



FUNDAMENTAL CATECHETICS

A Course for Orthodox Catechists

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E-Quip Course of Studies in Catechetics

Module I

FUNDAMENTAL CATECHETICS

Catechesis in the Church

The Church is sent by Christ to continue His work. Its mission, then, comes from Jesus Christ. Just as Christ is sent by the Father, so He sends His disciples to continue His mission: The Kingdom of God.

The mission of the Church is evangelisation.

Evangelisation transmits God's Revelation: his plan for humanity; it is manifested in deeds and words, closely linked and manifesting God's pedagogy towards humanity.

Jesus Christ is the mediator and the fullness of Revelation. He is the Centre of all Evangelisation and Catechesis.

The transmission of Revelation through the Church is the work of the Holy Spirit, who is present in the whole Church and who guarantees its authenticity through the indefectibility of the Church as the Body of Christ with Him as Head.

The evangelisation transmitted by Revelation is addressed to the whole of humanity: all men and women situated historically, so that they may convert and find salvation and healing in Christ. Evangelisation turns the Church into an evangelizing community that, in turn, is evangelized.

1. The evangelizing process has its own dynamic that can have three phases in constant interaction: mission, catechumenate and pastoral.
2. Pastoral action is an expression of evangelisation, it is the whole life of the Christian community, while at the same time converts and those sufficiently formed are incorporated. It is developed through four mediations or ministries: the Word, Communion or *Koinonia*, Service or *Diakonia*, and the Liturgy.
3. Catechesis within the evangelizing and pastoral process has its special significance; It is integrated into the evangelizing process and is an essential and priority moment of it. Catechesis is distinct from the first proclamation or kerygma, it promotes and matures people who have taken the first step towards the Lord and his Gospel and prepares them for pastoral action, it is different from other forms of Christian education.
4. Catechesis can be defined as a process: an intensive period of organic, systematic and integral Christian formation, although of a basic and fundamental character. This process has a structure and coherence between all its elements and carries with it a specific schedule.

Nature of Catechesis

Catechesis is an action of an eminently ecclesial nature.

The Christian community is the origin, place, responsible agent and goal of catechesis:

1. Origin: In catechesis, as a pastoral service of the Word, the Church manifests herself as the sacramental reality of salvation.
2. Place: Catechesis initiates and deepens the experience of the Christian faith, which is not an individual reality but a community one.
3. Responsible agent: the whole community has the task of helping those who wish to know the Lord, taking care of the recruitment, formation and support of catechists.
4. Goal: Catechesis builds and renews the community through the integration and maturation of the catechised in the faith.

Catechesis is a necessary and priority action in the Church.

The Purpose of Catechesis

- The purpose of catechesis is confession of faith and communion with Jesus Christ.

The confession of faith that expresses this communion with Jesus Christ is the profession of faith in the Triune God: to God through Christ in the Holy Spirit: theological dimension.

The profession of faith is complete only if it is related to the Church: the ecclesial dimension. The singular expression "I believe" is open to the plural "we believe" is the expression of faith of the whole Church.

The profession of faith commits us to service to our neighbour and the world around us: the diaconal dimension. We see Jesus Christ in others and identify with those most in need.

The profession of faith that seeks to achieve the catechetical process requires a mature faith. It has some characteristics or qualities:

1. Integrated
2. Psychologically grounded
3. Differentiated
4. Deepened
5. Operative
6. Open

Mature faith has some basic expressions:

1. Personal and Structural Conversion
2. Acquisition of knowledge and attitudes of faith

3. Realization of forms of life and action.

Tasks of Catechesis

Catechesis must carry out tasks that are fundamental to its purpose: to help us know, celebrate and contemplate the mystery of Christ.

It also has other important tasks: educating for community life, initiating mission life, etc.

All the tasks of catechesis are equally necessary. Each one carries out the purpose of catechesis in its own way, they are involved and develop together, in order to carry out their great tasks.

Catechesis makes use of two great means: the transmission of the Gospel Message and the Living Tradition or Mind of the Church. These tasks are the object of education: as a gift and as a commitment, each must be part of the total experience of human life.

The Catechetical Process

Catechesis is considered a permanent process of initiation, maturation and deepening in the Orthodox Christian faith of all members of the Church. It is an immersion in the mind of the Church.

A catechetical process is any intensive period of Christian formation that takes place over a certain period of time, that is, it has a beginning and an end, and it is carried out in a systematic and organized way.

This process is permanent when it encompasses all stages of life and is not reduced to the catechumenate or infancy.

This ongoing process demands that catechetical action at each stage of life be carried out in a progressive and complementary way.

The modalities of catechesis that deserve special attention are:

1. The Catechumenate and Adult Catechesis
2. Catechesis of adolescents and young people
3. Family catechesis
4. Children's catechesis

The current catechetical process has a gradual structure according to these three stages:

1. Pre-catechumenate or stage of search and information
2. Catechesis proper or stage of formation
3. Mystagogy

Catechesis Recipients: Life Ages and Special Situations

Salvation in Christ is for every person, and every person has the right to hear the Gospel Message. Catechesis is for everyone. The whole community has the right and the duty to listen to catechesis.

