

General Directory for Catechesis Key Concepts

Jesus Christ after his Resurrection, together with the Father, sent the Holy Spirit in order that He might accomplish from within the work of salvation and that He might animate His disciples to continue the mission to the whole world.

He was the first and supreme evangelizer. He proclaimed the Kingdom of God as the urgent and definitive intervention of God in history, and defined this proclamation “the Gospel”, i.e. “the Good News”. To this Gospel, Jesus devoted his entire earthly life: He made known the joy of belonging to the Kingdom, its demands, its magna carta, the mysteries which it embraces, the life of fraternal charity of those who enter it and its future fulfillment . (GDC 34)

A Synthesis of The Place of Catechesis in the Church's Mission of Evangelization According to the General Directory for Catechesis

Revelation

God truly reveals Himself as one who desires to communicate Himself, making the human person a participant in His divine nature. In this way God accomplishes His plan of love.

Fully revealed in Jesus Christ and realized by the power of the Holy Spirit, the providential plan of the Father implies:

- the Revelation of God, of His innermost truth, and of the true vocation and dignity of the human person;
- the offer of salvation to all, as a gift of God's grace and mercy, a gift which brings freedom from evil, sin and death;
- the definite call to gather into the family of God all of His scattered children.
(GDC 37)

God uses a pedagogy to reveal Himself to the human person: He uses human events and words to communicate His plan. (GDC 38)

God revealed Himself progressively – through the prophets and through salvific events, until He brought to completion His self-revelation by sending His own Son. Jesus is indeed the Father's one, perfect and unsurpassable Word. (GDC 40)

Conversion and Faith

Christian faith is, above all, conversion to Jesus Christ, full and sincere adherence to His person and the decision to walk in His footsteps. Faith is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, making of oneself a disciple of Jesus. This demands a permanent commitment to think like Him, to judge like Him and to live as He lived. In this way the believer unites himself to the community of disciples and appropriates the faith of the Church. (GDC 53)

This “Yes” to Jesus Christ, who is the fullness of the revelation of the Father, is twofold: a trustful abandonment to God and a loving assent to all that God has revealed to us. This is possible only by means of the action of the Holy Spirit. (GDC 54)

Faith involves a “metanoia,” i.e. a change of life, a profound transformation of mind and heart. Faith and conversion arise from the heart, that depth of the human person which involves all that the person is.

By meeting Jesus Christ and by adhering to Him the human being sees all of his deepest aspirations completely fulfilled. He finds what he has always been seeking and finds it superabundantly.

Faith is a gift from God. It can only be born as a completely free response to the promptings of the Holy Spirit who moves the heart and turns it toward God, and who makes it easy to accept and believe the truth. (GDC 55)

Faith is destined to grow in the hearts of believers. Adhering to Jesus Christ sets in motion a process of continuing conversion which goes on for the whole of one’s lifetime. (GDC 56)

The Sacraments of Initiation

Faith, moved by divine grace and cultivated by the action of the Church, undergoes a process of maturation. Catechesis, which is at the service of this growth, is also a gradual activity. The gradual nature of catechesis is inspired by the stages of the great catechumenal tradition of the Church. In the baptismal catechumenate, formation is articulated in four stages:

- **the pre-catechumenate:** the locus of the first evangelization leading to conversion, where the kerygma of the primary proclamation is explained,
- **the catechumenate:** the context of integral catechesis beginning with the “handing on of the Gospels”,
- **the time of purification and illumination:** a more intense preparation for the sacraments of initiation, including the “handing on of the Creed, and the “handing on of the Lord’s Prayer”,
- **the time of mystagogy:** the experience of the sacraments and entry into the community. (GDC 88)

There is a fundamental difference between pre-baptismal catechesis and post-baptismal catechesis. However, some elements of the pre-baptismal catechumenate must inspire post-baptismal catechesis. The pre-baptismal catechumenate:

constantly reminds the whole Church of the fundamental importance of initiation and the basic factors which constitute it: catechesis and the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist;

is the responsibility of the entire Christian community and thus increases awareness of the importance of every form of faith-education that the Church offers;

is completely permeated by the mystery of Christ’s Passover; thus all catechesis must be inspired by the Paschal Mystery;

is an initial locus of inculturation since the Church receives catechumens integrally, together with their cultural ties; all catechetical activity incorporates into the catholicity of the Church, authentic seeds of the word scattered through nations and individuals.

