

Pastoral Letter On The Ministry Of Catechesis

Introduction

1. One of the most remarkable characteristics of the Judaeo–Christian tradition is the desire of God, communicated clearly and consistently in the Scriptures, to be known by his people and to live in communion with them.¹ This fundamental message of salvation history is both consoling and challenging. It is a consoling message because it brings God’s People into direct contact with the meaning of the privilege of being a Christian — to be invited to know God and to live in relationship with God. It is a challenging message because it calls God’s People to clarify the priorities of their lives in such a way:

- that they find the time to know God, who was revealed fully in Christ;
- that, based on their understanding of God’s revealed message in Christ, they choose to live in intimate relationship with God.

2. Knowing God and understating the implications of what it means to live in intimate union with God require that the Catholic community show a willingness to feed itself and an openness to be fed by others from what Pope John Paul II calls the supreme rule of faith. In his Encyclical letter *Faith and Reason* Pope John Paul II alerts the Catholic Community to a growing ‘biblicism’ in contemporary society which “tends to make Sacred Scripture the sole criterion of truth”.² The Holy Father corrects this misconception by explaining the meaning of the supreme rule of faith: “The supreme rule of faith derives from the unity which the Spirit has created between Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Magisterium of the Church in a reciprocity which means that none of the three can survive without the others”.³ The supreme rule of faith is the foundation from which the Catholic community must be fed.

3. The Pastors of the Church, the Holy Father and the Bishops, have a very serious responsibility in the important matter of feeding God’s People.⁴ In addition, as members of the People of God themselves,⁵ the Holy Father and the Bishops share the same call as all Christians — to know God and to live in intimate union with God. Therefore, they must also be open to being fed from the supreme rule of faith.

4. It is in the context of sharing the same call and being on a journey to the Father together that we, the Archbishops and Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference, wish to address the Roman Catholic Community of the Caribbean about the ministry of Catechesis.

¹ II Vatican Council, *Constitution on Divine Revelation*, November 18, 1965, N. 2 (English Translations of the Second Vatican Council Documents are taken from *Vatican Council II, Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975).

² John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Fides et Ratio* (On the Relationship between Faith and Reason), September 14, 1998, page 84, N. 55.

³ *Ibid.*, page 85, N. 55; Cf. the *Constitution on Divine Revelation*, N. 9–10.

⁴ *Code of Canon Law*, Latin–English Edition, (Translation prepared under the auspices of the Canon Law Society of America, First Published in 1983), Canon 773.

⁵ II Vatican Council, *Constitution on the Church*, November 21, 1964, Ch. 2, ‘The People of God;’ *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 204.

5. We wish to state clearly at the opening of this Pastoral Letter that we are aware of and extremely grateful for the substantial efforts that have been and continue to be made by many of God's People to pass on the Catholic Tradition and to form mature members of the Catholic Community. We acknowledge the contributions of priests and religious who are committed to the ministry of catechesis, of laypersons who share that commitment all Catholic teachers in both Catholic and government schools or as catechists in the many Archdioceses and Dioceses; of the Conference and also of those who specialize in the ministry of catechesis on various levels: the Catechetical Offices throughout the Antilles Episcopal Conference, the Theological Faculty in Jamaica, the Catechetical Institute in St. Lucia and the School of Continuing Studies in Religion at the Regional Seminary in Trinidad. We invite these dedicated believers to persevere in their ministry and their collaboration with the Archbishops and Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference in serving the faith needs and reducing the faith vulnerability of the Catholic people in the Caribbean Region of the Church.

