

The Catechism of the Catholic Church
and the Craft of Catechesis

by

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With an introductory essay by
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Chapter Three

A Personal Pedagogy: Teaching the Living Realities of the Faith

In this chapter we will be seeing how the *Catechism* assists us in overcoming a serious difficulty that has made it hard to practice the craft of catechesis. Elements of the craft that ought to have been placed in a harmonious relationship have been isolated from one another. Catechesis has been greatly weakened in the Church for many decades over lingering difficulties concerning the relationship between revelation as propositional and revelation as personal. What do we mean by this? We can put it in the form of a question: As one is catechizing, is one acquainting a person with knowledge of truths of the Faith, or is one introducing them to a Person, the Person of Jesus Christ?

In the former category, that of the truths of the Faith, it seems necessary to place the whole of dogma, the whole of the "Deposit of Faith". Surely it is vital that a catechist hand on these faithfully to the next generation. And yet, it is often suggested, is it not so much more important to introduce people to the living Lord? In which case, is it not prayer, devotion, and spirituality that are of paramount importance? We can perhaps leave doctrine, dogma, and the study of the truths of the Faith to the more intellectually minded. Doctrine, then, is widely considered to be dry, abstract, and arid. It is said that doctrine, expressed in propositional form, cannot compete with the living knowledge of the Person of Christ. Catechists are to introduce others directly to Jesus Christ, not to knowledge *about* him.

Newman wrote about this common opposition that can be set up between propositional and personal belief:

People urge that salvation consists, not in believing the propositions that there is a God, that there is a Savior, that our Lord is God, that

there is a Trinity, but in believing in God, in a Savior, in a Sanctifier; and they object that such propositions are but a formal and human medium destroying all true reception of the Gospel, and making religion a matter of words or of logic, instead of its having its seat in the heart.¹

This negative reaction to doctrine as an expression of revelation as propositional helps us to understand why it was so often the case that, even where the *Catechism* was not well received among those responsible for catechesis, the part on prayer was often singled out as "beautiful" or "helpful".

We can probably appreciate the point being made. We would think, for example, that something was wrong if we came across a married couple who had only met once, who lived in separate houses and who believed that marriage consisted in looking at photos and memorizing facts about each other. The Church's marriage to her Divine Spouse is about communion with her Lord and not simply gathering information about him.

Still, it is one thing to acknowledge that communion with another concerns more than knowledge of the other person; and quite another to deny knowledge a place at all. There remains an antipathy to doctrine in much catechesis that is worth exploring. We need to examine, then, the roots of this opposition that is often introduced between the personal and the propositional, and then look at the ways in which the *Catechism* responds to it. As we shall see, the *Catechism* opposes any sense that we are faced with a choice of either/or here; rather, the Faith is both personal and propositional.

Newman himself recognizes that it is possible that in some cases people may replace what he describes as "a vital religion" with "a dogmatic creed", resting "in the propositions themselves". But he emphasizes that this need not be so; indeed:

Knowledge must ever precede the exercise of the affections. We feel gratitude and love, we feel indignation and dislike, when we have the information actually put before us which are to kindle those several emotions. We love our parents, as our parents, when we know them to be our parents; we must know concerning God, before we can feel

¹John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 82.

love, fear, hope, or trust towards Him. Devotion must have its objects; those objects, as being supernatural, when not represented to our senses by material symbols, must be set before the mind in propositions.²

Rather than think of propositions as detaching us from God, we need to be aware of their absolute necessity in attaching us to God. Newman's own life bore witness to this:

When I was fifteen (in the autumn of 1816), a great change of thought took place in me. I fell under the influences of a definite Creed, and received into my intellect impressions of dogma, which, through God's mercy, have never been effaced or obscured.³

Newman had discovered the converting⁴ impact of doctrine, the "supernatural power of persuasion with which Christian dogma is endowed, when it is taught in its fullness".⁵

The *Catechism* makes it a priority from the outset to exclude any thought of a separation between a propositional and a personal understanding of revelation. The connection between the two is summed up succinctly:

We do not believe in formulas, but in those realities they express, which faith allows us to touch. "The believer's act [of faith] does not terminate in the propositions, but in the realities [which they express]". All the same, we do approach these realities with the help of formulations of the faith which permit us to express the faith and to hand it on, to celebrate it in community, to assimilate and live on it more and more.⁶

Several scriptural quotations are carefully selected to open the whole of the *Catechism* and these precisely concern the relationship between knowledge of God and knowledge about him.

"FATHER, . . . this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3). "God our Savior desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the

²Ibid., p. 83.

³John Henry Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua*. (London: Dent, 1993), Chap. 1.

⁴It is described as Newman's "first conversion" by Charles Dessain in *John Henry Newman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 3.

⁵E. Gilson, introduction to J. H. Newman's *Grammar of Assent* (New York: Doubleday, 1955), p. 18.

⁶CCC 170, citing St. Thomas Aquinas, ST II-II, 1, 2, ad 2.

truth" (1 Tim 2:3-4). "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12)—than the name of Jesus (CCC, Prologue).

In the first quotation St. John writes of eternal life being a matter of "knowing" the Father and Jesus. This knowing is the fruit of a genuine commitment to him and love for him. It is a personal, intimate knowing of God. The second quotation concerns knowledge of God, knowledge about him. This is propositional knowledge.

