

CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF THE PHILIPPINES

NORMS AND GUIDELINES FOR

THE MINISTRY OF CATECHESIS

I. INTRODUCTION

Purpose of this Document

In issuing this Document, we wish to affirm our deep commitment to catechesis as one of the primary tasks of our Church in the Philippines as it is of the universal Church (Cfr. *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT), 1). We wish likewise to manifest our unwavering conviction "that if catechesis is done well in our local Churches, everything else will be easier to do." (CT, 63). For the more we give catechesis priority over other works and undertakings the more will we find in catechesis a strengthening of the internal life of our faithful and of the external activity of our Church. (CT, 15).

While "catechesis always has been and always will be a work for which the whole Church must feel responsible and must wish to be responsible" (CT, 16), we acknowledge that beyond all others we, as Bishops, are primarily responsible for catechesis. Above all, we should "bring about and maintain in our Churches a real passion for catechesis, a passion embodied in a pertinent and effective organization, putting into operation the necessary personnel, means and equipment, and also financial resources" (CT, 63). It is in this context therefore that we transmit to you these Norms and Guidelines for the ministry of catechesis.

Scope of this Document

These norms and guidelines are concerned with catechesis in general and catechesis within the school context, or religious education. The section on catechesis in general responds to only one question: **what are the main criteria to measure authentic catechesis?** Obviously there are many other areas of catechetical ministry that need clear-cut directives. We are confident however that those areas will be included in the **National Catechetical Directory of the Philippines** which is in the process of preparation.

The particular norms and guidelines for catechesis in the context of our Catholic schools should be read with the findings of the Episcopal Commission on Education and Religious Instruction in mind. These findings are contained in the ECERI's report last 1979 under the title of **The Shape of Religious Education in the Philippines Today**.

II. NORMS FOR AN AUTHENTIC CATECHESIS

1. **Catechesis should center on the mystery of the Trinity and Christ's saving work.**

The spirit and content of catechesis is inspired by the axiom, "through Christ to the Father in the Holy Spirit." If catechesis loses sight of these three elements or neglects their close relationship, it is not faithful to the Christian message (GCD, 4-42). *Catechesi Tradendae* considers this as "the principle inspiring all catechetical work and all who do this work" (CT, 72).

2. **Catechesis should be christocentric, i.e. it should center on the Person of Jesus Christ and Christ's teaching which is at the same time a lesson about life.**

"The Fourth General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops often stressed the Christocentricity of all authentic catechesis . . . It is to reveal in the Person of Christ the whole of God's eternal design reaching fulfillment in that Person. It is to seek to understand the meaning of Christ's actions and words and of the signs worked by him, for they simultaneously hide and reveal His mystery. Accordingly the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Spirit" (CT, 5).

3. **Catechesis should present the Christian message in its entirety and in such a way that the inter-relationship of its parts is maintained.**

To expound only what people want to hear, or to explain the Christian message in such a fragmentary and disjointed way that the faithful lose a sense of mystery, and reverence fails the catechetical mission. The Creeds — the Apostles' and the Nicene — are examples of brief best comprehensive statements of the Christian message. For this reason *Catechesi Tradendae* calls our attention to this point: "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 word of faith" not in mutilated

falsified or diminished form but whole and entire, in all its rigor and vigor. Unfaithfulness on some point to the integrity of the message means a dangerous weakening of catechesis and putting at risk the results that Christ and the ecclesial community have a right to expect from it." (C. T., 30).

4. Catechesis should recognize a certain hierarchy of truths.

A careful reading of the GCD brings about the point that hierarchy of truth does not mean that some truths pertain less to faith itself, that others do, but rather, that some truths of faith enjoy a higher priority inasmuch as other truths are based on and illumined by them.

5. Authentic catechesis should adapt to the circumstances of those being catechized.

Catechesis must take learning theory and other factors — Cultural, sociological, psychological, which influence human behavior and values into account. In a catechetical context, effective communication is as important as doctrinal orthodoxy. This is what *Catechesi Tradendae* means when it says: "it can happen that in the present situation of catechesis, reasons of method or pedagogy suggest that the communication of the riches of the content should be organized in one way rather than another." (C.T., 31).

6. Catechesis should interpret the present life in the light of revelation and at the same time disposes people for the world to come.

"In the time past, it began," as the General Catechetical Directory (GCD) states, "made progress, and in Christ reached its highest point; in the present time it displays its force and awaits its consummation in the future." (GCD, 44). Compare this with C.T.'s no. 22: "This revelation is not however isolated from life and it illumines the whole life with the light of the Gospel, to inspire it or to question it."

