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| **Criteria for the presentation of the message**97. The criteria for presenting the Gospel message in catechesis are closely inter-connected with each other as they spring from the same source.– The message centered on the person of Jesus Christ *(christocentricity),* by its inherent dynamic, introduces the trinitarian dimension of the same message.– The proclamation of the Good News of the Kingdom of God, centered on the *gift of Salvation*, implies a message of *liberation*.– The *ecclesial*characterof the message reflects its *historic* nature because catechesis—as with all evangelization—is realized within "the time of the Church".– The Gospel message seeks *inculturation*because the Good News is destined for all peoples. This can only be accomplished when the Gospel message is presented in its *integrity and purity.*– The Gospel message is a *comprehensive message,*with its own hierarchy of truth. It is this harmonious vision of the Gospel which converts it into a profoundly *meaningful* event for the human person.Although these criteria are valid for the entire ministry of the word, here they are developed in relation to catechesis.**The christocentricity of the Gospel message**98. Jesus Christ not only transmits the word of God: he *is*the Word of God. Catechesis is therefore completely tied to him. Thus what must characterize the message transmitted by catechesis is, above all, its "christocentricity". (310) This may be understood in various senses.– It means, firstly, that "at the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth". (311) In reality, the fundamental task of catechesis is to present Christ and everything in relation to him. This explicitly promotes the following of Jesus and communion with him; every element of the message tends to this.– Secondly, christocentricity means that Christ is the "centre of salvation history", (312) presented by catechesis. He is indeed the final event toward which all salvation history converges. He, who came "in the fullness of time" is "the key, the centre and end of all human history". (313) The catechetical message helps the Christian to locate himself in history and to insert himself into it, by showing that Christ is the ultimate meaning of this history.– Christocentricity, moreover, means that the Gospel message does not come from man, but is the Word of God. The Church, and in her name, every catechist can say with truth: "my teaching is not from myself: it comes from the one who sent me" (*John*7,16). Thus all that is transmitted by catechesis is "the teaching of Jesus Christ, the truth that he communicates, or more precisely, the Truth that he is". (314) Christocentricity obliges catechesis to transmit what Jesus teaches about God, man, happiness, the moral life, death etc. without in any way changing his thought. (315)The Gospels, which narrate the life of Jesus, are central to the catechetical message. They are themselves endowed with a "catechetical structure". (316) They express the teaching which was proposed to the first Christian communities, and which also transmits the life of Jesus, his message and his saving actions. In catechesis, "the four Gospels occupy a central place because Christ Jesus is their centre". (317)**The trinitarian christocentricity of the Gospel message**99. The Word of God, incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, Son of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is the Word of the Father who speaks to the world through his Spirit. Jesus constantly refers to the Father, of whom he knows he is the Only Son, and to the Holy Spirit, by whom he knows he is anointed. He is ?the Way' that leads to the innermost mystery of God. (318) The christocentricity of catechesis, in order of its internal dynamic, leads to confession of faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.It is essentially a trinitarian christocentricity. Christians, at Baptism, are configured to Christ, "One of the Trinity", (319) and constituted "sons in the Son", in communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Their faith is, therefore, radically Trinitarian. "The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life". (320)100. The trinitarian christocentricity of the Gospel message leads catechesis to attend amongst others, to the following points.– The internal structure of catechesis: every mode of presentation must always be christocentric-trinitarian: "Through Christ to the Father in the Holy Spirit". (321) "If catechesis lacks these three elements or neglects their close relationship, the Christian message can certainly lose its proper character". (322)– Following the pedagogy of Jesus in revelation of the Father, of himself as the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, catechesis shows the most intimate life of God, starting with his salvific works for the good of humanity. (323) The works of God reveal who he is and the mystery of his inner Being throws light on all of his works. It is analogous with human relationships: people reveal themselves by their actions and, the more deeply we know them, the better we understand what they do. (324)– The presentation of the innermost being of God, revealed