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**CATECHESIS IN THE CHURCH'S LEGAL TRADITION**

**A Comprehensive Overview from its Origins to the 1983 Code  
of Canon Law**

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# CATECHESIS IN THE CHURCH'S LEGAL TRADITION

## A Comprehensive Overview from its Origins to the 1983 Code of Canon Law

BRENDA PRATO

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**Abstract:** In this article, the author deals with the relationship between catechesis and canon law by giving a historical overview highlighting vital canonical documents starting from the Scriptures to the 1983 Code of Canon Law. The author emphasises how catechesis evolved from its birth until the promulgation of the 1983 Code of Canon Law and gives a comparative analysis between the Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law of 1917 and the 1983 Code of Canon Law, revealing similarities and key differences.

**Zusammenfassung:** In diesem Artikel befasst sich die Autorin mit dem Verhältnis zwischen Katechese und kanonischem Recht, indem sie einen historischen Überblick gibt, wobei sie wichtige kirchenrechtliche Dokumente von der Heiligen Schrift bis zum Kodex des kanonischen Rechts von 1983 beleuchtet. Die Autorin arbeitet heraus, wie sich die Katechese von ihrer Entstehung bis zur Promulgation des Kodex von 1983 entwickelt hat, und liefert eine vergleichende Analyse zwischen den Kodizes von 1917 und 1983, indem sie Ähnlichkeiten und wesentliche Unterschiede aufzeigt.

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### 1 Introduction

The first Gospel of the Scriptures concludes with Christ's command,

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:19).

As a result, the roots of catechesis can be traced back to Christ's words. Catechesis falls under the *munus docendi* of the Church<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, in the same gospel sentence, catechesis is linked with baptism. Thus, the relationship between catechesis and baptism (and, by extension, between the rest of the sacraments) is of utmost necessity. The Church's ultimate mission is to save souls (c. 1752). By welcoming individuals into the Church through baptism and after having received the initial catechesis, the Church welcomes the-now-members to the family of God. The Church, therefore, is responsible for ensuring that catechesis is appropriately imparted, adapted, updated and reformed when necessary. It is here that canon law plays its role; it is this point that this article is interested in.

This article examines the historical development of catechesis, tracing its origins from the Scriptures and early Christianity. It then analyses the Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law of 1917 (CIC/1917) and its section that discusses catechetical instruction. Afterwards, it discusses five

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, the words 'Church', and 'church', both refer to the Catholic Church.

Church documents from the time of Vatican Council II up until the promulgation of the 1983 Code of Canon law (CIC/1983). These documents are the following:

- The Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*<sup>2</sup>
- The Decree *Christus Dominus*<sup>3</sup>
- The Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*<sup>4</sup>
- The Decree *Ad Gentes*<sup>5</sup>
- The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*<sup>6</sup>

The article concludes by examining the section of the CIC/1983 which focuses on catechesis. It offers a comparative analysis of catechetical instruction between the Codes of Canon Law, highlighting key differences and continuities from a canonical perspective.

In laying down the historical overview of catechesis from its origins to the CIC/1983, this article focuses on two key elements. First, it explores how the relationship between catechesis and canon law evolved from early Christianity to the promulgation of the CIC/1983. Second, it examines how post-Vatican Council II documents effected, if so, the CIC/1983 when compared to the CIC/1917.

## 2 The Scriptures and Early Christianity

The origin of 'catechesis' is found in Greek. Catechesis (*κατηχήειν*) is a compound word from the verb *ἤχῃν* (i.e. to sound, to ring out) and *κατά* (i.e. down)<sup>7</sup>. Once adopted by Christianity, it became closer in definition to what it is understood as today: *Κατηχέω*<sup>8</sup> (*Katekheo* → *Catecheo* → Catechise) means 'to teach by word of mouth', 'to instruct'. In the Bible, *κατηχέω* is used a few times, always in the New Testament<sup>9</sup>.

Going back to the Scriptures is necessary to understand what the early Christians understood by the term. Three narratives will be given prominence in this section. Firstly, Luke opens his Gospel by explaining to Theophilus that "it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you... that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed (*κατηχήθης*)" (Lk 1:4). The very first time one encounters the origin of catechesis in the Bible, one can notice that such narrative confirms the Truth in writing. Secondly, in the Scripture narrative of the ministry of Apollos, one can note that he was very knowledgeable, fervent in spirit and strong in his preaching. However, his knowledge was somewhat limited because he was called aside by Priscilla and Aquila, who explained the Gospel more accurately to him. The focal point in this narrative is that Apollos had already been "instructed (*κατηχημένος*) in the way of the Lord" (Acts 18:25); his mentors needed

<sup>2</sup> Paul VI, Constitution Sacrosanctum concilium (4 December 1963), in: AAS 56 (1964) 97-138.

<sup>3</sup> Paul VI, Decree Christus dominus (28 October 1965), in: AAS 58 (1966) 673-701.

<sup>4</sup> Paul VI, Decree Apostolicam actuositatem (18 November 1965), in: AAS 58 (1966) 837-864.

<sup>5</sup> Paul VI, Decree Ad gentes (7 December 1965), in: AAS 58 (1966) 947-990.

<sup>6</sup> John Paul II, Post-Synodal Exhortation Catechesi tradendae (16 October 1979), in: AAS 71 (1979) 1277- 1340.

<sup>7</sup> Jansen, Raymond, Canonical Provisions for Catechetical Instruction an Historical Synopsis and Commentary, Washington D. C. 1937, 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Lewis, Charlton / Short, Charles, A Latin Dictionary, Oxford 1958, 209.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Luke 1:4; Acts 18:25, Acts 21:21, 24; Rom 2:18; 1 Cor 14:19; Gal 6:6.

to refine what he already knew, and they felt responsible to do so. Thirdly, St. Paul demonstrates that when instructing (*κατηχήσω*) others in the Church, he prefers to speak words that others can understand rather than making use of the gift of tongues (1 Cor 14:19).

Consequently, in the Scriptures, the concept of catechesis starts taking shape in the New Testament, and three points ought to be highlighted:

- the aim of catechesis is that it confirms and teaches the truth about Jesus, his life and ministry, his death and resurrection;
- responsible persons ought to correct false and/or inaccurate teaching in a dignifying manner;
- catechesis must be delivered in a language the catechumens understand.