By beginning with these quotations, the *Catechism* is reminding us that we need doctrine and we need personal commitment to the Lord. Our knowledge of God must be personal, springing from a deep inner commitment to him, and propositional, knowledge about God. The two are interdependent. Knowledge and commitment go together. As Newman said, we love and respect our parents when we know them to be our parents. We cannot love God if we know nothing about him. We cannot worship Christ without knowing something of his divinity. But on the other hand, we shall never know God fully unless we love him, and we shall never have a clear understanding of Christ's divinity unless we worship and adore him.

We can think of the apostles on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35). The two apostles were walking alongside Jesus, and yet they did not know him because they did not know enough about him. And so Jesus explained to them all the parts of Scripture that referred to him; he "opened . . . the Scriptures" to them. He told them who he was. And it was only then that they could experience him as their Lord and Savior.⁷

C. S. Lewis presented a useful analogy in *Mere Christianity* to help us think about the relationship between knowing God personally and knowing about God. He said that experiencing God might be compared to standing on a beach, sensing the power of the waves. Doctrines, on the other hand, are more like a map of the sea—far less interesting than the sea itself, but if we want to get anywhere and not merely stand on the beach all day we will need the map.⁸ Doctrine is

⁷As we shall see in chapter 7, when we examine the character of catechesis as scriptural and liturgical, the disciples were able to recognize Jesus through his opening of the Scriptures and, inseparably, the salvific event of the "breaking of the bread".

⁸C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: Fount, 1977), pp. 132-33.

what we need if we want to be practical about the Christian life and start moving.

Doctrine is personal

The key point to bear in mind is that the Truth upon which doctrine focuses our attention is not an abstraction. It is not ultimately a set of propositions about reality, or a philosophical system. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6) (*Jesus is the Truth*). When Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?" therefore, he was asking the wrong question, because ultimate Truth is not a "what". Truth is a "who".

We are called, then, to know the truths of the Faith, and to know them as truths belonging to the Truth, who is a Person. Knowledge of Jesus as the Truth sets us free (Jn 8:32), and knowledge of doctrine as personal sets catechesis free. All of our doctrinal propositions are attempts to formulate truths clearly. They are absolutely necessary, for they are not merely human attempts to know more precisely the Person of Christ and the Persons of the Trinity; they are Christ's revelation, allowing us to know his Father, his Spirit, and himself more precisely. Every doctrinal formulation is deeply personal. That is why there is nothing more satisfying, more exciting, and more enlivening than doctrines: doctrines are icons of Persons. "Creeds and dogmas", wrote Newman,

live in the one idea they are designed to express, and which alone is substantive; and are necessary, because the human mind cannot reflect upon it except piecemeal, cannot use it in its oneness and entirety, or without resolving it into a series of aspects and relations.⁹

Creeds, dogmas, doctrines do indeed "live"—they are living truths since they are truths about Persons. In its essence, the Catholic Faith concerns persons, created and uncreated. It is because of this that the Deposit of Faith is something living. Consider the language used of the Deposit here:

We guard with care the faith that we have received from the Church, for without ceasing, under the action of God's Spirit, this deposit of

⁹ *University Sermons* XV, 20-23, cited in John Henry Newman, *Development of Doctrine* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1954), I, 2, 9.

great price, as if in an excellent vessel, is constantly being renewed and causes the very vessel that contains it to be renewed.¹⁰

In an address he gave on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Cardinal Schönborn commented on this passage as follows:

This is an impressive image that St. Irenaeus uses here: the faith, a precious deposit received from the Church and entrusted to us to be safeguarded with care, has the power to restore to life, and to ceaselessly renew its recipient, the vessel which contains it. I think that here we are touching upon an essential point for a clear understanding of the Catechism.¹¹

The Deposit is living, and we describe Tradition as “living” because the Scriptures and the liturgy are alive with Christ, and with his Father and with the Spirit of life. In fact, creeds also, and acts of worship, moral actions and prayers, are personal realities: they are the activities and expressions of persons—of the Trinity, of angels, and of men and women. The realities of Tradition are inseparable from persons. Doctrine is personal.

Foundational personal realities

In an earlier chapter we spoke of the *Catechism* using the image of a symphony. We can usefully return to it now. As well as having four movements, which we compared to the four parts of the *Catechism*, every symphony has *main themes* that recur frequently. In an analogous way, this is also true of the *Catechism*. It is rooted in certain foundational truths that permeate every part. It is upon these truths that we need to base our catechesis. Some parts of the Faith are more important than other parts. For example, the *Catechism* has something to say about the immorality of reckless driving (see CCC 2290). But this is not as important as what it has to say about Jesus Christ. Using the

¹⁰ St. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 3, 24, 1; PG 7/1: 966. This is cited in CCC 175.

¹¹ Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, “Address on 10th Anniversary of the Publication of the *Catechism*”, October 2002, trans. Dudley Plunkett from the original French in *The Word*, July 2003, p. 8.

image of a symphony we can say that what the *Catechism* says about Jesus is one of the main “themes” that recurs in every movement, whereas the sentence on dangerous driving could be compared to a single bar of music.

