reconciliation, in accordance also with the authoritative indication of Pope Paul VI (cf. apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, December 8, 1975).

3. Points to be Noted and Method of Work

For the preparation of the synod and for the study of this document, it will be useful to give attention to the following points:

A. The single purpose of the proposed theme. It is useful to clarify gradually that it is a question of treating catechetics in our time, studying particularly the situations, problems and prospects of catechetics for the rising generation.

Thus there will be avoided excessively generic considerations on catechetics, abstract discussions about our time and too specific problems concerning catechetics for children and young people. Attention will rather be directed to the living experiences of the catechizing Church, which is especially concerned with the rising generation.

B. The relationship between catechetics and the other aspects of the Church's Life.

Attention to catechetics for the rising generation will necessarily lead to an examination of the attitudes, difficulties and commitments of the entire Christian community in regard to the Word of God, with particular concern for the responsibilities of the episcopate and of adults in the Church.

Thus there will be avoided both a separation of catechetical questions from their ecclesial context and a dilution of them in the totality of the other present problems of the Church.

C. The relationship between catechetics and the whole life of a person and his or her education.

Catechetics will be considered in its effectiveness for an integral education of the faithful, that is, in relationship with faith, with liturgical and sacramental experience, and with the mission of Christians in the world. It will also be considered with reference to the problems and

aspirations of the people of our time, in such a way that the Christian message will become a motive and criterion of the evaluation of life.

D. Proposed plan.

In these outlines for consultation, an exhaustive plan of study is not proposed. Even though a certain organic unity is not lacking, there is rather proposed a series of arguments which can serve as the basis for the discussion of the different aspects of the theme of the synod.

For each argument a brief illustration has been prepared and some questions have been posed.

In examining the arguments, and even more in making the general synthesis of the study, it is desirable to follow a method which in general takes into account the following: comments on the situation, the interpretation of the principal problems which emerge, and possible orientations and proposals.

The plan proposed has the aim of permitting an orderly consultation of the episcopate and has a mainly indicative value. The bishops have the freedom to adapt to local situations what is given in the illustrative part and what is asked for in the questions.

4. Toward a Responsible Renewal

Like every renewal, the renewal of catechetics can run two risks: the risk of breaking with the past and the risk of fearing the future. These are phenomena that are rather widespread and at times disquieting.

At the conclusion of these rapid introductory premises to the plan of study, it is fitting to recommend a justified feeling of confidence, which can be sustained by an ecclesial experience that is not improvised but now sustained also by a vast series of studies and of documents.

Each one can consult the bibliography at his disposal. In the particular churches, authoritative documents of the episcopal conferences are not lacking. In 1971, the *General Catechetical Directory* was published (by the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, Vatican City) and the Second International Catechetical Congress was held. The study documents and the acts of the Synod of Bishops of 1974 offer an authoritative point of departure.

Finally, for a more profound communion of intentions, everyone can always draw much material from the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the texts of the papal magisterium. Among the latter, in particular, the already-mentioned apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (cf. above no. 2/C) which in a very authoritative way invites all the Church to evangelical witness in the modern world.



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PART TWO

I

5. The Whole Church is Responsible for Catechetics

One of the most promising realities of the catechetical movement in our time seems to be the growing awareness that the whole Church is responsible for catechetics.

Not just the bishops, not just the priests, not just men and women religious, not just certain lay people of goodwill, but the whole Christian community—visible particularly in the local Church—is called upon, with various charisms, various ministries and various responsibilities, to be a credible witness to the risen Lord.

This awareness is not always translated into pastoral action. Hence there follows a series of inconveniences to which precisely the rising generation is particularly exposed.

More concretely, these considerations become important when it is desired to consider what is, in fact, the primary role of the family and the specific task of parents in teaching the faith. Or again, what is the role of the Christian assembly, the liturgical assembly in particular: its manner of gathering together, of listening to the invitation to conversion, of responding with the profession of faith, with praise, with song, with the "breaking of bread," both in the liturgical act and in the consistency and witness of life.

Again: one has to consider what in fact is the mission proper to pastors, to priests and to deacons in the Church. And what is the role of qualified catechists, who act through the Church's mandate and in communion with her.