Although canon law was not yet established as it is today, early Christians were trying to organise themselves by creating rules, as seen in the Council of Jerusalem of 50 AD (Acts 15). This council was held to discuss whether the teaching on circumcision needed to be amended. In addition, early Christians were trying to build a structure within the Church, which was no easy task given the blame Christians took for the burning of Rome, followed by several persecutions and Diocletian's 'Great Persecution'. Between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, three central sources have been found that served as guidelines or rules related to several areas, including catechesis. These sources are:

1. *Didachè tôn Dodeka Apostolôn* (*Didache*)
2. *Traditio Apostolica* of Hippolytus (*Traditio Apostolica*)
3. *Didascalia Apostolorum* (*Didascalia*)

All three relate to catechesis as they discuss baptism and catechetical formation in some form or provide rules around the Christian initiation rite. The *Didache* has three main sections discussing Christian ethics and rituals, including baptism and church organisation<sup>10</sup>. "But before the baptism let the baptiser fast, and the baptised, and whatever others can; but thou shalt order the baptised to fast one or two days before"<sup>11</sup>. The *Traditio Apostolica* deals with moral conduct related to several areas, like presbyters, deacons, and confessors, to name a few. It is also divided into three sections. The second section deals with baptism, starting with the catechumenate (from chapter 16 to chapter 20)<sup>12</sup>. "Let catechumens spend three years as hearers of the word. But if a man is zealous and perseveres well in the work, it is not the time but his character that is decisive"<sup>13</sup>. By the time the *Traditio Apostolica* was written (*circa* beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century), the Church had become more cautious about converts<sup>14</sup>, explaining the three-year-long duration. The *Didascalia* is rather legalistic<sup>15</sup>. Chapters IX and XVI focus on the anointing of the

<sup>10</sup> *Eternal Word Television Network*, The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (Didache) at: <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/teaching-of-the-twelve-apostles-didache-11471>.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter VII. Concerning Baptism.

<sup>12</sup> *Easton, Burton Scott*, The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus, 1934, Cambridge University Press, at: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/61614/61614-h/61614-h.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>14</sup> *Robinson, William, T.*, Historical Survey of the Church's Treatment of New Converts with Reference to Pre- and Post-Baptismal Instruction, in: The Journal of Theological Studies 42 (1941), 47, 42-53.

<sup>15</sup> For instance, it portrays circumcision and baptism as two separate actions being adopted from the Jewish traditions. *Didascalia Apostolorum*, 24. Cf. *Ferguson, Everett*, The Early Church at Work and Worship. Catechesis, Baptism, Eschatology and Martyrdom, Vol. 2, Cambridge 2014, 153.

catechumens before receiving baptism<sup>16</sup>. "As of old the priests and kings were anointed in Israel, do thou in like manner, with the imposition of the hand, anoint the head of those who receive baptism, whether of men or women..."<sup>17</sup>. It discusses other issues, such as liturgical rules and widows, to mention a few<sup>18</sup>.

Notably, setting rules and discussing catechesis was crucial in the early centuries. Jesus had left his Teachings, and he showed the way. However, several issues needed to be resolved so that the Apostles and those who came after them could welcome new members into the Church of Christ. For this reason, one starts seeing councils, legal sources and instructions. The Church has been functioning in this manner ever since. Throughout the centuries, the law developed further, including catechesis and those responsible for it. The Church also developed her universal law, allowing particular churches to establish their law according to their cultural context.

### 3 The Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law of 1917 on Catechesis

The 1917 Code of Canon Law (CIC/1917) discusses catechesis in Chapter 1, 'On Catechetical Instruction' under Title 20, 'On Preaching the Divine Word', of the Fourth Part, 'On Ecclesiastical Magisterium' which is found in Book III, 'On Things'. It contains eight canons on catechesis (CIC/1917 cc. 1329–1336). Title 20 includes two other canons before the section on catechesis: the first one speaks about the responsibility of the Roman Pontiff and of the bishops to preach (CIC/1917 c. 1327); the second one speaks about the mandatory requirement to be able to preach, that is, a mission or a conferral of an office which inheres such preaching responsibilities (CIC/1917 c. 1328).

The source of c. 1327 is Christ's mandate to "go make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19) and to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15). The word *praedicandae* refers to the preaching of a cleric rather than that of lay people<sup>19</sup>, mainly because of the rationale that the Roman Pontiff and the bishops are the successors of Peter and the Apostles (CIC/1917, c. 329 §1<sup>20</sup>).

The section on catechesis opens by emphasising the importance of catechetical instruction of the *Christifideles* as a *proprium ac gravissimum officium*, particularly for the pastors of souls (c. 1329). The phrase 'pastors of souls' refers to all those caring for the souls, including parish priests and residential bishops<sup>21</sup>. The code proceeds to the duties of the *parochus*, which include:

- To prepare children, at established times, for the sacraments of penance and confirmation (CIC/1917 c. 1330 1<sup>o</sup>);
- To instruct children during Lent so that they may be prepared for the First Holy Communion (CIC/1917 c. 1330 2<sup>o</sup>);

<sup>16</sup> Connolly, Hugh, *Didascalia Apostolorum*, Oxford 1929, at: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didascalia.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., iii. 12.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Jansen, Canonical Provisions (note 7), 38.

<sup>20</sup> „*Episcopi sunt Apostolorum successores atque ex divina institutione peculiaribus ecclesiis praeficiuntur quas cum potestate ordinaria regunt sub auctoritate Romani Pontificis.*“ (c. 329 § 1 CIC/1917).

<sup>21</sup> Bouscaren, Timothy Lincoln / Ellis, Adam Charles / Korth, Francis, *Canon Law: a Text and Commentary*, Milwaukee 1966, 752.

- To complete catechesis to those children who have just received their First Holy Communion (CIC/1917 c. 1331);
- To explain the catechism to the adult faithful, on Sundays and other feasts, in a language the congregation understands (CIC/1917 c. 1332).

From the order of the canons, it can be noted that catechesis to children is the first priority (CIC/1917 cc. 1330, 1331). The Third Council of Baltimore insisted that the duties mentioned in c. 1330 are to be executed by the *parochus* or his assistants and that there are to be frequent visits by the *parochus* at the catechetical schools, not taught by priests<sup>22</sup>. Adults are discussed for the Sunday Mass and Masses on feast days (CIC/1917 c. 1332). The *parochus* can enlist the help of clerics and pious laymen (if necessary) to assist in the catechetical instruction of children (CIC/1917 c. 1333)<sup>23</sup>. In 1905, Pius X issued regulations to bring uniformity to catechetical instruction worldwide<sup>24</sup>. As noted below, these regulations inspired the CIC/1917's section on catechesis:

Topic	CIC/1917	<i>Acerbo Nimis</i>
Preparation of children for Penance and Confirmation.	c. 1330 1°	20. II.
Preparation of children for First Holy Communion during Lent.	c. 1330 2°	21. III.
Explanation of the catechism to adults on Sundays and feast days.	c. 1332	24. VI. (19. I. for children)
Include clerics and pious laymen in the teaching of catechesis.	c. 1333	22. IV.

Table 1: Comparison between the CIC/1917 and *Acerbo Nimis*

The section on catechetical instruction continues by stating that the local ordinary is to judge whether and when the help of the religious is necessary for catechetical instruction; the religious Superiors (either themselves or through their subjects, even if exempt) are bound to instruct particularly within their churches without hindering the religious discipline (CIC/1917 c. 1334). This provision is intended for adult catechesis<sup>25</sup>. The local ordinary is to create regulations in his territory regarding catechesis, including exempt religious so long as they teach non-exempt persons (CIC/1917 c. 1336).

Aside from the *parochus* and the local ordinary, parents and those replacing parents are to ensure the education of catechesis of the children in their care; this includes household leaders and patrons (CIC/1917 c. 1335). The word *heri* in this canon refers to house owners that employ servants. The obligation is twofold: employees should not have obstacles surrounding their religious duties and receive instruction according to their needs<sup>26</sup>. Indeed, Paul states that "If

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> There is a mention in this canon about a pious sodality of Christian teaching or something similar. The principal sodality referred to in this canon is The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine which was founded in 1560 in Rome and approved in 1571 by Pius V. Cf. *Bouscaren et al.*, Canon Law (note 21), 753.