The Contemporary Pastoral Situation

A. The International Context

6. The Church is facing a very challenging pastoral situation throughout the world due to what is called secularization. Secularization is defined as an historical process of social, cultural and political emancipation by which organized society is freed from the control/dominance of religious institutions and symbols.⁶ Secularization is by no means merely theoretic. It is the process which is responsible for what philosophers and theologians have called the "Post-Christian Era" and it frequently leads to a desacralizing process in the lives of people and cultures.⁷ The secularizing/desacralizing process manifests itself in a progressive separation of faith and culture. Culture influences people in such a fundamental manner that frequently, without being conscious of the power of the process, they begin to experience a distancing from the sacred and spiritual on a practical level e.g. from prayer, worship and formative reflection on the scriptures and teaching of the Church. The phenomenon of secularization and desacralization affects both public and private life. For many people, the final outcome of the secularizing/desacralizing process is that faith and religion are no longer considered to be important. People live in a climate of increasing unbelief and religious indifference.⁸

7. This very subtle process, which is further complicated by the issue of pluralism in a quickly shrinking global community, has had some very practical effects. It has produced anti-life/anti-family legislation throughout the world; it has influenced in a detrimental way the values of people and, therefore, their ethical behavior; it has undermined family life, facilitated the sexual revolution and encouraged, quite deliberately, the acceptance of materialism, consumerism and individualism as the modern philosophy of life. It has made believers vulnerable to secular values which they would have easily recognized and rejected even in the recent past. The proponents of the

⁶ *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter Fink, (Collegeville, MN, 1990), pages 1156–1161.

⁷ *The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. K. Rahner, (New York: Seabury Press, 1975) pages 1554–1661; *The Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. Rene Latourelle, (New York: Crossroad Press, 1995) pages 282–290; 971–986.

⁸ Pontifical Council for Culture, *Towards A Pastoral Approach to Culture*, May 23, 1999, N. 23.

secularizing/desacralizing agenda are still trying to facilitate an even deeper separation of Faith and Culture which will, almost certainly, lead to secularism.⁹

8. Another major phenomenon in the international context is globalization. It has connected cultures which may already be secularized or which have moved to secularism. While people have benefited positively from access to information and the rapid movement of consumer goods, they are also frequently overwhelmed by the immediacy of communication and the impact of new ideas and values which are incompatible with the traditional values of their cultures. Due to economic globalization, forced migration of people has already appeared and nations find themselves less powerful than the multinational corporations which operate within their jurisdictions. Globalization is unleashing forces which are beginning to homogenize culture and values. These conditions not only present a significant pastoral challenge to the Church on the level of evangelization but have enabled “religious ignorance to feed the various; forms of syncretism among cults, new religious movements and the Catholic Faith.”¹⁰

B. *The Caribbean Context*

9. Unsurprisingly modern communications, international travel, education outside the region, the impact of economic globalization and the not so subtle influences of tourism have brought the issues summarized above under the heading of ‘The International Context’, to the Caribbean. These powerful factors are producing the same effects in the Caribbean that they have produced throughout the world. The behavior patterns of the people have already been affected.

10. As in the past, the Bishops must alert the people to the issues and provide the memo for the people to protect their faith and moral standards.

11. The reader will recall that in 1975, the Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference issued a Pastoral Letter, “Justice and Peace in a New Caribbean,” which addressed the Catholic community of the Caribbean about the dangers of understanding the issue of development in exclusively economic terms. The Bishops stressed that a misunderstanding of the meaning of development leads to materialism and greed and is directly related to the trend of a high rate of migration from the region.¹¹ They then applied the developing materialistic agenda to a number of significant issues, including education and the family, to show how a shift in values was already in process in the Caribbean.¹² The Bishops recommended a careful study of the Social Teaching of the Church as the way to understand the issues and protect the community from compromise.¹³ The wisdom of the Bishops was confirmed recently in the document from the Synod of Bishops on the Church in America.¹⁴

12. In 1982, the Bishops returned to the issue of development — this time with the goal of helping the people understand the meaning of ‘true freedom’. In a second Pastoral

⁹ Cf. Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Evangelization in the Modern World), December 8, 1975, N. 55

¹⁰ *Towards A Pastoral Approach to Culture*, N. 21.

¹¹ Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference, Pastoral Letter, *Justice and Peace in a New Caribbean*, November 21, 1975, N. 22–26.

