

SEMINARY FORMATION: A PERIOD FOR AUTHENTIC CATECHESIS AND WITNESSING

Albert Ikpenwa¹

1.0. PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Seminary Formation: A Period for Authentic Catechesis and Witnessing is a paper I presented during our annual colloquium to begin the 2022-2023 formation and academic year.

The choice of this theme was inspired by the following comment/request directed to me by a student in the course of delivering a lecture during the 2021/ 2022 academic year: “Father, you have taught us what the Church says on ‘this’ topic, now tell us what you as a person believe or your own opinion on the topic.”

The Necessity of this Theme

Though the comment/request above was made by one person, it is clear that he is not alone in this line of thought, but represents deep-seated widening divide between what the Churches teaches and what some seminarians and priests believe and also do. This widening gap ranges from moral, doctrinal, social, liturgical, cultural and canonical issues. Many either forget or directly put aside what they were taught in the seminary and appropriate a belief system that is diametrically opposed to the teachings of the Church and worse still impose such belief system on those under their charge.

The seminary formation system is meant to integrate one into the belief system of the Church, make it a part of one’s life so that one

¹Rev. Fr. Dr. Albert Ikpenwa is a priest of the Catholic Diocese of Awgu. He is the current Rector of Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu and also a lecturer in the seminary.

may defend this belief system even with one's own blood. This is why at the end of their seminary training, candidates for Diaconate Ordination are handed the book of the Gospel by their Bishop with the following words: "*Receive the Word of God, whose herald you have become. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, practice what you teach.*"

Again, for formators to teach theology in the seminary they must receive *Missio Canonica* after taking an oath with the holy bible in their hands to "firmly accept and retain each and every truth regarding the doctrine of faith and morals, whether solemnly defined by the Church or asserted and declared with the ordinary Magisterium"

Furthermore, it is customary for Priests, Seminarians and Mass Servers to recite the following prayers in the sacristy before every celebration of the Eucharist,

"Go before us o Lord, in this our sacrifice of prayer and Praise, and grant that what we say and sing with our lips, we may believe in our hearts. And what we believe in our hearts, we may practice and show forth in our daily lives. Through Christ our Lord. Amen."

But despite all these, the chasm between what the Churches teaches and what some seminarians and priests believe continues to exist, thus the need for a research work of this nature.

Scope of the Theme

As the theme suggests, it aims to examine the fundamental importance of catechesis, as the foundation upon which candidates for the priesthood would build their belief system, to be in *tandem* with the belief-system of the Church. This theme should also be considered as a continuation of or the second part of the paper I presented during the 2017 colloquium: *THE NEW RATIO FUNDAMENTALIS INSTITUTIONIS SACERDOTALIS: DISCIPLESHIP, A STAGE IN THE JOURNEY OF*

FORMATION, AS WELL AS COMMITMENT FOR THE WHOLE OF LIFE.

The following documents of the Church on catechesis: *General Catechetical Directory DCG* (1971); *Evangelii Nuntiandi EN* (1975); Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* of Pope John Paul CT (1979); *Catechism of The Catholic Church CCC* (1992); *General Directory for Catechesis GDC* (1997); *The New Directory for Catechesis NDC* (2020), as well as other documents of the Church would serve as our works of reference.

These documents trace the mandate to catechize to the Lord Himself, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20). They also present the works of the Apostles, who in obedience to the master took this assignment seriously. For example, St Paul’s address to Timothy “You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well” (2 Tim 4:2) speaks for itself.

The subsequent subheadings would deal with the nature and content of what is to be taught; identity, competence and formation of Agents of Catechesis, as well as the challenging nature of the work of catechesis.

This paper is also intended to bring to the public domain, the efforts seminaries make, to ensure that candidates for the priesthood are properly equipped with the tools they need for the work of evangelization. This is because many are prone to blame seminary formation, for whatever lapses observable in candidates produced by the seminaries.