by Jesus, the mystery of being one in essence and three in Person, has vital implications for the lives of human beings. To confess belief in one God means, that "man should not submit his personal freedom in an absolute manner to any earthly power". (325) It also implies that humanity, made in the image and likeness of God who is a "communion of persons", is called to be a fraternal society, comprised of sons and daughters of the same Father, and equal in personal dignity. (326) The human and social implications of the Christian concept of God are immense. The Church, in professing her faith in the Trinity and by proclaiming it to the world, understands herself as "a people gathered together in the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit". (327)**A message proclaiming salvation**101. The message of Jesus about God is Good News for humanity. Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God; (328) a new and definitive intervention by God, with a transforming power equal and even superior to his creation of the world. (329) In this sense, "Christ proclaims salvation as the outstanding element and, as it were, the central point of his Good News. This is the great gift of God which is to be considered as comprising not merely liberation from all those things by which man is oppressed, but especially liberation from sin and from the domination of the evil one, a liberation which incorporates that gladness enjoyed by every man who knows God and is known by him, who sees God and who surrenders himself trustingly to him". (330) Catechesis transmits this message of the Kingdom, so central to the preaching of Jesus. In doing so, the message "is gradually deepened, developed in its implicit consequences", (331) and thus manifests its great repercussions for man and the world.102. In its drawing out the Gospel kerygma of Jesus, catechesis underlines the following basic aspects:– Jesus, with the Kingdom, proclaims and reveals that God is not a distant inaccessible Being, "a remote power without a name" (332) but a Father, who is present among his creatures and whose power is his love. This testimony about God as Father, offered in a simple and direct manner, is fundamental to catechesis.– Jesus shows, at the same time, that God, with the coming of his Kingdom offers the gift of integral salvation, frees from sin, brings one to communion with the Father, grants divine sonship, and in conquering death, promises eternal life. (333) This complete salvation is at once, immanent and eschatological, because "it has its beginning certainly in this life, but which achieves its consummation in eternity". (334)– Jesus, in announcing the Kingdom, proclaims the justice of God: he proclaims God's judgement and our responsibility. The proclamation of this judgement, with its power to form consciences, is a central element in the Gospel, and Good News for the world: for those who suffer the denial of justice and for those who struggle to re-instate it; for those who have known love and existence in solidarity, because penance and forgiveness are possible, since in the Cross of Christ we all receive redemption from sin. The call to conversion and belief in the Gospel of the Kingdom—a Kingdom of justice, love and peace, and in whose light we shall be judged—is fundamental for catechesis.– Jesus declares that the Kingdom of God is inaugurated in him, in his very person. (335) He reveals, in fact, that he himself, constituted as Lord, assumes the realization of the Kingdom until he consigns it, upon completion, to the Father when he comes again in glory. (336) "Here on earth the Kingdom is mysteriously present; when the Lord comes it will enter into its perfection". (337)– Jesus shows, equally, that the community of his disciples, the Church, "is, on earth, the seed and the beginning of that Kingdom" (338) and, like leaven in the dough, what she desires is that the Kingdom of God grow in the world like a great tree, giving shelter to all peoples and cultures. "The Church is effectively and concretely at the service of the Kingdom". (339)– Finally, Jesus manifests that the history of humanity is not journeying towards nothingness, but, with its aspects of both grace and sin, is in him taken up by God and transformed. In its present pilgrimage towards the Father's house, it already offers a foretaste of the world to come, where, assumed and purified, it will reach perfection. "Accordingly, evangelization will include a prophetic proclamation of another's life, that is of man's sublime and eternal vocation. This vocation is at once connected with and distinct from his present state". (340)**A message of liberation**103. The Good News of the Kingdom of God, which proclaims salvation, includes a "message of liberation". (341) In preaching this Kingdom, Jesus addressed the poor in a very special way: "Blessed are you poor, yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh" (*Lk*6,20-21) The Beatitudes of Jesus, addressed to those who suffer, are an eschatological proclamation of the salvation which the Kingdom brings. They note that painful experience to which the Gospel is so particularly sensitive: poverty, hunger and the suffering of humanity. The community of the disciples of Jesus, the Church, shares