7. The bishop has the primary responsibility for catechesis in the diocese, and under him the pastor is directly responsible for the local church.

Catechesi Tradendae has this to say: "You (bishops) are, beyond all others, the ones primarily responsible for catechesis, the catechists par excellence." (C. T., 63). When this text is read together with the other recent documents of the Church — its meaning and impact emerge in bolder relief. The decree of Vatican II on the Pastoral Office of Bishops (*Christus Dominus* (CD) describes their responsibility in regard to catechesis (nos. 13-14). The message to

the People published at the close of the 1977 Synod of Bishops states, "the bishop has the primary role in the catechetical activity of the local church. It is his task to coordinate the activity of all who dedicate themselves to catechize in his own local church. Along with him, all their own ways must collaborate in the ministry of catechesis" (n. 14). So also the parish priest. Although he holds "the office of direct responsibility" he too is answerable to the bishop. For one, the parish priest should see to it that the diocesan catechetical directives are implemented.

Catechesi Tradendae in Chapter II precisely underlines this point when it traces catechesis in the course of the Church's history from the teaching of the apostles and their fellow workers, the Letters and Gospels the instructions and treatises of the Fathers of the Church, the Councils, the missions, etc. From this Exhortation draws the conclusion that catechesis is a duty and a right of the Church in every country. It is the priority task to which the Church must devote her best resources.

III. NORMS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Objectives

1. Religious education in our schools should aim not only to a simple intellectual assent to religious truths but also to a total commitment of one's whole being to the Person of Christ (**The Catholic School (TCS)**, 50).

"Without entering into the whole problem of teaching religion in schools, it must be emphasized that, while such teaching is not merely confined to "religious classes" within the school curriculum, it must, nevertheless also be imparted explicitly and in a systematic manner to prevent a distortion in the child's mind between general and religious culture. The fundamental difference between religious and other forms of education is that its aim is not simply intellectual assent to religious truths but also a total commitment of one's whole being to the Person of Christ" (**TCS**, 50).

"Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise in a Catholic school. His revelation gives new meaning to life and helps man to direct his thought action and will according to the Gospel making the beatitudes his norms of life." (**TCS**, 34)

2. Religious education should be imparted not only implicitly and indirectly, but also explicitly and in a systematic manner. (**TCS**, 50).

'This of course concerns first and foremost the Catholic school: it would no longer deserve this title if, no matter how much it shone for its high level of teaching in non-religious matters, there were justification for reproaching it for negligence or deviation in strictly religious education. Let it not be said that such education will always be given implicitly and indirectly... While Catholic establishments should respect freedom of conscience, that is to say avoid burdening consciences from without by exerting physical or moral pressure, especially in the case of the religious activity of the adolescents, they still have a grave duty to offer religious training suited to the often widely varying religious situations of the pupils. They also have a duty to make them understand that, although God's call to serve him in spirit and truth, in accordance with the commandments of God and the precepts of the Church does not apply constraint, it is nevertheless binding in conscience.' (CT, 69).

3. Since faith is principally assimilated through contact with people whose daily life bears witness to it, our educational personnel should strive to create in the school community an atmosphere permeated with the Gospel spirit of freedom and love. (TCS, 53-55).

ORGANIZATION

4. When feasible, in all our schools, there should be a specific office to take care of religious education. This particular office shall design, with the cooperation of other sectors within the school community, specific programs whereby religious values are instilled into the learner while at the same time enabling him to experience his Christian faith.

5. To promote a more coordinated and effective faith environment within the school community, the office of religious education should take charge of both the more organized religious education classes and the activities meant to experience Christian faith.

6. Inasmuch as the faith-dimension is the determinant element of our educational apostolate, and because this should be the common concern of the entire school community, an organizational structure in which all sectors of the school are represented should be established in each of our Catholic school.

7. Considering the centrality of religious education in the context of our educational apostolate, religious education subjects should be given priority in terms of both the most convenient time, qualified teaching staff, and material resources.

8. Considering the importance of continuity of systematic religious education, Catholic schools should work closely with the parents, the parish priest and other agents of the community. (Cfr. TCS, 48).

FACULTY MEMBERS

9. "While the Bishop's authority is to watch over the orthodoxy of religious instruction and the observance of Christian morals in the Catholic schools, it is also the task of the whole educative community to ensure that a distinctive Christian educational environment is maintained" (TCS, 73). It is highly recommended that periodical meeting between the authorities of Catholic schools and the ordinary of the place be held. Among other things, special attention should be given to the criteria used in the recruitment of religious education teachers.

