**New Approaches to Catechesis in The Light of the New General Directive for Catechesis**

**By**

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**Introduction:**

His Grace, Most Rev. Dr. Alfred Adewale Martins, the Metropolitan Archbishop, Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos, Msgri, and Rev. Fathers. It gives me a great pleasure to be given the opportunity to discuss with the priests of Lagos Archdiocese the topic: “*A new approach to Catechesis in the Light of the New General Directive for Catechesis.*”

The timeless task Christ gave to the apostles and by extension to the Church is to “go and make disciples of nations and teach them all that I commanded you,” (Cf. Matthew 28: 19). This mandate is unchanging, but the ways to go about it is subject to change. Heraclitus, an ancient Greek Philosopher was credited the statement that: “everything is in a state of constant flux,” in other words, change is an ultimate reality in nature. Bishops and priests, serve a God that does not change in a Church that has fundamental truths of faith that are constant. However, the means of transmitting knowledge about God and truths about him which we regard as Catechesis must adapt to new ways of transmission of the truth of faith.

In this intervention, I will briefly define what catechesis is; there will be an exposition of the new Directory on catechesis. New approaches to catechesis in the light of the New Directory will be examined. Finally, I will also share the practical ways we have adopted in our attempt to catechize the faithful in Osogbo Diocese.

**Catechesis in Perspective.**

As a form of useful reminder, Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation: *Catechesi Tradendae* sums up what catechesis is in these words: “All in all, it can be taken here that catechesis is an 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.” (no 5)

Catechesis means the passing on of the deposit of faith to the new members of the Church. From time immemorial, it denotes the elementary teaching given to new converts with a view to baptism. Catechesis has higher purpose as well, being the proclamation of the “kerygma” with the intent on evangelisation as well as instruction given to the baptized faithful in the Church. In a wider sense of the word, catechesis encompasses all the ideas mentioned. In other words, catechesis isn’t just a class. It is a formation in the life of discipleship.

There are three categories of Christian catechesis namely: (a) Catechesis of initiation or fundamental catechesis, (b) Permanent catechesis, (c) Perfective catechesis.[[1]](#footnote-1) What do we mean? Catechesis of initiation deals with basic catechism for new converts, those preparing for baptism, communion and first reception of the sacrament of reconciliation or confession.

Permanent catechesis deals with the consolidation of the faith in the faithful. This basically is meant to draw out the implications of the Gospels in the various situations of life, as far as is possible and practical. As well as deepening of the understanding of the doctrines of the Church. This gathering is an example of an attempt to promote permanent catechesis and how to implement it. Perfective catechesis is basically for higher level of formal studies of Theology such as in Seminaries and Universities. It is directed to those with special mission or vocation for a deeper penetration of the faith.

**The New General Directory for Catechesis**

*The New General Directory for Catechesis* was released on 25th of June 2020, in the wake of the outbreak of global pandemic known as covid19 and general upheaval the world over. The document itself is a follow up of some existing magisterial documents on Catechesis in the Church, these include: General Catechetical Directory (1971), The General Directory for Catechesis (1997), Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992) and Evangelii Gaudium (2013).

The new General Directory for Catechesis enunciates the goals and tasks of catechesis in the light of the contemporary global context. There is a strong emphasis on “Kerygma” within the process of evangelization, the document calls attention to new and emerging cultural conditions to which everyone must be attentive.

The New Directory on catechesis consists of twelve chapters, which are subdivided into three parts. Part one of the document is about Catechesis in the Church’s Mission and Evangelization. There are four sub-headings on (i) Revelation and its transmission. (ii) The identity of Catechesis ( iii) The Catechists and Formation of Catechists.

Part two addresses the process of catechesis. (i) The pedagogy of the faith. (ii) The catechism of the Catholic Church. Methodology in Catechesis. (iii) Catechesis in the lives of persons. Part three has as the general heading: (i) Catechesis in the particular Churches.( ii) The section examines catechesis in the face of contemporary cultural scenarios. (iii) Catechesis at the service of the inculturation of the faith and finally, the organisms at the service of catechesis.

Without equivocation, the New Directory on Catechesis affirms the presentation of the Catholic faith as enshrined in the Catechism of the Church as the point of reference for catechetical instructions, at the same time Sacred Scriptures and the recent writings of the Popes must be given serious attention.