Is a process of formation and a school of the faith whose catechesis is characterized by:

comprehensiveness and integrity of formation,
gradual character expressed in definite stages,
meaningful rites, symbols, biblical and liturgical signs,
constant references to the Christian community (GDC 90 and 91)

Evangelization and Catechesis

The Church exists in order to evangelize, i.e. to carry forth the Good News to every sector of the human race so that by its strength the Good News may enter into the hearts of human beings and renew the human race. (GDC 46)

Evangelization is the process by which the Church, moved by the Spirit, proclaims and spreads the Gospel throughout the entire world. The elements in the process of evangelization are:

- **Christian Witness:**
Urged by charity, evangelization impregnates and transforms the whole temporal order, appropriating and renewing all cultures; it bears witness among all peoples of the new way of being and living which characterizes Christians;
- **Primary Proclamation:**
Evangelization explicitly proclaims the Gospel and calls to conversion; this is addressed to non-believers and those living in religious indifference;
- **Christian Initiation:**
By means of catechesis and the sacraments of Christian Initiation, evangelization initiates into the faith and the Christian life those who convert to Jesus Christ or those who take up again the path of following Him, incorporating them into the Christian community;
- **Continuing Education in Faith within the Christian Community:**
Evangelization nourishes communion among the faithful by means of continuous education in the faith (homilies and other forms of catechesis), the sacraments and the practice of charity;
- **Arousal to Mission:**
Evangelization sends the disciples of Christ to proclaim the Gospel by word and deed throughout the whole world. (GDC 48)

Catechesis plays an integral part in each element of the process of evangelization.

- **Primary Proclamation (pre-catechesis):**

Many who present themselves for catechesis require genuine conversion. Only by starting with conversion can catechesis fulfill its proper task of education in the faith. Catechesis educates the convert in the faith and incorporates him into the Christian community. Catechesis promotes and matures *initial conversion*. (GDC 61 and 62)

- **Christian Initiation (Initiatory Catechesis):**

Catechesis is a fundamental element of Christian Initiation and is closely connected with the sacraments of initiation, especially with Baptism, the sacrament of faith. The “profession of faith” is at once an element inherent in Baptism and the goal of catechesis. The aim of catechetical activity is to encourage a living, explicit and fruitful profession of faith.

Those who have converted to Jesus Christ and who have been educated in the faith, receive the sacraments of Christian Initiation and are delivered from the powers of darkness. Having died, been buried and risen with Christ, they receive the spirit of adoption as children and celebrate with the whole people of God the memorial of the Lord’s death and resurrection. (GDC 65 and 66)

Initiatory catechesis lays the basis for the Christian life of the followers of Jesus. (GDC 69)

- **Continuing Education in Faith within the Christian Community (Continuing Catechesis):**

The process of continuing conversion goes beyond what is provided by basic catechesis. Continuing formation in faith is directed to the individual Christian in the journey towards holiness. It is also directed to the Christian community as such so that it may mature in its spiritual life, its love for God and neighbor and its openness to the world as a missionary community. This demands of the community a great fidelity to the action of the Holy Spirit, the constant nourishment of the Body and Blood of Christ and continuing education in the faith, listening all the time to the word of God.

In the Christian community the disciples of Jesus Christ are nourished at a twofold table: “that of the word of God and that of the Body of Christ.” The Gospel and the Eucharist are the constant food for the journey to the Father’s House. (GDC 70)

Ministry of the Word and Catechesis

The ministry of the word is a fundamental element of evangelization. Through the Church it transmits Revelation by using human words. These, however, always refer to works:

- works which God has done and continues to do, especially in the liturgy;
- the witness of Christians,
- the transforming action which these Christians achieve, together with so many people of goodwill throughout the world.

