



## Press conference - Intervento di Mons. Rino Fisichella



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The publication of a *Directory for Catechesis* is a joyful event in the life of the Church. For those dedicated to the immense task of catechesis, it may be seen as a positive challenge because it makes them appreciate the dynamic nature of the catechetical movement, which has always had a significant presence in the life of the Christian community. The *Directory for Catechesis* is a document of the Holy See and entrusted to the entire Church. Much time and work has gone into its preparation, and its publication comes after a wide international consultation. Today we are presenting the Italian edition. However, translations are ready in Spanish (separate editions for Latin America and Spain), Portuguese (separate editions originating in Brazil and Portugal), English (separate editions originating in the United States of America and the United Kingdom), French, German and Polish. The *Directory* is directed in first place, to Bishops, the first catechists among the People of God because of their primary responsibility for the transmission of the faith (ref. n. 114). Responsibility for catechesis also extends to the Bishops' Conferences with their respective Catechetical Commissions, which contribute to the elaboration of a hopefully national project aimed at supporting the work of the individual dioceses in this field (ref. n. 413). However, those most directly involved in the use of the *Directory*, remain the priests, the deacons, the consecrated persons, and the millions of male and female lay catechists that, with generosity, hard work, and hope, offer daily their ministry in their various communities. The dedication, with which they labor, particularly in a time of cultural transition like the present, is the tangible sign of how the encounter with the Lord can transform a catechist into an authentic evangelizer.

Today, what we are presenting is essentially the third catechetical *Directory* since the Second Vatican Council. The first of 1971, the *General Catechetical Directory*, and the second of 1997, the *General Directory for Catechesis*, have left their mark on these last fifty years in the history of catechesis. Not only have these texts had a primary role, but they have also been instrumental in helping catechesis to progress, not least by renewing its methodology and taking into account

pedagogical considerations. The need for a new Directory was born of the process of inculturation which characterizes catechesis in a particular way and which, especially today, demands a special focus.

Today the Church is facing a great challenge in the form of *digital* culture. Focusing on a phenomenon that imposes itself as global requires that those who are responsible for the formation do not prevaricate. In contrast with the past, when culture was limited to the geographical context, digital culture is entwined with the ongoing globalization and even determines its development. The instruments created in this last decade manifest a radical transformation of behaviors that influence above all the formation of personal identity and interpersonal relations. The speed of linguistic change, and with it, behavioral relations, allows us to glimpse at a new model of communication and formation, which inevitably also affects the Church in the complex world of education. The various manifestations of the Church's presence in the vast world of the internet is certainly a positive fact, but digital culture goes much further. It goes to the root of the anthropological question which is decisive in every formative context and which cannot prescind from truth and freedom. The mere posing of this problem requires the verification of the adequacy of any formation proposal regardless of its provenance. For the Church, however, this verification is especially necessary in the light of her "competence" over humanity and her claim to truth.

This premise is perhaps, by itself, sufficient to require a new *Directory for Catechesis*. It is no exaggeration to say that twenty years in the digital age are like a half-century prior to its onset. Thus the need to have a Directory that would look with profound realism on recent cultural developments bearing in mind the requirements of catechesis. It is for this reason that the *Directory* presents not only the problems inherent in digital culture, but also suggests which paths to take so that catechesis becomes a proposal capable of being understood and adequate to the requirements of its context.

There is, however, a more theological and ecclesial reason that has required the preparation of this *Directory*. The highlighting of the synodal dimension cannot make us forget the recent Synods in the Church. In 2005, the Synod on *The Eucharist: Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church*; in 2008, the one on *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*; in 2015, the one on *The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and the Contemporary World*; and in 2018, the Synod on *Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment*. In all of these gatherings, constants emerge which touch closely on the theme of evangelization and catechesis as can be verified from the documents that have followed them. More specifically, it is proper to highlight two complementary events which mark the history of this last decade with regard to catechesis: the Synod on *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith* of 2012, with the consequent Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* of Pope Francis, and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, both of which touch directly the competence of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization.

Evangelization occupies the primary place in the life of the Church and in the everyday teaching of Pope Francis. It could not be otherwise. Evangelization is the task that the Risen Lord has entrusted his Church in order to be, in the time of every age, the faithful announcement of his Gospel.

To ignore this premise would be tantamount to making the Christian community, one of just many meritorious associations, strong in its two thousand years of history, but not the Church of Christ.

The perspective of Pope Francis, among other things, stands in strong continuity with the teaching of Saint Paul VI in *Evangelii nuntiandi* of 1975. Both do nothing but refer to the wealth arising from Vatican II, which, as regards catechesis, found its focal point in the *Catechesi tradendae* (1979) of Saint John Paul II.

Catechesis, therefore, must be united intimately with the work of evangelization and cannot be separated from it. It needs to take on the very characteristics of evangelization, without falling into

the temptation to become a substitute for it or to want to impose its pedagogical premises on evangelization. In this relationship, the primacy belongs to evangelization, not to catechesis. This allows us to understand why, in the light of *Evangelii gaudium*, this *Directory* distinguishes itself in its support of a "*kerygmatic catechesis*".

The heart of catechesis is the announcement of the person of Jesus Christ, who surpasses the limits of space and time to present himself to each generation as the good news offered to reach the meaning of life. In this perspective, a fundamental characteristic emerges which catechesis must make its own: *mercy*. The *kerygma* is an announcement of the Father's mercy directed at the sinner who is no longer considered as an excluded person, but as a privileged guest at the banquet of salvation, which consists in the forgiveness of sins. If we wish, it is in this context that the experience of the *catechumenate* acquires force as experience of the forgiveness offered and of the new life of communion with God which ensues.

