

THE GENERAL CATECHETICAL DIRECTORY¹

HISTORICAL NOTES

A call for the compilation of directories for various areas of pastoral activity is contained in the Second Vatican Council's decree "Christus Dominus", where it is stated: "A directory should be compiled on the subject of the catechetical instruction of Christian people, and should deal with the fundamental principles of such instruction, its arrangement, and the publication of books on the subject" (No. 44).

Before work was begun on the present Directory, careful study was given to the problem of whether it might be better to prepare a simple catechetical directory, rather than a directory which, in some way, would serve the additional purpose of a general catechesis. The idea of preparing a simple, comprehensive catechism that would serve the Universal Church was early discarded. The reason was that, if such a work were attempted, it would be necessary to make specific application to the various problems of men of our time, differentiated as they are by social and cultural conditions, and consequently the book would have ended up more as a basic statement of doctrine than as a catechism. Such a document would without doubt be useful but it would not be possible to call it a catechism in the true and proper sense of the word. Therefore, it was decided to prepare a General Directory, that would also include something of the content of the doctrine to be taught.

When this fundamental question was finally resolved, the actual work on the Directory was begun.

Jean Card. Villot, who was then the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, briefly informed the First Synod of Bishops concerning the criteria that would guide the preparation of the document, underlining the fact that there would be close collaboration between the Holy See and the Episcopal Conferences in its preparation.

¹ L'osservatore Romano, July 1, 1971.

Early in 1968 a questionnaire was sent to all the Episcopal Conferences in which they were asked to suggest basic norms, concerning the nature and purpose of catechesis, concerning the criteria for handling doctrinal content and concerning the incorporation of catechetical activity into the total pastoral action of the Church, which incorporation it was devoutly desired to see authoritatively reaffirmed in the Directory. Meanwhile, there was constituted, in accord with some Episcopal Conferences, a special international commission of experts on the subject.

Once the replies were received from the Episcopal Conferences, almost all of which answered, showing thereby deep interest in the project, the commission of experts began its work of compilation. When the first summary outline of the Directory was finished it was submitted for examination, in October of 1968, to a Plenary Session of the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy. The commission of experts then developed the original text according to the suggestions made at the Plenary Session and in the early part of 1969 this expanded manuscript was again sent to all the Episcopal Conferences for their examination.

After receiving the replies from this second consultation, the commission of Catechetical experts proceeded to the editing of the definitive text, thereby completing their role in the project.

Now that the work of the catechetical experts was finished, the Directory was submitted, as was planned from the beginning, to the examination of a special commission of theologians. It is clear that catechetical experts would instinctively emphasize the object or the person towards which religious teaching is aimed; on the other hand, it is equally clear that theologians would incline to underline the immutable deposit of revelation in a manner similar to the way in which it was systematically expressed in the past. Consequently, in order to avoid the undue influence of either one of these two tendencies both of which are good and legitimate and in order to achieve a harmoniously fused catechesis, the second revision was made by theologians.

NATURE, PURPOSE, CONTENT

The present document is not a catechism, but a directory. A catechism aims to explain the content of faith to a specific audience. A directory, on the other hand, seeks to give direction to all the activity of the ministry of the Word, and particularly that activity which concerns the formation, that is, the maturing in faith, of the believing people. The scope of a directory, therefore, is much wider than that of a catechism. In the writing of a catechism, however, the principles and criteria given in the Directory cannot be ignored.

The present Directory can be considered the first organic document published on the subject by the Holy See. Naturally, there were not lacking in the past various and equally important documents. It should also be remarked that the entire Magisterium of the Church, whether it be ordinary or extraordinary, has always had the essential purpose of presenting and deepening the revealed message. However, a directory, in the strict sense of the word, has not been published until now.

The principal source of the Directory is the acts of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, the nature of which was essentially pastoral.

Catechetical activity is approached in the document in a positive fashion. There is no attempt to enter into arguments with anyone, the purpose being rather to affirm positively that which is right and true. Nevertheless, some deviations and exaggeration, which, as is known, are found in catechetics, today are taken into consideration. Precisely because of its positive tone, it can appear that the theoretical aspect of the Directory prevails over the practical and normative. It is true, in fact, that much importance has been given to the analysis of the act of catechising and to its purpose, to the relationship between catechetics and the deposit of revelation, to the statement of the basic content to be transmitted. However, practical and normative aspects are not lacking as is shown in particular by the chapter on criteria for content, the sixth part on pastoral plans, as well as the Appendix, which treats of the initiation of young children in the Sacraments.

In a general document like this it has not been possible to take into account what might be called the overall situation of the Church. For that reason the document does not pre-

tend to be exhaustive but to stimulate further research and to guide the preparation of local directories and of national catechisms. For this reason the Directory is beamed at Bishops and at those who, under their guidance, have responsible positions in the field of catechetics.

