

OPEN CATECHESIS

FORMAL PROPOSAL

Revised Version 2b

January 2000

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TERMS

Catechesis

a). From Catechesi Tradendae; Apostolic - Exhortation of John Paul II on Catechesis in our Time, 1979 :-

"...SPECIFIC AIM OF CATECHESIS

20. Nevertheless, the specific aim of catechesis is to develop, with God's help, an as yet initial faith, and to advance in fullness and to nourish day by day the Christian life of the faithful, young and old. It is in fact a matter of giving growth, at the level of knowledge and in life, to the seed of faith sown by the Holy Spirit with the initial proclamation and effectively transmitted by baptism. Catechesis aims therefore at developing understanding of the mystery of Christ in the light of God's word, so that the whole of a person's humanity is impregnated by that word. Changed by the working of grace into a new creature, the Christian thus sets himself to follow Christ and learns more and more within the Church to think like him, to judge like him, to act in conformity with his commandments, and to hope as he invites us to. To put it more precisely: within the whole process of evangelisation, the aim of catechesis is to be the teaching and maturation stage, that is to say, the period in which the Christian, having accepted by faith the person of Jesus Christ as the one Lord and having given him complete adherence by sincere conversion of heart, endeavours to know better this Jesus to whom he has entrusted himself: to know his "mystery", the Kingdom of God proclaimed by him, the requirements and promises contained in his Gospel message, and the paths that he has laid down for any one who wishes to follow him. It is true that being a Christian means saying "yes" to Jesus Christ, but let us remember that this "yes" has two levels: it consists in surrendering to the word of God and relying on it, but it also means, at a later stage, endeavouring to know better and better the profound meaning of this word. ..."

"...CATECHESIS AND SACRAMENTS

23. Catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity, for it is in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, that Christ Jesus works in fullness for the transformation of human beings. In the early Church, the catechumenate and preparation for the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist were the same thing. Although in the countries that have long been Christian, the Church has changed her practice in this field, the catechumenate has never been abolished; on the contrary, it is experiencing a renewal in those countries and is abundantly practised in the young missionary Churches. In any case, catechesis always has reference to the sacraments. On the other hand, the catechesis that prepares for the sacraments is an eminent kind, and every form of catechesis necessarily leads to the sacraments of faith. On the other hand, authentic practice of the sacraments is bound to have a catechetical aspect. In other words, sacramental life is impoverished and very soon turns into hollow ritualism if it is not based on serious knowledge of the meaning of the sacraments, and catechesis becomes intellectualised if it fails to come alive in sacramental practice..."

"...THE SOURCE

27. Catechesis will always draw its content from the living source of the word of God transmitted in Tradition and the Scriptures, for "sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit

of the word of God, which is entrusted to the Church", as was recalled by the Second Vatican Council, which desired that "the ministry of the word--pastoral preaching, catechetics and all forms of Christian instruction...--(should be) healthily nourished and (should) thrive in holiness through the word of Scripture". To speak of Tradition and Scripture as the source of catechesis is to draw attention to the fact that catechesis must be impregnated and penetrated by the thought, the spirit and the outlook of the Bible and the Gospels through assiduous contact with the texts themselves; but it is also a reminder that catechesis will be all the richer and more effective for reading the texts with the intelligence and the heart of the Church and for drawing inspiration from two thousand years of the Church's reflection and life. The Church's teaching, liturgy and life spring from this source and lead back to it, under the guidance of the pastors and, in particular, of the doctrinal Magisterium entrusted to them by the Lord..."

"...ECUMENICAL DIMENSION OF CATECHESIS

32. The great movement, one certainly inspired by the Spirit of Jesus, that has for some years been causing the Catholic Church to seek with other Christian Churches or confessions the restoration; of the perfect unity willed by the Lord, brings me to the question of the ecumenical character of catechesis. This movement reached its full prominence in the Second Vatican Council and since then has taken on a new extension within the Church, as is shown concretely by the impressive series of events and initiatives with which everyone is now familiar. Catechesis cannot remain aloof from this ecumenical dimension, since all the faithful are called to share, according to their capacity and place in the Church, in the movement towards unity. Catechesis will have an ecumenical dimension if, while not ceasing to teach that the fullness of the revealed truths and of the means of salvation instituted by Christ is found in the Catholic Church, it does so with sincere respect, in words and in deeds, for the ecclesial communities that are not in perfect communion with this Church. In this context, it is extremely important to give a correct and fair presentation of the other Churches and ecclesial communities that the Spirit of Christ does not refrain from using as means of salvation; "moreover, some, even very many, of the outstanding elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church herself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church". Among other things, this presentation will help Catholics to have both a deeper understanding of their own faith and a better acquaintance with and esteem for their other Christian brethren, thus facilitating the shared search for the way towards full unity in the whole truth. It should also help non-Catholics to have a better knowledge and appreciation of the Catholic Church and her conviction of being the "universal help towards salvation". Catechesis will have an ecumenical dimension if, in addition, it creates and fosters a true desire for unity. This will be true all the more if it inspires serious efforts--including the effort of self-purification in the humility and the fervour of the Spirit in order to clear the ways--with a view not to facile irenics made up of omissions and concessions on the level of doctrine, but to perfect unity, when and by what means the Lord will wish. Finally, catechesis will have an ecumenical dimension if it tries to prepare Catholic children and young people, as well as adults, for living in contact with non-Catholics, affirming their Catholic identity while respecting the faith of others...."