We are all invited to take this encounter personal and see it as a way of deepening our understanding of the richness of the Catholic doctrine. Let us confront the attendant challenges faced by both the Agents of Catechesis and those to be catechized and proffer

solutions that would have a far-reaching effect on the propagation of faith within our context.

2.0. NATURE OF CATECHESIS

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, Pope John Paul II describes catechesis as “an education of children, young people and adults in the faith, which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life.”²

This is in line with *The 1971 General Catechetical Directory* statement that “For every man whose mind is open to the message of the Gospel, catechesis is a particularly apt means for him to understand God’s plan in his own life and to examine the highest meaning of existence and history that the life of individual men and of society may be illumined by the light of the kingdom of God and be conformed to its demands, and the mystery of the Church as the community of those who believe in the Gospel may be able to be recognized.”³

2.1. Catechesis as Trinitarian and Christocentric

Using the above documents of the Church as our works of reference, catechesis is both Trinitarian and Christocentric in nature. This means that it is not just any kind of teaching, but ‘especially’ the teaching of Christian doctrine. This teaching directed to different categories of people is centred on the words and life of Jesus Christ, who was sent into the world by the Father, in communion with the Holy Spirit, to bring salvation to mankind. Thus, right from the start, the Agent of Catechesis is made aware of the fact that it is neither his word nor his life that should be transmitted, but the word of God, made present in many forms, in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ

² Pope John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation Catechesi Tradendae*, October 16, 1979, no. 5.

³ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *General Catechetical Directory*, April 11, 1971, no. 21.

through the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵ Christ himself though coequal with the Father, did not claim to teach in his name, but in the name of the one who sent him (cf. Jn. 7:16) and in so doing laid an example which his disciples followed to teach others what they in turn received from the Lord (cf. 1Cor 11: 14).

It is within this context that the Agent of Catechesis should not attempt to water down the content of the message he is to transmit, by clouding it with his personal opinions.⁶ This does not diminish the integrity of the Agent of Catechesis as an intelligent being, but enhances it because by presenting the doctrine the way it is, he intelligently accepts his limitations as a human being and expresses his faith in the supreme, omniscient God. This is why it is of ultimate importance that he (the Agent of Catechesis) must not only acquaint himself with the content of the message he is to transmit but also let the message penetrate his innermost being, to the extent that he becomes one with the message he is to transmit “for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (Mt. 10:20). Again, in Jn. 15:16 Christ states, “You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.”

2.2. Catechesis as Organic and Systematic Body of Teaching

Given the vast and all-encompassing nature of the words and life of Christ, which are to be transmitted, temptation to muddle up and transmit them in a staccato form abounds. In fact, echoing the words of Pope John XXIII during the opening of the Second Vatican Council, “the substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another.” Thus, the need to arrange them as organic and systematic body of teaching. It is for this reason that *Catechesi Tradendae* gives the following

⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 6.

⁵ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 99.

⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandii*, December 8, 1975, no. 65.

criteria for determining the authenticity of the whole process of catechesis:

- It must be systematic, not improvised but programmed to reach a precise goal;
- It must deal with essentials, without any claim to tackle all disputed questions or to transform itself into theological research or scientific exegesis;
- It must nevertheless be sufficiently complete, not stopping short at the initial proclamation of the Christian mystery such as we have in the *kerygma*;
- It must be an integral Christian initiation, open to all the other factors of Christian life.⁷

The above makes it clear that the arrangement of what is to be taught is not left at the whims and caprices of the one who is entrusted with the responsibility to catechize. If they were to be left at the whims and caprices of the Agent of Catechesis, he may minimize, exaggerate or entirely leave out areas he may consider as not essential. Such would certainly threaten the very faith the process is meant to engender and undermine the universal dimension of the mission of Christ.