One can identify the foundational personal realities at the heart of the Faith: the trine God, in himself and as he reveals himself in salvation history; the incarnate Christ, the Word of God come among us; Christ’s saving work, the Paschal mystery handed on now, through the Holy Spirit, in the liturgy and sacraments of the Church; and the created order of free persons. All of our catechesis ultimately concerns these personal realities. The text of the *Catechism* therefore rests upon, and makes available for our understanding, these personal realities, which underlie each of the articles and sections:

- God, a unity of three Persons, and his gracious plan of salvation
- The Person of Christ, true God and true man
- The Paschal mystery, the work of our redemption, handed on in the Church through the work of the Holy Spirit
- The human person, created and graced

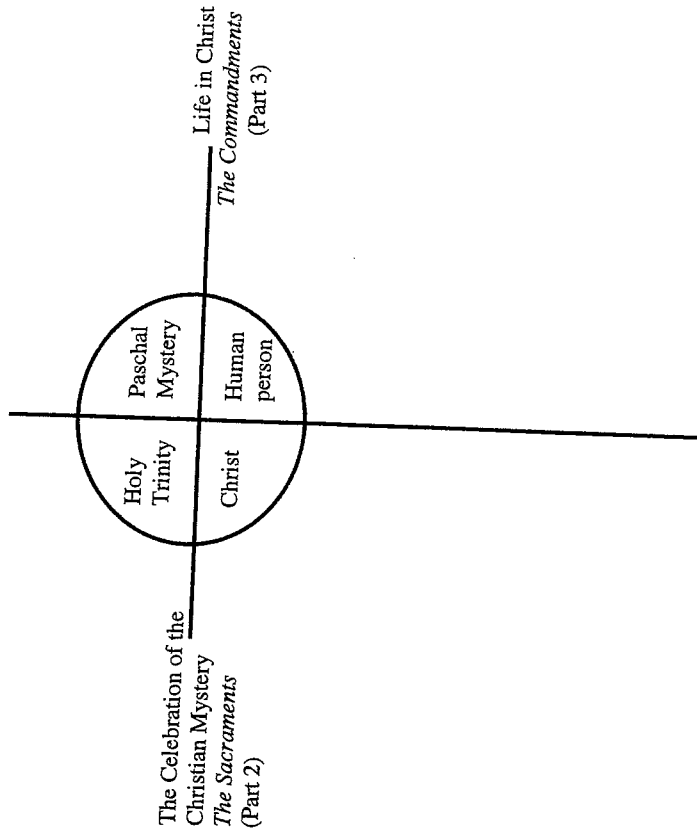
We can show the importance of these themes diagrammatically, at the centre of each of the parts.

The four points of the cross find their meeting point at the center; and there are found the foundational themes, grounding every part. The *Catechism* has been carefully written and edited so that these four themes run like golden threads through all four parts and through every section of every part. One of the key elements in the craft of catechesis is to ensure that, whatever the subject you are teaching—angels, the sacrament of reconciliation, Jesus’ teaching on the Jewish law, or whatever—you relate it to one or more of these key themes. Why?

First of all, because you will be leading others to appreciate the personal heart of the Faith, helping them to see that the truths of the Faith terminate in personal realities. Through doctrine they will be led to the living Lord.

Secondly, because in doing this you will be helping your students to see the coherence of the Faith, the way in which the “pieces” fit

The Profession of Faith
The Creed
(Part 1)



could describe some doctrines as being like the roots and trunk of a tree, while others are like the branches, leaves and fruit, which draw their nourishment from these great central doctrines.

For example, the doctrine of Christ's divinity is a "root" doctrine, while the doctrine of Mary as Mother of God is one of the fruits of this: since Christ is divine and Mary was his mother, Mary is the Mother of God. The authors of the *Catechism* thought it important for Catholics to be able to explain why they hold beliefs about Mary, the saints and so on. They can do this in part by showing how these beliefs follow from the foundational realities.

The principle of the hierarchy of truths does not mean that some truths are less true after all and so need not be believed! It would be a strange-looking tree that had roots and a trunk but no branches. It would be a sorry sight if the tree never blossomed into leaf and fruit. Moreover, the "leaves and fruit" beliefs safeguard the central beliefs as well as following from them. For example, the belief in the Virgin Birth protects the belief in the divinity of Christ, because it draws attention to the fact that God was Christ's only Father. As we have seen, Catholic beliefs are interconnected. We cannot take away any one of them without damaging another.

Let us look now at the foundational personal realities that lie at the heart of the *Catechism* and that we are invited to place at the center of our catechetical work.

1. The Holy Trinity

The foundational reality underlying everything is God himself, a triune unity. This is what the *Catechism* teaches about the Holy Trinity: "The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them."¹² The Trinity is the central mystery of faith and life: that is, of the Creed, the liturgy, and sacraments, life in Christ, and prayer. It is the source of all the other mysteries of the Faith.

As catechists, we often shy away from teaching about the Holy Trinity. We think this teaching too difficult for our students—and indeed

together. Thirdly, because you will be offering them reasons for the aspect of the Faith you are teaching: the Church's teaching becomes understandable to them, in that the items are seen to be drawn together in a beautiful harmony around personal truths.

The Church has a phrase to describe the way in which different doctrines depend upon those that are more foundational. She speaks of the "hierarchy, or 'order', of truths". The Second Vatican Council said that doctrines "vary in their relationship to the foundation of 'Christian faith'" (UR 11). We noted in an earlier chapter that we

¹² CCC 234.

for ourselves—to grasp. This is why we can be particularly grateful that the *Catechism* shows us so simply and so clearly at every turn how to make links between each area of faith and life and this central living mystery of the Faith. Let us look at some examples, to appreciate how the *Catechism* helps us with this.

