

## **CCC II. Handing on the Faith: Catechesis**

Quite early on, the name catechesis was given to the totality of the Church's efforts to make disciples, to help men (and women) believe that Jesus is the Son of God so that believing they might have life in his name, and to educate and instruct them in this life, thus building up the body of Christ.

**Periods of renewal in the Church** are also intense moments of catechesis. In the great era of the Fathers of the Church, saintly bishops devoted an important part of their ministry to catechesis. St. Cyril of Jerusalem and St. John Chrysostom, St. Ambrose and St. Augustine, and many other Fathers wrote catechetical works that remain models for us.<sup>11</sup>

"The ministry of catechesis draws ever fresh energy from the councils. the Council of Trent is a noteworthy example of this. It gave catechesis priority in its constitutions and decrees. It lies at the origin of the Roman Catechism, which is also known by the name of that council and which is a work of the first rank as a summary of Christian teaching. . "<sup>12</sup> The Council of Trent initiated a remarkable organization of the Church's catechesis. Thanks to the work of holy bishops and theologians such as St. Peter Canisius, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Turibius of Mongrovejo or St. Robert Bellarmine, it occasioned the publication of numerous catechisms.

Catechesis in the Church has again attracted attention in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, which Pope Paul VI considered the great catechism of modern times.

Graced by God, we come to see that "In the life of faith there are always two movements: God in search of us and we in search of God" (*U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults*, p. 109).

## **VATICAN II**

Vatican II (1962-1965) was one of the great moments in the history of our Church. It marked a time when the Church took a look at where it was and where the world was—and sought to close the gap. The Council wasn't a sudden event; years of changes in the world and years of study among Church leaders and theologians brought us all to this great moment.

Although Pope John XXIII (1958-1963) is rightly given credit for initiating the Second Vatican Council, the preparations for a council had been discussed for many years. But it was Pope John, a student of Church history with firsthand experience of the joys and troubles of the world, who brought the spirit of informed openness that so shaped Vatican II. And of course it is to the credit of his successor, Paul VI (1963-1978), that the Council moved forward following John's death.

The momentum behind the Church's ongoing renewal is found in the teachings of Vatican II. It is found in a Church re-centered on the Gospels and the Eucharist and in constant dialogue with the world. Pope John Paul II said it best a few years ago: "The best preparation for the new millennium can only be expressed by a renewed commitment to apply, as faithfully as possible, the teachings of Vatican II to the life of every individual and of the whole Church" (The Coming Third Millennium, #20).

### **Ministry transformation**

It's common today to see lay women and men assisting at Mass as Eucharistic ministers. These and other lay liturgical ministers—ushers, greeters, lectors and music ministers—are visible reminders of the wide variety of laypeople who minister within the Church. Some serve as catechists or youth ministers, others as hospital chaplains, bereavement ministers, administrators of priestless parishes and outreach workers

### **Dynamic liturgies**

The liturgical renewal that swept through the Church after Vatican II brought new life to the celebration of the Eucharist and other sacraments. New sacramental rites and the use of local languages encourage more full and active participation.

### **New interest in Scripture**

More Catholics are reading the Bible today—with more solid understanding—than at any other time in Church history. Growing numbers of lay women and men are attending theology schools, leading and/or joining Bible study groups and reading an array of solid articles or

books on the subject. Priests and religious are no longer the only Scripture experts.

### **Outreach to all humanity**

One of the most warmly received insights of Vatican II is that salvation is concerned not solely with saving souls but also with saving the whole person—body and soul. This holistic view is appealing because we naturally do not want to lose any genuine part of our human experience. St. Irenaeus, often quoted at the time of the Second Vatican Council, captured this well: “The glory of God is the human person fully alive!”

Jesus’ mission on this earth was not only to free the human heart from sin, but also to free men and women from disease, oppression and everything that hinders their development as humans created by God and destined for eternal life. When we profess our belief in the resurrection of the body, this integral salvation is implied.

### **Growth of social justice**

In 1983, the bishops of the United States issued *The Challenge of Peace*, a pastoral letter on war and peace. In it they discussed the morality of war and of nuclear weapons. To help Catholics form their consciences on economic matters, they issued a pastoral letter on the U.S. economy in 1986. More recently, in 1999 and again in 2003, the U.S. bishops addressed civic responsibility in the document *Faithful Citizenship*.

Conscientious Catholics are reading these and other statements that the bishops have published on political and social issues. Church leaders continue to encourage Catholics to let their hearts be guided by the “social gospel.”

### **The Eucharist**

The “breaking of bread”—as the Eucharist was called in earliest times—has always been at the centre of the Church's life. Through it Christ makes present within time the mystery of his death and resurrection. In it he is received in person as the “living bread come down from heaven” (*Jn 6:51*), and with him we receive the pledge of eternal life and a foretaste of the eternal banquet of the heavenly Jerusalem.