today the same sensitivity as the Master himself showed them. With great sorrow she turns her attention to those "peoples who, as we all know, are striving with all their power and energy to overcome all those circumstances which compel them to live on the border line of existence: hunger, chronic epidemics, illiteracy, poverty, injustice between nations... economic and cultural neo-colonialism". (342) All forms of poverty, "not only economic but also cultural and religious" (343) are a source of concern for the Church.As an important dimension of her mission, "the Church is duty bound—as her bishops have insisted—to proclaim the liberation of these hundreds of millions of people, since very many of them are her children. She has the duty of helping this liberation, of bearing witness on its behalf and of assuring its full development". (344)104. To prepare Christians for this task, catechesis is attentive, amongst other things, to the following aspects:– it shall situate the message of liberation in the prospective of the "specifically religious objective of evangelization", (345) since it would lose its raison d'être "if it were divorced from the religious basis by which it is sustained which is the kingdom of God in its full theological sense; (346) thus, the message of liberation "cannot be confined to any restricted sphere whether it be economic, political, social or doctrinal. It must embrace the whole man in all his aspects and components, extending to his relation to the absolute, even to the Absolute which is God"; (347)– catechesis, in the ambit of moral education, shall present Christian social morality as a demand and consequence of the "radical liberation worked by Christ"; (348) in effect, the Good News which Christians profess with hearts full of hope is: Christ has liberated the world and continues to liberate it; this is the source of Christian praxis, which is the fulfilment of the great commandment of love;– at the same time, in the task of initiating mission, catechesis shall arouse in catechumens and those receiving catechesis "a preferential option for the poor", (349) which "far from being a sign of individualism or sectarianism, makes manifest the universality of the Church's nature and mission. This option is not exclusive" (350) but implies "a commitment to justice, according to each individual's role, vocation and circumstances". (351)**The ecclesial nature of the Gospel message**105. The ecclesial nature of catechesis confers on the transmitted Gospel message an inherent ecclesial character. Catechesis originates in the Church's confession of faith and leads to the profession of faith of the catechumen and those to be catechized. The first official word of the Church addressed to those about to be baptized, having called them by name, is: "What do you ask of God's Church?" The candidates' reply is *"Faith"*. (352) The catechumen who has discovered the Gospel and desires to know it better, realizes that it lives in the hearts of believers. 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.Hence, when catechesis transmits the mystery of Christ, the faith of the whole people of God echoes in its message throughout the course of history: the faith received by the Apostles from Christ himself and under the action of the Holy Spirit; that of the martyrs who have borne witness to it and still bear witness to it by their blood; that of the saints who have lived it and live it profoundly; that of the Fathers and doctors of the Church who have taught it brilliantly; that of the missionaries who proclaim it incessantly; that of theologians who help to understand it better; that of pastors who conserve it with zeal and love and who interpret it authentically. In truth, there is present in catechesis the faith of all those who believe and allow themselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit.106. This faith, transmitted by the ecclesial community, is one. Although the disciples of Jesus Christ form a community dispersed throughout the whole world, and even though catechesis transmits the faith in many different cultural idioms, the Gospel which is handed on is one. The confession of faith is the same. There is only one Baptism: "one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism one God and Father of us all" (*Eph*4,5). Catechesis, in the Church, therefore, is that service which introduces catechumens and those to be catechized to the unity of the profession of faith. (353) By its very nature, it nourishes the bond of unity (354) and brings about an awareness of belonging to a great community which cannot be limited by space or time: "From Abel the just to the last of the chosen ones to the end of the earth, to the close of the age. (355)**The historical character of the mystery of salvation**107. The confession of faith of the disciples of Jesus Christ springs from a pilgrim Church which has been sent on mission. It is not yet that of the glorious proclamation of the journey's end; rather, it is one which corresponds to the *"times of the Church"*. (356) The *"economy of Salvation"*has thus an historical character as it is realized in time: "*...in time past it began, made progress, and in Christ reached its highest point; in the present