If we look at the first part of the *Catechism*, “The Profession of Faith”, it is clear how the second section, expounding the content of the Creed, is trinitarian—because, of course, the Creed is divided into three broad sections. Thus we have chapter 1: “I Believe in God the Father”; chapter 2: “I Believe in Jesus Christ, the Only Son of God”; and chapter 3: “I Believe in the Holy Spirit”. The three chapters have drawn our attention to the simple point that the Creed is trinitarian in structure.

If we then turn to one of the articles, we find the same trinitarian golden thread running through it. Let us look at article 9 of chapter 2: “I Believe in the Holy Catholic Church”. This article begins by stressing that our teaching about the Church must be rooted in our teaching about Christ (CCC 748), about the Holy Spirit (CCC 749), and about the Holy Trinity (CCC 750). We are immediately reminded about the hierarchy of truths and about helping our students to see the connections between the Church and our doctrine of God.

After discussing biblical images of the Church, we move to a subsection titled “The Church’s Origin, Foundation, and Mission”. The *Catechism* then teaches, “We begin our investigation of the Church’s mystery by meditating on her origin in the Holy Trinity’s plan and her progressive realization in history” (CCC 758). The beginning point, then, is the Trinity. And we can now understand what the title signifies: the Church’s Origin is in the Father; her Foundation lies with the Son; and her Mission is inspired by the Spirit. The paragraphs that follow expound this teaching, patiently demonstrating to us how the Church, at every stage of her history—from being a plan born in the Father’s heart to the final perfection and gathering of the Church “in the Father’s presence”—depends upon the work of the Holy Trinity, and especially upon one or other of the persons of the Trinity.

The paragraphs that follow this treatment then look at the connection between the Persons of the Trinity and the Church again, this

time not related to the historical development of the Church, but in terms of three key models of the Church: as the People of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit (see CCC 781–801). Thus we have a second treatment of the Church, once again trinitarian in character.

Let us turn to another part of the *Catechism*, part 2, “The Celebration of the Christian Mystery”. Here we are beginning to look at liturgy, at the *Opus Dei*, the work of God (see CCC 1069). The opening paragraphs of this part straight away lead us into the heart of the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, with the first article in chapter 1 of section 1 being called “The Liturgy—Work of the Holy Trinity”. Three sections trace the work of the Father (CCC 1077–83), the Son (CCC 1084–90) and the Holy Spirit (CCC 1091–1109) in the liturgy. We are being led to understand the ways in which liturgical and sacramental acts flow from the life of the Trinity.

What about the third part of the *Catechism*, “Life in Christ”? This again opens with a strong trinitarian dimension. The opening paragraphs refer us to the relationship of every Christian to the Father (CCC 1693), the Son (CCC 1694), and the Holy Spirit (CCC 1695). And, once again, the trinitarian theme runs through the individual sections of the third part of the *Catechism*, so that if one turns to the first article, on “Man: The Image of God”, one moves immediately into the consideration that the human person is naturally created for communion with others precisely because he is made in the image of a trinitarian God, a communion of Divine Persons (see CCC 1702).

The fourth part of the *Catechism* is a profound articulation of the nature of Christian prayer. In the opening section, “What Is Prayer?”, the *Catechism* describes prayer as “the habit of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God” (CCC 2565), and once again it gives us a historical perspective to enable us to appreciate how prayer involves our communion with each of the Divine Persons. Three articles treat of prayer in the Old Testament (CCC 2568–97), in the “fullness of time” (CCC 2598–2622) and in “the age of the Church” (CCC 2623–49). The age of the “fullness of time” is, of course, the age of the Son of God, while the “age of the Church” is the period of the Holy Spirit. Thus, once again, we are led into this part of the *Catechism* through the mystery of the Trinity.

The second "theme" (to use our symphonic image), or foundational reality, running through the *Catechism* is Christ himself. Jesus Christ, true God and true man, suffuses every page. The *Catechism* quotes from paragraph 5 of Pope John Paul II's encyclical on the teaching of the Faith, *Catechesi Tradendae*: "At the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth" (CCC 426). At the center of the *Catechism* we find, not a "doctrine", however profound and penetrating, but a living, beating heart—the Sacred Heart of the only Son of God (CCC 478).

The *Catechism* teaches, quoting from John Paul II again, that in catechesis "Christ, the Incarnate Word and Son of God, . . . is taught—everything else is taught with reference to him" (CCC 427, citing CT 6). This is precisely what we find in the *Catechism* itself: everything is taught with reference to him. By taking this approach the authors of the *Catechism* help us to understand more clearly what doctrine really is; we are led to see that our doctrinal statements are simply attempts to know the Person of Christ more faithfully. Each is inseparably tied to Jesus Christ. We might say that dogmas are like refractions of the Light of the world himself, aspects of his infinitely rich life, introducing us to his Person and work in a thousand and one different ways. The dogmatic teaching of the Church on the sacraments, for example, has its foundations in the mysteries of Christ's life, since "what was visible in our Savior has passed over into his mysteries".¹³

Let us look briefly at some examples from the *Catechism* to illustrate this point. Notice, first of all, how often teaching on a particular theme opens with reference to Christ, immediately drawing our attention to the fact that all catechesis on the subject must be conducted in the light of his Person and teaching. For instance, we can look at the treatment of angels where, after preliminary definitions, we are told that "Christ is the center of the angelic world" (CCC 331). This point is immediately supported by three biblical references (Mt 25:31; Col 1:16; Heb 1:14) and the further clarification that he is this because angels belong to him. There are two dimensions to this belonging: first, they belong to him by virtue of the fact that they were created

through him and for him; secondly, they belong to him because they assist him in the work of *salvation*. Christ is the center of the angelic world, then, in terms of *creation* and *redemption*.

