

What forms does the ministry of the word take?

The aim of evangelisation is Christian conversion. It seeks interior change, beginning with an initial conversion that will continue to mature over a life-time [GDC 56].

In evangelisation, the ministry of the word takes different forms. Each relates to a particular stage of conversion. In this way, it cooperates with the progressiveness of God's act of Revelation.

The *Directory* identifies four forms of the ministry of the word. Religious education is one, and will be dealt with under the question 'What is religious education?' Before taking up this question, however, we need first to distinguish between three other forms of the ministry of the word — primary proclamation, initiatory catechesis, and ongoing catechesis. We need also to understand what is New Evangelisation.

PRIMARY PROCLAMATION

Through the act of Revelation, God calls people to discover their Creator through the universe, including the world around them [CCC 32]. A believer exercises the ministry of the word here, firstly by helping another person to become more aware of God through creation.

Secondly, God calls people through their human heart aspirations, be they yearnings or questions, that ultimately God alone can satisfy [CCC 33]. Human heart yearnings include those for lasting happiness, freedom, inner peace and goodness. Human heart questions include those about the meaning of life and suffering, personal identity and life after death.

A believer exercises the ministry of the word here, firstly by helping another to become aware of these aspirations, and then by helping the other person to realise that these aspirations can be satisfied fully only by the One who created the human heart [cf GDC 117].

Thirdly, human sinfulness is the cause of much of the unhappiness and evil people experience. Its symptoms can be seen in human greed, violence, selfishness, wars and injustices. One of its effects in the lives of the young are the weaknesses they recognise in themselves when, for example, they fail to live their ideals of friendship and loyalty, they regret being the causes of family tensions, and when they desire to improve and to become better people.

The ministry of the word is exercised by Christians who lead others to become aware that, in Jesus Christ, God offers 'healing' from human sinfulness, and forgives sins. Learning of this promise, people find the hope for salvation stirring within them (from Latin *salus*, meaning 'heal') [DV 3; CCC 55].

Together, these three ministry of the word activities form what is called *primary proclamation* [GDC 61]. They are essential for any evangelisation. This proclamation can be achieved in many ways. Pope Paul VI wrote [EN 51]:

An almost indefinite range of means can be used for this purpose: explicit preaching, of course, but also art, the scientific approach, philosophical research and legitimate recourse to the sentiments of the human heart.

The aim of primary proclamation is achieved when a person arrives at an *initial faith in Jesus Christ*. They decide they want to follow Christ by building their life upon all that he taught.

Primary proclamation is directed to five groups of people. Ordinarily, it is directed to those with no religious faith or who follow other religions. In New Evangelisation, it is directed to baptised Christians who have 'lost a living sense of faith', who 'no longer consider themselves members of the Church' or who 'live at the margins of Christian life' [GDC 51, 58 (c)]. In both cases, primary proclamation seeks to promote two moments towards conversion.

The two moments towards Christian conversion

The first moment needed for Christian conversion is *interest in the Gospel*. This involves trying to raise people's awareness of the aspirations of the human heart, and to relate these to the Gospel, as described above. The aim of this moment is to lead people to [GDC 56(a)]:

... an interest in the Gospel, yet without any firm decision.

The second moment, called the *pre-catechumenate*, involves trying to arouse in a person an *initial conversion*, a basic desire to follow Jesus Christ, the Saviour, the one who brings Salvation. This includes the desire to turn from sin and to follow him. Hence, in primary proclamation [GDC 117]:

... the proclamation of the Gospel shall always be done in close connection with human nature and its aspirations, and will show how the Gospel fully satisfies the human heart.

Primary proclamation is one of the basic forms of the ministry of the word that needs to be offered *within* a Catholic school community [GDC 260].

INITIATORY CATECHESIS

The Gospels show Jesus forming those who accepted his call to follow him. He revealed to them the basic experiences of God needed if they were to enter into the life he offered. He taught them all that is necessary to share in these experiences. To live as a Christian, for example, a person needs to experience God as a God of love. For this reason, in Baptism [Romans 5:5]:

... the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit ...

These basic experiences of God, and the teachings of Christ that relate to them, are handed on today by the Church. They are the 'realities' of which St Thomas spoke in the quotation given earlier [cf CCC 170]. They are summarised in the propositions of Creed, the Sacraments, the Life in Christ and Christian prayer. Basic experiences of the God of love, for example, are expressed in 'We believe in God, the Father'. In the words of Pope John Paul [FR 99]:

... what is communicated in catechesis is not a body of conceptual truths, but the mystery of the living God.

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A Christian exercises the ministry of the word by introducing others to the basic experiences of God that are the foundation of the Christian life. The 'realities' underlying the Creed, the Sacraments, the Life in Christ and Christian prayer 'constitute the nucleus of the Christian experience' [GDC 67].