time it displays its force and awaits its consummation in the future*. (357) For this reason, the Church, in transmitting today the Christian message, begins with the living awareness which she carries of it, has a constant "memory" of the saving events of the past and makes them known. In the light of these, she interprets the present events of human history, where the Spirit of God is continually renewing the face of the earth, and she awaits with faith for the Lord's coming. In Patristic catechesis, the narration *(narratio)* of the wonderful deeds of God and the awaiting *(expectatio)* of Christ's return always accompanied the exposition of the mysteries of faith. (358)108. The historical character of the Christian message requires that catechesis attend to the following points:– presentation of salvation history by means of Biblical catechesis so as to make known the "deeds and the words" with which God has revealed himself to man: the great stages of the Old Testament by which he prepared the journey of the Gospel; (359) the life of Jesus, Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary who by his actions and teaching brought Revelation to completion; (360) the history of the Church which transmits Revelation: this history, read within the perspective of faith, is a fundamental part of the content of catechesis;– in explaining the Creed and the content of Christian morality by means of doctrinal catechesis, the Gospel message should illuminate the 'today' of the history of salvation; indeed, "...in this way the ministry of the Word not only recalls the revelation of God's wonders which was made in time...but at the same time, in the light of this revelation, interprets human life in our age, the signs of the times, and the things of this world, for the plan of God works in these for the salvation of men"; (361)– it should situate the sacraments within the history of salvation by means of a mystagogy which "...re-lives the great events of salvation history in the 'today' of her liturgy"; (362) reference to the historico-salvific 'today' is essential to such catechesis, and thus helps catechumens and those to be catechized "to open themselves to this 'spiritual' understanding of the economy of Salvation..."; (363)– the *"deeds and words"*of Revelation point to the *"mystery contained in them"*; (364) catechesis helps to make the passage from sign to mystery; it leads to the discovery of the mystery of the Son of God behind his humanity; behind the history of the Church, it uncovers the mystery of her being the "sacrament of salvation;" behind the "signs of the times", it encounters the traces of God's presence and plan: catechesis, thus, shall exhibit that knowledge which is typical of faith, which "is knowledge through signs". (365)**Inculturation of the Gospel message**(366)109. The Word of God became man, a concrete man, in space and time and rooted in a specific culture: "Christ by his incarnation committed himself to the particular social and cultural circumstances of the men among whom he lived". (367) This is the original "inculturation" of the word of God and is the model of all evangelization by the Church, "called to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures". (368)'Inculturation' (369) of the faith, whereby in a wonderful exchange are comprised, "all the riches of the nations which have been given to Christ as an inheritance", (370) it is a profound and global process and a slow journey. (371) It is not simply an external adaptation designed to make the Christian message more attractive or superficially decorative. On the contrary, it means the penetration of the deepest strata of persons and peoples by the Gospel which touches them deeply, "going to the very centre and roots" (372) of their cultures.In this work of inculturation, however, the Christian community must discern, on the one hand, which riches to "take" (373) up as compatible with the faith; on the other, it must seek to "purify" (374) and "transform" (375) those criteria, modes of thought and lifestyles which are contrary to the Kingdom of God. Such discernment is governed by two basic principles: "compatibility with the Gospel and communion with the universal Church". (376) All of the people of God must be involved in this process which "...needs to take place gradually, in such a way that it really is an expression of the community's Christian experience". (377)110. In this inculturation of the faith, there are different concrete tasks for catechesis. Amongst these mention must be made of:– looking to the ecclesial community as the principal factor of inculturation: an expression and efficient instrument of this task is represented by the catechist who, with a profound religious sense, also possesses a living social conscience and is well rooted in his cultural environment; (378)– drawing up local catechisms which respond to the demands of different cultures (379) and which present the Gospel in relation to the hopes, questions and problems which these cultures present;– making the Catechumenate and catechetical institutes into "centres of inculturation", incorporating, with discernment, the language, symbols, and values of the cultures in which the catechumens and those to be catechized live;– presenting the Christian message in such a way as to prepare those who are to proclaim the Gospel to be capable "of giving reasons for their hope" (*1 Pt*3,15) in cultures often pagan or post-Christian: effective apologetics to assist the faith-culture dialogue is indispensable today.