It is important to notice that the *Catechism* does much more than simply assert that an item should be taught by reference to Christ: it also gives us the reasons for this. The authors of the *Catechism* want us not only to know the Faith; they also want us to be able to "give an account of the hope" that is in us (1 Pet 3:15), to be able to offer reasons for the Faith we present.¹⁴

"Christ" is the word that opens the treatment of Tradition (CCC 75), the Church (CCC 748), and the teaching on man, the image of God (CCC 1701). And "Christ" is the word that concludes the treatment of the Eucharist (CCC 1405) and funerals (CCC 1690), and the culminating point of the section on the Amen (CCC 1065). These are more than mere literary devices. They reflect a constant concern in the pages of the *Catechism* that Christ and his teaching genuinely form the center of each article. What is said in the introduction to part 3 can be as truly said of every section of the *Catechism*: "The first and last point of reference of this catechesis will always be Jesus Christ himself. . . ." (CCC 1698). Christ is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, the context and substance, of every article.

The authors of the *Catechism* explain why, in successive areas of the Faith, this is necessarily the case. Thus, for example, throughout the Scriptures God the Father speaks only one single Word, the Word who is his eternal Son (see CCC 102) and when we listen to the teaching of the Church we are hearing Christ's voice (CCC 87, 427); teaching on the sacraments must be centered on Christ because the Church's sacraments continue the works that Christ performed during his earthly life (CCC 1115); the moral life is rooted in Christ since he is the source and goal of our being (CCC 1701); and our Christian lives flow from our incorporation into him at baptism (CCC 1694). Finally, our prayer is nothing other than a glorious participation in the eternal language of love flowing between the Father and the Son (CCC 2564). A quotation from St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians very simply

¹³ St. Leo the Great, *Sermo* 74, 2; PL 54:398.

¹⁴ We will be considering this point in more detail in chapter 4, when we examine the way in which the *Catechism* assists us in understanding the Faith as eminently reasonable.

and beautifully sums up the centrality of Christ in the *Catechism's* presentation of the Faith: "For to me, to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21; cited in CCC 1698).

3. *The Paschal mystery, handed on in the Church*

The work of the Blessed Trinity in bringing about our salvation in the Paschal mystery is a further foundational theme in the *Catechism*. Christianity is a religion concerned with salvation, with the deepest issues of loss and gain, of tragedy and redemption. It is the dramatic story of the losing of all that is most precious, and of its restoration, long looked for and given beyond all expectation (see CCC 422). It is about man's capacity for an addiction to all that is base and squalid and his secret longing for the beauty of nobility. The *Catechism* teaches us that the Paschal mystery, that most momentous of all events in human history, of Christ "passing over" to his Father through his Passion, death, and Resurrection, sums up the whole of this longing, and this suffering and enables its transformation (see CCC 2606).

As with the truths of the Trinity and Christ, that of the Paschal mystery underpins each part of the *Catechism*. Once again, let us look briefly at how this is the case. As we know, the first part of the *Catechism* is substantially concerned with the Creed, which is itself a summary of salvation history of God's plan to save us. In much abbreviated form it tells of creation, the Fall, the Incarnation, and subsequent death and Resurrection of Christ. It concludes with the sending of the Spirit to continue and make present through Christ's body, the Church, the salvation won by Christ. The culminating point in this story of salvation is the Paschal mystery. This is the mysterious heart of God's plan, the cornerstone that is also the stumbling block (see CCC 1336). In the first part of the *Catechism* it is treated specifically in CCC 595-655 and the rest of the first part fans out from this section as spokes of a wheel around their center.

In the second part of the *Catechism* the whole of its treatment of liturgy and the sacraments is placed in the context of the Paschal mystery. We can see this from the main chapter headings in section 1: chapter 1 is called "The Paschal Mystery in the Age of the Church", while chapter 2 is "The Sacramental Celebration of the Paschal Mystery". The authors stress that the Paschal mystery is one of the key

principles for appreciating the nature of the liturgy and the sacraments, those "masterpieces" of God crafted by the Holy Spirit (see CCC 1091). In CCC 1067 they make the point that the work of God in creation and redemption reaches its climax in "the Paschal mystery of his [Christ's] blessed Passion, Resurrection from the dead, and glorious Ascension", and they go on to say that it is precisely this "mystery of Christ that the Church proclaims and celebrates in her liturgy so that the faithful may live from it and bear witness to it in the world" (CCC 1068). In the liturgy and the sacraments, then, "Christ, our redeemer and high priest, continues the work of our redemption in, with, and through his Church" (CCC 1069). The treatment of each sacrament is carefully developed to ensure that this point is kept clearly in our view, with the personal heart of the liturgy and the sacraments thereby placed before us.