¹² *Ibid.*, N. 28, 44–50.

¹³ *Ibid.*, N. 54–55.

¹⁴ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in America*, (the Church in America), January 22, 1999, N. 63.

Letter; “True Freedom and Development in the Caribbean,” the Bishops reviewed the successes and failures of development in the region since the 1975 Pastoral Letter and, most importantly, alerted the people to the presence, of a new danger: the attempt to impose the ideology of *atheistic* Marxism on the region.¹⁵ The Bishops again advocated a deeper knowledge of Catholic Social Teaching and a renewed appreciation of the connection between evangelization and authentic development as the way to respond to the danger.¹⁶

C. *Implications of the Pastoral Situation*

13. The reader should find this summary description of “The Contemporary Pastoral Situation” challenging, but not discouraging. History has proven that the Church is never stronger than when it passes through periods of trial. However, the pastoral situation cannot be ignored and the influence of its already present effects cannot be underestimated. The truth is that people are confused, drifting from the faith and unable to relate or defend the Faith. They are vulnerable to the contemporary trends.

14. People are searching for substance, direction and meaning their lives. Some members of the Catholic Church have turned to biblical fundamentalism to satisfy their need for certainty about salvation. However, the Church has not accepted biblical fundamentalism as an authentic way to understand the scriptures.¹⁷ Other Catholic people have joined ‘fundamentalist movements’ for spiritual security. The Church has analyzed these movements and has not recommended them as authentic guides for life or salvation.¹⁸ Most Catholics have remained as members of the Church, but they are uncomfortable with the faith vulnerability they experience. They are looking to the Catholic Church to help them deepen their knowledge of the Faith, their spirituality and their ability to defend the Faith.

15. The Second Vatican Council had begun to address the secularization issue in 1965 and called for a critical evaluation of the modern trend in the light of the gospel.¹⁹ More recently, Pope John Paul II analyzed the same pastoral situation, which had become even more challenging since the end of the Second Vatican Council, and responded with a call for a new evangelization²⁰ and a new emphasis on catechesis as an essential element of the new evangelization process. The Holy Father named catechesis as “a moment of evangelization.”²¹

¹⁵ Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference, Pastoral Letter, *True Freedom and Development in the Caribbean*, February 2, 1982, N. 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, N. 15

¹⁷ The Pontifical Biblical Commission, “*The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*,” September 21, 1993, pages 18–19.

¹⁸ Cf. Report of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, Secretariat for Non-Believers and the Pontifical Council for Culture, “Sects, Cults and New Religious Movemners,” May 4, 1986. **Since fundamentalism is a significant challenge to the (Arch)dioceses of the Antilles Episcopal Conference, a select bibliography on fundamentalism has been added to this Pastoral Letter on the Ministry of Catechesis. Cf. Appendix.**

¹⁹ II Vatican Council, *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, December 7, 1965, N. 36.

²⁰ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio* (On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate), December 7, 1990, N. 33.

²¹ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae*, (Catechesis in Our Time), October 16, 1979, N. 18.

16. **We the Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference recognize the signs of the secularizing/desacralizing/globalizing challenge in the Caribbean. We stress the importance to our people of understanding “The contemporary Pastoral Situation.” It provides the background for appreciating and accepting the papal call for a new evangelization and for the need for all to be catechized. We accept our responsibility to help our people understand and address this challenge. We invite the Roman Catholic Community of the Caribbean to join with us in reflecting the Ministry of Catechesis. It is our hope that prayerful study, reflection and dialogue about this Pastoral letter on Catechesis will lead to a firm decision to re-chose the life-long process of evangelization as an indispensable element for the renewal of the Church and for the passing on of the Catholic Tradition to new generations.**

What is Catechesis

17. **The term catechesis comes from a Greek word, ‘katechein’ which means to ‘re-sound’ or ‘re-echo.’ It can also mean an oral teaching. Since the 1971 General Catechetical Directory, catechesis has been understood as a form of the church’s ministry of the word.²² Its contemporary position is ecclesial not merely academic/informational and, therefore, it requires an authentic Christian community for the ministry and aims at the development of authentic Christian community as the goal of its ministry.**