The Holy Spirit is the principal agent of the ministry of the word, the one through whom the living voice of the Gospel rings out in the Church and through her in the world.

(GDC 50)

The ministry of the word does this in five ways:

- **By Primary Proclamation:**

The most immediate expression of the missionary mandate of Jesus, it is directed to non-believers – those who have chosen unbelief, those Christians who live on the margins of Christian life, those who follow other religions. The religious awakening of the children of Christian families is an eminent form of this proclamation.

- **By Christian Initiation:**

Those who are moved by grace to decide to follow Jesus are introduced into the life of faith, of the liturgy and of the charity of the People of God. The Church achieves this fundamentally by catechesis, in close relation with the sacraments of initiation (whether these are about to be received or have already been received). Important forms include:

- catechesis of non-baptized adults in the catechumenate,
- catechesis of baptized adults who wish to return to the faith,
- catechesis of baptized adults who need to complete their initiation,
- catechesis of children and of the young,
- Christian education in families,
- religious instruction in schools.

- **By Continuing Education in the Faith:**

Christians already initiated in the basic elements of the Christian faith need to nourish and deepen their faith continually throughout their lives. This is accomplished through a great variety of forms: systematic and occasional, individual and community, organized and spontaneous.

- **By Liturgy:**

This takes different forms:

the homily which is one of the most important, celebrations of the word, instruction received during the administration of the sacraments, immediate preparation for reception of a sacrament, celebration of sacramentals, and, above all, participation in the Eucharist.

- **By Theology:**

Theology seeks to develop understanding of the faith. Theology must confront philosophical forms of thought, various forms of humanism and the human sciences and dialogue with them. It is articulated whenever the systematic treatment and the scientific investigation of the truths of the faith are promoted. *(GDC 51)*

This ministry of the word serves the process of full conversion:

- the first proclamation of the Gospel is characterized by the call to faith;
- catechesis gives a foundation to conversion and provides Christian life with a basic structure;
- ongoing education in the faith provides the necessary nourishment that every baptized adult needs. *(GDC 57)*

Catechesis is that particular form of the ministry of the word which matures initial conversion to make it into a living explicit and fruitful confession of faith:

- Initiatory Catechesis, both before and after the reception of Baptism, prepares for this decisive undertaking.
- Continuing catechesis helps to mature this profession of faith, to proclaim it in the Eucharist and to renew the commitments which it entails. *(GDC 82)*

Catechesis

Catechesis, for its part, transmits the words and deeds of Revelation and makes clear the profound mysteries they contain. Catechesis not only recalls the marvels worked by God in the past, but also in the light of the same Revelation, interprets the signs of the times and the person's present life, for it is in these that the plan of God for the salvation of the world is realized. *(GDC 39)*

Jesus is the fullness of Revelation and catechesis is Christocentric. The mystery of Christ is the center from which all other elements are structured and illuminated. *(GDC 41)*

Catechesis is an essentially ecclesial act. The true subject of catechesis is the Church which, continuing the mission of Jesus the Master and animated by the Holy Spirit, is sent to be the teacher of the faith. The Church transmits the faith which she herself lives:

her understanding of the mystery of God and His salvific plan,
her vision of the human person's highest vocation,
the style of evangelical life which communicates the joy of the Kingdom,
the hope which pervades her,
the love which she has for humankind and all God's creatures. *(GDC 78)*

The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ. It proposes to help those who have just converted to know better:

this Jesus to whom they have entrusted themselves,
His mystery,
the kingdom of God proclaimed by Him,
the requirements and teaching contained in His Gospel,
the paths that He has laid down for anyone who wishes to follow Him.