<sup>24</sup> *Acerbo Nimis*, 18.

<sup>25</sup> *Bouscaren et al.*, Canon Law (note 21), 753.

<sup>26</sup> *Jansen*, Canonical Provisions (note 7), 116.

one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (1 Tim 5:8)<sup>27</sup>.

Noticeably, the chapter on catechetical instruction opens by emphasising that the responsibility of catechesis lies in the hands of all pastors of souls (CIC/1917 c. 1331). Particular emphasis is put on the *parochus* and his duties concerning this ministry (CIC/1917 cc. 1330–1333). The duties of the local ordinary are then mentioned concerning the religious and their superiors (CIC/1917 c. 1334); emphasis is put on the local ordinary's direction of the ministry in his territory (c. 1336). Parents are mentioned last (CIC/1917 c. 1335).

While catechists are not explicitly mentioned, they can be included in the canon where the *parochus* can seek the assistance of the religious and pious laymen (CIC/1917 c. 1333 §1). The order of these canons can be disputed, given that the *parochus* is given prominence, then the religious and pious laymen (under the *parochus*' direction), the local ordinary, and the parents. It is perhaps organised according to hierarchical ranking, especially considering the canon that mentions the roman pontiff (CIC/1917 c. 1327).

Concerning the nature of the duties of the ordinary and the *parochus*, there is a distinction to be made:

*"...the obligation of the ordinary arises by reason of a divinely instituted office, while that of the pastor has its basis in an office established by ecclesiastical law, that is, the pastor is obliged directly by ecclesiastical law, and indirectly by divine law in as much as he participates in the work of the episcopal office. As pastor, he is also bound in justice to direct his efforts toward the accomplishment of this ministry"*<sup>28</sup>.

In the encyclical *Etsi Minime*, Pope Benedict XIV explained that the bishop might exercise his preaching power during a pastoral visit and at any time that he deems necessary to preach the mysteries of the catholic religion. On the other hand, the *parochus* is seen as the shepherd, who, by his example, is to stimulate the flock entrusted to him to cultivate the Lord's vineyard<sup>29</sup>.

Under 'On Preaching the Divine Word', it is clear that preaching is the responsibility of the roman pontiff for the universal Church and the bishops for their dioceses (CIC/1917 c. 1327). Thus, this canon sheds light on the fact that since catechesis is a form of preaching, the eight canons on catechetical instruction are indeed organised according to who is responsible according to the hierarchy. Catechesis in the CIC/1917 was primarily regarded as a task of the clergy; the laity, including the parents, were secondary. When the CIC/1983 is discussed later, it will be noted that the part on catechesis is organised differently. For instance, it will be noted that the parents are at the top of the list of responsible persons (CIC/1917 c. 774). However, before discussing the current code, it is essential to go through the Vatican Council II documents and other writings

<sup>27</sup> The original verse states, "*si quis autem suorum et maxime domesticorum curam non habet fidem negavit et est infideli deterior*". Cf. Weber, Robert / Gryson, Roger, *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*, Editio Quinta, Stuttgart, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007, XLIX+1980. The word *domesticorum* incorporates the members of the household who might not necessarily refer to (blood) relatives.

<sup>28</sup> Jansen, Canonical Provisions (note 7), 79.

<sup>29</sup> *Assolverà questo incarico il Vescovo che, anche in tempo diverso da quello della Visita Pastorale, sarà qualche volta presente dove viene trasmessa la sana dottrina al cristiano, interrogherà ragazzi e fanciulle sulle cose ascoltate e illustrerà con le sue parole i Misteri della nostra Religione. Un impegno del Pastore che risulterà grandemente utile al gregge a lui affidato, e il suo esempio stimolerà gli altri a coltivare con tutte le forze la vigna del Signore degli eserciti.* (*Etsi Minime*, 2).

that predated the canons that exist today on catechetical instruction. These documents will help illustrate the reasoning behind catechesis portrayed in the CIC/1983.

## 4 Documents of Vatican Council II and Other Documents

With Vatican Council II, one could notice the shift in the mentality of the Church: from an institution that is self-governing and independent (i.e. *societas perfecta*) to a church that is there to serve the needs of the people. Given its fundamental role in the Church, catechesis was one of the many topics tackled during Vatican Council II.

### 4.1 *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: Catechesis in the Liturgy

The constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* states that the sacred liturgy includes substantial instruction for the *Christifideles*. The priest presiding over the congregation and addressing the prayers to God in *persona Christi* does so in the name of the people present<sup>30</sup>. Through the liturgy, catechesis is thus delivered by the priest. Another example that shows the shift in the Church's mindset is the permissibility of the vernacular language during Mass, during the celebration of the sacraments and other parts of the liturgy (although Latin should be preserved); the reason for the vernacular languages is because it "frequently may be of great advantage to the people"<sup>31</sup>. Consequently, the CIC/1983 will be formulated in a way that gives prominence to the people of God by discussing the *Christifideles* quite early on.

Catechesis falls under the *munus docendi* of the Church. One should be cautious and differentiate the *munus docendi* from the *munus propheticum*. The *munus propheticum* is acquired by all the faithful through baptism. In contrast, the *munus docendi* pertains solely to those with authority to teach<sup>32</sup>, including clerics, religious or laity. The pastors of souls (who by virtue of their office participate in the *munus docendi*), while instructing, are to teach the Christian faithful to participate in the entire Mass (i.e. participation should not take place just during the liturgy of the Word but also during the liturgy of the Eucharist as they are one single act of worship)<sup>33</sup>.

Furthermore, catechesis plays a crucial role in the season of Lent. Through the recalling or preparation of baptism and penance, Lent helps the faithful hear the Word of God more frequently, devote themselves to prayer and celebrate the Paschal Mystery<sup>34</sup>. Such help is achieved in the liturgy, mainly through the liturgical catechesis (i.e. a) by baptism: by making use of "*elementi battesimali della liturgia quaresimale e anche altri della antica tradizione*"<sup>35</sup>; b) by penance: by reminding the faithful of the consequence of sin as an offence against God and by praying for sinners)<sup>36</sup>. In *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the emphasis is put on catechesis within the context of the liturgy. It suggests specific examples of how the *Christifideles* ought to be

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<sup>30</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 33.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 36, 2.

<sup>32</sup> *Fuentes*, José Antonio, The Participants in Catechesis and their Dependence on the Magisterium (Canons 773-780), in: *Studia Canonica*, 23 (1989), 373-386, 383.

<sup>33</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 56.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*



instructed by the presiding cleric. Consequently, in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the recipients of catechesis are mainly the lay faithful whom a cleric catechises.