Right from the time of the Apostles, conscientious efforts have been made by the Fathers of the Church to provide a body of teaching on the words and life of our Lord Jesus Christ in one form or another. The Gospels, the Acts of the Apostle, the New Testament letters and the works of the early Fathers of the Church: Clement of Rome, Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Ambrose and Augustine bear eloquent testimony of concerted efforts to present a systematic body of knowledge, which should be imparted on those seeking to know, follow, abide with Christ and allow him to penetrate their innermost being.⁸ In our own time, documents such as: *General Catechetical Directory* DCG (1971); *Evangelii*

⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 21.

⁸ *Ibid*, no. 12.

Nuntiandi EN (1975); Apostolic Exhortation Catechesi Tradendae of Pope John Paul II (1979); Catechism of The Catholic Church CCC (1992); General Directory for Catechesis GDC (1997); The New Directory for Catechesis NDC (2020), speak for themselves.

The above manifest the richness of catechesis as an organic and systematic body of teaching that has its matrix in the sacred scriptures, the tradition and magisterium of the Church.

2.3. Major Thematic Areas covered by Authentic Catechesis

As organic and systematic body of teaching, catechesis is developed along carefully chosen thematic areas (Subjects, Themes, Aspects, Areas) that embody the doctrinal framework upon which the Catholic faith is built. Such thematic areas like “the initial proclamation of the Gospel or missionary preaching through the *kerygma* to arouse faith; apologetics or examination of the reasons for belief; experience of Christian living; celebration of the sacraments; integration into the ecclesial community; and apostolic and missionary witness”⁹ are fashioned in such a way that they address different needs and stages in the spiritual and moral growth process of every Christian person. This means that catechesis is fashioned to accompany every Christian person right from the moment he comes into contact with the Good News, through developmental stages, down to adulthood.

The first thematic area as listed above centres on *Kerygma* and so brings to the fore the fact that proclamation of the word goes hand in hand with catechesis. By proclaiming the Word, one communicates to one’s hearers the identity of the person of Jesus and in so doing impact on them their first knowledge of the Christian way of life (cf. Acts 2:14-47).

⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 18.

It is based on this that the Fathers of the Church situate catechesis within the context of evangelization.¹⁰ In fact, catechesis according to *Catechesi Tradendae* “is one of these moments - a very remarkable one - in the whole process of evangelization.”¹¹

The second thematic area centres on apologetics or examination of the reasons for belief. It is obvious that here one is not dealing with the initial hearers of the word, but with deepening of the faith already received. It underlines also the different stages or levels in catechetical instruction. **An organic and systematic** way of teaching takes into consideration the levels and stages of those who are to be catechized, and organizes what is to be taught in such a way that it addresses the peculiar needs of those at each stage.

In as much as the scope of this write-up does not permit us to go into details on these stages and the contents of what is to be taught, suffice it to mention that the documents above not only made distinctions among children, adolescent and adult stages, it also made distinction between those who had never heard the word and those who after going through the initial contact with the word, lost it through certain factors and are in need of reawakening and deepening of their faith. It is not by chance that the *General Directory for Catechesis* begins the introductory part with the parable of the sower.¹² This parable brings home the danger inherent in superficial and ungrounded reception of the word. This is what the second thematic area of catechesis is meant to address, by making the content of what is to be taught, the mode and method of teaching, tailored towards helping those in this state of belief have a better understanding of the reason for their belief.

The rest of the thematic areas: celebration of the sacraments; integration into the ecclesial community and apostolic and

¹⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Papal Encyclical Evangelium Vitae*, no. 44; Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 26.

¹¹ Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 18.

¹² Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 14.

missionary witness bring to the fore, the fact that Christian life does not start and end with hearing of the word, but has to be translated into concrete living situation.... The celebration of the sacraments especially the Eucharist are moments for not only deep reflection on the mystery celebrated, but also for catechizing. Since sacraments are moments in the life of Christ, one who celebrates them participates in the life and teachings of Christ. Here, special emphasis is laid on the preparation and delivery of Homilies.