In the catechetical formation pathway, certain groups of people and some specific situations need special attention and dedication:

1. The catechesis of *adults* who are most capable of living a mature and responsible Christian life, and on whom the catechesis of other groups depends.
2. The catechesis of *children* and *young people* because these are fundamental stages in the formation of the future adults of the ecclesial community.
3. The *family* catechesis that precedes, accompanies and enriches every form of catechesis because the family is a "little church."
4. The catechesis of the *elderly*, which allows us to deepen this fundamental and sometimes long stage of preparation for eternity.

Adult **catechesis** must provide a basic foundation in the faith, and a consolidation of the faith. This catechesis must immerse the adult and responsible Christian in the Tradition of the Orthodox Church in such a way that the adult appropriates the mind of the Church and looks at the total reality in the light of the living Tradition of the Fathers of yesterday and today.

The **catechesis of children** is a didactic catechesis that must appropriate both Tradition and the most current pedagogies. It is an initial catechesis, it is the beginning of the long journey of faith towards maturity in adulthood. This catechesis should help children and young people to make sense of the sacraments they have received and receive, and to understand that they are part of a living community: The Body of Christ that celebrates the Divine Eucharist.

The **catechesis of young people** must consider their needs and expectations. It must give them the Christian tools to confront a secularized society with its humanist proposals. This catechesis should use the interactive resources to which young people are accustomed and their own language. It must be a dynamic and participative training.

Catechesis for the elderly must focus on the integration of the elderly into the Christian community. It must grant hope in the midst of the sickness, pain, and deterioration that sometimes accompany the human aging process. Its character should be one of fullness and hope, it should provide a sense of faith in God, in the resurrection and the Kingdom to come.

Catechesis in **special situations** and **contexts** requires well-prepared catechists who know how to approach catechesis in very specific socio-cultural contexts and in particular situations: disabled and maladjusted, differentiated groups, marginalized, diverse environments: rural, urban, urban tribes, etc.

The Content of Catechesis: The Gospel Message and the Mind of the Church

Orthodox Christian identity refers to a reality, to a concrete content: The Message of the Gospel transmitted within the Church and interpreted by her in the light of the Tradition received from the Apostles.

The educational content of the Orthodox Faith encompasses a set of truths, values, attitudes, and patterns of conduct: The Orthodox Ethos. This content constitutes the totality of the Christian message at the service of the whole man: intelligence, affectivity and operability.

Sacred Tradition is the source of catechesis: from it the catechetical content is drawn. This source is expressed through Sacred Scripture, the rich Liturgical Texts, Iconography, Hymnography, etc. All these sources make up the Mind of the Church in all times and places. A living reality inspired by the Holy Spirit that manifests itself in the total life of the Church as the Body of Christ, the Pillar and Bulwark of Truth.

For the presentation of the Christian Catechetical Message, some criteria are offered that should direct and guide this presentation:

- | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| 1. Complete | 5. Liberating | 9. Globalized |
| 2. Core based | 6. Historical | 10. Christocentric- |
| 3. Significant | 7. Gradual | Trinitarian |
| 4. Saving | 8. Enculturated | 11. Ecclesial |

The application of these norms and criteria depends on the situations of human existence. The order depends on the most advisable methodology and pedagogy.

The Content of Catechesis: The Nuclei of the Orthodox Catechetical Message

The content of Orthodox Catechesis is the orderly and gradual whole of the Christian Message. The content of catechesis should include these fundamental cores:

1. The Church
2. The Orthodox Ethos
3. The Sources of Christian Doctrine: Revelation, the Holy Scriptures, Holy Tradition, the Nicene Creed
4. The Orthodox View of Salvation
5. Orthodox Worship
6. The Divine Liturgy and the Sacraments
7. The Spiritual and Moral Life
8. Prayer

Catechetical language must include all forms of language from Sacred Scripture and Apostolic Tradition and must be presented in a meaningful and accessible way to the men and women of today.

Catechetical materials are essential tools for proper catechesis.

The Catechetical Act

The catechetical act, which proclaims and offers the Word of God to men, must by its very nature be faithful to a twofold reality: God and man.

Fidelity to God is understood as fidelity to the transmission of the revealed message, and fidelity to man as fidelity to his person, to his experience and to his history.

The catechetical act integrates several elements that cannot be dissociated from each other:

1. The human and Christian experience of the catechised person
2. The Living Tradition of the Church including Sacred Scripture and the Apostolic and Patristic Tradition
3. The expression of the Orthodox Faith in its various forms: the confession of the Faith, the celebration of the Liturgy and the Sacraments, and Christian commitment

These factors appear throughout the catechetical act, although they do not do so in a fixed order.

