

## **Directory for Catechesis. A Pastoral Re-Reading in terms of Keywords**

*Carl-Mario Sultana, Secretary of the CCEE Catechesis Section*

Abbreviations:

*Directory for Catechesis* – DfC

*Evangelii Gaudium* - EG

The long-awaited new *Directory for Catechesis* has been promulgated after 5 years of intensive work by the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelisation which was in charge of this 'update' of the Directory. The fact that several experts from the field were consulted in order to make this document a true guide which reflects the needs of the contemporary socio-cultural and catechetical contexts augurs well for both the reception and the overall outlook of the Directory.

### **The Directory as a Tool**

The *Directory for Catechesis* as the term 'directory' implies seeks to give a direction, it directs the reader to a particular goal. Its aim is to help the reader and all those who are active in the catechetical ministry to have a vision towards which one seeks to move, and to achieve. The *Directory* states this from the very beginning (para. 10): "The new *Directory for Catechesis* offers fundamental theological-pastoral principles and some general guidelines that are relevant for the practice of catechesis in our time. It is natural that their application and the operative guidelines should be a task for the particular Churches, called to provide an elaboration of these common principles, so that they may be inculturated in their own ecclesial context. This *Directory*, therefore is a tool for the elaboration of the national or local directory...capable of translating the general guidelines into the language of the respective ecclesial communities".

Its aim is not to limit the extent of catechesis in terms of what is being proposed in the *Directory*. It does not seek uniformity at all costs, but it is aimed at kindling creativity in catechesis which is in line with the general principles presented in the *Directory*, and which are also in tune with the particular socio-cultural, pastoral and catechetical milieu in which they are put into practice.

### **My Position when confronted with the Directory**

I am giving this reaction as an initial one. I have not been involved in the preparation or the elaboration of this new *Directory*. Therefore, whatever I am going to speak about here can be considered as an initial pastoral reading of the *Directory*. I had known that the process of its updating had been started, and had eagerly been waiting for the final product. In March 2019, in one of our annual meetings as National Directors of Catechesis, Mgr Tebartz Van Elst had shown us the index. At that time, I was able to see that the contents of the *Directory* were very elaborate, and that they cover a wide variety of themes and topics closely linked to catechesis.

I must also state at the beginning that I read the *Directory* from the European point of view.

## **A Pastoral Reaction to the Directory**

I would like to share with you a pastoral reaction in terms of keywords or emphasis which the new *Directory* makes. I am going to elaborate on the following themes which I personally found, not only intriguing but also to some extent original in the new *Directory*:

1. *Evangelii Gaudium* as the firm foundation of the *Directory*
2. Kerygmatic Catechesis
3. The Catechumenate
4. The human being in the contemporary social and cultural context – the digital culture
5. Mystagogy
6. The way of Beauty – Via Pulchritudinis

### 1. *Evangelii Gaudium* as the firm foundation

As with the other previous Directories, the new *Directory* is based on the theology which is being developed in the contemporary society as a result of the Church's reading of the signs of the times. (*General Catechetical Directory* 1971 – Vatican Council II; *General Directory for Catechesis* 1997 – *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Catechesi Tradendae* CCC and *Fidei Depositum*).

It is clear that EG is the foundation on which the *Directory* is solidly positioned. The amount of direct and indirect references to EG attest to this. Whilst the 1997 *General Directory for Catechesis* has a myriad of footnotes which were aimed at helping those who were studying it to further deepen the ideas and concepts within it, the new *Directory* has much less references, but from these references there are quite a substantial amount of them which refer to EG. It can indeed be noted that EG is always referred to in order to give more strength to the point being made. Therefore, EG reinforces the particular position which is being made.

Having EG as a point of departure and as the same time as a vision towards which one is seeking to move, implies that there are certain aspects which are highlighted more than the rest. Amongst these, we find the strict link which there is between evangelisation and catechesis. Indeed, catechesis is rightly seen within the context of evangelisation, and as an integral part of it (DfC, 66-74). The *Directory* insists that catechesis has to be seen as “a privileged stage in the process of evangelisation” (DfC, 56). The divisions within the process of evangelisation and of catechesis respectively are re-worded. Nonetheless, they essentially remain the same but reflect the new exigencies of our times with regards to evangelisation and catechesis.