One has to think of the mission of men and women religious.

One has to examine realistically the experience of ecclesial "groups," "movements" and "associations" and of Catholic action, with regard to education in the faith.

One has to see what in effect is the role of teachers in the school; and what is the competence of Christians in their working environment and their presence as operators and transmitters of social communications.

- *In the concrete, who are the various people in charge of catechetics in your country today?*

- *What main remarks can you make on the responsibility of your Christians for catechetics?*

- *What sections of this responsibility seem most promising?*

- *What difficulties emerge?*

6. All Christians Need Catechetics

In our time more than ever there is needed a catechetics that accompanies Christians throughout their lives, with due regard to their concrete situation of faith.

For this reason, in recent decades there has developed in the Church the awareness that all Christians always need to listen constantly to the Word of God, so that each individual can know the faith in a way suited to his or her own spiritual needs and his or her own responsibilities.

However, it is not easy to translate this awareness into effective pastoral programs.

More or less everywhere, for example, there is the problem of baptized Christians who do not practice or do not believe; there is the problem of Christians who practice but who have little ability to bear witness in life; or the problem of Christians who are very much committed on the social or political level but who do not give sufficient emphasis to a clearly seen life of faith and prayer.

Then there is the growing need to help young people, married couples, parents, workers, those who live in rural environments, those who for various reasons are placed on the margin of life or deprived of freedom, those who have determining responsibilities on the social or educational level to live with greater competence their specific situation as people and as Christians.

There are the expectations of the old, who are more and more placed in a critical situation in modern society.

And then there is the problem, in all its delicacy and complexity, of the handicapped.

As is becoming evident from present experience, it is not just a matter of the need for catechetics that in some way or other reaches everybody. It is also a matter of questioning oneself about the manner of favoring catechetics that will sustain in each individual an experience of faith intimately connected with and sustained by the sacraments and always open to a consistent commitment of life.

- *In your country, to whom is catechetics mainly directed? Who, on the other hand, remains most outside?*

- *In your country, what are the main experiences of catechetics that tries to respond to the needs of the Christians of our time? What are your own preoccupations? What are the orientations of the magisterium?*

- *Does the catechumenate in the full sense exist in your country? Is there discussion of catechetics for a permanent Christian course or catechetical courses of a catechumenal type? If applicable, what is the meaning of these expressions?*

II

7. Catechetics for Children

While in our time catechetics tends to highlight on the one hand the joint educative work of the whole Church and on the other hand the attention that needs to be paid to Christians of all ages and all conditions, this does not mean that one can lessen the importance and originality of catechetics for children. Indeed, it is precisely children that can often be one of the most powerful reminders to the whole Christian community and individual members of the faithful to be attentive to their own vocation and their own educational responsibilities.

For a reflection concerning children, three criteria of observation can be useful; they should however be considered jointly.

There is one criterion that enables one to consider the children's ages. For example, one can say that the term "children" covers those from the age of five or six up to the beginning of adolescence.

There is a criterion of a more cultural and pedagogical order. Children can be those who still basically belong to the world of the family and are growing up through a strong osmosis with the family environment, which today more than ever is open to the intervention or interference of the widest social environment—the school, the mass media, etc.

Finally there is a criterion of the ecclesial order: children are the ones who, progressively and with a first personal awareness, take part in the Church's life, up to the celebration of the sacraments of Christian initiation and the first commitments of personal witness.

These simple criteria of observation, which have no scientific pretensions, can enable one to examine in a more orderly way the main problems of catechetics for children: their psychology, their human and Christian development, their role in the Church, the content and language most suitable for their education, etc.

From this examination there can then be drawn considerations of importance for catechetics for the whole Church.

- *In your country, what consideration is given to children and their education? And what consideration does the Christian community give to this matter? Does the Christian community also pay attention to the very youngest, up to the age of four or five?*

- *In what way is catechetics for children evolving? What are the positive aspects and what are the worrying points?*

- *What is the relationship between catechetics for children and the stages of their liturgical and sacramental initiation?*

- *How does the Christian community participate in the tasks of catechetics for children? How do parents participate?*

8. Catechetics for Young People

The three criteria of observation mentioned above in regard to catechetics for children can also be useful for reflection on catechetics for young people. That is to say, it can be useful to consider the world of the young from the statistical and sociological point of view, from the cultural and pedagogical point of view and from the ecclesial point of view.