18. There are many definitions of catechesis. Two definitions are presented here for the consideration of the reader:

- Catechesis is a ministry which is intended “to make the faith of people living, conscious and active through the light of instruction based on the Scriptures, tradition, liturgy, the teaching authority and the life of the Church.”²³
- 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 hearers into the fullness of Christian life.”²⁴

19. The first definition is now part of the *Code of Canon Law*.²⁵ The Second definition has been included in the Prologue of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.²⁶

20. The 1997 General Directory for Catechesis has developed some of the points contained in these two definitions of catechesis. The contribution made by the General Directory for Catechesis is very helpful for understanding the goals of the ministry of catechesis in our contemporary world. The specific points of development are:

1) *Catechesis is about Faith and Christian Life.*

21. The connection between the faith and the life of the Catholic believer must be recognized and appreciated by the believing person and be evident to those who are affected by the witness of the believer. The interaction of faith and life must be

²² Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *General Catechetical Directory*, April 11, 1971, N. 16–17.

²³ II Vatican Council, *Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church*, October 28, 1965, N. 14.

²⁴ *Catechesis in Our Time*, N. 18.

²⁵ *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 773.

²⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Geoffrey Chapman, A Cassell Imprint, (Villiers House, 41/47 Strand, London, WC2N 5JE, First Published 1994), N. 5

consistent. It must encourage an experience of God as merciful Father, a rediscovery of Jesus in both his divinity and humanity, a sense of co-responsibility for the mission of the Church and a raising of consciousness about the social obligations of the faith.²⁷

2) *Catechesis must Communicate the Faith in a Systematic Manner*

22. The purpose of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is to provide the Church with a synthesis of the essential and fundamental content of the Catholic doctrine as regards faith and morals in light of the Second Vatican Council and the entire Catholic Tradition.²⁸ The Catechism also gives the sources of the Catholic Tradition. Its structural format is based on the four pillars of the great catechisms of the Church: 1) The Profession of Faith (the Creed), 2) The Sacraments of the Faith, 3) The Life of Faith (the Commandments) and 4) The Prayer of the Believer.²⁹

23. **The systemic thoroughness of the Catechism and its continual references to the sources of the faith are intended to provide “a sure norm for teaching the faith.”³⁰ The General Directory for Catechesis affirms the positive points of development in catechesis since the II Vatican Council, but also observes that there have been “crises, doctrinal inadequacies, influences from the evolution of global culture and ecclesial questions. derived from outside the field of catechesis which have often impoverished the quality of catechesis.”³¹ Particular concern was expressed in the *General Directory for Catechesis* concerning difficulties about the acceptance of the II Vatican Council, about the place of Tradition in catechesis and about certain doctrinal lacunae which were specifically listed in the *General Directory*.³²**

3) *Catechesis is a Ministry of Family*

24. **Family is the fundamental environment for catechesis. The II Vatican Council’s Declaration on Christian Education puts it very clearly, “Parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children. The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute.”³³ Pope John Paul II follows the II Vatican Council’s teaching when he challenges parents to accept their ministry of catechizing their own children with tireless zeal. He stresses that the family’s work of catechesis has an irreplaceable character.³⁴ The *General Directory for Catechesis* presents the family as a source of catechesis which holds a privileged position. It states that the family is in the unique position to teach the Gospel by rooting it in profound human values. It lists the awakening of a sense of God, the first steps in prayer, the education of a Christian conscience, formation in the Christian sense of love as examples of Christian education which is ‘more witnessed than taught.’ Sensitive to the contemporary breakdown in family life in international culture, the *General Directory for Catechesis* emphasizes the growing importance of the faith of**

²⁷ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory of Catechesis*, August 11, 1997, N. 24.

²⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, N. 11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, N. 13–17.

³⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, N. 3.