EG 169-173 proposes personal accompaniment as one of the ways forward in presenting the Gospel to our contemporary society. The new *Directory* similarly considers personal accompaniment as a very important aspect in contemporary catechesis. This is especially so in the formation of catechists, who truly need to be formed as companions on the journey during the process of catechesis (DfC, 113, 135). Accompaniment is also important during the process of catechesis with specific categories of persons, for example, accompanying families (DfC, 235-235) or accompanying adults (DfC, 263-265).

In various parts of EG, Pope Francis calls the Church to embrace a missionary outlook and a missionary transformation. The new *Directory* picks up this new way of looking at the mission of evangelisation and of catechesis in our contemporary world and proposes “the need for a

renewed impulse of evangelisation [which] justifies the decision to rethink in a missionary vein all the pastoral activities of the Christian community, even the most ordinary and traditional ones. Catechesis as well is touched by demands of missionary conversion to which the parish is called” (DfC, 303).

Within the specific realm of the parish, the *Directory* speaks of a missionary transformation in terms of three particular aspects:

- a. forming a community of missionary disciples not of experts who know it all;
- b. forming a missionary mentality, that is, a tension to listen to others and to go out to listen to the experiences of people and illuminate these with the Gospel;
- c. present formative experiences (inspired by the catechumenate) which make it possible to get to know, and to accept the kerygma (DfC, 303).

It is interesting to note that the *Directory* elaborates only on five tasks of catechesis. The task which regards *missionary initiation* is omitted in the new *Directory*. The reason for this may be in the fact that the missionary dimension of catechesis is a transversal theme in the new *Directory*.

## 2. Kerygmatic Catechesis

The new *Directory* emphatically proposes a kerygmatic type of catechesis without seeking to take us back in time to the kerygmatic movement which was typical of catechesis in the 1930's through to the 1960's. The inspiration is from EG 164-165 which states that:

In catechesis too, we have rediscovered the fundamental role of the first announcement or kerygma, which needs to be the centre of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal... This first proclamation is called “first” not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things. It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level and moment... We must not think that in catechesis the kerygma gives way to a supposedly more “solid” formation. Nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation. All Christian formation consists of entering more deeply into the kerygma, which is reflected in and constantly illumines, the work of catechesis, thereby enabling us to understand more fully the significance of every subject which the latter treats. It is the message capable of responding to the desire for the infinite which abides in every human heart (EG 164-165; DfC, 68).

This text from EG is frequently referred to and at times also reproduced in several parts of the new *Directory* (DfC, 68). A kerygmatic presentation of the Good News is not only important during the first proclamation, but it should be the distinguishing characteristic of all the different phases of catechesis with all the different categories and ages of interlocutors (DfC, 57).

What is meant by kerygmatic catechesis in the new *Directory*? This is a very pertinent question which we need to answer in an adequate way if we are seeking to understand the new vision being proposed by the *Directory*. When we are speaking of a kerygmatic catechesis, we are also saying that the primary aim of all our catechetical endeavours should be the proclamation of the Good News. If we want kerygmatic catechesis as a term not to end up a cliché – as what happened with the term ‘new evangelisation’ – we have to see that this is rooted not only in the message of the Gospel, but that it also deeply seated in the proclamation of a Person – Jesus Christ.

Kerygmatic catechesis seeks to do away with the simple transmission of information about Jesus in an abstract way. It tries to touch the practical reality in which the contemporary human being is living, and striving with. Kerygmatic catechesis presents Jesus as a person who is not only interested in our qualms and anxieties, but as God with us, accompanying us throughout our lives. It is only in this way that we can present Jesus as the Good News for each and every generation in a fresh way. It is only in presenting Jesus as the Good News that the human being discovers himself as the image of God, called to be in union with him – the reason for which human beings were created (DfC, 2, 33b, 57-60, 175, 196, 303b).