However, because of the strong ferments of the world of youth in our time, one must avoid the claim to cover all the vast range of problems: one has rather to pay attention to the main phenomena.

For example, it is as well to reflect upon the attitudes of young people towards structures and social and religious traditions.

Nor will it be out of place to note the risks of the manipulation of the world of youth by the forces of political, economic, social and cultural power.

One can consider the so-called "choice of field" that young people make as regards social problems, politics, culture, love, the family, profession, the Church, etc.

One can describe their presence in the Church, as it concretely is, and one can study the main experiments of catechetics for young people now being carried out in the various countries, with particular reference to those being carried out by groups and ecclesial associations.

It will also be useful to listen to the opinions and testimonies of the young people themselves, and in particular of the priests who devote themselves to their Christian education.

- *What are the main problems that the world of youth poses to catechetics? What are the main preoccupations?*

- *What orientations and dominant choices characterize catechetics for young people in your country?*

- *In particular, what are the most important themes of catechetics for young people? What are the primary objectives regarding education in the faith?*

- *How does the Christian community participate in the task of catechetics for young people? How do the young people themselves participate?*

9. Children, Young People and Adults in the Church

In many respects children and young people make up a world of their own, and are considered for what they are today, not just for what they will be tomorrow.

And yet they are the adults of tomorrow, and they bring to each society the hopes of continuity and renewal.

This is also true for the Church. For this reason the Church has always paid particular attention to catechetics for children and young people. It is to them that will belong the responsibility for living and bearing among people the witness of faith not just today but tomorrow as well.

Hence the Church's preoccupation that catechetics for the rising generation should not fall into the risk of fashion and demagoguery but should respond to their expectations.

Hence the Church's desire that catechetics for the rising generation should be catechetics of authentic freedom and authentic Christian creativity. It is the rising generation that will be able to bear new fruits of evangelical life in situations and in the face of problems that those who lived before them perhaps did not know.

For this reason, while on the one hand the Church particularly addresses herself to young people in the name of the Gospel, on the other hand she must allow herself to be addressed by their way of living and by their way of speaking.

- *What are the difficulties that may be created by the break or lack of understanding between the rising generation and the Church in your country?*

- *On the other hand, what are the particular points of convergence between the Christian message and the rising generation?*

- *What do you think can be done in order to establish a communion between adults and young people in the Church?*

10. Catechetics and Modern Cultures

In examining the task of catechizing the rising generation, there immediately emerge the problems connected with the relationship between catechetics and modern cultures. It is worth considering more closely the real situation of Christians today so as to appreciate better the risks, uncertainties, anxieties, hopes and expectations linked with the growth of their faith.

This is not a new theme for the synod fathers (cf. in particular the 1974 Synod); but it can now be related better to the implications which it has for catechetics, especially catechetics for children and the young.

To put it schematically, the principal features of modern cultures which might be examined for the common benefit of the whole Church would appear to be the following:

—The features of a technical and scientific culture which is non-religious, lay, atheistic or strongly secularized, whether it be of a Marxist or liberal type or of a socioeconomic or psychological type;

—The features of a culture which is non-Christian but profoundly religious, such as are found not only in countries of a different religion or a different religious tradition but also in countries with a Christian tradition;

—The features of popular religiosity, still heavily imbued with values sometimes mixed with folklore and magic, superstition, forms of spiritism and religious syncretism;

—The features of an image-oriented culture, with its characteristic power of suggestion, pedagogical possibilities and risks;

—The propensity for theological debate which involves, interests or disorients so many Christians today.

The study of the relationship between catechetics and contemporary cultures seems important, for it enables one to get to the roots of many tensions and expectations which are very alive in the whole Church, and which are linked in a concrete way with her catechizing task, especially in regard to children and the young.