b). From The General Directory for Catechesis, 1997: CTS97:-

P.34

"...Some challenges for catechesis

33. In order to express its vitality and to be efficacious, catechesis today needs to undertake the following challenges and directions:

- Above all it needs to present itself as a valid service to evangelisation of the Church with an accent on missionary character;
- It should address itself to those who have been and continue to be its privileged recipients: children, adolescents, young people and adults;
- Based on the example of catechesis in the patristic era, it needs to form the personality of the believer and therefore be a true and proper school of Christian pedagogy;
- It needs to announce the essential mysteries of Christianity, promoting the trinitarian experience of life in Christ as the center of the life of faith;
- It needs to consider as its primary task the preparation and formation of catechists in the deep riches of the faith...."

"...The fundamental tasks of catechesis are:

– Promoting knowledge of the faith

Who has encountered Christ desires to know him as much as possible, as well as to know the plan of the Father which he revealed. Knowledge of the faith (*fides quae*) is required by adherence to the faith (*fides qua*). Even in the human order the love which one person has for another causes that person to wish to know the other all the more. Catechesis, must, therefore, lead to "the gradual grasping of the whole truth about the divine plan", by introducing the disciples of Jesus to a knowledge of Tradition and of Scripture, which is "*thesublime science of Christ*". By deepening knowledge of the faith, catechesis nourishes not only the life of faith but equips it to explain itself to the world. The meaning of the Creed, which is a compendium of Scripture and of the faith of the Church, is the realisation of this task.

– Liturgical education

Christ is always present in his Church, especially in "liturgical celebrations". Communion with Jesus Christ leads to the celebration of his salvific presence in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist. The Church ardently desires that all the Christian faithful be brought to that full, conscious and active participation which is required by the very nature of the liturgy and the dignity of the baptismal priesthood. For this reason, catechesis, along with promoting a knowledge of the meaning of the liturgy and the sacraments, must also educate the disciples of Jesus Christ "for prayer, for thanksgiving, for repentance, for praying with confidence, for community spirit, for understanding correctly the meaning of the creeds...", as all of this is necessary for a true liturgical life

– Moral formation

Conversion to Jesus Christ implies walking in his footsteps. Catechesis must, therefore, transmit to the disciples the attitudes of the Master himself. The disciples thus undertake a journey of interior transformation, in which, by participating in the paschal mystery of the Lord, "they pass from the old man to the new man who has been made perfect in Christ". 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. Evangelisation which "involves the proclamation and presentation of morality", displays all the force of its appeal where it offers not only the proclaimed word but the lived word too. This moral testimony, which is prepared for by catechesis, must always demonstrate the social consequences of the demands of the Gospel.

– Teaching 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. The "*handing on of the Our Father*" is a summary of the entire Gospel and is therefore a true act of catechesis. When catechesis is permeated by a climate of prayer, the assimilation of the entire Christian life reaches its summit. This climate is especially necessary when the catechumen and those to be catechised are confronted with the more demanding aspects of the Gospel and when they feel weak or when they discover the mysterious action of God in their lives.

Other fundamental tasks of catechesis: initiation and education in community life and to mission

86. Catechesis prepares the Christian to live in community and to participate actively in the life and mission of the Church. The Second Vatican Council indicates the necessity for pastors "to form genuine Christian communities" and for catechumens "[to] learn to co-operate actively in building up the Church and its work of evangelisation".