The New Directory on Catechesis directs that: a “fresh and focused tool” that will enhance evangelization must be adopted in catechetical activities. It presents fundamental theological –pastoral principles for catechesis that will adequately respond to social conditions and cultural factors that shape the transmission of the faith in a pandemic ridden world. Two papal proclamations gain attention in the document namely: “The mission” and “echo the mission.” According to Pope Paul VI, “The Church exists to evangelise”, while Pope Francis affirms personal responsibility with the statement: “I am a mission.”

Three principles of action are proposed for the effectiveness of catechesis in re-evangelisation: Witnessing, mercy and dialogue. Every baptized person has a missionary vocation and everyone must find innovative ways of communicating the faith, with commitment and responsibility. All the faithful are invited to be courageous witnesses of Jesus Christ, in the family, work place and wider community.

Electronic media of communication manifest radical behavioural transformations that influence the formation of personal identity and interpersonal relations. The church must there be visible and loud in the social media. Coordinated efforts must be made to train the faithful in the right use of social media and formation of their minds in their interactions through social media must not be taken for granted.

The catechists are valuable pastoral workers in the Church. They are to be formed as missionary disciples; they are to imbibe missionary spirituality as an antidote to “sterile pastoral fatigue.” Furthermore, they must be formed to be dedicated, and be men/women of integrity. In the course of their duties, they must be vigilant and respect protection of minors and vulnerable persons. They must avoid sexual abuse as well as abuse of power. Priests undoubtedly are the immediate pastoral authority figures that will ensure compliance to rules and standards laid down by the church for the Catechists. In short Catechists are to be trained to be “saints next door.”

**New Approaches to Catechesis: Virtual Catechesis Reality and Challenges**

The Use of Communication Media: Electronic medium in particular provides the best means of catechesis in the contemporary time. Faith based video clips can be used in catechesis, graphics, whassap, twitter and instagram are useful tools that can be employed in catechesis. During the outbreak of covid19 pandemic globally last year over 1.2 billion children were out of the classroom. As a result, education changed dramatically, with the distinctive rise of e-learning, whereby teaching was undertaken remotely and on digital platforms in advanced countries and partly in Nigeria. Unfortunately, all our catechetical activities shut down during the covid 19 lockdown because we were not prepared for the challenge.

How secular authorities responded to the covid19 crisis in the education of children who were under lockdown then will be instructive for us as we discuss new approaches to catechesis in the light of the new directory. In India the students had platforms like BYJU’S - a Bangalore-based educational technology and online tutoring firm founded in 2011, which was adjudged the world’s most highly Valued Edtech company as at last year. The company developed: *Think and Learn app*, through it hundreds of thousands across India were reached online through the app.

Chinesse Government introduced *Tencent classroom*, which was used extensively since February 2020, through it Chinese government instructed a quarter of a billion full-time students through online platforms. This resulted in the largest “online movement” in the history of education with approximately 730,000, or 81% of K-12 students, attending classes via the Tencent K-12 Online School in Wuhan.

Singapore developed *Byte Dance*  as an internal tool offering teachers and students unlimited video conferencing time, auto-translation capabilities, real-time co-editing of project work, and smart calendar scheduling, amongst other features. To do so quickly and in a time of crisis, the company in charge of the *ByteDance* ramped up its global server infrastructure and engineering capabilities to ensure reliable connectivity. Our MTN, Globalcom, Airtel etc have no blue print on how they could be of help to keep education moving during covid19 pandemic. If education was at a standstill catechesis did not fare better. Masses were aired life on television and spiritual reflections given, however, I do not think those limited interventions adequately catered for the catechetical needs of the faithful in Nigeria at that material point in time.

I strongly belief Lagos Archdiocese has human and material resources to fund technological apps through which catechesis can be done online all over the Archdiocese from a central location. Experts in the field of social media can help develop catechetical packages that can be transmitted to parish platforms and families. The examples of how India, China and Singapore responded to the vacuum created by the lack of face to face classroom education method are relevant for our consideration for catechetical programmes in postcovid19 pandemic era.

While some believe that the unplanned and rapid move to online learning – with no training, insufficient bandwidth, and little preparation – will result in a poor user experience that will hinder effectiveness, others believe that a new hybrid model of information sharing will emerge, with significant benefits. I believe that the integration of information technology in Catechesis will enhance formation of faith and morals and should become an integral component of catechesis in the Church. The time to start putting things in place to catch up with the rest of the world is now; our diocesan catechetical initiatives cannot afford to remain at “analogue” level.