Consequently, the faith presented through a kerygmatic type of catechesis is not something which is distant from the person, or which pertains to the past, but it is an event which touches human beings within the same reality which they are living. It therefore presents itself as an ever-present and relevant reality.

One of the characteristics of presenting Jesus Christ as the Good News of salvation is mercy. Kerygmatic catechesis is also a proclamation of God’s mercy. The concept of mercy is typical of Pope Francis’ Christology which overflows into his anthropology. It constitutes presenting Jesus as close to the human being not to condemn him/her but to offer mercy and reconciliation. It is only through the gift of mercy that human beings discover themselves as individuals who have not been abandoned by God to their fate but as persons invited to enter into communion with him (DfC, 303b, 327, specifically with prisoners – DfC, 282). Mercy as one of the characteristics of a kerygmatic catechesis is mostly visible in the catechumenate (DfC, 65).

### 3. The Catechumenate

The Catechumenate as a process of Christian initiation is proposed as the model on which all the different forms of catechesis with different categories of people is projected and put into action (DfC, 2, 242). It is also presented as the model par excellence of an experience of mercy and of reconciliation, both with fellow human beings and with God.

The *Directory* strongly proposes a pastoral conversion where the catechumenate as a process for Christian Initiation is concerned. The Catechumenate throughout the years has presented the Church, and particularly parishes with several aspects which need to be urgently revised (DfC, 300-303). Amongst those where we need to embark on a pastoral conversion, we find:

1. that catechesis during the period of the catechumenate should distance itself as much as possible from instruction which is typical of a school (DfC, 297). It should not give information about Jesus and the Catholic faith by a catechist who knows a lot of

information about Jesus, but it needs to take the form of a practical experience, of an apprenticeship in the faith and in getting to know Jesus through a personal experience;

2. all catechesis imparted should distance itself from any form of imposition, even when we are speaking of truths which cannot be negated. Catechesis should propose the faith in the form of a dialogue with the individual who is called to make a free personal decision (DfC, 53, 142, 260, 396).
3. reconsidering the importance of a progressive catechesis, as directly opposed to giving everything at once. The gradual entry into the mystery of Christ and of the Church need to be safeguarded, whilst gradually inserting the individual in a continuous process of getting to know Jesus more (DfC, 61, 63, 64f; hierarchy of truth – DfC, 178, 179);
4. that catechesis is not presented as the token for the Sacraments of Initiation in such a way that once the Sacraments have been received, then there is a void due to a lack of mystagogy and permanent formation (DfC, 97-98);
5. the Sacraments of Initiation should not be used as a pastoral excuse for administering the Sacrament of Confirmation at an earlier age, with the reasoning that if this is delayed, we will lose numbers. This reasoning empties the Sacrament of its importance and of the mystery within it (experiments with Sacraments of Initiation – DfC, 70);

#### 4. The Human Being and the Contemporary Socio-Cultural Context – The Digital Culture

The *Directory* acknowledges that we can never speak to the human being as if we are in a vacuum, that is, without considering the socio-cultural context in which human beings are living today. In this respect, besides the normal aspects of inculturation (DfC, 394-406), complex situations of pluralism (DfC, 319-335), popular piety (DfC, 336-342), ecumenism (DfC, 343-353), academic and scientific communities (DfC, 354-358), bioethics (DfC, 373-378), engagement with the environment (DfC, 381-384), the world of work (DfC, 392-393), and poverty (DfC, 385-388), amongst others, the *Directory* specifically speaks of the digital culture in which the contemporary human being is immersed today (DfC, 359-372).

The point of departure when considering the human being in the digital culture is the presence of the Church in the digital arena. This is a step in the right direction. However, we cannot be satisfied simply by such a move. For a better and fruitful ministry within the digital culture, we need to understand some of the characteristics of the contemporary digital culture which are an enhancement to the normal *modus operandi*:

1. it is truly a new culture: different language, new mentality, new hierarchy of values;
2. it is an opportunity for encounter and dialogue which is not hindered by spatial barriers;
3. it offers a much broader access to information and knowledge;
4. it promotes social involvement, especially through the social media;
5. it assists our memory (DfC, 359-360).