## 4.2 The Decree *Christus Dominus*: Adaptation and Responsibility

The decree *Christus Dominus* is somewhat concerned about how catechesis is delivered and, most importantly, that it is delivered to all while adapting to everyone's capacity. In doing so, *Christus Dominus* highlights the responsibilities of the bishops and the *parochi*. This decree encourages using various media available for preaching and catechetical instruction<sup>37</sup>. Five tasks pertain to bishops. Firstly, the decree states that bishops are to ensure that catechetical instruction reaches children, adolescents, youths and adults<sup>38</sup>. Secondly, bishops are also responsible for ascertaining that a "suitable arrangement" is provided according to the matter being treated, the age, the character, the ability, and the circumstances of life of the pupils<sup>39,40</sup>. Thirdly, bishops are to see that the instructions are based on the scriptures, tradition, liturgy, magisterium, and the life of the Church<sup>41</sup>. Fourthly, it is the bishops' responsibility to ensure the proper training of catechists; they are to be at the least aware of psychology and pedagogy<sup>42</sup>. Lastly, bishops are to seek to renew and/or adapt the catechetical instruction of adult catechumens<sup>43</sup>.

*Christus Dominus* highlights two tasks for the *parochi*. Firstly, they must preach the Word of God to all the *Christifideles*; secondly, they must provide complete knowledge of the mystery of salvation through catechesis according to the age of the pupils<sup>44</sup>. Sacred theology goes hand in hand with the written Word of God and with sacred tradition; the soul of sacred theology is the studying itself<sup>45</sup>. Studying is a significant responsibility which helps to successfully achieve the rest of the responsibilities of the *munus docendi*. All clerics are bound to stick to the Bible through regular reading and study; catechists are also bound with such a task<sup>46</sup>. It is imperative not to become an *inanis praedicator* (an empty preacher) because one's refusal to listen<sup>47</sup>, learn or keep oneself updated.

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<sup>37</sup> *Christus Dominus*, 13.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> With regard to the ability, it can be presumed that *Christus Dominus* also refers to pupils with different abilities (i.e. synonyms: with special needs, with particular disabilities).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* The aspect of ensuring that catechetical instruction is according to the gospel, is reiterated and illustrated in *Nostra Aetate*. It reaffirms that the Jewish people are not to blame for Christ's death; it further states that in light of this, it must be made sure that no one teaches against the gospel during catechesis (*Nostra Aetate*, 4). *Presbyterorum Ordinis* repeats that the proclamation of the Gospel should be to all by priests (who work together with their bishop), and that the ministry of the word is to be carried out in distinct ways depending on the needs of those who are listening; this way, people are drawn towards the sacraments and the People of God are built. The Gospel of Matthew (Cf. Mt 28:19-20) is used here to demonstrate that it is through the preaching to everyone which leads to baptism (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 4).

<sup>42</sup> Catechists must also be able to catechise according to the correct interpretation of the Bible as opposed to subjective interpretation which should be avoided (2 Pet 1:20-21). Cf. *Obielosi, Dominic*, The Role of Scripture and Catechesis in Evangelisation, in: *Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 21 (2016), 20-31, 28.

<sup>43</sup> *Christus Dominus*, 14.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 30, 2.

<sup>45</sup> *Dei Verbum*, 24.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

### 4.3 The Laity in *Apostolicam Actuositatem*

In the decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, the laity is given prominence. *Apostolicam Actuositatem* states that the laity share in the *tria munera* of Christ, of a priest, prophet and king; through this sharing, the laity may participate and, thus, form part of the apostolate<sup>48</sup>. This laity participation helps pastors reach the full effectiveness of their apostolic mission<sup>49</sup>. The argument is that while there is a diversity of ministries within the Church, there is but one mission that every Christian is called to fulfil<sup>50</sup>. This mission is created upon one's conferral of baptism. For this reason, the laity (not just clerics and the religious) are called to this mission.

Lay people ought to get accustomed to collaborating with their priests within the parish; the laity may help solve problems related to the parishioners and may seek solutions related to issues regarding human salvation<sup>51</sup>. Lay people must increasingly appreciate their diocese and participate in projects related to the diocese through their *parochus*<sup>52</sup>. *Apostolicam Actuositatem* highlights the fact that this collaboration is becoming still more significant due to 1) people's mobility, 2) "reciprocal relationships", and 3) new means of communication which no longer allow society to remain confined and segregated<sup>53</sup>.

One might wonder why the Church is putting the obligation on the laity to fulfil their mission together with their *parochus* and *episcopus*. Is it simply to encourage diocesan unity and hierarchical unity? What about personal charisms and initiative of the laity? Is there enough space for the laity to be innovative? Two arguments come to mind: order within the hierarchy and collaboration in fulfilling the Church's mission. The laity should obey their pastor, and the pastor should obey his bishop (just as the bishop and every other *Christifideles* should obey the pope). However, obedience goes deeper than that, and the reason is more accepting, considering today's mindset. This reason leads to the second argument: it is not about obeying one's authoritative body but about achieving the same mission as brothers and sisters through one baptism. For the Church's mission to succeed, there must be a two-way relationship between the clergy and the laity. It is not just the laity that has to learn to collaborate with their *parochus*. However, it is also up to the *parochus* to allow lay involvement. Every church member has something to offer based on one's life vocation and circumstances. Through the obligation of collaboration, every individual should be permitted to be creative for the sake of the Church's mission. Moreover, without the laity there would be no family apostolate. *Apostolicam Actuositatem* indicates, for instance, that Christian couples manifest and prove, through their life example, the indissolubility and the sacredness of the marriage bond<sup>54</sup>. The decree goes further in giving other examples of family apostolate:

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<sup>48</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 10. Lotter and Aarde argue that lay participation can take various forms (e.g. in the liturgy, in assisting the clergy in visiting shelters, prisons, to name a few); in collaborating, the laity and the clergy work hand in hand for the body of Christ's well-being. Cf. Lotter, George /van Aarde, Timothy, A rediscovery of the priesthood of believers in Ephesians 4:1–16 and its relevance for the Missio Dei and a biblical missional ecumenism, in: In die Skriflig 51 (2017), 1-10, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Collaboration between the laity and the clergy is encouraged in *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. Cf. Boone, Eric, Le décret *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. L'engagement des laïcs dans l'Église et dans le monde, in: Revue théologique de Louvain 45 (2014) 562-593, 580.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 11. *Christifideles Laici*, says Tollefsen, can be seen as an upgrade of AA to an extent. This lengthy document points out several crucial aspects. One worth mentioning in the context of the lay apostolate is that the laity should not forget to live as lay

- "the adoption of abandoned infants,
- hospitality to strangers,
- assistance in the operation of schools,
- helpful advice and material assistance for adolescents,
- help to engage couples in preparing themselves better for marriage,
- catechetical work,
- support of married couples and families involved in material and moral crises,
- help the aged by providing them with the necessities of life and obtaining a fair share of the benefits of an expanding economy"<sup>55</sup>.

Catechesis is listed as one of the family apostolate examples. The laity can catechise as members of the Church by virtue of their baptism and as married couples through the sacrament of marriage. Family groups are suggested here to facilitate the family apostolate for Christian couples and their families<sup>56</sup>.