³¹ *General Directory for Catechesis*, N. 2.

³² *Ibid.*, N. 28, 30.

³³ II Vatican Council, *Declaration on Christian Education*, October 28, 1965, N. 3.

³⁴ *Catechesis in Our Time*, N. 68.

grandparents in family catechesis. It states, “their wisdom and sense of the religious is often decisive in creating a true Christian climate.”³⁵

4) *Catechesis is Community Based and Community Oriented*

25. The baptismal catechumenate, which is the basis of the model for the catechizing ministry of the Church, is the responsibility of the entire Christian community. The goal is to introduce catechumens into the Christian life and Christian community. They learn the faith not just when they are being taught but also when they are being formed by actually experiencing the life of the Church. As the goal of the catechumenate is to introduce people to the Christian community, the goal of post-baptismal catechesis is to deepen the understanding of the baptized and to invite them to involve themselves more deeply in the life and mission of the Church community.³⁶

5) *Catechesis is a Life-long Process*

26. While many people associate catechesis with ministry to children or with pre-sacramental preparation programs, the *General Directory for Catechesis* makes it very clear that catechesis is a life-long process for all believers.³⁷ It begins in the family, spans the various phases of life, includes the handicapped, migrants and the marginalized and, finally, extends through old age. It is necessary to prepare catechists for each level of this specialized ministry.³⁸

The Essential Elements of Catechesis

27. There are four elements in the process of catechesis: 1) Knowledge of the Faith; 2) Formation based on Faith knowledge; 3) Commitment to the Lord flowing from knowledge and formation; 4) Mission as a result of informed commitment.³⁹ Each of the four elements must be present in the life of a mature Christian. The four elements of catechesis must be in relationship with each other on a permanent basis. Their interaction is the heart of the growth formula for a Christian.⁴⁰

28. The four elements of catechesis do not necessarily flow logically i.e. starting with knowledge and moving to mission. Frequently, the elements develop in a psychological-spiritual-pastoral contest. For example, if a person is influenced by the witness of a Christian who is involved in mission, it would not be surprising if that person were attracted to assist in that mission in some way. Eventually, participation moves the person to a desire for faith knowledge which, in turn, leads to an openness to formation. Formation prepares a Christian for informed commitment to the Lord which by its nature makes itself visible in mission.

29. Since catechesis is a life-long process, the interaction of the four elements of catechesis can lead to a deeper involvement in one or more of the elements. For example, involvement in mission can make a person aware of the need to increase their knowledge of the faith or convince a person of the need to purify their motivation for commitment or

³⁵ *General Directory for Catechesis*, N. 255.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, N. 88–91; 220–221.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, N. 51–57.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, N. 232.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, N. 81–87.

⁴⁰ *General Catechetical Directory*, N. 31; *General Directory for Catechesis*, N. 87.

participation in mission through formation and conversion. Commitment to the Lord without participation in mission is inadequate and, therefore, a sign that additional growth is necessary in the Christian life. If one or more of the four elements is entirely missing from the life of a Christian, it means that a fundamental formation/conversion experience is needed.⁴¹

The Fundamental Relationships of The Ministry of Catechesis

1) Catechesis and Evangelization

30. Evangelization has been given many definitions, but the most simple yet comprehensive is the definition given by Pope Paul VI: “Evangelization is bringing the Good News to the whole community and, through its influence, transforming humanity from within and making it new”⁴² Pope John Paul II understands catechesis “as a very remarkable moment in the evangelization process”⁴³ Evangelization and catechesis are interrelated, yet they cannot be identified with each other. The content of catechesis is the content of evangelization. It is the same message — the Good News of Salvation.⁴⁴ Therefore, whether catechesis is understood as a part of the introductory process of arousing faith in unbelievers which, hopefully, will lead to incorporation into the Church or whether it is understood as a part of the process which helps the faith of children, young people and adults mature, it has a context of evangelization.⁴⁵

31. As the II Vatican Council taught, evangelization always develops in slow stages and progress in the ministry is not without setbacks.⁴⁶ Pastoral circumstances change and the changes require adaptations in the pastoral approach. The call of Pope John Paul II for a New Evangelization is itself a response to a change in moral circumstance within the various cultures of the Church. Catechesis as an instrument of evangelization must, therefore, adapt itself to changes in the pastoral situation. The various levels of catechetical programs must be redesigned to meet new challenges whether the challenges affect individuals, communities or cultures.