3.0. THE IDENTITY AND PROFICIENCY OF AGENTS OF CATECHESIS

Discussion on the nature and the thematic areas to be covered by authentic catechesis leads to the question: who is an Agent of Catechesis?

According to *General Directory for Catechesis* "Catechesis is a responsibility of the entire Christian community. Christian initiation, indeed, 'should not be the work of catechists and priests alone, but of the whole community of the faithful.'¹³ This is born out of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council that made it possible for:

- the people of God to acquire a keener awareness of the "common priesthood" founded on Baptism, and rediscover evermore the universal call to holiness and a livelier sense of mutual service in charity;
- the ecclesial community to acquire a livelier sense of the word of God. Sacred Scripture, for example, is read, savoured and meditated upon more intensely.¹⁴

With this in mind, it is the duty of every baptized catholic to proclaim and teach the word of God to those who have not received it or are in need of reawakening or rekindling what they had

¹³ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 220.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, no. 27.

received. This is why, as we shall see later, the roles of parents as the first catechists to their children can never be overemphasized.

However, even though catechesis is the responsibility of all the Christian faithful, only some members receive the ecclesial mandate to be catechist.¹⁵ This is not only based on the division of labour in the Church, but also on the will of Christ who elevates some members into the ministerial priesthood even though all baptized share in the common priesthood. In the very words of St. Paul, “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-13). Thus, some members of the Church are allotted different types of assignment each according to their competence and all for the good of the Church and for the greater glory of God. In the sphere of catechesis, the following hierarchical order of responsibility is observable:

a. The Pope

The Pope as the successor of St Peter bears the responsibility of shepherding the flock entrusted to him by Christ himself. He is to feed Christ’s lambs and tend his sheep (cf. Jn. 21:15). Tending Christ’s lambs and feeding his sheep include nourishing them with spiritual food and guiding them with sound teachings on the way of the Lord. This is what Pope John Paul II refers to when he stated, “For his part, the Pope has a lively awareness of the primary responsibility that rests on him in this field.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid, no. 221; Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *New Directory for Catechesis*, (Abuja: Paulines Publication Africa, 2020) no. 111.

¹⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 16.

Again, the Second Vatican Council states that "Christ's mandate to preach the Gospel to every creature (cf. Mk 16:15) primarily and immediately concerns the bishops with Peter and under Peter."

Thus by implication, "The Successor of Peter is thus, by the will of Christ, entrusted with the preeminent ministry of teaching the revealed truth."¹⁷

b. Bishops

Since the task of governing the Church was entrusted to St. Peter in collegiality with the other Apostles, it goes without saying that the Pope as the successor of St. Peter carries out these tasks of preaching and teaching the Good News in collaboration with the Bishops. Thus, "in union with the Successor of Peter, the bishops, who are successors of the apostles, receive through the power of their episcopal ordination the authority to teach the revealed truth in the Church."¹⁸

In the particular Churches, bishops are the first/chief catechists of their individual dioceses.¹⁹ They represent the mind of the Universal Church in their area of jurisdiction, teaching and guiding the flock entrusted to them. In fact, aware of the numerous responsibilities and challenges Bishops face in their diocese, Pope John Paul II made it clear that these responsibilities should not distract one from the primary duty of personally teaching the people of God. They should "let the concern to foster active and effective catechesis yield to no other care whatever in any way."²⁰

c. Priests

Priests as collaborators of the Bishop are also entrusted with the mandate to preach and teach the people of God. Just as the Bishop is the first catechist of his diocese so also is a priest the first catechist

¹⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 67.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, no. 68

¹⁹ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *New Directory for Catechesis*, no. 114.

²⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 63.

in a Parish or community.²¹ Due to their proximity to the people of God, as parish priests, chaplains, teachers in schools and organizers of other large or small ecclesial communities, priests are daily in contact with different groups that make up the body of Christ.²² Their activities have wide ranging impact on the people of God that is why the Pope admonishes thus, “I beg you, ministers of Jesus Christ: Do not, for lack of zeal or because of some unfortunate preconceived idea, leave the faithful without catechesis. Let it not be said that “the children beg for food, but no one gives to them”²³

In teaching the people of God the priest must remember what is said above that he is not to teach his **words** or personal opinion, but the word of God according to the mind of the Church. That does not mean that he should not use his talent to enrich and make the teaching appealing to those under his tutelage, but such should never diminish, remove or substitute the substance of the message.

d. Others groups such as *Men and Women Religious, Lay Catechists* have their degrees of responsibilities,²⁴ but due to the scope of this presentation, we shall focus on the formation of candidates for the priesthood as Agents of Catechesis.

4.0. CATECHETICAL FORMATION OF CANDIDATES FOR THE PRIESTHOOD

Since you cannot give what you don't have (*nemo dat quod non habet*), it goes without saying that those to be entrusted with the responsibility to handle catechesis should undergo one form of formation or another. This section focuses on the formation seminarians should undergo to prepare them to give authentic catechetical instruction.²⁵ In fact, according to *The General Catechetical Directory*, “it is of great importance that a thorough

²¹ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *New Directory for Catechesis*, no. 115.

²² Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 64.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 65-66; Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *New Directory for Catechesis*, no. 117-129.

²⁵ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *New Directory for Catechesis*, no. 151.

catechetical preparation be given students in seminaries and scholasticates, which should be completed afterwards by the continuing formation mentioned.”²⁶

The New Directory for Catechesis outlines the following as what the seminary should foster in Major seminarians:

- a. Permeate them with missionary spirit through spiritual formation that would help them proclaim the Gospel.
- b. Guarantee experiences of the first proclamation and exercise in the various forms of catechesis.
- c. Introduce them to ... profound understanding of *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.
- d. Explore the *Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults*
- e. Present the guidelines of the respective particular Church relative to catechesis.
- f. Guarantee a place in the curriculum of the study of catechetics, of the Magisterium on catechetical matters, of pedagogy, and of other human sciences.²⁷

Since major seminarians do not fall from heaven, it is pertinent that they undergo initial catechetical instruction before ever they enter into the Major seminary. Thus, for the purpose of realizing the aim of this colloquium paper, we shall start with what we refer to as the **pre-seminary catechetical formation**.

4.1. Pre- Seminary Catechetical formation

The need for candidates for the priesthood to undergo the rigors of being catechized themselves cannot be overemphasized. “It must be restated that nobody in the Church of Jesus Christ should feel excused from receiving catechesis. This is true even of young seminarians and young religious, and of all those called to the task of being pastors and catechists. They will fulfil this task all the better

²⁶ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 115.

²⁷ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *New Directory for Catechesis*, no. 152.

if they are humble pupils of the Church, the great giver as well as the great receiver of catechesis.”²⁸

In the **Pre- Seminary formation** stage, one is introduced into the faith through *Kerygma* as already stated and then pass through several stages of instructions, *pre-baptismal* or in some cases *post-baptismal* that culminate in the reception of the sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. *General Directory for Catechesis* describe these stages as: *the pre-catechumenate, the catechumenate, purification and illumination and mystagogy*.²⁹ For details of what are involved in these stages one should consult the above document of the Church. The importance of this very first stage can never be overemphasized, because it is upon it that any other formation process is built. It is therefore not by chance that before candidates are admitted into Bigard Memorial Seminary, they must present evidence of having received these sacraments. That means they must have undergone different stages of catechetical instructions. A situation whereby such catechesis at this early stage is not well carried out or the candidates do not take them seriously poses great danger to the candidate’s ability to be receptive to the formation process. It is also good to emphasize the importance of parental influence at this stage. As earlier pointed out, parents are the first catechists to their Children.³⁰ Thus, they have the responsibility of guiding their children in the way of the Lord at that early stage. When parents fail in this responsibility of theirs, the result may be stunted growth in knowing the way of the Lord. However, since in our milieu many cases of first generation Catholics or even parents that are traditional religious worshipers abound, children from such background may not receive any parental catechesis. Thus, extra effort and the Grace of God is required, for such children, to make up what they lack. It is noteworthy that some Dioceses are now making it compulsory for

²⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 45.