Catechesis seeks to solidify and mature this first adherence. Baptism, the sacrament by which we are configured to Christ, sustains this work of catechesis with the help of its grace. *(GDC 80)*

Communion with Jesus Christ, by its own dynamic, leads the disciple to unite himself with everything with which Jesus Christ himself was profoundly united:

with God his Father, who sent Him into the world,
with the Holy Spirit, who impelled His mission;
with the Church, His body, for which He gave himself up,
with humankind whose lot He wished to share. *(GDC 81)*

Role of the Parish Community in Catechesis:

Catechesis runs the risk of becoming barren if no community of faith and Christian life welcomes the catechumens, sustains them and forms them in faith. The accompaniment which a community gives to the initiated is eventually transformed into their being totally integrated by the same community. (GDC 69)

The Six Fundamental tasks of Catechesis:

- **To Promote Knowledge of the Faith:**
By introducing the disciples of Jesus to a knowledge of Tradition and of Scripture, catechesis leads to the gradual grasping of the whole truth about the divine plan. Catechesis nourishes the life of faith and equips it to explain itself to the world. It teaches the meaning of the Creed as a compendium of Scripture and of the faith of the Church.
- **To Promote Liturgical Education:**
Communion with Jesus Christ leads to the celebration of His salvific presence in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist. Catechesis, along with promoting a knowledge of the meaning of the liturgy and the sacraments, also educates the disciples of Jesus Christ to that full, conscious and active participation which is required by the very nature of the liturgy and the dignity of the baptismal priesthood.
- **To Promote Moral Formation:**
Conversion to Jesus Christ implies walking in His footsteps. Catechesis transmits to the disciples the attitudes of the Master Himself. The Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus takes up the Decalogue and impresses upon it the spirit of the beatitudes, is an indispensable point of reference for the moral formation which is most necessary today. Catechesis teaches the social consequences of the demands of the Gospel.
- **To Teach to Pray:**
Communion with Jesus Christ leads the disciples to assume the attitude of prayer and contemplation which the Master himself had. To learn to pray with Jesus is to pray with the same sentiments with which He turned to the Father: adoration, praise, thanksgiving, filial confidence, supplication and awe for His glory. All of these sentiments are reflected in the Our Father, the prayer which Jesus taught His disciples and which is the model of all Christian prayer.

- **To Educate for Community Life:**

Christian community life does not happen spontaneously. It is necessary to educate for it carefully. Catechesis prepares the Christian to live in community by inculcating the attitudes Christ calls for in the Gospel:

- the spirit of simplicity and humility (Mt. 18:3),
- solicitude for the least among the brethren (Mt. 18:6),
- particular care for those who are alienated (Mt. 18:12),
- fraternal correction (Mt. 18:15),
- common prayer (Mt. 18:19),
- mutual forgiveness (Mt. 18: 22),
- fraternal love which embraces all these attitudes (Jn. 13:34).

Catechesis also encourages fraternal attitudes toward members of other Christian churches and ecclesial communities. It gives a clear exposition of all the Church's doctrine and also a suitable knowledge of other confessions with which there are shared elements of faith. It arouses and nourishes a true desire for unity.

- **To Educate for Participation in the Life and Mission of the Church:**

Catechesis prepares the Christian to participate actively in the life and mission of the Church. It seeks to equip and prepare the disciples of Jesus to be present as Christians in society through their professional, cultural and social lives, and to cooperate in the different ecclesial services, according to their proper vocation.

Catechesis nourishes the evangelical attitudes which Jesus taught His disciples when He sent them on mission:

- to seek out the lost,
- to proclaim and heal,
- to be poor,
- to know how to accept rejection and persecution,
- to place one's trust in the Father and in the support of the Holy Spirit,
- to expect no other reward than the joy of working for the Kingdom.

(Mt. 10: 5-42, LK 10: 1-20)

Catechesis also prepares for interreligious dialogue, i.e. meaningful communication with men and women of other religions. Catechesis helps to reconcile and at the same time to distinguish between the proclamation of Christ and interreligious dialogue.

(GDC 85 and 86)

A Synthesis of the Meaning of Inculturation in the General Directory for Catechesis

What is Inculturation?