⁴¹ *General Catechetical Directory*, N. 22; *General Directory for Catechesis*, N. 53–57.

⁴² *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (On Evangelization in the Modern World), N. 17–19.

⁴³ *Catechesis in Our Time*, N. 18.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, N. 26.

⁴⁵ *General Directory for Catechesis*, N. 49.

⁴⁶ II Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes* (On the Church’s Missionary Activity), December 7, 1965, N. 6.

2) *Catechesis and Liturgy*

32. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks of the connection between catechesis and liturgy. It teaches that, “since the Liturgy is the summit towards which the action of the Church is directed and is the fount from which all her power flows ... it (the Liturgy) is the privileged place for catechizing the People of God.”⁴⁷ The teaching of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reflects the pastoral experience of the Church, namely, that for many Catholic people the only sustained exposure they have to the ministry of catechesis is the liturgy. It is the liturgy which proclaims the interrelationship among the *lex orandi*, the *lex credendi* and the *lex vivendi* (the law of prayer, of belief and of living) which should be present in the lives of the people.⁴⁸

33. The importance of liturgy for catechesis must be reflected in the preparations for liturgical celebrations and in the manner in which liturgy is celebrated. The homily provides an excellent opportunity for doctrinal and moral catechesis. Liturgical celebration supports catechesis because it joins prayer and teaching to the grace of Christ which enlightens and nourishes Christian activity.⁴⁹ Active participation in liturgy is, of course, essential if the liturgy, as the privileged place for catechesis, is to support the conversion/growth process.

3) *Catechesis and Apologetics*

34. The *General Directory for Catechesis* contains a significant reference to Apologetics.⁵⁰ The Directory mentions apologetics under inculturation and specifically in the context of the catechist’s mission to proclaim the Gospel in cultures that are pagan or post-Christian. The catechist must be capable of presenting the Gospel and explaining the faith in a reasonable manner, especially by sharing the sources of the faith. Apologetics means speaking in defense of the faith. More specifically, it means presenting the reasonableness, the truth and the value of the Christian faith.⁵¹ From the viewpoint of reasonableness, it is important to note that the content of the faith is not all mystery. As Pope John Paul II has reminded us, in the Catholic Tradition, Faith and Reason should be friends.⁵²

35. Too frequently the Catholic Christian, whether a catechist or not, does not feel capable of speaking or writing in defense of the faith. As result, many Catholics will not become involved in the catechesis of adults or in ecumenical or inter-faith dialogue. If they are involved in the ministry at all, it is in catechetical programs for children. Consequently, catechetical programs must prepare people for the ministry of apologetics, which is primarily directed to adults — not only to adults who are not believers but to believing adults of other traditions and especially to adult Catholics who have grown indifferent or even, hostile to the Church.

⁴⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, N. 1074.

⁴⁸ Irwin, Kevin, *Context and Text, Method in Liturgical Theology*, (Collegeville MN, Liturgical Press, 1994), page 311.

⁴⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, N. 2031.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, N. 110; Cf. *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. J. Komonchak, M. Collins, D. Lane, (Collegeville, MN, 1987) pages 44–48.

⁵¹ *The New Concise Catholic Dictionary*, ed. R. Ekstrom (Mystic, Connecticut, Twenty Third Publications), Page 19.

⁵² *On the Relationship Between Faith and Reason*, N. 57.

36. Another important dimension of apologetics as a dimension of catechesis is witness. As Pope John Paul II stated in *Redemptoris Missio*, “People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, in life and action than in theories.”⁵³ The witness of the catechist/apologist either supports or undermines the ministry of catechesis. In the eyes of those to be catechized, the witness of the catechist/apologist speaks to the issue of credibility of the ministry.