²⁹ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 88.

³⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 68.

their seminarians to sit for catechetical examination as a way of keeping them abreast with the catechism of the Church, which they are to teach others. This is a step in the right direction.

4.2. Seminary Formation Period: A Platform for Enhanced Catechesis

As stated above, for candidates to be admitted into the major seminary, they are expected to have passed through the first stage discussed above. Candidates that successfully passed through this stage would definitely find it easier to adapt to seminary formation³¹, than those who did not.

Be that as it may, the seminary formation is organized in such a way that candidates are led through the teachings and doctrines of the Church in systematic ways, so as to deepen their faith in the Lord and learn how to transmit this message to others.

THE NEW RATIO FUNDAMENTALIS INSTITUTIONIS SACERDOTALIS divides the seminary formation into stages: propaedeutic stage; the stage of philosophical studies or discipleship stage; the stage of theological studies or the configuration stage, and the pastoral stage or stage of vocational synthesis.³² Though it made effort to emphasize the interconnectedness of these stages, it also delineated the peculiar nature of each of these stages. In fact, the New Ratio stresses “one is always a disciple throughout the whole of life, constantly aspiring to configuring oneself to Christ, by exercising pastoral ministry, indeed, these dimensions are a constant feature of the journey of each seminarian, but some receive greater attention at particular stages over the course of formation, albeit never to the neglect of the others.”³³

³¹ Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 39.

³² Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation – Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (Bangalore: Pauline Publications, 2016), 57.

³³ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation – Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, no. 57.

This is evidenced in Our 2017 Colloquium paper, where we concentrated on the discipleship stage but also connected it with the other stages in formation. A summary of two of the stages shows that:

- a. At the philosophical/ discipleship stage, students are taught what it means to stay with Christ and **learn how to enter into the secrets of the kingdom**. This is because, “Staying with Christ become a pedagogical-spiritual journey, that transforms the life of the seminarian and bears witness to his life in the world.”³⁴ Within this stage, candidates are to “acquire the necessary knowledge of philosophy and of the human sciences.”³⁵
- b. At the Theological/configuration stage candidates are to “make the relationship with Christ more intimate and personal and, at the same time will lead to an awareness and an assumption of priestly identity.”³⁶ “This also means confirming one’s own way of thinking and working in communion with the Bishop and brother priests for the good of that portion of the people of God.”³⁷

The programme of studies at the different stages of seminary formation not only inculcate into the candidates the way of Christ, but also turn them into teachers of the way of Christ, in communion with the magisterium of the Church.

Thus, even though our seminary only offers catechesis as a subject in the theological stage, the whole of seminary formation is structured to teach candidates the way of the Lord from the propaedeutic to configuration stages.

³⁴Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation – Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, no. 61.

³⁵ *Ibid*, no. 66.

³⁶ *Ibid*, no. 68.

³⁷ *Ibid*, no. 71.

4.3. Subject Matter/Content of Catechesis within the Seminary Formation Period

The General Directory for Catechesis lists the following as forms of **continuing catechesis**:

- The study and exploration of Sacred Scripture...The "*lectio divina*" is an eminent form of this vital study of Scripture.
- The study of the social teaching of the Church.
- Liturgical catechesis. This explains the contents of the prayers, the meaning of the signs and gestures, educates to active participation, contemplation and silence.
- Occasional catechesis which seeks to interpret determined circumstances of personal, family, ecclesial or social life and to help live them in the prospect of faith.
- Initiatives of spiritual formation which seek to reinforce conviction, open new perspectives and encourage perseverance in prayer and in the duties of following Christ.
- A systematic deepening of the Christian message by means of theological instruction, so as truly to educate in the faith, encourage growth in understanding of it and to equip the Christian for giving the reason for his hope in the present world³⁸:

One who is familiar with seminary formation cannot but note that what are mentioned above form part and parcel of seminary curriculum. For instance:

- a. Through the study of the bible students are drawn deeper into the mystery of God by the use of hermeneutical and exegetical tools.³⁹

³⁸ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 71.