"...– Missionary initiation

a) Catechesis is also open to the missionary dimension. This seeks to equip the disciples of Jesus to be present as Christians in society through their professional, cultural and social lives. It also prepares them to lend their cooperation to the different ecclesial services, according to their proper vocation. This task of evangelisation originates, for the lay faithful, in the sacraments of Christian initiation and

in the secular character of their vocation. It is also important that every means should be used to encourage vocations to the Priesthood, and to the different forms of consecration to God in religious and apostolic life and to awaken special missionary vocations. The evangelical attitudes which Jesus taught his disciples when he sent them on mission are precisely those which catechesis must nourish: to seek out the lost sheep, proclaim and heal at the same time, to be poor, without money or knapsack; 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.

b) In educating for this missionary sense, catechesis is also necessary for interreligious dialogue, if it renders the faithful capable of meaningful communication with men and women of other religions. Catechesis shows that the link between the Church and non-Christian religions is, in the first place, the common origin and end of the human race, as well as the "many seeds of the word which God has sown in these religions". Catechesis too helps to reconcile and, at the same time, to distinguish between "the proclamation of Christ" and "inter-religious dialogue..."

PREMISSES

1. That there is a requirement and demand for religious education at all levels in the Roman Catholic Church..
 2. That the purpose of religious education is to promote faith development in the individual, widening horizons, producing enthusiasm, and enhancement of individual security in the Faith.[GDC. P.85 op.cit.]
 3. That structured pure academic 'training' can produce sterility and confusion in participants.
 4. That structured Lecture Courses only reach small numbers of participants.
 5. That structured Lecture Courses do not lower inhibitions in those who find it hard to ask questions in public.
 6. That structured Lecture Courses do not satisfy individual educational requirements, since the subject matter is dictated by the course organiser and/or lecturer.
 7. That structured Lecture Courses have great difficulty in accommodating the various intellectual abilities of those participating.
 8. That structured Lecture Courses cannot cater for an ongoing, guided individual faith development, which can be tailored to individual requirements.
 9. That educational activities should have a broad horizon, touching on all aspects of the Faith, and also providing for the ecumenical dimension.
 10. That the faith of the individual should be supported according to requirements.
 11. That there should be present a consistent and informed doctrinal contact point for those of other faiths in aid of Ecumenism, this process should be two-way, whereby not only are other Faiths able to obtain information on the Roman Catholic Church, but that those of the Roman Catholic Church are provided with unbiased and factual information on other faiths.
 12. That a flexible body created to provide catechetical instruction must also encourage theological reflection as well as dogmatic knowledge. It must be bold enough to face the unanswerable with courage and humility, not falsehoods and miss-directions.
 13. That there is a need for cross-cultural input in Catechesis.
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OUTLINE

What is Open Catechesis?

- ❑ Put simply it is a faith information service, that is available to everyone (no matter what age), through a variety of media and allows for individual anonymity if required.
 - ❑ The user of the service will be able to pose any question they might have on the Faith (or other Faiths) and receive an answer and/or guidance based on the available teaching of the Church, Theological Interpretation, Spiritual & Pastoral Direction.
 - ❑ The user will be able to ask their questions via mail, voice, FAX, Email, and have the choice to remain anonymous by use of pseudonym.
 - ❑ The user will be able to indicate the level of depth they require in their answer (subject of course to the nature of the question) and via an editing procedure the complex maybe made more palatable as required.
 - ❑ Answers are returned to the user and will be published in a digest periodically in a de-personalised form.
 - ❑ The Digest will, it is hoped, over time provide a global perspective on Educational and/or Pastoral requirements, facilitating future planning for possible educational/pastoral presentations and guidance, together with reference material for the process of Open Catechesis itself.
 - ❑ Open Catechesis will also periodically hold seminars on those issues which are raised most commonly promoting free discussion on these topics.
 - ❑ Those outside the Church from other faiths will also be able, and encouraged, to use the service in the hope that a consistent and accurate portrayal of the Roman Catholic Faith may be presented, promoting ecumenical dialogue, based on truth not on hearsay. It is also hoped that members of other faiths may be co-opted onto the Open Catechesis Advisory Network so that the reverse requirement of the provision of factual information on other faiths may be addressed.
 - ❑ Open Catechesis would work actively with other groups supporting and assisting as required.
 - ❑ Open Catechesis would be available to schools, for the support of Teachers & Pupils.
 - ❑ Open Catechesis can provide 'after Alpha' & 'after RCIA' support and direction.
 - ❑ Open Catechesis will be able to expand to Parishes across the Diocese (or further?) producing a cohesive network of faith sharing and catechesis with minimal financial overheads.
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METHOD

Open Catechesis consists of three major groups:-

- 1) CORE
- 2) CONSULTATIVE
- 3) RECEPTION / EDITORIAL

Each group will function as follows:-

CORE GROUP

Correlates all enquiries, dealing with the easier enquiries directly or via consultation with the CONSULTATIVE NETWORK or via other resources. Archives and publishes all requests and replies to the Open Catechesis network. Supports all RECEPTION/EDITORIAL groups and checks on consistent working across the groups. The CORE group will operate and maintain a WEB SITE for direct contact both by the groups and individuals.