In the Incarnation, the Word of God became man in space and time, an individual rooted in a specific culture. This is the original “inculturation” of the word of God and the model for all evangelization by the Church. *(GDC 109)*

The Gospel message seeks inculturation because the Good News is destined for all peoples. *(GDC 97)*

The Church sets out to meet each person taking into serious account diversity of circumstances and cultures and maintains the unity of many in the one saving Word: *(GDC 169)*

Inculturation is not simply an external adaptation designed to make the Christian message more attractive. It is the penetration of the deepest strata of persons and peoples by the Gospel, which goes to the very center and roots of their cultures. *(GDC 109)*

The question posed by the Second Vatican Council is still valid: “What is to be done to prevent increased exchange between cultures -- an exchange which ought to lead to genuine and fruitful dialogue between groups and nations -- from disturbing the life of the community, overthrowing its traditional wisdom and endangering the character proper to each people?”

- In many places there is an acute awareness that traditional cultures are being assailed by powerful external forces and by alien imitations of imported life styles, with the result that the identity and values proper to peoples are thus being gradually eroded.
- The widespread influence of the communications media, out of economic or ideological interest, often imposes a vision of life which does not respect the cultural distinctiveness of the peoples whom they address.

Thus, with inculturation, evangelization encounters one of its greatest challenges. In the light of the Gospel, the Church must appropriate all the positive values of a culture and of cultures and reject those elements which impede development of the true potential of persons and peoples. *(GDC 21)*

Who Does the Work of Inculturation?

The work of inculturation is done by all the people of God. It takes place gradually and is an expression of the community's Christian experience. *(GDC 109)*

The whole People of God reflect the authentic "sensus fidei" which must never be lost sight of.

Inculturation needs to be guided and encouraged, but not forced, lest it give rise to negative reactions among Christians.

It must be an expression of the community's life, one which must mature within the community itself, and not be exclusively the result of erudite research.

The thrust to incarnate the Gospel requires the cooperation of all who live in the same cultural condition – clergy, pastoral workers, Catechists and laity. *(GDC 206)*

The People of God do the work of Inculturation by the following means:

- principally by the ecclesial community. The Church community is represented by a Catechist who has a profound religious sense, a living social conscience, and is well-rooted in the cultural environment.
- by local catechisms which present the Gospel in relation to the demands, hopes, questions and problems of the cultures to whom they are addressed.
- by catechetical institutes and the catechumenate which incorporate, as appropriate, the language, symbols and values of the culture in which those to be catechized live.

In each Diocese, catechetical programs and materials should be updated and revised. *(GDC 213)*

If there are several linguistic or ethnic groups in the diocese, programs, guides and directories should be provided in the various languages. *(GDC 214).*

- by preparation of those who are to proclaim the Gospel so that they become capable of giving reasons for their hope in cultures often pagan or post-Christian. *(GDC 110)*

The direct involvement of those persons who can best indicate effective ways of proclaiming the Gospel in a specific culture is fostered by widespread catechesis. *(GDC 214)*

What is the Role of Catechesis in Inculturation? (GDC 202 to 214)

Catechesis, like evangelization in general, is called to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures. To do so, Catechesis must:

- know in depth the culture of the persons being catechized and the extent of that culture's penetration into their lives.
- recognize a cultural dimension in the Gospel itself; the Gospel does not spring from some human cultural humus, but it cannot be isolated from the cultures in which it was initially inserted and in which it has found expression through the centuries.
- witness to the transcendence of the Gospel and at the same time discern those seeds of the Gospel present in culture:

The Christian community must discern which modes of thought, which criteria and which lifestyles of the culture are compatible with the faith; these it adopts. It must discern which are contrary to the Kingdom of God; these it seeks to purify and transform. *(GDC 109)*

This discernment is governed by two basic principles – compatibility with the Gospel, and communion with the universal Church. *(GDC 109)*

The methodology which catechesis uses is a dynamic process consisting of the following interactive elements:

listening to the culture of the people for an echo of the word of God, discerning what has an authentic Gospel value or is at least open to the Gospel,
purifying what bears the mark of human frailty or sin (passions, structures of evil),
stimulating dialogue,
fostering an attitude of radical conversion to God and patient interior maturation.