PART I

Today's problem. Some indications are given concerning the present situation of the world and of the Church. Only general observations are made concerning a few vast cultural areas. The purpose here is to suggest to national directors the necessity of an attentive analysis of their own situations, in such a way that catechetical activity can operate effectively in the concrete human, social and cultural context.

PART II

The ministry of the Word. Above all, there is considered the relationship that should exist between the minister of the Word and the deposit of revelation. The minister of the Word must announce that which God has revealed. In the light of this message, transmitted faithfully by Tradition and taught infallibly by the Magisterium, he interprets human demands and realities. This is followed by an analysis, within the frame of the various forms of the ministry of the Word, of catechetical activity strictly understood, that is, that activity which seeks the complete and harmonious formation of the Christian.

PART III

The Christian message. Catechetics does not proclaim a human word but a divine Word. The first chapter of this part III lays down the fundamental criteria that must be followed in the selection and the exposition of the contents of catechetics. They are criteria that are particularly important for compiling catechisms. The second chapter offers a brief presentation of the essential elements that constitute the contents of Christian faith and it points out that the unavoidable purpose of catechetics is the faithful and integral communication to men of that which God has revealed.

PART IV

Methodology. A short treatment of general methodology is presented since it is valid and even necessary in every form of catechetics. The Directory, however, does not choose one method over another nor does it enter into an analysis of the various methods. The selection of the proper methodology depends, in fact, on those who write the catechism expected to be produced.

PART V

Catechetics for different age groups. Catechetics can take different ways in the fulfillment of its mission. Catechetics taught according to age groups is, in practice, the most important of these ways and the most dependable. For this reason the Directory gives this catechetical approach more attention in regards to methods, pedagogy and content. Catechetics for adults, because of the possibility it offers to present the Christian message in a more complete way, and because it affords a basis for work with children and youth, is considered the most important form of catechetics by the Directory.

PART VI

Pastoral plan. It presents some suggestions concerning what Episcopal Conferences, and other groups charged with catechesis, can do to extend the faithful and efficacious preaching of the Word of God. It is a high level plan, which, given the diversity of conditions and possibilities in the various local Churches, will be able to be carried out only gradually by certain Episcopal Conferences.

APPENDIX

Initiation of young to the Sacraments. The delicate and difficult problem is faced of whether, as is occurring in some parts of the Church, it is possible to admit young children to First Communion without their first receiving the Sacrament of Penance. After analysing the arguments pro and con regarding the experiment, the Directory reaffirms the value of

the traditional practice, that is, to make a First Confession before First Communion, although permitting the Episcopal Conferences to continue in some cases—as an experiment—the new practice, but provided that all is done in communion and in agreement with the Apostolic See, which has the final decision on the matter.

II.

INTERNATIONAL CATECHETICAL CONGRESS

It will be held in Rome on the grounds of the Pontifical University of the Lateran from September 20-25 of this year. It is the second catechetical Congress organized by the Holy See. The first one took place in 1950.

The idea for this Congress did not arise from the coincidence of the recent publication of the Catechetical Directory. The Sacred Congregation for the Clergy had previously been planning an International Catechetical Congress. The deep social and cultural changes, the strong development of the secular sciences, above all of anthropology, the very discussions that are taking place concerning the nature of the educational process, all these manifested, even in the world of catechetics, the need for an attentive rethinking of a calm exchange of experience between the Holy See and the Episcopal Conferences and among the Episcopal Conferences themselves.

The main theme of this year's Congress will be quite different from that of 1950. At this time the emphasis was placed above all on organization and on methodology; today the overriding problem is how to promote catechetical activity and what dimensions to give to it.

The Congress plans to bring together in Rome the people responsible for catechetics; the Presidents of the national episcopal catechetical commissions, the directors and members of the National Catechetical Offices, regional coordinators and directors of Catechetical Centres and catechetical reviews, etc.

In general, as has already been pointed out, the purpose is to explore certain problems more deeply and to promote a useful exchange of experiences.

The four basic themes, intimately related one with another, are the following:

- Analysis of the present situation;
- Catechetical activity;
- Content and extent of catechetical activity;
- Pastoral plans to be promoted in the future.

In addition to these basic topics four or five additional short talks will be given to develop one or the other important point made in the main addresses on the basic themes. However, the entire Congress will not consist of speeches, for group discussions will take up a major part of the meeting time. These groups will be organized on the basis of cultural and linguistic similarity.

Inasmuch as the Congress is international in scope the selection of speakers has been made, in consultation with the Episcopal Conferences, on the basis of ability and geographic distribution.

EPISCOPAL ORDINATION ANNIVERSARIES

Let us pray for our Bishops on the occasion of their ordination anniversaries.

1. Most Rev. VICENTE ATAVIADO
August 8, 1968
2. Most Rev. FRANCISCO CLAVER
August 22, 1969
3. Most Rev. VICENTE P. REYES
August 24, 1959.
4. Most Rev. WILLIAM BRASSEUR
August 24, 1948
5. Most Rev. ANTONINO NEPOMUCENO
August 31, 1969