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AN ACCOUNT OF OUR HOPE

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CHAPTER 1

A REMARKABLE MOMENT: FROM VATICAN II TO THE PUBLICATION OF THE *CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH*

In the landmark catechetical document, *Catechesi Tradendae*, St. John Paul II termed catechesis “a very remarkable moment in the whole process of evangelization.”¹ It seems to me that the same term could be applied to the past fifty years in relation to the Church’s ministry of catechesis. The time of the promulgation of the Second Vatican Council’s decree on the pastoral office of bishops in the Church in 1968 to the publication of *The United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* in 2006 has been an extraordinarily important period of five decades in which the Church’s catechetical ministry has been afforded unprecedented support in documents of the universal Church as well as those of the bishops of the United States. The Preface to the *General Directory for Catechesis* made this same point in relation to the universal Church already in 1997.

The thirty-year period between the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council and the threshold of the third millennium is without doubt most providential for the orientation and promotion of catechesis. It has been a time in which the evangelizing vigour of the original ecclesial community has in some ways re-emerged. It has also seen a renewal of interest in the teaching of the Fathers and has made possible a return to the catechumenate.²

This chapter will attempt to describe the significance of these years in the history of the Church’s catechetical ministry by examining briefly several of the more important catechetical documents of the period³ as well as several pivotal developments in catechetics that unfolded during that time.

On October 28, 1965, St. Paul VI promulgated the document, *Christus Dominus*, the decree of the Second Vatican Council on the

1. St. John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979), no.18.

2. Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997), Preface: 2.

3. Ibid.

pastoral office of the bishop. That document called for the creation of “a directory for the catechetical instruction of the Christian people in which the fundamental principles of this instruction and its organization will be dealt with and the preparation of books relating to it.”⁴ This directive signaled the beginning of a new, still unfolding age of catechesis in the Church. Thus began a half-century of the most significant developments in the history of catechetics since the preaching of the apostles in the first century of Christianity.

International Catechetical Study Weeks (1959–1968)

Even before St. John XXIII convoked the Second Vatican Council, the Church was wrestling with the challenge of remaining relevant in a rapidly secularizing world. This sense was felt among church leaders, theologians, catechists, and the lay faithful in general. Within the fields of catechetics and liturgy, a renewal and reform movement began to surface that saw value in bringing catechetical and liturgical leaders from different parts of the world together to share their experiences of proclaiming the Gospel and celebrating the rites of the Church within the cultures of their respective countries.

In the history of the modern catechetical movement, the series of six International Catechetical Study weeks that were held in Nijmegen, Holland (1959), Eichstatt, Germany (1960), Bangkok, Thailand (1962), Katigondo, Uganda (1964), Manila, Philippines (1967), and Medellin, Columbia (1968) appear now, over fifty years later, to have been significant directional moments in the renewal and reform of catechetics. When taken together, the resolutions, conclusions, and summaries of these six International Catechetical Study weeks constitute an important element of the framework within which catechetics has evolved before, during, and after the Second Vatican Council. But, especially in the days before Vatican II, there seemed to be heightened worldwide interest in global concerns, diversity within the Church, and the Church’s coexistence in the world with both other Christian and non-Christian religious traditions. The International Catechetical Study weeks directly involved the participants with these concerns precisely because they were international in scope and missionary in focus.

4. The Documents of Vatican II, *Decree on the Bishops’ Pastoral Office in the Church, Christus Dominus* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), no. 44.

The International Catechetical Study weeks were, in no small measure, the result of the entrepreneurial spirit and theological expertise of Johannes Hofinger, a student of Joseph Jungmann. Hofinger had been a missionary in Northern China from 1941–1949 and a professor in the regional seminary there. When he returned, he cofounded the East Asian Pastoral Institute with Alfonso Nebreda. From the position of assistant director of that Institute, Hofinger organized six meetings in which he gathered catechetical leaders from across the globe for the purpose of study and dialogue. He served as the general secretary for all the study weeks, edited the collections of the papers delivered during the study weeks, and oversaw their publication. These experiences became known as International Catechetical Study Weeks. The outcomes of these study weeks directly and substantially influenced the deliberations of the fathers of the Second Vatican Council as well as the documents that they formulated and which St. Paul VI promulgated. Some of the participants in the study weeks also participated in the discussions of the Council, some as bishops, others as *periti* (experts), formal observers, or various staff members. Hofinger himself served on one of the preliminary committees working on the draft of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. Some of the themes discussed during the International Catechetical study weeks can be found in *Ad Gentes*, the Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, and *Nostra Aetate*, the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions.