**The integrity of the Gospel message**111. In its task of inculturating the faith, catechesis must transmit the Gospel message in its integrity and purity. Jesus proclaimed the Gospel integrally: "...because I have made known to you all that I have heard from my Father" (*Jn*15,15) This same integrity is demanded by Christ of his disciples in his sending them on mission to preach the Gospel: "...and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (*Mt*28,19). A fundamental principle of catechesis, therefore, is that of safeguarding the integrity of the message and avoiding any partial or distorted presentation: "In order that the sacrificial offering of his or her faith should be perfect, the person who becomes a disciple of Christ has the right to receive 'the words of faith,' not in mutilated, falsified or diminished form but whole and entire, in all its rigour and vigour". (380)112. Two closely connected dimensions underlie this criterion.– The *integral*presentation of the Gospel message, without ignoring certain fundamental elements, or without operating a selectivity with regard to the deposit of faith. (381) Catechesis, on the contrary, "must take diligent care faithfully to present the entire treasure of the Christian message". (382) This is accomplished, gradually, by following the example of the divine pedagogy with which God revealed himself progressively and gradually. Integrity must also be accompanied by adaptation. Consequently catechesis starts out with a simple proposition of the integral structure of the Christian message, and proceeds to explain it in a manner adapted to the capacity of those being catechized. Without restricting itself to this initial exposition, it gradually and increasingly proposes the Christian message more amply and with greater explicitness, in accordance with the capacity of those being catechized and with the proper character of catechesis. (383) These two levels of the integral exposition of the Gospel message are called: *intensive integrity*and*"extensive integrity".*– The presentation of the authentic Gospel message, in all of its purity, without reducing idemands for fear of rejection and without imposing heavy burdens which it does not impose, since the yoke of Jesus is light. (384) The criterion of authenticity is closely connected with that of inculturation since the latter is concerned to "translate" (385) the essentials of the Gospel message into a definite cultural language. There is always tension in this necessary task: "Evangelization will lose much of its power and efficacy if it does not take into consideration the people to whom it is addressed.". however "it may lose its very nature and savour if on the pretext of transposing its content into another language that content is rendered meaningless or is corrupted... (386)113. In the complex relationship between inculturation and the integrity of the Christian message, the criterion to be applied is a Gospel attitude of "a missionary openness to the integral salvation of the world". (387) This must always unite acceptance of truly human and religious values with the missionary task of proclaiming the whole truth of the Gospel, without falling either into closed inflexibility or into facile accommodations which enfeeble the Gospel and secularize the Church. Gospel authenticity excludes both of these attitudes which are contrary to the true meaning of mission.**A comprehensive and hierarchical message**114. This message transmitted by catechetics has a "comprehensive hierarchical character", (388) which constitutes a coherent and vital synthesis of the faith. This is organized around the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, in a christocentric perspective, because this is "the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them". (389) Starting with this point, the harmony of the overall message requires a "hierarchy of truths", (390) in so far as the connection between each one of these and the foundation of the faith differs. Nevertheless, this hierarchy "does not mean that some truths pertain to Faith itself less than others, but rather that some truths are based on others as of a higher priority and are illumined by them". (391)115. All aspects and dimensions of the Christian message participate in this hierarchical system.– The history of salvation, recounting the "marvels of God" (mirabilia Dei), what He has done, continues to do and will do in the future for us, is organized in reference to Jesus Christ, the "centre of salvation history". (392) The preparation for the Gospel in the Old Testament, the fullness of Revelation in Jesus Christ, and the time of the Church, provide the structure of all salvation history of which creation and eschatology are its beginning and its end.