It is important to point out that virtual catechesis cannot completely replace traditional face to face teaching of the faith. Human person communicates using both verbal and non-verbal means. This obviously cannot be adequately done online. Moreover, the personal witness of life of the catechists and others involved in catechesis in our parishes cannot be done through online means. The ways proposed by Pope John Paul II for catechesis remain therefore relevant at any point in time. They provide unassailable approaches to catechesis, even in a world ravaged by pandemic.

(i) Utilization of various places, occasions, gatherings and various occasions of special value, such as doctrinal seminar for the youth organization, retreats and workshops for Catholic Men Organisation, Laity and Catholic Women Organisation etc. Their gatherings provide suitable opportunity for re-evangelisation through catechesis.

(ii) The Homily: Pope John Paul II, posits that, while respecting the specific nature and proper context of homily delivery, “the homily takes up again the journey of faith put forward by catechesis, and brings it to its natural fulfillment.”

(iii ) Catechetical Literature, provide good means of re-evangelising our people. For example in Osogbo diocese we have the Deepening the Faith Manual, Manual for Instructors, Catechetical Bulletin and Seedling the Faith Bulletin for the children. The parish bulletin can equally serve as tool of re-evangelisation if well prepared with relevant catechetical materials included.

(iv) The Parish, is the actual setting in which catechesis takes place, it is true that catechesis can be given anywhere, but Pope John Paul II stressed that, the parish community must continue to be the prime mover and pre- eminent place for catechesis for the re-evangelisation of the faithful.

(v) In the Family: The family's catechetical activity has a special character, which is in a sense irreplaceable. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies and enriches all other forms of catechesis it is therefore a veritable means of re-evangelisation in the Church.

(vi) At School, together with and in connection with the family, the school provides catechesis with possibilities that cannot be neglected. The special character of the Catholic school, the underlying reason for it, the quality of the religious instruction integrated into the education of the pupils have proven over the ages to be invaluable means of evangelisation as well as re-evangelisation.

**Seedling the Faith: Children Faith Formation**

The formation in faith of children is the first work of evangelization entrusted to parents, and to other members of the family. Through “seedling the faith” programme otherwise known as Sunday School for children, we get involved in the formation and nurturing of the faith of the youngsters. The directorate of religious education produces the booklet with which the animators guide the children. The programme is uniform all over Osogbo Diocese. Seedling the faith involves reproduction of Biblical stories and personalities in such a way that the children can understand them. Doctrinal themes are equally simplified for the children.

**Deepening the Faith**

Deepening the faith programme is an ongoing weekly catechesis of adults in Catholic Diocese of Osogbo. The weekly themes based on spiritual, pastoral and doctrinal points are usually prepared by a team of competent priests and lay faithful. The booklet for the programme comes out quarterly. The animators for the programme have been trained and their training is ongoing. Deepening the faith is basically interactive in nature. Pope John Paul II describes this form of catechesis as: “the principal form of catechesis, because it is addressed to persons who have the greatest responsibilities and the capacity to live the Christian message in its fully developed form. “

**Conclusion**

Catechesis echoes and proclaims the Christian faith received from Christ through the Apostles, through catechesis the faith is taught and transmitted. At every stage of evangelization, catechesis is involved, from the initial encounter to conversion and consolidation of the faith. The world, in which the faithful are called to live and to give witness to the faith which catechesis seeks to deepen and strengthen, is full of distraction and challenges. The faith therefore must be continually enlightened, stimulated and renewed, so that it may pervade the temporal realities in which they live and work. The most important lesson in new approach to catechesis is that all involved in Catechesis must be conversant with the use of social media. While technology cannot replace face to face catechesis, those who are not competent in the use of technology will be replaced by those who are competent in the use of technology in the nearest future. Priests who are able to catechize their parishioners through digital means will be able to reach more people than those who do not. Priests are to work closely with those assisting in catechesis such as catechists, Sunday school teachers and those involved in teaching catechism in the parish. New approaches to catechesis will achieve its goal when there is collaboration among all pastoral agents in the parishes and pastoral agents are resourceful in the use of digital and traditional means of catechizing the people.

Thank you for listening.

1. Jacques Audinet, “Catechesis” in Encyclopedia of Theology : The Concise Sacramentum Mundi, (edited) Karl Rahner, New YorK: The Seabury Press, 1975, p. 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)