10. Everything being equal, the salaries of religious education teachers should be equivalent or at par with those of the teachers in other academic departments within the same school.

11. The person in charge of religious education program should see to it that faculty members of religious education are given adequate opportunities for up-dating their knowledge of Christian faith and for deepening their Christian life in faith.

BISHOPS

12. The ordinarius loci should be informed at the end of each schoolyear on items with reference to religious education in the different Catholic schools of his diocese by way of a report. This report will be made according to the different levels (elementary, secondary and collegiate level) and should provide following information:

- Number of subjects of religion offered.
- List of faculty members with educational attainment.
- Textbook used in the various offerings.
- Person responsible for religious education.
- Religious activities held for faculty members.
- Religious activities held for students.

13. From time to time the Ordinarius loci will conduct a written examination to all students of a given class in his diocese in order to appraise himself of the knowledge students have gained in religious subjects.

"The bishop has the primary role in the catechetical activity of the local Church. It is his task to coordinate activity of all who dedicate themselves to catechize in his own local Church. Along with him all their own, ways must collaborate in the ministry of catechesis" (**Message to the People**, 14).

"The Catholic school... receives from the Bishops in some manner the "mandate" of an apostolic undertaking" (TCS, 71; also, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, **Apostolicam Actuositatem**, 24).

"The essential element of such a mandate is "union with those whom the Holy Spirit has assigned to rule God's Church and this link is expressed especially in overall pastoral strategy. "In the whole diocese or in given areas of it the coordination and close inter-connection of all apostolic works should be fostered under the direction of the Bishop. In this way all undertakings and organization, whether catechetical, missionary, charitable, social, family, educational, or any other programme serving a pastoral goal will be coordinated. Moreover, the unity of the diocese will thereby be evident (CD, 17)", (TCS, 72).

"The assigning of various responsibilities is governed by the principle of subsidiarity, and, with reference to this principle, ecclesiastical authority respects the competence of the professionals in teaching and education." (TCS, 70).

"While the Bishop's authority is to watch over the orthodoxy of religious instruction and the observance of Christian morals in the Catholic schools, it is the task of the whole educative community to ensure that a distinctive Christian educational environment is maintained in practice." (TCS, 73).

PARTICULAR TO THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITIES

14. We gratefully appeal to all our Catholic Institutions of Higher Learning and major ecclesiastical academic centers to jointly undertake the following urgent task: to elaborate a "societal and historical analysis of Philippine society acceptable to Christians and premised by a genuinely Christian world vision and a Christian view of history and man. It should be done with all possible seriousness and depth, free from distorting ideological bias (cf. l.c. **PUEBLA**

Document, nn. 535-537), thoroughly aware of the best actual contemporary developments both in Christian social teaching and in the social and historical sciences.¹

It has been said that in our Catholic schools and universities our departments of social sciences and history have often been content with "repeating" the sociological and historical analysis of Philippine society which are influenced by other uncritical liberal (ideological viewpoints, and that conscientization seminars, and other like groups, looking for social analyses more critically aware of, e.g. structures of injustice, of domination, etc., have had to resort to "structural analysis" rather uncritically drawing from an opposed ideological viewpoint.

It remains an urgent need for our educational task that "societal and historical analyses" of Philippine society acceptable to Christians and premised by a genuinely Christian world vision and a Christian view of history and man be elaborated with all possible seriousness and depth, free (as much as possible) from distorting ideological bias (in the sense not acceptable to Christians, cf. PUEBLA, nn. 535-537), thoroughly aware of the best critical contemporary developments both in Christian social teaching and in the social and historical sciences.

Such a social analysis following the general lines of contemporary texts of the Church's magisterium, e.g., *Octogesima Adveniens*, *Populorum Progressio*, *Justice in the World*, the *Puebla Conference*, could perform the service of a critical evaluation of views of Philippine society deriving largely from competing "ideologies" present in the Philippine scene.

*Approved by the General Assembly
of the Catholic Bishops' Conference
of the Philippines on July 8, 1980*

¹ It has been remarked, perhaps not without foundation, that our Catholic centres of higher studies have not met the need — still very urgent — of various organizations, groups in the Church for a *societal analysis* which builds on a Christian and Gospel perspective, which is coherent with Catholic social teaching and a genuinely Christian anthropology and vision of history.