Notwithstanding these positive aspects, there is also a dark side to the digital culture:

1. it can be one of loneliness and isolation, hindering the development of authentic relationships;
2. it can allow for the possibility of manipulation by creating a distorted vision of reality;
3. there is a risk of addiction, sexual exploitation and violence;

#### 4. the spread of fake news and false information (DfC, 361).

The contemporary human being is so immersed in the digital culture that it is impossible to understand the human being fully if one disregards the digital age in which they are living. The digital culture has indeed become an integral part of human anthropology: human beings understand and react to the world around them using criteria from the digital culture. This is the reason why understanding the digital culture is so important. We need to be aware that the digital culture has an impact on how the human being looks at the truth, even immutable truths which are at times considered equal to virtual reality, thus emptying them of their true significance, meaning and grandeur (DfC, 362-364).

Moreover, what is virtual in the digital world is considered as real and on the same level as the Truths of a Sacred and Religious Nature. This is a situation which may lead to syncretism and apotheosis, where everything is put on the same level, to the detriment of revealed Truths (DfC, 365-369).

What should be the characteristics of catechesis in this digital era?

- primarily, it must start by understanding the power of the medium and use its positive aspects. Still, we should not stop in how to make use of the digital media, but “how to become an *evangelising presence on the digital continent*” (DfC, 371);
- it must seek to present pathways to the faith that exploit the unique identity of the individual;
- still, the process, while being personalised needs to insert the interlocutor into the community of believers, and not leave him/her isolated;
- it should clarify religious language which at times has been adopted for online purposes;
- it should find adequate means to answer the existential questions of human beings (DfC, 370-372).

One of the important considerations in all this is that the *Directory* makes us aware that nothing is static as in the past, but everything is constantly changing, even the human being. So we need to be on the alert for changes so that we react and adjust accordingly.

#### 5. Mystagogy

The *Directory* presents mystagogy as a special moment/time in the catechumenate, but which should not be limited to it (DfC, 35, 63-64). Mystagogy should not be considered as an optional aspect of the catechumenate. It is indeed necessary because it gives meaning to our catechetical endeavours in terms of:

1. an interpretation of the rites and of the sacraments in the light of the events of salvation;
2. explaining the meaning of liturgical signs and symbols;
3. presenting a holistic approach to the Sacraments of Initiation, giving them meaning in terms of living a truly Christian life. (DfC, 98):

The concept of Mystagogy is extended in the new *Directory*. It must not be limited to the catechumenate but must extend beyond the limits of the catechumenate in virtue of the way in which it seeks to help and to accompany individuals in continuing to accept Christ in their

life and to keep on inserting themselves in the mystery of Christ, and they on their part allow Christ to enlighten their lives, words and choices. This is a process which runs through a whole lifetime.

### The Way of Beauty

One of the novelties of the *Directory* is that it considers the way of Beauty – via pulchritudinis – as one of the sources of catechesis (DfC, 106-109). This has been indeed so for many centuries, where art played a very important educational aspect in times when people were not as literate as they are today. Here expressions such as *biblia pauperum* come to mind. In the past, this enabled the presentation of the mysteries of salvation through visual art in churches to uneducated and illiterate people.

Notwithstanding the fact that as a human race we have made strides ahead in education and in instilling a culture of learned human beings, the way of beauty remains one of the sources of catechesis which can reach human beings today in the real context in which they are living. By considering the way of beauty as one of the sources of catechesis, we are referring to art, literature, music and other forms of beauty which exist in each and every particular Church and which are able to somewhat demonstrate the beauty of God, and induce human beings to ask questions of an existential nature which would ultimately lead to God. European Churches are very rich and offer a great opportunity in this respect.

### Conclusion

I must admit that we had to wait for quite some time to have the official version of the new *Directory*, but today, in hindsight, I have to say that it was worth the wait. I have just scraped the surface of this document with the vision it presents. The *Directory* truly gives a new and comprehensive vision for catechesis in our contemporary time. In my opinion, the new *Directory* truly justifies its position and outlook for catechesis in the light of the contemporary human being and socio-cultural milieu in which we are living.

It is now the task of those responsible for catechesis to see that this is put into practice.