In addition to their influence on the Second Vatican Council, some of the dominant themes discussed during the study weeks were later incorporated into other official Church documents. The participants in the Medellin Study Week, for example, requested that the conclusions reached there have an impact on the development of the *General Catechetical Directory* (1971) that was being prepared at that time. Several of the themes that surfaced in Medellin can be found in that *Directory*. In addition, the study weeks' general concern for social justice was taken up by two meetings of the Synod of Bishops, the first on evangelization in 1974 and the second on catechesis in 1977. The respective apostolic exhortations, St. Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and St. John Paul II's *Catechesi Tradendae*, incorporate numerous conclusions suggested at the study weeks.

The International Catechetical Study Weeks were by definition international in both the composition of the participants and the scope of their programs. This international character meant that national, linguistic, and cultural differences dramatically influenced the respective agendas, methods for proceeding through the agendas and the final reports of the study weeks. What was discussed, why it was discussed, and how it was communicated to the world depended on the diverse ethnic, racial, and economic perspectives represented at the study weeks. Mixing representatives from first-, second-, and third-world countries at each of the study weeks ensured their international character and sometimes produced unpredictable results.

The International Study Weeks also had a missionary character. While each of the study weeks developed characteristics of a missionary catechesis specific to its own situation, all of them seemed to assume the fact that the catechetical apostolate is part of the wider pastoral mission of the Church and, therefore, is fundamentally a missionary activity. The paradigm of a believing community inviting nonbelievers to hear the word of God proclaimed, to celebrate that proclamation in liturgy, and to live what the rites signify in community can be found in the discussions at each of the study weeks. A preoccupation with the theme of conversion, the adaptation of the message of the Gospel to various cultural settings, and seeing the catechumenal process precisely as missionary outreach are also strains common to each of the study weeks.

Part of the influence of the six study weeks on the catechetical apostolate is their consistent awareness of the historicity of the Gospel and the particular circumstances of individual people in specific settings. This awareness of historicity, woven through the documents of the study weeks, can be traced through the evolution of modern catechetics right up to and including the promulgation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

The seeds of the "remarkable moment" in the history of catechetical renewal and reform that has stretched now over fifty years can be found in the International Catechetical Study Weeks. A brief look at each reveals the strong theological and pastoral foundation that has supported that renewal and reform.

A. Nijmegen (1959)

In 1959 Father Hofinger invited a large number of missionaries—including a cardinal, thirty bishops, eighty priests, and scholars

from many universities—from all over the world to a conference in Nijmegen, Holland. The purpose of the gathering was for a week of concentrated study on the role of liturgical adaptation as it effects the missions and the role of the missions as they effect liturgical adaptation. In the days before the Second Vatican Council, the liturgy was perhaps the most pressing pastoral issue facing not just churches in mission lands, but parishes in local churches that had been established for centuries. The participants in the study week were concerned with use of the vernacular in the liturgy, incorporation of native customs into the rites of the Church, the celebration of the sacraments within distinct cultures as well as the proclamation of the Gospel to those who have never heard of Christ.

The format for the study week adopted the traditional schema of the presentation of papers by several experts, formal responses by varied conference participants, and open discussions. Father Hofinger gathered as many of the papers, responses, and discussion notes together so that the proceedings from the study week could be published and distributed as widely as possible. *Liturgy and the Missions: The Nijmegen Papers* record the results of the first International Catechetical Study Week.⁵

B. Eichstätt (1960)

Just a year later Father Hofinger organized the second International Catechetical Study Week in Eichstätt, Germany. The theme of this gathering was “Catechetics and the Missions.” It brought face to face proponents of the German school of “kerygmatic catechesis” developed primarily by Hofinger’s mentor, Josef Jungmann, and the French school of “symbolic catechesis,” or catechesis of the four signs developed principally by Joseph Colomb. “Kerygmatic catechesis” asserted that the foundations of catechesis were Sacred Scripture and in the early liturgical life of the Church. It promoted the primacy of the Christian message and its need for a thorough revitalization reflective of the apostolic period. “Symbolic catechesis” represented a developmental approach to learning. It asserted that faith is the acceptance of God present in signs and symbols that reveal his presence, emphasized the primacy of human experience within the catechetical process and proposed that the goal of catechesis is a living and dynamic faith.