- translate the authentic essentials of the Gospel message into a definite culture language. *(GDC 112)*

Catechesis must transmit the gospel message in its integrity and purity, taking diligent care to present faithfully the entire treasure of the Christian message. But Integrity must be accompanied by adaptation; consequently, catechesis must explain the elements of the faith in a manner adapted to the capacity of those being catechized.

- proclaim the profound change, i.e. the conversion, which the Gospel, as a transforming, regenerating force, works in culture.

- promote a new expression of the Gospel in accordance with evangelized culture:

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.

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. *(GDC 113)*

What are the agents catechesis uses to effect inculturation?

The agents are:

- the Christian Initiation process which has important cultural implications such as:
acquiring new motivations in life,
education of conscience,
learning a biblical and sacramental language,
knowledge of the historical density of Christianity.

The baptismal catechumenate is an initial locus of inculturation. Following the example of the Incarnation of the Son of God, made man in a concrete historical moment, the Church receives catechumens integrally, together with their cultural ties. All catechetical activity participates in the function of incorporating into the catholicity of the Church, authentic seeds of the Word, scattered through nations and individuals. *(GDC 91)*

- the Family, the central and primary agent of an incarnate transmission of faith.
- liturgical Catechesis with its richness of signs and with its accessibility to so many people by such things as:
the Sunday homily,
the content of the Lectionary,
the structure of the liturgical year,
occasions of particularly significant catechesis such as marriages,
funerals, visits to the sick, feasts of patron saints.
- multi-ethnic and multi-cultural situations which lead to a greater discovery and appreciation of the resources of diverse groups to receive and express the faith.

What is the role of language and media in inculturation?

Inculturation of the faith is a linguistic task. In order to express its meaning and demonstrate its existential importance, Catechesis must:

- respect and value the language proper to the message, especially biblical language, as well as the historical-traditional language of the Church (creed, liturgy) and doctrinal language (dogmatic formulations).
- enter into dialogue using forms and terms proper to the culture of those to whom it is addressed and speaking a language suited to today's children and young people, to intellectuals and scientists, to the illiterate, to people of simple culture, to the handicapped, etc.;
- stimulate new expressions of the Gospel in the culture in which it has been planted. *(GDC 208)*

The evangelization of modern culture depends to a great extent on the influence of the media. Catechesis must:

- have a greater appreciation of the media's use of the language of the image and balance it with the language of the word;
- safeguard the genuine religious meaning in selected forms of expression;
- promote deep personal discernment and mature criticism of what is being received from the media;
- develop and provide catechetical aids to help accomplish these aims.

The cooperative efforts of all those engaged in Catechesis are needed.

(GDC 209)

Where is Inculturation Directed?

The Gospel seeks a catechesis which reaches people where they live, especially where the most elementary and fundamental cultural exchanges take place: family, work environment, free time.

The light of the Gospel must enlighten such forums of modern society as:

- communications;
- civil campaigns for peace, development and liberation of peoples;
- the protection of creation;
- the defense of human rights especially of minorities, women and children;
- scientific research;
- international relations. *(GDC 211)*

It is necessary to distinguish inculturation in countries of recent Christian origin, where the primary proclamation of the Gospel must yet be consolidated, from inculturation in countries of long Christian tradition which have need of a new evangelization.

(GDC 212)

Account must be taken of situations which are open to conflict and tension deriving from factors such as:

- ethnic pluralism,
- religious pluralism
- differences in development which sometimes are strident,
- urban, rural and suburban life styles,
- massive secularization in some countries and strong religiosity in others. *(GDC 212)*

Respect must be given to the cultural tendencies of the various social and professional strata, such as:

- men and women of science and culture,
- the world of workers,
- the youth,
- the marginalized,
- foreigners,
- the disabled. *(GDC 212)*

Attention must be paid to the diverse cultures existing in one and the same people or nation. *(GDC 212)*