4) *Catechesis and Ecumenism*

37. Catechesis cannot remain above the call which binds all Christians to work toward unity. Catechesis must help those being catechized to develop a desire for Christian unity. Pope John Paul II established three conditions for catechetical ecumenism: “1) That while never ceasing to teach that the fullness of revealed truth and of the means of salvation is found in the Catholic Church, it do so with respect for ecclesial communities not in full communion with the Church; 2) That catechesis give a correct and fair presentation of other Churches and ecclesial traditions because the Spirit of Christ does not refrain from using them as a means of salvation; 3) That catechesis prepare children, young people and adults for living in contact with non-Catholics and for affirming their Catholic identity while respecting the faith of others.”⁵⁴

38. There is finally the issue of ecumenical collaboration in catechesis. The norms which govern such collaboration are twofold: 1) that it compliments the normal catechesis which is given to Catholics and 2) that it may never be understood in a syncretistic sense, i.e. a reduction to a common minimum.⁵⁵

5) *Catechesis and Community*

39. The *General Directory for Catechesis* stresses that the nature of catechesis is ecclesial. It is a ministry of the Church. It is not an action which can be realized on a private basis by purely personal initiative. It is a ministry done in the name of the Church by participating in the mission of the Church.⁵⁶ The Church community is essential in the catechetical process because catechesis is more than teaching doctrine and precepts. It is a process in which those being catechized are introduced into the fullness of Christian life through the experience of living in the Catholic community.⁵⁷ The ‘I believe’ of every individual, because it is always professed in and through the Church, becomes the ‘we believe’ of the community.⁵⁸

Plans of the Antilles Episcopal Conference

40. It has already been noted that the Bishops have recognized the challenge described under the heading, ‘The Contemporary Pastoral Situation’ and that they have accepted responsibility to respond to the challenge. Prior to publishing this Pastoral Letter on the Ministry of Catechesis, the Bishops have already approved four resolutions to increase emphasis on catechesis within the Caribbean as part of the response of the Conference to the new evangelization called for by Pope John Paul II.

⁵³ *On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate*, N. 42.

⁵⁴ *Catechesis in Our Time*, N. 32.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, N. 33; *General Directory for Catechesis*, N. 197.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, N. 77, 219

⁵⁷ II Vatican Council, *Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity*, December 7, 1965, N. 14.

⁵⁸ *General Directory for Catechesis*, N. 83.

- “To Establish a Catechetical Page on the WEBSITE of the Antilles Episcopal Conference to allow the Catechetical Offices of the Conference to have access to catechetical resources presently unavailable to them and to facilitate direct communication among the catechetical offices which is now severely restricted due to the expenses of travel.”
- “That the Catechetical Commission of the Antilles Episcopal Conference develop ‘Guidelines for Competency’ indicating the content and formation components which each participant should have acquired at the end of a given course.”⁵⁹ This resolution applies to catechetical programs for children, young people and adults.
- “That each Diocesan Bishop facilitate collaboration among the Catholic schools, catechetical office and parish based religious education programs of the diocese.”⁶⁰
- That the Catechetical Commission of the Antilles Episcopal Conference shall have direct contact with the catechetical offices in the Conference regarding the AEC Catechetical Project, keeping the Diocesan Bishops fully informed by sending them a copy of all correspondence.”⁶¹

41. The resolutions are presently being implemented by the Catechetical Commission of the Antilles Episcopal Conference.

42. The second resolution of the 1998 Annual Plenary Meeting calls for a very substantive response and requires a commitment to extensive dialogue. The Catechetical Commission has decided to develop the response in dialogue with the Catechetical offices within the Antilles Episcopal Conference, (Arch)diocesan Councils of Priests and Principals of Catholic Schools. It has chosen a modified form of the program contained in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA)” to facilitate a lifelong process of growth in knowledge, formation, commitment and mission.