5. Johannes Hofinger, *Liturgy and the Missions: The Nijmegen Papers* (New York: P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1960).

Many of the papers presented at the symposium encouraged a deeper appreciation of local culture on the proclamation of the Gospel and the consequent and necessary adaptation of the gospel message within various cultures. The speakers emphasized the notion that native cultures already bore the seeds of faith and should be seen as fertile soil for the word of God. One presenter, Cardinal Valerian Gracias of Bombay, a leading Catholic thinker and later a Council leader, described the role of missionary catechetics to “break the charms of paganism, to lay the foundations of a new life in Christ in the new Christians and to plant Christianity in every member in such a way as to build for future generation.”⁶

Once again Hofinger gathered the proceedings of the study week, edited the presentations, responses, and notes and published them in 1961 as *Teaching All Nations: A Symposium on Modern Catechetics*. The volume contained twenty-eight articles by experts in missionary evangelization, catechesis, and liturgy. Hofinger summarized the conclusions that were formally articulated at the Eichstätt study week. Several catechetical experts termed the Eichstätt study week, “a landmark in the history of modern catechetics.”⁷ It reinvigorated kerygmatic catechesis and outlined the principles for a renewal of catechesis. Its insistence on careful planning in catechesis and an organized presentation of the Christian message were two of its themes that influenced the *General Catechetical Directory*. Much to the satisfaction of the French school of “symbolic catechesis,” included in its final report were the four signs. “Catechesis embraces a four-fold presentation of the faith: through liturgy, Bible, systematic teaching and the testimony of Christian living.”⁸

C. Bangkok (1962)

The third International Catechetical Study Week was held in Bangkok, Thailand in 1962. Its theme was “Mission Catechetics.”

While the “official” record of this study week was prepared by Alfonso Nebreda,⁹ Theodore Stone, a participant from the United States, recorded a description of the state of catechesis at the time

6. Hofinger, *Teaching All Nations: A Symposium on Modern Catechetics* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1961), 22.

7. Bernard Marthaler, “Catechetics in Context,” in *Our Sunday Visitor* (Huntingdon, IN: 1973): 26.

8. Hofinger, *Teaching All Nations*, 134.

9. Alfonso Nebreda, “East Asian Study Week on Mission Catechetics,” *Lumen Vitae* 17 (1962), 721.

which he said was remarkably the common understanding of all the participants. It's a lengthy citation, but quite an important summary for the time and the circumstances of an international study day.

A primary concern of the participants was to summarize succinctly the leading characteristics of the catechetical apostolate. Only with such a foundation could they proceed to a determination of the special principles guiding the approach to the non-Catholic. The leaders who gathered at Bangkok came to unanimous agreement concerning the goals and principles of the catechetical apostolate. They formulated these leading characteristics in the following way:

- 1) *Basic Idea*. Modern catechetics considers the catechetical apostolate as a mission imparted by the Church to participate in Christ's proclamation of the good news of salvation. The whole of catechetics is to be inspired and regulated by this basic idea.
- 2) *Aim*. The aim of the catechetical apostolate is not knowledge as such, but living faith—a faith which responds to God's call (message).
- 3) *Message*. The emphasis is on content more than on method. With regards to content, modern catechetics emphasizes a concentration on the central theme of God's love, accomplished in Jesus Christ (dead, risen and living in His Church), presented as a Gospel (good news)-oriented life.
- 4) *Method*. The main lines of method are to follow the dynamics of faith: to present the religious facts (God's saving deeds) in connection with life situations and real needs; to unfold their religious meaning; to stimulate a personal response to this call of God in Christian living. As such, method is a handmaid, but an indispensable one. In all its phases it needs thorough adaptation to those who are catechized.
- 5) *Fourfold Presentation of the Faith*. Genuine catechetics requires the sound equilibrium of a fourfold presentation of the Faith: through liturgy, Bible, systematic teaching and the testimony of Christian living. Systematic teaching is not to be begun before the age of ten or twelve, and even then, needs to be completed by and thoroughly informed with biblical and liturgical catechesis.
- 6) *The Catechist*. Because the teacher of religion is Christ's spokesman and witness, the teacher is more important than the textbook. He must first assimilate the message personally. He must build up his religious life from the message in harmony with professional training.