It will be important in particular not to lose sight of two considerations.

a) The need to pay close attention to the cultural forms proper to each country, region and continent. In this way it will be possible to

note the diversity of language and the variety of pedagogical approaches in catechetics;

b) The need to consider the increasing openness of each country to cultural forms which the means of social communication are inevitably spreading from one end of the globe to the other.

- *What positive features for catechetics can be drawn from the cultural situation in your country? What are the difficulties?*

- *How is catechetics approaching the problem of ecumenism? How is it approaching dialogue with non-Christians?*

- *What particular problems are posed for catechetics by the influence of other cultures, arriving in your country from other countries or continents?*

- *In your country, is an effort being made to renew catechetical language and teaching methods? With what results? What are the difficulties?*

11. Catechetics and Social Situations

Strongly felt in many Christian countries is the relationship between catechetics and social commitment.

In many countries there is developing the so-called catechetics of liberation with interesting prospects and not always without ambiguities or risks. Not a few particular Christian communities are having recourse to their own means and to very committed pastoral programs, precisely in catechetics for children and the young.

On the other hand, others are lagging behind, or, by way of reaction, are holding rigidly to pastoral programs mainly concerned with doctrinal orthodoxy but not with pedagogical orthodoxy, sometimes also ignoring the Second Vatican Council and successive statements of the magisterium relating to the teaching of the faith in the social situation of today.

It often seems that it is precisely in this tension that there arises lack of understanding within the Church. It also seems that it is precisely in the overcoming of this tension that the most significant attempts at renewal are to be placed.

A number of precise questions emerge at this point regarding, for example:

- The relationship between “doctrinal tradition” and “human advancement”;

- The relationship between catechetics and political commitment;

—The relationship between theology and the human sciences.

Theology too has its word to say on these problems, and not without good effect, with the debates that frequently follow.

- *What are the most important experiments now being conducted in your country for a positive solution of the relationship between catechetics and social situations?*

- *In particular, what problems does the local situation pose for the catechizing of the young? What is being done about this? With what results?*

12. Catechetics and Liberty

In the same context of the relationship between catechetics and social situations, an important problem for the Church in our time is the relationship between catechetics and liberty, and this under two aspects.

On the one hand, catechetics must work for the education of free and responsible persons. On the other, catechetics requires effective conditions of religious liberty, above all when it is a question of catechizing children and the young.

With reference to religious liberty, the Second Vatican Council emphasized:

—The duty and the right of each individual to seek religious truth;

—The right of the religious community to teach and publicly manifest its faith;

—The right of every family to arrange freely its own religious life and to decide the religious education of its children (*cf. Declaration on Religious Liberty*, nos. 3-5).

The right to religious liberty is reconfirmed in many documents that deal with international society.

- *What liberty is granted in your country for the Christian education of the rising generation?*

- *How does catechetics in your country intend to promote liberation from social, political, economic and moral conditioning?*

13. Catechetics and the School

The relationship between catechetics and the school deserves to be considered by the next synod.

It is widely held that the place for catechetics in the true sense is the ecclesial environment: the Christian family, the parish community, *communautés de base*, etc.

Others hold that the personality of children and of many young people is decisively formed by the school.

Moreover, throughout the world there is a tendency to recognize that the school is at the service of all and works for the integral education of the person.

Nor may one overlook the role of the universities in the various countries, and the need for a catechetical pastoral program enabling young university students to lay an adequate foundation for their faith and for their responsibilities as Christians in our time.

- *Is there catechetics in the schools in your country? How is it understood? With what result and with what limitations is it carried out?*

- *What steps do you take to catechize children and young people who do not go to school?*

- *Please describe what is being done pastorally to catechize young people at the universities in your country. What interest do university students show in seriously deepening their faith?*

- *What provision is made to help them in their spiritual needs inside and outside the university?*

- *Are there associations of Catholic university students? How effective is their presence in the university world and in the Church?*

14. Catechetics and the Means of Social Communication

The means of social communication today constitute a reality whose consequences have vast repercussions for the spreading of ideas and forms of behavior.

Their use as teaching instruments is continually increasing and poses important problems for catechetics.

Children and young people especially are everywhere becoming more and more accustomed to this teaching aid, and it would be very risky if catechetics ignored it.