#### 4.4 Catechists in *Ad Gentes*

The decree *Ad Gentes* mentions the catechumenate in one instance and the catechists in two separate paragraphs. *Ad Gentes* affirms that catechumens accept God's belief in Christ; these persons are then admitted to the catechumenate by liturgical rites<sup>57</sup>. The catechumenate does not merely clarify the Church's doctrine and precepts. However, it is a phase in which the catechumens train throughout the Christian life<sup>58</sup>. The catechumenate is compared to an apprenticeship duty where Christ joins the disciples as their teacher<sup>59</sup>. Catechumens ought to be instructed in the mystery of salvation and the practice of gospel morality. In other words, catechumens should be guided on applying the Gospel to one's life and circumstances because that is the right path towards salvation. While keeping this in mind, it can be understood why *Ad Gentes* also suggests that catechumens are ideally to be baptised during Lent or Easter: because it refers to the theological idea that through baptism, they are reborn in Christ.

This document further states that Christian initiation is not something to be taken care of by priests alone or just with the help of catechists; the whole Christian community should also be involved. The involvement of the Christian community conforms with the reality that once the catechumens are baptised, they become part of this community and become brothers and sisters in one baptism. Consequently, there is a sense of belonging when the whole community is involved. *Ad Gentes* also suggested that the juridic status of catechumens was to be indicated in the new code of Canon Law because although they are not yet baptised, and therefore not

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persons even extra ecclesia (i.e. not forgetting they are citizens of the world as well). Cf. *Tollefsen, Christopher*, The Apostolate of the Laity, in: Bradley, Gerard V / Brugger Christian E. (ed.) *Catholic Social Teaching: A Volume of Scholarly Essays*, Cambridge 2019, 308.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> *Ad Gentes*, 14.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

members of the Church, they already lead a life of faith, which makes them "of the household of Christ"<sup>60</sup>. The CIC/1983 does include canons related to the juridic personality of catechumens<sup>61</sup>.

*Ad Gentes* praises the work of catechists and describes their input as "of great importance", especially when clerics are minimal<sup>62</sup>. The decree suggests that schools and other institutions should be created for catechists to further their knowledge and be better instructors<sup>63</sup>. Additionally, *Ad Gentes* proposes a just wage for those persons who dedicate themselves wholly to this work<sup>64</sup>. Further, *Ad Gentes* recommends that the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith<sup>65</sup> provides funds for the training and support of catechists<sup>66</sup>. It also reminds the churches that they ought to show gratitude to auxiliary catechists as their work is of great value as well<sup>67</sup>. Lastly, *Ad Gentes* proposes that a *missio canonica* should be given to all well-trained catechists "so that in the eyes of the people they may serve the Faith with greater authority"<sup>68</sup>.

#### 4.5 The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*

Before delving into *Catechesi Tradendae*, mentioning *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is necessary. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is a post-synodal exhortation, following the synod "Evangelisation in the Modern World" of 1974. This synod happens to be the Third General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. In contrast, the synod that *Catechesi Tradendae* resulted from was the next, that is, the Fourth General Ordinary Assembly of 1977. *Catechesi Tradendae* refers to *Evangelii Nuntiandi* ten times. In some instances, more than one paragraph of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is quoted in *Catechesi Tradendae* within the same reference. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* explains what evangelisation entails while specifying that catechesis is one of evangelisation's subdisciplines. *Catechesi Tradendae* came next to delve deeper into this subdiscipline of evangelisation, that is, catechesis, while remaining in line with what the prior document said.

Evangelisation refers to the instances when the Good News is brought to all levels of humanity and enhances an interior change; the initiation would include baptism and the living style according to the Gospel<sup>69</sup>. Consequently, evangelisation occurs when the Church aims at converting "solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs"<sup>70</sup>. Further on, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* highlights catechesis as a

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. There are several canons in the CIC/1983 which, in fact, mention catechumens (e.g. cc. 206, 788 §1, 851 1°, 865 §1, 1170, 1183 §1).

<sup>61</sup> Cf. c. 206 reiterates almost word for word with *Ad Gentes* paragraph 14 which speaks about catechumens belonging to the house of Christ. There are other canons that speak about catechumens (Cf. c. 851 1° speaks about their preparation for baptism; and c. 865 §1 speaks about the will and the sufficient instruction of the catechumens).

<sup>62</sup> *Ad Gentes*, 17.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. This suggestion has already been seen in *Christus Dominus* 14, which was mentioned as one of the five tasks of the bishops.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> The name of this congregation has been changed in 2022 by Pope Francis to 'Dicastery for Evangelisation' through the apostolic constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* which merged together the Pontifical Council for Evangelisation with the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples. Cf. *Vatican News*, The Dicastery for Evangelisation, at: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2022-06/dicastery-evangelization-vatican-praedicate-evangelium.html>. Cf. also *Francis*, Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate evangelium*, (19 March 2022) in: AAS 4 114 (2022) 375-457.

<sup>66</sup> *Ad Gentes*, 17.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

means of evangelisation that ought not to be forsaken nor put aside; both children and young people may learn significantly from a catechetical instruction which has structure<sup>71</sup>.

*Evangelii Nuntiandi* mentions three specific places that can offer such catechesis:

- the Church,
- the schools (where possible), and
- the Christian households<sup>72</sup>.

Such catechetical instruction, says *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, must be backed up with suitable books that are "updated with wisdom and competence" and approved by the bishops<sup>73</sup>. However, good texts alone are not enough. The instruction methods must be age-appropriate and adapted to the pupils' culture and capacity<sup>74</sup>. The goal is to imprint the fundamental truths in the pupils' memory, intelligence and heart, eventually forming the pupils into competent future catechists, teachers and parents<sup>75</sup>. Furthermore, it is not just children that ought to be catechised. Young people and adults who gradually discover Christ urgently need catechetical instruction; this is a reminder of the necessity of the catechumenate stage<sup>76</sup>.

*Catechesi Tradendae* is a rather lengthy document, and it is certainly not the purpose to discuss it in great depth here. The main reason why *Catechesi Tradendae* is included is that it serves as a practical guideline for catechetical instruction in modern times. John Paul II expresses that the aim of *Catechesi Tradendae* is twofold: to continue what his two predecessors started and to fulfil one of the major tasks of his apostolic charge; catechesis has been a vital part of his ministry as priest and as bishop<sup>77</sup>. Among other things, John Paul II hoped that *Catechesi Tradendae* would give "fresh vigour to the initiatives in hand", that with necessary vigilance, it "stimulate(s) creativity", and that it "help(s) to spread among the communities the joy of bringing the mystery of Christ to the world"<sup>78</sup>.

The Church has always seen it as her duty and right to catechise: a duty because of Christ's mandate to "go make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19) and a right because every baptised individual has the right to be informed and instructed<sup>79</sup>. By extension, since every baptised person has the right to receive sacraments (c. 213), they have the right to be prepared and well-informed about the sacraments before receiving them (CIC/1983 cc. 217 and 843 §2). One of the best ways of acquiring such knowledge is through catechetical instruction. Catechumens and babies are exceptional cases. Catechumens are usually adults who need and deserve further and adapted catechetical instruction. This formation also applies to the sacrament of baptism, especially when they do not come from a Christian background. Babies, on the other hand, are not aware of the celebration of the sacrament of baptism when it occurs, which means that they have the right to ongoing catechetical instruction as they develop holistically.