This form of the ministry of the word is called 'initiatorial catechesis', or the catechumenate. It initiates people into 'the fullness of Christian life' [GDC 63]. It initiates also into the community of Christ's followers, the Church, and as well as the Church's 'living experience of the Gospel' [GDC 66]. Its aim is spiritual, liturgical, sacramental and apostolic maturity [RD 69].

Initiatorial catechesis, therefore, seeks to mature a person's initial faith in Christ into 'a living, explicit and fruitful confession of faith' in *all that he revealed* [GDC 82]. Initiatorial catechesis [GDC 63]:

... corresponds to the period in which conversion to Jesus Christ is formalised, and provides a basis for adhering to him.

The content of initiatorial catechesis is limited to what is 'basic' and to what is 'common' for all believers. It never goes into disputed issues or becomes a form of theological investigation [GDC 68]. These activities are more appropriate to 'ongoing catechesis', a topic to be discussed shortly.

The tasks of initiatorial catechesis

To hand on 'the nucleus of the Christian experience', catechesis needs to undertake six basic, but interdependent tasks. These are [GDC 85–86]:

- ❖ to promote knowledge of the faith
- ❖ to promote liturgical participation
- ❖ to promote moral formation
- ❖ to teach how to pray
- ❖ to educate for participation in Church community life
- ❖ to promote missionary initiation.

Because these tasks of catechesis are interdependent, none can be thought of in isolation. They develop *together*. Hence [GDC 87]:

Each great catechetical theme — catechesis of God the Father, for example — has a cognitive dimension as well as moral implications. It is interiorised in prayer and appropriated in witness. One task echoes the other: knowledge of the faith prepares for mission; the sacramental life gives strength for moral transformation.

To fulfil these tasks, catechesis uses two means. One is handing on the Gospel, the other is handing on the experience of the Christian life. For example [GDC 87]:

Liturgical formation must explain what the Christian liturgy is, and what the sacraments are. It must also, however, offer an experience of the

different kinds of celebration and it must make symbols, gestures etc known and loved.

An 'apprenticeship' process of formation

Initiatory catechesis cannot be understood properly unless God's act of Revelation is understood. From this act, there can be discerned the basic principles of a divine pedagogy. These principles form the foundation of the processes of catechesis outlined in the *Directory* [GDC 139–162].

The processes of catechesis are processes of *formation* (not simply education or 'instruction') [GDC 63]. This is because [GDC 55]:

Faith and conversion arise from the 'heart', that is, they arise from the depth of the human person and they involve all that he is. By meeting Jesus Christ and by adhering to him, the human being sees all his deepest aspirations completely fulfilled.

The notion that the processes of initiatory catechesis are processes of formation may be confusing for anyone accustomed to thinking of Revelation solely in terms of propositions. This way of thinking overlooks the experiential nature of the content of the faith, the 'realities' the propositions are meant to serve, the 'mystery' to be communicated through catechesis. It leads to the delusion that conversion can be achieved merely through instruction in these teachings.

The content of the faith cannot be handed on bleached of the experiences that constitute it. On the contrary, initiatory catechesis requires a 'comprehensive formation' that [GDC 67, 68]:

... includes more than instruction: it is an apprenticeship of the entire Christian life, it is a 'complete Christian initiation'.

As it is a formation for the Christian life, it comprises but surpasses mere instruction ... it incorporates into the community which lives, celebrates and bears witness to the faith. It fulfils (simultaneously) initiatory, educational and instructional functions.

The idea that catechesis merely involves 'instruction in the faith' (or 'convert instructions') sometimes leads people to confuse catechesis with religious education. This is a misunderstanding of catechesis, for it overlooks the need for catechesis to be *experiential* and *behavioural* as well as *cognitive* [GDC 35].

ONGOING CATECHESIS

God's act of Revelation never ceases. Until they die, God continues to reach out to people, calling them to share ever more deeply in the divine life. Hence, catechesis needs [GDC 152(c)]:

... (to) teach the person to read his own lived experience in this regard, so as to accept the invitation of the Holy Spirit to conversion, to commitment, to hope and to discover more and more in his life God's plan for him.

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Also, as pointed out when discussing the question 'What is Christian Faith?', entrusting oneself to God and assenting to revealed truths are life-long challenges. They involve a life long journey. Hence, ongoing catechesis is needed, for [GDC 56 (d)]:

The basic maturity, which gives rise to the profession of faith, is not the final point in the process of continuing conversion ... but the foundation of a spiritual building which is destined to grow.