- *What role do the means of social communication play in your country? What problems do they present for catechetics?*

- *In what way does catechetics educate children and young people for an image-dominated culture?*

- *Does your country have at its disposal means of social communication for catechetics? Which means? With what results are they employed?*

- *What do you suggest should be done in this regard to organize international collaboration?*

15. Catechetics for Christian Living

The aims, content and methods of catechetics, also in the necessary consideration of the exigencies of Christians and of their time, can, in the end, come only from a preferential vision of faith, which is linked in the Church to the revelation of God the Father in his Son, Jesus Christ.

Such a vision of the faith requires today the working out of catechetical models which will be both respectful of tradition and able to meet the exigencies of Christian living in our time.

What models of Christian education should today inspire the renewal of catechetics?

Is it not necessary to learn to distinguish with greater maturity the aim, content and methods of catechetics today from those of other times?

Should not one learn to distinguish the task of catechetics from the task of a pure and simple theological and doctrinal teaching?

On the other hand, can catechetics be limited to the acquisition of simple Christian attitudes, without necessary doctrinal rigor and without regard for the whole Christian truth?

These and other questions are constantly being raised among those who in different ways are involved in the field of catechetics in general and of catechetics for children and young people in particular.

To sum up it could be said that today there is a tendency to enrich the "Catechism of Christian Doctrine" *in such a way that, while faithfully presenting the message, catechetics can offer a foundation and illumination for the whole of Christian life.* This renewal, which is not always without risks, seems fundamental especially for catechetics for children and young people.

- *Which aims of catechetics are of most concern to you? The transmission of doctrine? The committal of the faith to memory? Preparation for the sacraments? Training to learn to see everything in the light of faith? The Christian interpretation of life?*

- *Are these problems concerning the purpose of catechetics being studied in your country? What orientations have emerged?*

16. Content of the Faith and Catechetics

The fullness of the Christian message is contained in scripture and in the tradition of the Church. Scripture and tradition are the "documents of faith" and are also the language of the Church.

Catechetics is being remodelled in accordance with these documents as its primary source. Catechetics must continually ask itself what aspects of scripture and tradition it should emphasize, in what order and with what pedagogical interpretation. Thus the arrangement of any program, its content and presentation call for continual attention in order to ensure a genuine transmission of the faith.

The episcopal ministry is called upon to discern what are the concrete ways for the transmission of the faith which will best ensure both fidelity to the gospel and attention to the needs of the faithful.

There are many practical tendencies in this field:

—Some people reduce catechetics to a demanding effort of evangelization;

—Others reduce catechetics to a pure explanation of doctrine or theology, without regard for the concrete conditions of the faith of the Christians of our time;

—Others consider catechetics above all as an interpretation of the human situation;

—Others insist on strong religious instruction, especially for children and young people, leaving aside or postponing until later liturgical and sacramental experience;

—Others look on catechetics primarily as a proximate preparation for the celebration of the liturgy and the sacraments.

These tendencies are more immediately encountered in catechetics for children and young people.

- *What are the principal tendencies in your country from the point of view of content for teaching the message of faith?*
- *Is there a development taking place? If so, what exactly?*
- *How do you judge these tendencies? According to what criteria?*
- *What do you think should be done in order that catechetics today may demonstrate the originality of Christian salvation?*

17. Catechetical Method

Several times in the course of these outlines there have emerged remarks and questions concerning the catechetical method.

Without claiming to examine the importance and study of this catechetical problem, it may now be opportune to consider more carefully the salient aspects of the experiments now being carried out in various countries, in relation to the fundamental criterion of all catechetical methodology, namely the criterion of fidelity to God and fidelity to man.

One may thus reflect on the manner of bringing Christians, especially children and young people, to a knowledge of the documents of revelation, the history and life of the church, the lives of the saints, the formulation and expression of faith, and the tasks of witness and service in the world.

One may consider the methods followed by catechetics for a clear and honest education of Christian thinking, which should always be accompanied by religious experiences and exercises of charity prepared and carried out with care.

Account will be taken of the specific exigencies regarding the personal formation of the Christian conscience, while always remaining open to the comparison and enrichment that can derive from community and group experience.