CONSULTATIVE GROUP

A computer network of consultants which can be consulted by the CORE group as required. The CORE group will circulate a query to all the network via email and correlate replies.

RECEPTION / EDITORIAL GROUP

Local groups formed at the Parish who handle initial reception of queries and dissemination of final reply. Should include an ordained minister if possible. This is the human face of Open Catechesis, it is here that the questioner is encouraged to interact with Open Catechesis so that a continuing dialogue is opened up producing an ongoing faith development. It is here that the cold facts and theological interpretation are humanised by the editorial group according to individual requirements. All of this activity is closely supported and monitored by the CORE group who will publish guidelines for the groups operation.

Example

a). The question will be received by the RECEPTION GROUP via available methods (MAIL, FAX, DIRECT etc.) who will make an initial assessment based upon such criteria as:-

1. Whether the query is anonymous or not.
2. Age of enquirer (if indicated).
3. Depth of answer requirement.

To facilitate this analysis it would be useful to maintain pro-forma for the users of Open Catechesis which would have boxes to tick for age and depth level required. Alternatively these could just be indicated by the questioner themselves.

Once this assessment has been made it is noted and passed to the EDITORIAL GROUP for the final stage.

b). ALL questions are passed to the CORE together with the assessment notes obtained by the RECEPTION GROUP via email or FAX. The CORE group will ascertain whether the subject requires referral to the CONSULTATIVE network or not and act accordingly. **It is vital no matter how trivial the question that ALL questions are passed to the CORE, this is necessary not only for the questioner who must always feel that their enquiry goes to the full OPEN CATECHESIS, but also for archival purposes and to preserve the unity of OPEN CATECHESIS.**

The CORE group will assemble a raw answer from available resources and/or the CONSULTATIVE network and pass this back via email or FAX to the local EDITORIAL GROUP.

c). The EDITORIAL GROUP will use the raw data received from CORE and use this to construct an answer based upon the initial assessment of the RECEPTION group and local pastoral input. The final edited answer will be returned to CORE for final approval and archives.

It can be seen from this example that the process will contain a number of stages and although perhaps cumbersome it is necessary for uniformity and integrity. Because OPEN CATECHESIS will not be afraid to deal with possible unanswerable questions it must be as wide and as uniform as possible, and maintain close contact with the local RECEPTION/EDITORIAL groups, so that it can closely monitor and guide these groups in order that the questioner will receive the best faith guidance available.

It should also be noted that CORE group will not rely solely on its CONSULTATIVE network, but on ALL accessible sources. The point is OPEN CATECHESIS is not afraid to confront the issues and to try to deal with them using the best means available and with **minimum** cost. OPEN CATECHESIS could be an open library of resources that would grow on a daily basis. Sub-groups handling specific issues could be formed and specialists could be consulted by CORE as and when required.

Open Catechesis will be introduced in stages, growing with demand and adapting itself as required. It is hoped that the pilot scheme (conducted at St.Thomas More Seaford – see pilot scheme proposal) will be joined by other Parishes and that the Consultative Network will grow wider and more diverse as time goes by. The central strength of Open Catechesis is its openness not only in function but in execution, relying on networking it has the flexibility to adapt and change with the minimum effort.

Open Catechesis would assist all groups within the Diocese as required and it is hoped work closely with all educational requirements/activities.

CONCLUSION

From what has preceded it will be seen that the proposal for Open Catechesis provides for a flexible catechetical support system, which is adaptable enough to deal with modern requirements. It has the ability to communicate globally reducing parochial outlooks but at the same time maintaining a local intimacy. The function of Open Catechesis is to provide what is required, when it is required together with a continuity not easily achievable by other means.

As the numbers of available Priests continues (regrettably) to decline, those few remaining are under increased workloads resulting in less time for the individual parishioner, Open Catechesis, by networking resources seeks to spread the workload but maintain the quality, to use the available resources as economically as possible, with minimal overhead.

Referring the reader back to the quotes given at the beginning of this document I leave it to you to judge how well this proposal fulfils the requirements.

Thank you and God Bless

Peter Dixon

General Schemata