What about parts 3 and 4 of the *Catechism*? They, too, have the sign of the cross and Resurrection marked on every page. The authors have ensured that we have this perspective as soon as we begin reading part 3, "Life in Christ". It opens with the following paragraph, which is a quotation from St. Leo the Great, one of the most important occupants of the See of Peter in the early Church:

"Christian, recognize your dignity and, now that you share in God's own nature, do not return to your former base condition by sinning. Remember who is your head and of whose body you are a member. Never forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the light of the Kingdom of God."¹⁵

The starting point for our catechesis about the moral life of the Christian is the reminder that it must be presented as a fitting response to the work of Christ, who has rescued us through the Paschal mystery. And a pithy phrase from St. Paul that we have already noted concludes the introductory section in part 3: "For to me, to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21; CCC 1698). For St. Paul, a description of the Christian life is as simple as that: to live is Christ. He can say this because he knows that the Christian life is always and only a participation in the life of the Lord, and especially a sharing in his death and Resurrection.

¹⁵ CCC 1691, citing St. Leo the Great, *Sermo 21 in nat. Dom.*, 3; PL 54:192C.

The individual articles in part 3 proceed with constant reference to this point. It is worth noticing, for example, the way in which the teaching on man in the image of God stresses how the *Passion* is central to the restoration of God's image in us (see CCC 1708); how the *Beatitudes* are said to reveal to us the face of Christ revealed in his death and Resurrection (CCC 1717); how the article on freedom asks us to measure all understandings of freedom against that won for us by Christ on the Cross (CCC 1741); and how our feelings are "mobilized" to support us in our strivings to grow in Christian maturity precisely by our meditation upon Christ's *Passion* (CCC 1769).

The fourth part of the *Catechism*, on prayer, is similarly rooted in Christ's Paschal mystery. In common with each of the parts of the *Catechism*, the fourth part is in two sections. The first section of each part deals with general and methodological issues—in this case tackling fundamental questions such as "Why pray?" "Can prayer effect things?" "What are the main types of prayer?" and "What are the sources of prayer?"; while the second section of each part deals with the "details" and the "content" of the Faith—in this case by taking us through the petitions of the Our Father. The authors have chosen to make the Paschal mystery central to both sections by placing teaching on it as the pivotal point in this part—article 3: "The Prayer of the Hour of Jesus". This teaching concludes the first section and introduces the second. The prayer Jesus makes when his "hour had come" (Jn 13:1) is found in John 17. Called by Tradition "the priestly prayer" (see CCC 2747), it is the longest prayer in the New Testament, and the *Catechism* also calls it his "Paschal" prayer (CCC 2748): "It is the prayer of our high priest, inseparable from his sacrifice, from his passing over (Passover) to the Father to whom he is wholly 'consecrated'";¹⁶

The *Catechism* makes it clear that this prayer is not something that lies in the past, merely as an inspiration to us, or simply something of historical interest. Rather, it is a prayer that "extends until the end of time" (CCC 2749) and it is the prayer into which our own prayers are called to enter to find their perfect expression—everything, the *Catechism* teaches, is brought together in this prayer (see CCC 2748).

¹⁶ CCC 2747; cf. Jn 17:11, 13, 19.

4. *The dignity of the human person*

Finally, let us consider the dignity of the human person, the fourth foundational theme underpinning the parts of the *Catechism*, the four dimensions of the Christian life. One might be inclined to think of this as a subsidiary, rather than a main theme. After all, the *Catechism* is profoundly God-centered, not man-centered, and it is the conviction of the authors of the *Catechism* that catechesis is to be characterized by teaching directly about God, and not merely about the human experience of God. But the Church has insisted that teaching about the dignity of the human person and his vocation to life in God is an essential part of the Deposit of Faith that is to be proclaimed (see, for example, GDC 123). This is the case because man is the only creature made "in the image of God", belonging to him, and like him, in a way that is shared by no other part of creation.

This is why the theme of man's vocation often opens a part of the *Catechism*; for example, part 1 begins with a chapter on "Man's Capacity for God", and part 3 begins with a chapter on "The Dignity of the Human Person". The doctrinal teaching on man's dignity is contained initially in two major places: first, the early paragraphs on the fundamental capacity of each person to love and know God because we are each made for him as our only and unimaginable fulfillment (see CCC 27-35); second, in the treatment on the Incarnation (especially CCC 456-83 and CCC 514-21). The *Catechism* asks us to remember that we are made in the image of God, but that Christ is the image of God; he is God. In other words, we are made "in Christ", and it is in him that we find our true face and dignity (see CCC 1701). The theme of the dignity of the person, then, is especially closely linked to that of Jesus Christ.

The *Catechism* helps us to realize this in a number of ways. One is by using phrases about our vocation and nature that echo those used of Christ. A striking example can be found in CCC 336. Speaking of angels, the *Catechism* teaches "From its beginning to death, human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession."¹⁷ This picks up ideas and phrases from a few paragraphs earlier, especially CCC 333, when it speaks of the role of the angels in Christ's life, protecting him and serving

¹⁷ In respect of this paragraph, the second edition of the *Catechism* (1997) altered the wording "From infancy" to read "From its beginning", reflecting the need for a complete absence of ambiguity in the face of a culture of death, which often denies the humanity of the unborn.

him from "the Incarnation to the Ascension". By echoing the words spoken about Christ, the authors are reinforcing the point that each human life is surrounded by angelic care *precisely because we are created in Christ*. This point is made over and again in different articles—for example, at CCC 1010, on death, where we read, "Because of Christ, Christian death has a positive meaning." What is true of human *life*, finding its true meaning and fulfillment in Christ, is also true of human *death*.