The centrality of the *kerygma*, however, must be received in a non-temporal qualitative sense. It requires, in fact, that it be present in *all phases* of catechesis and *in every* catechesis. It is the 'first announcement' that is always made because Christ is the one thing necessary. Faith is not something obvious to be called upon in moments of need, but an act of freedom that engages all of life. The *Directory*, therefore, makes its own the centrality of the *kerygma* expressed always in a Trinitarian sense as a commitment of the entire Church. Catechesis as expressed by the *Directory* is characterized by this dimension and its repercussions in people's lives. In this vision, the whole of catechesis acquires a particular value that is expressed in the constant deepening of our understanding the gospel message. In short, catechesis is meant to lead to the knowledge of that Christian love which leads those who have embraced it to become evangelizing disciples.

The *Directory* unfolds by touching on various themes, which only refer to the underlying objective. A first dimension is *mystagogy* presented through two complementary elements: a renewed appraisal of the liturgical signs of Christian initiation, then, the progressive maturation of the formation process in which the entire community is involved. *Mystagogy* is a privileged route to follow, but it is not optional in the catechetical journey. Its obligatory nature derives from the fact that through it we are inserted more and more into the mystery that is believed and celebrated. It is the awareness of the primacy of the mystery that leads catechesis not to isolate the *kerygma* from its natural context. The proclamation of faith is still an announcement of the mystery of God's love that becomes human for our salvation. One's response cannot go beyond accepting the mystery of Christ in itself in order to shed light on the mystery of one's personal experience (*Gaudium et spes*, 22).

Another new feature of the *Directory* is the link between evangelization and the catechumenate in its various meanings (ref. n.62). There is urgency in carrying out a "pastoral conversion" in order to free catechesis from some chokeholds that prevent its effectiveness. The first such chokehold can be identified in the school model, according to which the catechesis of Christian Initiation is undertaken under a school paradigm. The catechist replaces the teacher, the school classroom becomes the catechetical room, the school calendar is identical to the catechetical one, etc. A second one is the mentality by which catechesis becomes the condition for receiving a particular sacrament of initiation, with a consequent void opening up once initiation has ended. A third is the exploitation of a sacrament in the name of pastoral strategy, so that the time frame for confirmation is dictated by the need *not* to lose the small flock of young people remaining in the parish rather than by the significance which the sacrament possesses of itself in the economy of the Christian life.

Pope Francis has written that 'Proclaiming Christ means showing that to believe in and to follow him is not only something right and true, but also something beautiful, capable of filling life with new splendor and profound joy, even in the midst of difficulties. Every expression of true beauty can thus be acknowledged as a path leading to an encounter with the Lord Jesus... So a formation in the *via pulchritudinis* ought to be part of our effort to pass on the faith' (*Evangelii gaudium*, 167). An

innovative approach to catechesis lies in the *way of beauty*, above all by increasing awareness of the great heritage in terms of art, literature and music, which each local Church possesses. This is why the *Directory* has placed the *way of beauty* as one of the 'sources' of catechesis (ref. n. 106-109).

A final dimension offered by the *Directory* can be found in its effort to insert us progressively into the mystery of the faith. This characteristic cannot be delegated to a single dimension of the faith or of catechesis. *Theology* investigates the revealed mystery with the tools of *reason*. *Liturgy* celebrates and evokes the mystery with sacramental life. *Charity* recognizes the mystery of the brother or sister who holds out their hand. Catechesis, in the same way, gradually guides us to accept and live the mystery completely in our daily existence. The *Directory* adopts this vision when it asks that catechesis be formulated in such a way as to maintain the unity of the mystery while articulating the different phases of its expression. The mystery when embraced in its profound reality requires silence. A true catechesis will never be tempted to try to say everything about the mystery of God.

On the contrary, its task is to guide us to the contemplation of the mystery by making of silence its conquest.

The *Directory*, therefore, presents *kerygmatic catechesis* not as an abstract theory, but rather as an instrument with a strong existential value. This catechesis finds its strength in the *encounter* that allows one to experience the presence of God in the life of each one of us. A God who is near, who loves us and who follows the events of our history because the Incarnation of the Son engages him directly. Catechesis ought to involve everyone, the catechist and the catechized, in experiencing this presence and in feeling involved in the work of mercy. In short, this type of catechesis allows us to discover that before it is a moral proposal, faith is really an encounter with a person and that Christianity is not a religion of the past, but an event of the present. Such an experience promotes the understanding of personal freedom as the fruit of the discovery of the truth which sets us free (ref. *John* 8:31).

A catechesis that gives primacy to the *kerygma* is the opposite of any imposition, even that of a body of evidence which cannot be denied. The option of faith, in fact, before considering the contents to which adhere to through one's assent, is an act of freedom because one discovers that one is loved. In this context, it is good to consider carefully what the *Directory* proposes regarding the importance of the act of faith in its twofold articulation (ref. n. 18). For too long catechesis has focused on making the contents of the faith known and on the best pedagogical methods by which to reach this end, omitting the most crucial moment which is the act of deciding for faith and the giving of one's assent.

We hope that this new *Directory for Catechesis* will be of real assistance and support for the renewal of catechesis in the one process of evangelization that the Church has not tired of carrying out in two thousand years, in order that the world come to meet Jesus of Nazareth, the son of God made one of us, for our salvation.