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71 Ibid., 44.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid. This statement is a reminder of the five tasks of the bishop mentioned in *Christus Dominus*.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid. In *Catechesi Tradendae* 35-45, John Paul II goes into detail of who ought to be catechised; he stresses that catechetical material ought to differ among the different groups as their realities are different (i.e. age, mental capacity, life circumstances, etc.).

77 *Catechesi Tradendae*, 4.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid., 14.

John Paul II states that Paul VI's concluding speech of the synod made it clear that there was a need for systematic catechesis precisely because the contemplative study within catechesis differentiates it from the other approaches of promoting God's word<sup>80</sup>. He drew attention to four aspects when delivering catechesis. It must:

1. have a goal through a planned programme (i.e. not improvised)
2. focus on the essentials of the Christian faith (i.e. not to make it theological research)
3. be complete (i.e. not just stopping at the *kerygma*)
4. be a complete Christian initiation (i.e. that is accessible to all aspects of the Christian life)<sup>81</sup>.

While creating a system is undoubtedly beneficial, in Chapter VI, he mentions other ways of catechising which might not be so systematic yet still beneficial:

- communications media (e.g. television, radio, the press, records),
- the use of different places, occasions and gatherings (e.g. pilgrimages, traditional missions, Bible-study groups, youth groups.),
- the homily (catechetical material awakens in the liturgy and through the homily),
- catechetical literature (i.e. catechetical books),
- catechisms (i.e. to be approved by the authoritative pastors and be inspired by the General Catechetical Directory, which is the reference point)<sup>82</sup>.

*Catechesi Tradendae* explains that the content of catechesis should surround the Good News of Salvation. Thus, catechesis must follow the Word of God in the Scriptures and tradition<sup>83</sup>. Additionally, the Creed(s) contain faith in oral form and must be included in catechesis<sup>84</sup>. In *Catechesi Tradendae*, John Paul II discusses how catechesis should be conveyed. The most common method is memorisation, which is how Christian catechesis has been conveyed since its beginnings<sup>85</sup>. He does not seem to favour this method because it has led to several disadvantages, such as reducing catechesis to a repetition of formulae without genuinely comprehending the content<sup>86</sup>. However, John Paul II does not eliminate the method of memorisation. Memorisation should be used on the events of history surrounding salvation because such events depend on exact knowledge (e.g. some of Jesus' words, specific Biblical passages, the Decalogue, formulae on the profession fidei, some liturgical texts, and a few essential prayers)<sup>87</sup>.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 46-50.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 28. *Catechesi Tradendae* goes deeper into which material should be included in the catechetical instruction and how it should be delivered. Cf. *Catechesi Tradendae* 29-34.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

*Catechesi Tradendae* upgraded, so to say, who is responsible for catechesis: every baptised is responsible. John Paul II creates a list of such persons. It can be said that this list does not only include 'persons', but it also includes 'juridic persons', which he referred to as 'places':

Persons:

- bishops (i.e. by surrounding themselves with trustworthy assistants, they are to increase the passion for catechesis in their diocese, together with their episcopal conference; this passion is maintained by adequately investing in personnel, tools and financial means);
- priests (i.e. as assistants of their bishops, they are instructors of the faith in any place they are instituted; the deacons and other ministers available are their assistants);
- men and women religious (i.e. religious are urged to collaborate with pastors to be able to offer catechetical instruction according to their vocation);
- lay catechists (i.e. while thanking catechists for their work in the parishes, *Catechesi Tradendae* focused on catechists in missionary countries where Christianity is born through their work)<sup>88</sup>;

Places:

- in the parish (i.e. aware of the threatening existence of parishes, *Catechesi Tradendae* stresses that the parish remains a point of reference for many Christians, even non-practising ones);
- in the family (i.e. the family catechises through several events like the reception of sacraments and the birth of a baby but not only; "Family catechesis therefore precedes, accompanies and enriches all other forms of catechesis");
- at school (i.e. a distinction is made between Catholic Schools, non-confessional and public schools; while Catholic Schools ought to catechise and stick to the Church's teaching to keep the title 'Catholic', the other schools are encouraged to allow Catholic pupils to grow spiritually in exercising religious freedom; *Catechesi Tradendae* mentions other ways schools may affect the children's spiritual growth: through lunch breaks, social realities of other students and work environment);
- within organisations (i.e. mainly the lay associations, movements and groups; they can all achieve their goals optimally if they target the proper religious training of their members; the laity's work is ever more critical in this regard, yet it is necessary to be under the direction of the bishop);
- training institutes (i.e. while being grateful for the lay contribution, the challenge of the pastors of finding well-prepared lay catechists is no easy task; this calls for special institutes and centres, at least at a diocesan level)<sup>89</sup>.

To conclude this section, Vatican Council II and the documents that followed up with *Catechesi Tradendae* focused on the practicality of catechesis based on what was needed at the time. These documents paved the way for the section on catechetical instruction in the CIC/1983, which should not simply be seen as an updated version of the CIC/1917, especially after

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 63-66.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 67-71.

considering all the discussions between the two codes. These documents illustrated that catechesis is not simply the teaching of the faith by the clergy to the faithful during the Sunday Mass because catechesis should be seen as multidimensional. The responsibility of catechesis has broadened. It has been recognised that those who receive catechesis come from different ways of life. Thus, catechesis should not be a one-size-fits-all. Consequently, those responsible for catechising ought to be on an ongoing formation to deliver catechesis in the most optimal way possible.

## 5 Catechesis in the 1983 Code of Canon Law

The CIC/1983 is ultimately the result of the development that was described in the previous sections. Thus, the CIC/1983 should be understood in light of such development. Consequently, the canons on catechetical instruction of the CIC/1983 will be compared and contrasted with the parallel canons of the CIC/1917 in this section.

Like the CIC/1917, the CIC/1983 dedicates eight canons to catechesis (cc. 773–780) under the identical title 'On Catechetical Instruction'; in both codes, it comes after 'On Preaching the Divine Word', with a minor difference. In the CIC/1917, the section on catechesis is a subdivision of 'On Preaching the Divine Word' together with 'On Sacred Sermons' and 'On Sacred Missions'. The CIC/1983 encapsulates the two titles under a common title, 'The Ministry of the Divine Word'.

CIC/1917	CIC/1983
Title 20 – On Preaching the Divine Word	Title I – The Ministry of the Divine Word
Chapter 1 – On Catechetical Instruction	Chapter I – The Preaching of the Word of God
Chapter II – On Sacred Sermons	
Chapter III – On Sacred Missions	Chapter II – Catechetical Instruction

*Table 2: Comparison between the CIC/1917 and the CIC/1983*

This structural difference might look minor, but it echoes a shift in mentality from one code to another. One may suggest that in the CIC/1917, catechesis might have been regarded as a different way of preaching the Word of God, while the other two ways provided in the same code are sermons and missions. On the other hand, how catechesis is presented in the CIC/1983 can imply that it is not equated to preaching. However, it has more to do with 'informing' about the Word of God. It is best to return to the etymology to better understand this argument.