43. Within a year, the Catechetical Commission will offer the (Arch)dioceses of the Conference the completed segments of a draft of a document called Guidelines For Competency which will stress not only the essential elements of catechesis but also the involvement of the Christian Community in the catechetical process as well as the experience of those being catechized in the Christian community.

Conclusion

44. We, the Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference, invite the People of God in the Antilles Episcopal Conference to a process of serious reflection and discussion on the content and implications of this *Pastoral Letter on the Ministry of Catechesis*. Due to the importance and complexity of the relationship between Catechetics and Evangelization,⁶² we recommend that this Pastoral Letter be studied carefully and discussed in small groups in the parishes under the leadership of those who are responsible for pastoral care.

45. The process envisioned by this Pastoral Letter is both demanding and exciting. We wish to emphasize that neither the significance of the agenda nor the efforts of Bishops, Priests, Religious and Catechists will produce positive results in the

⁵⁹ Antilles Episcopal Conference, ACTA — 1998 *Annual Plenary Meeting*, (Private Publication), N. 20.2

⁶⁰ Antilles Episcopal Conference, ACTA — 1999 *Annual Plenary Meeting*, (Private Publication), N. 19.4

⁶¹ Congregation for Divine Worship, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, January 6, 1972

⁶² *The Church in America*, N. 69

evangelizing mission of the Church unless the individual believer chooses to be a willing participant in the process, i.e. an ‘active subject, conscious and co–responsible.’⁶³ It is our hope that the Catechetical project which will flow from this Pastoral Letter will bring the (Arch)dioceses of the Conference closer together as we confront ‘The Contemporary Pastoral Situation.’

46. We acknowledge that, ultimately, every pastoral effort depends on the action of God working through the Holy Spirit. Consequently, we pray humbly, yet confidently, with the psalmist: “May God bless the work of our hands!”

SIGNED

Most Reverend Edgerton R Clarke, *Archbishop of Kingston–in–Jamaica*

Most Reverend Lawrence Burke, *Archbishop of Nassau*

Most Reverend Kelvin E. Felix, *Archbishop of Castries*

Monseigneur Maurice Marie–Sainte, *Archbishop of St. Pierre & Fort–de–France*

Most Reverend Theodore McCarrick, *Archbishop of Newark*

Most Reverend Samuel E. Carter, S.J., *Archbishop Emeritus of Kingston*

Most Reverend Paul Boyle, *Bishop of Mandeville*

Monseigneur Ernest Cabo, *Bishop of Basseterre*

Most Reverend Sydney Charles, *Bishop of St. George’s–in–Grenada*

Most Reverend Charles Dufour, *Bishop of Montego Bay*

Most Reverend Willem Ellis, *Bishop of Willemstad*

Most Reverend Malcolm Galt, *Bishop of Bridgetown*

Most Reverend Edward J. Gilbert, C.Ss.R., *Bishop of Roseau*

Most Reverend Robert Kurtz, *Bishop of Hamilton–in–Bermuda*

Most Reverend Osmond P Martin, *Bishop of Belize & Belmopan*

Most Reverend Donald J. Reece, *Bishop of St. John’s–Basseterre*

Most reverend Robert Rivas, *Bishop of Kingstown in St. Vincent*

Monseigneur Louis Sankalé, *Bishop of Cayenne*

Most Reverend Benedict Singh, *Bishop of Georgetown*

Most Reverend Aloysius Zichem, *Bishop of Paramaribo*

Most Reverend Anthony Dickson, *Bishop Emeritus of Bridgetown*

Most Reverend John Mendes, *Auxiliary Bishop of Port of Spain*

Reverend Christian Pereira, *Archdiocesan Administrator, Port of Spain*

15 November 2000

⁶³ *General Directory for Catechesis*, N. 176

APPENDIX

Select Bibliography on Fundamentalism

(Each book or article listed in this Select Bibliography contains additional bibliographical references)

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