There is a constant pastoral concern in the *Catechism*, then, to show how its teaching on God and on Christ has clear implications for our understanding of ourselves. And this pastoral concern is rooted in the dogmatic truths of the creation and Incarnation. It is most systematically explored in the section on the "mysteries" of Jesus' life—CCC 512–21, one of the most crucial sections in the whole of the *Catechism*. These paragraphs can profitably be read and dwelt upon many times by all of us who want to teach the Catholic Faith—they explain how we are united to Christ because of the Incarnation and how the Incarnation is the basis both for our intrinsic dignity and for our day-to-day living. Let us look at these paragraphs briefly.

The three paragraphs, CCC 516–18, open with a common formula—"Christ's whole [earthly] life". The *Catechism* is teaching us that there are three "mysteries", or invisible realities, being communicated throughout the whole of Christ's life: *revelation of the Father, redemption, and recapitulation*. It is the third of these that is most important for us at this point. "*Recapitulation*" is a word that means "sum up as the head". Christ's human life is the *summary* of all God's dealings with the human race, a summary that puts right what went wrong before, and that stamps its own pattern on the rest of human history and life.

At the end of CCC 518 there is a quotation from St. Irenaeus,¹⁸ who makes the point that Christ experienced all the "stages" of human life and because of this gave "communion with God to all men". "Stages of life" is the phrase used to describe the fact that Christ shared and lived through all the points of natural development common to all people—he was a baby in the womb, an infant, a child, and so on.

If we now look at the conclusion to CCC 521 we will find there a quotation from the writings of another saint, St. John Eudes.¹⁹ It

beautifully mirrors the St. Irenaeus quotation: St. John Eudes says that it is *we* who "accomplish" the stages of *Jesus' life* and so come to share fully in the plan of God for us. Thus, Christ shared all the stages of our lives (St. Irenaeus), and now we accomplish in ourselves the stages of his life (St. John Eudes). Christ patterned his life on ours so that we might pattern our lives on his.

We have looked, then, in some detail at the ways in which the authors of the *Catechism* have embedded every article of the Faith, every doctrine, in the most fundamental personal realities that lie at the heart of the Faith: the Holy Trinity; the Person of Christ, true God and true man; the Paschal mystery, handed on through the Holy Spirit in the Church; and the dignity of man made in the image of God. These underpin every area of the *Catechism*. Ensuring that our annunciation of the Faith takes its life, its deepest meaning and its orientation from one or more of these will therefore enable our students to appreciate better the core mysteries of the Faith, their personal nature, and the coherence of all doctrines of the Faith in them.

Personal transmission of the Faith

We have seen that the pedagogy of God encompasses, in a profound unity, both the content of revelation and its manner of transmission. As we might expect, therefore, not only is the content of revelation personal; so also is its mode of transmission. And just as the personal truths lying at the heart of revelation may be captured in propositional statements, so these statements are also and necessarily attached to the personal acts that constitute the transmission of revelation. Of course, how could it be otherwise? To deny any propositional dimension to personal transmission would be to deny the natural way in which the human mind works, and also deny the human person a huge amount of his culture, in which the personal finds expression through liturgy, through the spoken and written language, through the handing on of the skills of craft and through the sharing of scientific knowledge. In the areas of both the content of the Faith and its transmission, no opposition should be set up between the personal and the propositional.

The *Catechism* speaks of "a specific divine pedagogy" in which "God communicates himself to man gradually" (CCC 53). And this communication, although it makes use of words, does not make Christianity

¹⁸ St. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 3, 18, 7; PG 7/1:937; cf. 2, 22, 4.

¹⁹ St. John Eudes, quoted in the *Liturgy of the Hours*, Week 33 Friday, Office of Readings.

a "religion of the book". Rather, "Christianity is the religion of the 'Word' of God, a word which is 'not a written and mute word, but the Word which is incarnate and living'" (CCC 108).²⁰ Christianity is better described as a "religion of the person". The *Catechism* uses an image from St. Irenaeus to explain God's pedagogy further: "The Word of God dwelt in man and became the Son of man in order to accustom man to perceive God and to accustom God to dwell in man, according to the Father's pleasure."²¹

In two places, the *Catechism* illustrates God's personal pedagogy, his gradual communication with man, accustoming man to his voice. CCC 54-67 identifies the "stages" of this revelation, developed in the form of covenants with those he chose—Noah, Abraham, Moses—and then his gradual formation of his people through the voices of his prophets. CCC 2566-89 reflects on the human response to this revelation and how it was articulated through the prayer of Abraham, Moses, David, and Elijah and in the assembly of the people of Israel. In all cases we see that the pedagogy is one of *personal transmission*, in which God seeks man out and elicits a response (CCC 2567). God reveals his Word and his Spirit to particular individuals and to a particular people, and it is for them to carry this Word and Spirit to others.