– The Apostles' Creed demonstrates how the Church has always desired to present the Christian mystery in a vital synthesis. This Creed is a synthesis of and a key to reading all of the Church's doctrine, which is hierarchically ordered around it. (393)– The sacraments, which, like regenerating forces, spring from the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, are also a whole. They form "an organic whole in which each particular sacrament has its own vital place". (394) In this whole, the Holy Eucharist occupies a unique place to which all of the other sacraments are ordained. The Eucharist is to be presented as the "sacrament of sacraments". (395)– The double commandment of love of God and neighbour is—in the moral message—a hierarchy of values which Jesus himself established: "On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (*Mt*22,40). The love of God and neighbour, which sum up the Decalogue, are lived in the spirit of the Beatitudes and constitute the magna carta of the Christian life proclaimed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. (396)– The Our Father gathers up the essence of the Gospel. It synthesizes and hierarchically structures the immense riches of prayer contained in Sacred Scripture and in all of the Church's life. This prayer, given by Jesus to his disciples, makes clear the childlike trust and the deepest desires with which one can turn to God. (397)**A meaningful message for the human person**116. The Word of God, in becoming man, assumed human nature in everything, except sin. In this way Jesus Christ, who is "the image of the invisible God", (*Col*1,15) is also the perfect man. From this it follows that "in reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear". (398)Catechesis, in presenting the Christian message, not only shows who God is and what his saving plan is, but, as Jesus himself did, it reveals man to man and makes him more aware of his sublime vocation. (399) Revelation, in fact, "... is not... isolated from life or artificially juxtaposed to it. It is concerned with the ultimate meaning of life and it illumines the whole of life with the light of the Gospel, to inspire it or to question it". (400)The relationship between the Christian message and human experience is not a simple methodological question. It springs from the very end of catechesis, which seeks to put the human person in communion with Jesus Christ. In his earthly life he lived his humanity fully: "He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind, he acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved". (401) Therefore, "Christ enables us to live in him all that he himself lived, and he lives it in us". (402) Catechesis operates through this identity of human experience between Jesus the Master and his disciple and teaches to think like him, to act like him, to love like him. (403) To live communion with Christ is to experience the new life of grace. (404)117. For this reason, catechesis is eminently christological in presenting the Christian message and should therefore "be concerned with making men attentive to their more significant experiences, both personal and social; it also has the duty of placing under the light of the Gospel, the questions which arise from those experiences so that there may be stimulated within men a right desire to transform their ways of life". (405) In this sense:– in first evangelization, proper to the pre-catechumenate or to pre-catechesis, the proclamation of the Gospel shall always be done in close connection with human nature and its aspirations, and will show how the Gospel fully satisfies the human heart; (406)– in biblical catechesis, it shall help to interpret present-day human life in the light of the experiences of the people of Israel, of Jesus Christ and the ecclesial community, in which the Spirit of the Risen Jesus continually lives and works;– in explaining the Creed, catechesis shall show how the great themes of the faith (creation, original sin, Incarnation, Easter, Pentecost, eschatology) are always sources of life and light for the human being;– moral catechesis, in presenting what makes life worthy of the Gospel (407) and in promoting the Beatitudes as the spirit that must permeate the Decalogue, shall root them in the human virtues present in the heart of man; (408)– liturgical catechesis shall make constant reference to the great human experiences represented by the signs and symbols of liturgical actions originating in Jewish and Christian culture. (409)be organized in one way rather than another". (412) It is possible to begin with God so as to arrive at Christ, and vice versa. Equally, it is possible to start with man and come to God, and conversely. The selection of a particular order for presenting the message is conditioned by circumstances, and by the faith level of those to be catechized. It will always be necessary to elaborate with care that pedagogical method which is most appropriate to the circumstances of an ecclesial community or of those to whom catechesis is specifically addressed. Hence derives the need to investigate correctly in order to find those means which best respond to different situations.It is a matter for Bishops to draw up more particular norms for this and to apply them by means of Catechetical Directories and catechisms which cater for different ages and cultural conditions, as well as in other ways deemed more appropriate. (413) |