The Catechist: The Ministry of Catechesis in the Local Church

The proclamation of the Gospel, the transmission of the Faith and its living take place within the local Church. This Church is made up of the community of disciples of Jesus Christ who profess the Orthodox Faith and who live in a specific socio-cultural space.

The Church, as the Body of Christ, manifests itself in each of the local churches gathered around the Bishop (or his delegates, the priests) in the celebration of the Eucharist.

Every church exists to evangelize, to transmit the living Orthodox Faith, to transmit the Mind of the Church. Catechesis is the basic and fundamental action of every church. Each local church offers all its members a formative process, which allows them to know, celebrate, live and proclaim the Gospel within their own cultural horizon.

Catechetical Ministry

Definition of the Ministry

Catechetical ministry is:

A gift that the Holy Spirit bestows on the Church for the growth of the faith of communities already formed, as well as of those who are willing to become followers of Jesus Christ.

This gift requires of those who make it:

1. Vocation

2. Duration
3. Recognition from the Church
4. Preparation
5. Commitment

The catechetical ministry is carried out in the Church by a few specific persons: the catechists. To be a catechist we cannot turn to just anyone, only to those mature Christians whom the Holy Spirit calls to carry out this service within the local community.

The catechist needs a community that supports him, a community that is co-responsible for the task entrusted to the catechist.

The catechist needs to acquire the necessary preparation and competence to carry out this service with quality and effectiveness.

The Identity of the Catechist

The catechist has a very important identity. Not just anyone can be a catechist, as he or she must have the following characteristics:

1. Must be a believer, sent by the community
2. To encourage and educate their brothers and sisters in the faith
3. In a constant process of formation

The Formation of the Catechist, Places and Ways of Catechization

The formation of catechists is a task of the Orthodox Christian community and is of fundamental importance. Formation must be eminently Christocentric and ecclesial.

The formation of the catechist must be comprehensive: it contemplates the various aspects and dimensions of catechesis and its pedagogy and methodology. It must combine Orthodoxy with Orthopraxy in a meaningful way.

The formation of the catechist must take care of the following dimensions:

- The catechist's **being** as a person and a believer: the catechist transmits a living Christian experience as part of a community: The Church. This dimension takes care of the formation of the catechist as an adult, psychologically balanced, capable of giving meaning to his or her life, responsible and committed, capable of dialogue and relation, and above all, capable of working in a team.
The catechist needs to possess a mature faith and a solid Christian experience. He must be integrated into the community, a witness to the faith and the Christian experience. He needs to feel sent to communicate and proclaim the Good News. And, above all, he needs to be a guide and an educator in the faith.

- The **knowledge** of the content it transmits: the Christian Message that illuminates the different human sciences and education in particular.

Catechesis transmits contents, the contents of the Orthodox Faith: the Good News of Jesus Christ and of the Church. It transmits the Faith of the Saints and the Fathers; And it does them to specific people: children, young people and adults. It requires an adequate knowledge of that Message: truths, values, attitudes, and patterns of behaviour. And it also requires a knowledge of the people to whom this education is directed so that the Message is reflected in the intellectual, affective and behavioural dimensions of those people.

It requires of the catechist a biblical-theological formation centred on the Person of Jesus Christ and a knowledge of the great stages of salvation history: the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Church.

It requires knowledge of the core of the Christian message: The Symbol of Faith, the Liturgy, Prayer, and Christian conduct.

It demands a basic and minimal knowledge, illuminated by the experience of the Tradition of the Church of the human sciences: psychology, sociology, anthropology and pedagogy... which are the sciences of education.

- **Know-how**, since catechesis is an art: the art of communicating a specific message, in encounters with people with their own characteristics and immersed in a diverse socio-cultural reality.

Catechesis requires a pedagogy (or an andragogy): a style, a mood and a methodology. It constitutes an adaptation of the Message to the person being catechised that respects that Message and, in turn, makes it comprehensible and meaningful to the recipient. Although it is a methodology that makes use of psychology applied to teaching, catechesis is a **way of teaching...**

The catechist is an educator and a pedagogue (or andragogue) who helps and serves as a facilitator in the structuring of the mature and Christian person of the learner-catechised. The catechist must learn to program with the help of others (sometimes with the help of experts): the process, the stages, the sessions.

In **each** catechetical session, he combines the essential elements of the catechetical act and then **evaluates** the work done: session, stages, project or the total process.

He/she animates a group of people using the tools offered by psychology and socio-cultural animation, and seeks the creative participation of the catechised, making them protagonists of their own learning with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Since catechesis is an act of communication, it uses various **languages** for its necessary inculturation: doctrinal, dogmatic, biblical, liturgical, narrative, oral, corporeal, etc. He/she also uses audio-visual media, group dynamics, etc.

The Educational Places of Faith

Among the community settings that are particularly suitable for catechesis are:

1. The parish as a common setting for catechesis
2. The family, which is the privileged place of a first catechesis
3. Associations, brotherhoods and groups of the faithful

4. The Baptismal Catechumenate Linked to the Christian Community
5. The school where a dialogue between faith and culture should be offered.