God's pedagogy culminates in the personal word of an angel speaking to the Daughter of Zion, the "purest figure" among those holy women who had kept alive the hope of salvation (CCC 64). "Mary was invited to conceive him in whom the 'whole fullness of deity' would dwell 'bodily'" (CCC 484, citing Col 2:9). The fullness of revelation, of God himself, takes flesh in the womb of Mary, and it is this enfleshed Word, through the power of the Holy Spirit, that is then carried to Elizabeth, so that her own child leaps in the womb in recognition (Lk 1:44). God's pedagogy is for the sake of his becoming flesh, so that, in him, our flesh might partake of his own nature and life. "O marvelous exchange! Man's Creator has become man, born of the Virgin. We have been made sharers in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity."²²

²⁰ The *Catechism* here is citing St. Bernard, *S. missus est hom.* 4, 11; PL 183:86.

²¹ St. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 3, 20, 2; PG 7/1: 944; cf. 3, 17, 1; 4, 12, 4; 4, 21, 3. This is cited in CCC 53.

²² CCC 526, citing LH, Antiphon 1 of Evening Prayer for Jan. 1.

The embodied transmission of revelation, handed on in the beauty of the Word Made Flesh, is the central theme of the New Testament.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.²³

The apostles proclaim the Word of life, which they have touched, seen and heard. In his classic work *The Meaning of Tradition*, Yves Congar cites Charles Péguy, who offers a poetically expressed statement of the Christian understanding of the ongoing transmission of revelation in the life of the Church:

Just as at the church door, on Sundays and feastdays,
When we go to Mass,
Or at funerals,

We pass holy water to each other from hand to hand,
One to another, one after the other,
Directly from hand to hand, or pass a piece of blessed
bread dipped in holy water,

To make the sign of the cross, upon ourselves, the living,
or on the coffins of the dead,
So that step by step the same sign of the cross is, as it
were, carried by the same water....

In the same way, from hand to hand, from fingers to fingers,
From finger-tip to finger-tip, the everlasting generations
Who go to Mass age after age,
One generation succeeding another,
Pass on the word of God, in the same hope,
In the same breasts, in the same hearts, until the world
itself is buried.²⁴

²³ 1 Jn 1:1-3.

²⁴ From Péguy, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, quoted in Yves Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), p. 11.

The Faith is handed on from person to person, from fingertip to fingertip. An understanding of the etymology of "catechesis" assists us in the appreciation of this; it is derived from the Greek word "catechein", originally meaning "to echo".²⁵ In the time of St. Paul it was used to mean "to hear", "to learn" or "to instruct". Catechesis, then, is the "echoing" or "resounding" of a message. It is handing on what has been received. That is what St. Paul meant when he said that "I delivered to you . . . what I also received" (1 Cor 15:3). St. Paul has received the message, and now he is "echoing" it on to others. To be a catechist is to receive, and to hand on what has been received.

We have seen the pivotal role that the apostles had in the initial transmission of the living Word; having been touched and seen by Christ, their memories and their Faith now stand at the root of the Scriptures and at the heart of Tradition, through which the Faith continues to be handed on to each generation. They themselves handed on to others (whom the New Testament calls "overseers", "bishops") the responsibility for maintaining "oversight", under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, of this personal transmission of the Faith. The Church teaches that these stand "*in persona Christi Capitis*"—in the place of the person of Christ the Head (see CCC 1548). Because of the essentially personal nature of the transmission of Christ and his message, St. Irenaeus insisted that, in order to be part of the community of Faith, one needed to be in communion with this particular line of succession from the apostles.²⁶ Personal attachment to Christ is made available through the priest, who "continues the work of redemption on earth".²⁷

It is important to realize that when the Church speaks of the personal she does not oppose this to the social; rather, the person is intrinsically social: "Society is not for him an extraneous addition but a requirement of his nature" (CCC 1879). Therefore, "a society is a group of persons bound together organically by a principle of unity that goes beyond each one of them" (CCC 1880). When we are thinking of the transmission of the Faith, then, *personal transmission implies ecclesial*.

²⁵ See Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 1978), 3:771-72.

²⁶ St. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, 5, 20, 1: PG 7/1:1177.

²⁷ CCC 1589, citing the Curé of Ars, St. John Vianney, quoted in B. Nodet, *Jean-Marie Vianney: Curé d'Ars* (Le Puy, 1958), p. 100.

transmission. The Word of God lives in *the Church* and through the apostles and their successors, through the sacraments, liturgy, and life of the Church, and through the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Spirit hands on that Word, from generation to generation.

In order to foster the integration of the doctrinal and the personal in our teaching and in our appreciation of the personal nature of the transmission of the Faith, we can use the following questions as a basis for evaluating our resources and planning our catechetical sessions:

- Is the whole clearly rooted in the life and work of the Holy Trinity?
- Is it clear how the topic flows out of the life and work of Jesus Christ?
- Does the treatment of the topic highlight the Paschal mystery, handed on by the Holy Spirit in the Church?
- Is it clear how the topic enhances our understanding of who we are and our vocation to life in grace and the Trinity?
- Is it clear how the doctrines being presented lead those whom we are teaching to discover and know the Lord more deeply?

So we come to the fourth catechetical key:

KEY 4 PERSONAL

We are aware that doctrine and its transmission is essentially personal, and we ground catechesis in the living foundational realities of the Faith, handing ourselves over to serve the transmission of Christ and his message.