- 7) *Textbooks*. Textbooks are in the service of the teacher and the pupils. Good texts are required which take into account the development of present-day theology. Outdated texts cannot be modernized by mere modifications and revision.

Modern catechetics, therefore, is basically a spiritual, theological and pastoral renewal, not just a methodological and psychological improvement.

After summarizing the leading characteristics of the catechetical apostolate, the participants carefully studied and analyzed the process of religious instruction for non-believers. In this process they distinguished three stages: 1) pre-evangelization; 2) evangelization; 3) catechesis proper.¹⁰

The catechetical renewal well underway at the time was driven by shifts in theological and pedagogical developments. The notion of “pre-evangelization” was introduced during this study week. The experiences of missionary catechists in the field and those in urban centers in what many termed the “post-Christian” world seemed similar. Catechetical work focused on preparing the ground for the proclamation of the Christian message in both arenas. Adapting the Gospel to the special needs of various cultures was understood to be inherent in the catechetical process. Attending to the special circumstances of the person being catechized meant that effective catechesis needed to be more anthropological than it had been traditionally.

The anthropological approach to catechesis emphasized encountering the person where he/she is and adapting the Christian message to the particularities of the situation. It required a step back, in a sense, to discover a prior stage in the presentation of the Gospel. This prior stage was termed “pre-evangelization” and its focus on the exploration of personal experience and values was essentially anthropological. The study week gave added impetus to what has come to be known as the anthropological phase of catechetics. It represented a change from the concern about the content of catechesis to a concern about the subject of catechesis. Stone goes on to describe the important relationship between anthropology and pre-evangelization:

The guiding principle of pre-evangelization is anthropocentric, because we must start from the non-believer and carefully respect his situation. This means taking the other seriously, his person,

10. Theodore Stone, “The Bangkok Study Week,” in *Worship* 37 (1962): 185–86.

his conscience, his truths — even though these be fragmentary. It requires being alert to the non-believer's current interests and cares. The study week used the phrase "positive apologetics" to describe this: Positive apologetics proceeds from a true understanding and appreciation of whatever is good and acceptable in a man's culture. It consists in taking due consideration of the man with whom we speak, and in removing the personal concrete obstacles which prevent his ready acceptance of the kerygma (message).¹¹

D. Katigondo (1964)

Two years later the same anthropological concerns which characterized the Bangkok Study Week continued to be a prime topic of discussion at the Fourth International Catechetical Study Week held at the national seminary of Uganda in Katigondo. The subject-centered focus of catechesis on the life experience and culture of those being catechized was expanded and refined.

The promulgation of the first document of Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, also profoundly influenced the participants at Katigondo. From the beginning, the relationship between liturgy and catechetics had inspired the international study weeks. With the promulgation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the participants at Katigondo took the opportunity to underscore the need to adapt both liturgy and catechesis to the culture of the people. The proceedings of the Katigondo Study Week noted that "the liturgy has an inherent and indispensable catechetical function of illumination and liberation. It exercises this function mainly through symbolism and community action and, in order to do so effectively, requires adaptation to the cultural responses of the participants."¹² The final report also advocated for improved catechetical training for seminarians and priests, advised that permission be given to share the work of translating Sacred Scripture into native African languages with Protestant scholars and underscored the need for the development of suitable catechetical materials for Africans.¹³ The papers presented proceedings, resolutions,

11. Ibid., 186–87.

12. Michael Warren, ed., "Final Resolutions: Pan African Catechetical Study Week: Katigondo, 1965," in *Source Book for Modern Catechetics* (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 1983), 54–56.

13. Ibid.