For those who think of Revelation primarily in terms of 'truths', ongoing catechesis is 'a nice extra' once a person believes in the basic truths of Christian faith. However, the Church's renewed understanding of the *nature* of Revelation and Christian faith means that ongoing catechesis is of vital importance [GDC 173]:

The faith of adults, therefore, must be continually enlightened, developed and protected, so that it may acquire that Christian wisdom which gives sense, unity and hope to the many experiences of personal, social and spiritual life.

The Church's renewed understanding of evangelisation also brings the need for ongoing catechesis into sharp focus. Without it, how can adult believers receive the ongoing faith formation needed to bring 'the Good News into all strata of society'? [EN 18]. Ongoing catechesis is essential, therefore [GDC 175]:

... to encourage adults to assume responsibility for the Church's mission, and to be able to give Christian witness in society.

Ongoing catechesis can take many forms [GDC 71, 176]. This is important to note in the present discussion, for unless parents have opportunities for ongoing catechesis, family catechesis — and the religious education of children — cannot be as effective as it needs to be [GDC 227]. This will contribute to the decline in young people's religious practice.

In practice, a person's appreciation for the importance of ongoing catechesis reflects their faith in the Church's renewed doctrines of Revelation, Christian faith and evangelisation. The opposite is also true.



NEW EVANGELISATION

All evangelisation activities promote Christian conversion. Ideally, once a Christian convert has arrived at a basic level of Christian faith through primary proclamation and initiatory catechesis, they receive the Sacraments of Initiation and go on to become a committed follower of Christ.

However, in practice, many today who have been baptised, perhaps as children, lack the conversion element of Christian faith [cf CCC 154, 155]. Many, including children and teenagers sitting in Catholic school classrooms, are indifferent to this faith. Then there are those who live only in marginally Christian ways or who reject the Church [GDC 58 (c)]. These realities have to be taken into account when considering the kind of religious education students need [GDC 75].

It has to be accepted too that many Catholic parents and families, even if they go to Mass, still lack the degree of conversion needed to hand on Christian faith adequately to their children. Indeed, as the *Directory* warns in relation to all catechesis [GDC 62]:

Frequently, many who present themselves for catechesis truly require genuine conversion. Because of this, the Church usually desires that the first stage of the catechetical process be dedicated to ensuring conversion ...

Only by starting with conversion ... can catechesis, strictly speaking, fulfil its proper task ...

People in these situations need *New Evangelisation*. This is the appropriate pastoral response to 'the *baptised* of all ages' who have yet to convert (or reconvert) to Christianity [GDC 58 (c)].

Firstly, after raising religious awareness and awareness of the aspirations of the human heart that God alone can satisfy fully, *New Evangelisation* seeks to promote interest in the Gospel and initial conversion to Christ (*primary proclamation*). It then seeks to encourage faith in Christ's basic teachings so that the gifts received already through Baptism can develop (*initiatory catechesis*). The pre-catechumenate processes in *New Evangelisation* are referred to as *pre-catechesis* or *kerygmatic catechesis* [GDC 62 n6].

New Evangelisation is very much about pastoral pragmatism. For example, if those present during the Eucharist have little real interest in the Gospel (such as teenagers), *New Evangelisation* calls for the homily to offer both primary proclamation and catechesis [GDC 52]. Liturgy, therefore, has its own part to play in *New Evangelisation*. Liturgy needs to respond too to the special needs of 'unchurched' Catholics on occasions when they attend liturgical celebrations, such as Christmas, marriages and Sacraments of Initiation.

Also, the age of reception for Confirmation is a debated issue today in evangelisation. This question needs to be reconsidered if those receiving it require *New Evangelisation*, that is, if they [GDC 181]:

... from that moment, virtually abandon completely the practice of the faith.

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Decisions about the appropriate age for the reception of this sacrament cannot be made, therefore, in isolation from the faith situations of those to receive it [GDC 181]:

This is a matter of serious concern which requires specific pastoral care ...

The following chart demonstrates the relationship between evangelisation and New Evangelisation.

CHART TWO

| | Evangelisation | New Evangelisation |
|---|---|---|
| Towards interest in the Gospel | <i>Primary Proclamation</i> | <i>Primary Proclamation</i> |
| Towards initial conversion to Christ | <i>Primary Proclamation (Pre-catechumenate)</i> | <i>Primary Proclamation (called Kerygmatic or pre-catechesis)</i> |
| Towards the profession of Christian faith | <i>Initiatory catechesis or catechumenate</i> | <i>Initiatory catechesis</i> |

Discussion starters

'The ministry of the word in evangelisation takes many forms.' Discuss how this occurs in the light of the primary proclamation described above?

What are some of the implications and issues that arise for the practice of catechesis because it 'includes more than instruction: it is an apprenticeship of the entire Christian life'?

What do you envisage as some of the opportunities and challenges for catechesis in the future in the light of the Directory?

What is meant by New Evangelisation, and how does it differ from normal evangelisation?