The Latin word used in both codes for 'preaching' is *praedicare* (proclaim, publish, preach<sup>90</sup>). In contrast, the Latin word for instruction is *instituzione* (i.e. from *institutio*, *institutionis*: instruction, education<sup>91</sup>). Thus, one may deduce that while in the CIC/1917, proclaiming the Word of God was seen as a synonym for educating about the Word of God, in the CIC/1983, it is understood differently: first comes proclamation, then comes education. Consequently,

<sup>90</sup> Lewis, Charlton / Short, Charles, A Latin Dictionary (note 8), 969.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 97.



catechesis "is directed to those who have heard the gospel message and responded in faith"<sup>92</sup>. The reason for stressing this point is because all the eight canons of the CIC/1917 are in some way included in the CIC/1983; the wording may vary, and likewise, for the order of the canons. Additionally, there are two canons which are new to the CIC/1983.

Topic of Canon	CIC/1983	CIC/1917
Catechesis being a proper and grave duty for pastors of souls.	c. 773	c. 1329
Everyone is to care for catechesis under legitimate direction.	c. 774 §1	N/A
Parents/guardians are obliged to catechise their children.	c. 774 §2	c. 1335
The local ordinary is to ensure catechesis is well-sustained.	c. 775 §§1-3	c. 1336
A <i>parochus</i> can seek others' help for catechesis in his parish.	c. 776	c. 1334
There are duties that a <i>parochus</i> must care for in a special way. These may vary from one code to the other.	c. 777	c. 1330 - c. 1332
Religious superiors to ensure catechesis is imparted in their churches.	c. 778	c. 1334
Catechetical material must be adapted to the pupils.	c. 779	N/A
Local ordinaries to ensure that catechists are duly trained.	c. 780	N/A

Table 3: Topic of Canons' Comparison between the CIC/1983 and the CIC/1917

Both codes similarly open the section on catechetical instruction by stating that catechesis is a proper and grave office. What is new to the CIC/1983 is the phrase *vitae christianae experientiam*. First, this phrase was added to complete what was missing from the *doctrinae institutionem*<sup>93</sup> (i.e. it is not only about the doctrine but also about the experience of the Christian life). Second, it shows that the responsibility of catechesis is broader. The experience of the Christian life is amply vast "to convey the sense that one's faith has the potential of being enhanced by personal actions as well as interactions with others in the Christian community"<sup>94</sup>.

In the third part of this article, it was concluded that the canons on catechesis of the CIC/1917 were organised according to the hierarchical ranking. It was also noted that clerics and religious ideally imparted catechetical instruction; laymen's service was reserved for cases of necessity. Parents, being laypersons, were mentioned last. As noted from the table, the CIC/1983 puts the parents first, then continues according to hierarchical ranking. One can argue that the CIC/1983

<sup>92</sup> Coriden, James A., Introductory Commentary on cc. 773-780, in: Beal, John P. / Coriden, James A. / Green, Thomas J. (ed.), *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law: An Entirely New and Comprehensive Commentary by Canonists from North America and Europe, with a Revised English Translation of the Code*, New York 2000, 933.

<sup>93</sup> Thompson Hagarty, Maura, *The Code, Catechesis, and the Concept Experience. A Commentary on Canon 773*, in: *The Jurist* 61, 239 (2001) 239-256, 255.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

was drafted when human rights were highly discussed in Europe and worldwide<sup>95</sup>. The awareness of these rights shapes how a human being is perceived, not only in the secular world but also in the ecclesiastical sphere. Human beings, including children, have rights and duties; parents have a substantial role to play in the life decisions of their children. The fact that parents are given prominence in the CIC/1983 indicates several changes. To name a few:

- only parents have a right to decide for their children;
- parents are the first teachers, as Christians;
- parents ought to raise their children with Christian values,
- without the parents' will and care, any catechetical initiative for children by the hierarchy is futile;
- parents eventually need the assistance of the hierarchy to fulfil their Christian duties towards their children.

Moreover, while both codes use the phrase 'pastors of souls' to include all those in charge of the care of the *Christifideles* (CIC/1917 c. 1329; CIC/1983 c. 773<sup>96</sup>), the CIC/1983 makes an explicit statement that every member is to care for catechesis, *sollicitudo catechesis* (c. 774 §1). From the documents previously discussed, lay catechists were acknowledged and accepted before the making of the new code, mainly due to the decline in priestly vocations. Since the CIC/1983 uses the phrase 'every member', canonically meaning that every baptised person is included in this canon, it must also refer to lay catechists. Consequently, the word 'laymen' has been eliminated, and 'catechists' is used instead. Not only is 'catechists' gender neutral, but it is also hierarchy neutral – there is no longer a preference for clerics to catechise, followed by the religious and the laity in this CIC/1983.

Some questions arise from this: Was this choice in wording made because there was an urgent need for the laity to step in and assist (i.e., due to the lack of clerics and religious)? Or did the Church truly accept that the laity may also participate in catechesis because, through baptism, they also participate in the *munus propheticum*, which may lead to the *munus docendi*? A similar discussion arose with the 1997 Instruction, which discussed the laity's and the religious' complimentary assistance in the clergy's ministry<sup>97</sup> instead of supplementary assistance if necessary<sup>98</sup>. Does this mean that lay participation in the Church's teaching office can be regarded differently depending on the needs of the Church? In other words, can the laity participate only when they are genuinely needed (i.e. supplementary assistance) or is their involvement necessary for the Church's mission because it differs from that of a cleric (i.e. complementary assistance)? From the viewpoint of baptism, one would hope that lay participation is seen as complementary not as supplementary. In this context, the term 'assistance' seems to assume that the laity is always less knowledgeable than a cleric and that a cleric always coordinates the laity. In reality, is this always the case? Should it be so? Terms such as collaboration or

<sup>95</sup> To name a few, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and The European Convention on Human Rights came round about the same time (i.e. between the late 1940s and in the early 1950s) as an aftermath of the Second World War.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. *Christus Dominus*, 14; *Gravissimum Educationis*, 4; and *Catechesi Tradendae*, 1, 14-16. Cf. *Coriden*, Commentary to c. 773 (note 92), 933.

<sup>97</sup> *John Paul II*, Instruction on certain questions regarding the collaboration of the non-ordained faithful in the sacred ministry of priest" 15 August 1997, in: AAS 89 (1997), 852-877, 852 at: [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc\\_con\\_interdic\\_doc\\_15081997\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_interdic_doc_15081997_en.html)

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, Art. 13.

involvement would have been more suitable for imposing a less clerical approach to celebrating the sacraments and the teaching office.

The CIC/1983 stuck to the hierarchical ranking for the instructing and the organisation. While the instruction starts from the household, the local Ordinary initiates the catechetical organisation to ensure that catechetical norms are established and perhaps to issue catechisms with the Episcopal Conference after the Apostolic See's approval (c. 775). While the second paragraph of this canon allows the episcopal conferences to issue catechisms, the third paragraph grants them the authority to set up catechetical offices to assist the dioceses in religious education<sup>99</sup>. The subsequent two canons speak of the *parochus* and his responsibilities (cc. 776-777). The last canon discusses the religious Superiors (c. 778<sup>100</sup>).