Here too there can be summed up the considerations mentioned several times in the present outlines with regard to the age, the spiritual and cultural conditions and the educational background of those to whom catechetics is addressed, and of the use of audiovisual methods. It will also be useful to examine the validity of other means in catechetical methodology (courses of talks, religious plays, the use of music, competitions, examinations, etc.).

Nor will it be out of place to give consideration to a number of important didactic aspects that appear essential to any catechetical methodology: doctrinal formulations, for example, that are faithful to the text of faith and Christian conduct; or biblical or hagiographical narratives, prayer, the celebration of the Word, singing, also silence; and further, concrete initiatives considered useful for education to research, discovery, personal and group expression, friendly conversation, comparison and dialogue.

● *In your country, what emphasis is given in catechetics to the documents of revelation, the history and life of the church, and the lives of the saints?*

● *What criteria do you follow in catechetics in order to present a true formulation of the faith that will also train the memory?*

● *What methodological orientations do you recommend for catechetics for children and young people respectively?*

● *What more strictly didactic aspects seem to you important for catechetics in our time?*

18. Toward Collaboration in the Church

At the time of the Council of Trent, the Church, in her concern for the formation of the Christian community, concentrated her efforts principally on the formation of a clergy who would assume full responsibility for that community. It was for this reason, for example, that seminaries were established.

Since then, as a result of the endeavors of many bishops, priests and lay people, there has developed a greater sense of the coresponsibility of Christians in proclaiming and bearing witness to the gospel.

The fruits of this development have now matured, in particular, in the concept of the Church which was adopted by the Second Vatican Council in faithful accord with tradition: the Church as ever a disciple, ever missionary; the Church as the mystical body of Christ and the People of God; the Church as the sacrament in Christ of divine salvation in the world and the "light of the nations," awaiting the Lord's return.

Evangelization, like catechetics which is one specific expression of it, is the task of the apostles and their successors; it is likewise the task of the whole Church, according to the charisms and the ministries of each of her members.

The pastoral implementation of the teachings reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council demands that there be an ordered distinction between the various ministries and a hierarchical communion of all catechists. It also requires the proper training and concrete collaboration of all those who, in their different ways, take an active part in the Church's prophetic task.

The present outlines began precisely by drawing attention to the prophetic mission of the whole Church.

By way of conclusion, it is now proposed to note what is being done in the various countries for the specific preparation of those working in the field of catechetics, and in particular for catechists for the rising generation. From the exchange of experiences it is hoped there will also develop a growing measure of collaboration.

- *What orientations and programs has the episcopate in your country introduced to foster the coresponsibility of the whole of your church in catechetics?*

- *What steps are you taking to prepare catechists, priests, religious and laity?*

- Which emphases in the spirituality of catechetics do you value most?
- Are there catechetical institutes in your country? What has been their experience? What are their future prospects?
- What need do you see for international collaboration and for contact with the Holy See?

CONCLUSION

It is fitting to conclude these study outlines for the preparation of the synod with an invitation to reflect upon the meditation on unity which the Holy Father Pope Paul VI recently offered to the Church:

"The power of evangelization will find itself considerably diminished if those who proclaim the gospel are divided among themselves in all sorts of ways. Is this not perhaps one of the great sicknesses of evangelization today? Indeed, if the gospel which we proclaim is seen to be rent by doctrinal disputes, ideological polarizations or mutual condemnations among Christians, at the mercy of the latter's differing views on Christ and the Church and even because of their different concepts of society and human institutions, how can those to whom we address our preaching fail to be disturbed, disoriented, even scandalized?

"The Lord's spiritual testament tells us that unity among his followers is not only the proof that we are his but also the proof that He is sent by the Father. It is the test of the credibility of Christians and of Christ himself. As evangelizers, we must offer Christ's faithful not the image of people divided and separated by unedifying quarrels, but the image of people who are mature in faith and capable of finding a meeting-point beyond the real tensions, thanks to a shared, sincere and disinterested search for truth. Yes, the destiny of evangelization is certainly bound up with the witness of unity given by the Church. This is a source of responsibility and also of comfort." (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of December 8, 1975, no. 77)