The duty of caring for the catechetical formation of all the parishioners (c. 776) remains one of the dominant priorities of the *parochus* and all those in a similar designation (e.g. c. 517 §1 – priest *in solidum*)<sup>101</sup>. Canon 777 uses several verbs in the passive voice together with '*parochus curet*', which suggests that the parish priest is obliged to see that the list mentioned in the same canon is being fulfilled; in other words, he does not have to fulfil the obligations himself personally, but he can seek assistance<sup>102</sup>. The responsibilities of the *parochus* are more or less the same as those of the previous code.

However, there are some differences, as per the table below:

CIC/1983 (c. 777)	CIC/1917
There must be suitable catechesis for the sacraments (i.e. it is open for all individuals and all sacraments)	Children are to be prepared for penance and confirmation (c. 1330 1°)
Children are to be prepared in a reasonable time for the first penance and the reception of the first Holy Eucharist and Confirmation. (i.e. Lent is no longer mentioned, and confirmation is included).	Children are to be prepared so that during Lent, they receive their First Holy Communion (c. 1330 2°).
Pastors are to ensure the ongoing formation of children after the First Holy Communion.	This canon is identical to the new code (c. 1331).
Catechesis is also to be imparted to those with special needs.	There is no identical canon for this obligation in the old code.

<sup>99</sup> Coriden, James A., Commentary to c. 775, in: Beal, John P. / Coriden, James A. / Green, Thomas J. (ed.), *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law: An Entirely New and Comprehensive Commentary by Canonists from North America and Europe, with a Revised English Translation of the Code*, New York 2000, 934-935, 935.

<sup>100</sup> This canon is based on *Christus Dominus*, 35; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 69; and *Catechesi Tradendae*, 65. Cf. Coriden, Commentary to cc. 776-777 (note 92), 937.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 935. Cf. Bauer, Nancy, So That the Living Faith Becomes Manifest and Active: Catechetical Instruction According to the Code of Canon Law, in: *International Journal of Evangelisation and Catechetics* 1 (2020), 45-66, 61.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 936.

The faith of the youths and adults is to be strengthened through various means (i.e. there is freedom of when this should occur, in what way and by whom; youths are added).	The pastor is to explain the catechism to adults at a time when attendance is encouraged (c. 1332).
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*Table 4: Comparison of Canons' Text of the CIC/1983 and the CIC/1917*

There is an added responsibility "that catechetical formation also be given to those handicapped in body or mind insofar as their condition permits" (c. 777 4<sup>o</sup>)<sup>103</sup>. Thus, there is an inclusion of persons with special needs.

Such inclusion is undoubtedly a positive one, but it brings several challenges. For instance, how accessible are the catechesis centres? In what way are catechetical resources catering for such a range of special needs? Are the catechists and the *parochi* aware of such needs? Are they well-trained? The CIC/1983 gives the impression that it might have projected such challenges through the last two canons of this section, which did not exist in the previous code. There is an insistence that all social communication methods are to be used, which should be adapted according to the pupils' character, capacity, age and conditions of life (c. 779<sup>104</sup>). Although persons with special needs are not explicitly mentioned here, it can be presumed that they are included just as any other pupil is<sup>105</sup>. The last canon of this section explicitly mentions the catechists, something that was not done in the CIC/1917. Responsibility is put on the local ordinaries to ensure that catechists are well-trained, understand what they will be imparting, and learn the necessary pedagogical methods (c. 780<sup>106</sup>).

## 6 Conclusion

Catechesis was initiated due to Christ's mandate to teach. The biblical narratives and very early regulations were used to institutionalise catechesis. Eventually, the CIC/1917 was promulgated, listing the first canons on catechesis. Vatican Council II and various synods followed, shaping the canons on catechesis in the CIC/1983. To illustrate the changes, this article made a comparative analysis of the canons on catechesis of both codes. The two codes offer, to an extent, two different approaches towards catechesis. While the responsibility remains for all the faithful, referred to as 'pastors of souls' in both codes, the parents are given more prominence in the CIC/1983, making the new code look less hierarchical and focusing more on the duties of the

<sup>103</sup> The use of the word as found in the translation of the Canon Law Society of America 'handicapped in body or mind' has been disputed along the years. The wording found on the Vatican website for this canon is preferred by the author (i.e. "who are physically or mentally impeded"). See at: [https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic\\_lib3-cann756-780\\_en.html#CHAPTER\\_II](https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib3-cann756-780_en.html#CHAPTER_II).

<sup>104</sup> Some of the sources this canon is inspired from: *Christus Dominus*, 13-14; *Ad Gentes*, 26; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 40, 45; *Catechesi Tradendae*, 17, 22, 31, 46, 51, 55. Cf. *Coriden, James A.*, Commentary to c. 779, in: Beal, John P. / Coriden, James A. / Green, Thomas J. (ed.), *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law: An Entirely New and Comprehensive Commentary by Canonists from North America and Europe, with a Revised English Translation of the Code*, New York 2000, 937.

<sup>105</sup> As previously noted, the idea of adaptation has been mentioned in several documents (e.g. *Christus Dominus*, 14; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 44; and *Catechesi Tradendae*, 35-45). Cf. *Coriden*, Commentary to c. 779 (note 104), 937.

<sup>106</sup> Inspired from *Christus Dominus*, 14; *Dei Verbum*, 25; *Ad Gentes*, 15, 17; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 73; *Catechesi Tradendae*, 15, 63, 66, 71. Cf. *Coriden, James A.*, Commentary to c. 780, in: Beal, John P. / Coriden, James A. / Green, Thomas J. (ed.), *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law: An Entirely New and Comprehensive Commentary by Canonists from North America and Europe, with a Revised English Translation of the Code*, New York 2000, 936.

baptised. In the CIC/1983, the duties of the *parochus* are gathered under one canon, unlike in the CIC/1917. Nonetheless, aside from the differences already discussed, the Church documents that came in between the promulgation of the two codes could have been better reflected in the CIC/1983. For instance, the CIC/1983 could have included canons on the type of formation catechists ought to have, which would guide the local ordinaries on the type of training they ought to provide<sup>107</sup>.

Further, the code should also distinguish between catechesis for members (children and others), catechesis for non-members, and catechesis for the catechumens. Persons with special needs should also have a canon dedicated solely to addressing their particular needs. Various special needs can be distinguished under one canon, such as asking for the assistance of professionals and/or adequate training that can help in the catechetical preparation and the catechetical resources. Consequently, a canon on catechetical resources can also guide dioceses in creating authentic, unified material. Frequently, it is noted that overlapping resources are created within the same diocese but by different ecclesiastical offices. The code should provide the tools to ensure uniformity within diversity<sup>108</sup>. Last but not least, the code can also insist on the collaboration between the clergy and laity as a reciprocal necessity for the good of the faithful, emphasising the two-way relationship.

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**107** There are several canons in the CIC/1983 that mention the required qualifications for various roles in the church (Cf. cc. 378 §1 5°, 253 §1, 1421 §3, to name a few).

**108** This recommendation helps to become in conformity with *Catechesi Tradendae*'s systematic catechesis which John Paul II discussed.