³⁹ Decree on the Training of Priests *Optatam Totius*, Solemnly Promulgated by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI, on October 28, 1965, no. 16.

- b. In the study of Liturgy, students are tutored in the signs and symbols that make Christ present through the sacraments.⁴⁰
- c. The social teachings of the Church bring one face to face with concrete reality of preaching Christ in a world inundated with so many challenges: economic, social, cultural and political in nature. It also keeps one abreast with the Churches responses to these challenges, so that one would be able to promote and apply solutions offered by the Church to concrete situation. Again, other human sciences as stipulated in *The New Directory for Catechesis* nos. 146-147, are also taught in the seminary.
- d. On spirituality, it goes without saying that spiritual formation is one of the four pillars of formation.⁴¹ Students are led to develop more intimate relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- e. **Catechesis and Theology**
Catechesis depends on sound theology in order to teach the authentic doctrines of the Church. The contents of what is proposed for the formation of catechist⁴² as well as that of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* are condensed forms of theology that is taught in the seminary.

However, even though catechesis depends on theology for its content, it must not lay “any claim to tackle all disputed questions or to transform itself into theological research or scientific exegesis.”⁴³

⁴⁰The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*., Solemnly Promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI, on December 4, 1963, no. 16-17.

⁴¹ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation – Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, no. 101 – 115.

⁴² Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 233-252; Sacred Congregation for the Clergy. *New Directory for Catechesis*, no. 143 – 145.

⁴³ Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 21.

Here, the document underlines the fact that theology as a science raises and discusses questions concerning the faith. It would be wrong to carry these questions and discussions into the area of catechesis without taking into consideration the level of theological enlightenment of the audience. In fact, catechists “must refuse to trouble the minds of the children and young people, at this stage of their catechesis, with outlandish theories, useless questions and unproductive discussions, things that St. Paul often condemned in his pastoral letters 1 Tm. 1:3ff.; 4:1ff.”⁴⁴

That is why the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is arranged in such a way that it “collects all that is fundamental and common to the Christian life without "presenting as doctrines of the faith special interpretations which are only private opinions or the views of some theological school.”⁴⁵

The wealth of knowledge offered to seminarians within their period of studies is enormous. It is therefore of utmost importance that this wealth of knowledge be synthesized in such a way that it helps to build up the faith of seminarians. Lack of proper synthesis of what is learnt in the seminary would lead to crisis of faith on the part of the candidates themselves that would directly or indirectly be transferred to the people of God. An authentic formation programme would ensure that the wealth of knowledge seminarians acquire in theology, neither puts one into a state of confusion, nor be used to confuse the very people one is to teach. It is also important that students who experience crisis of faith are not allowed to carry it into the ministry. This is not an easy task. That is why acquisition of the right virtues are needed as we shall discuss below.

⁴⁴ Ibid, no. 61.

⁴⁵ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 124.

5.0. THE VIRTUES NECESSARY FOR AUTHENTIC CATECHESIS AND WITNESSING

At the beginning of this colloquium paper, we stated that “the chasm between what the Church teaches and what some seminarians and priests believe is a fact that stares us in the face.” From the ongoing, it is clear that the seminary formation programme is richly furnished with courses that avail one the opportunity to acquire knowledge necessary for authentic Christian witnessing. But the fact above shows that it is not enough to acquire the knowledge of the doctrines of the faith. Candidates need to internalize and make them part of their lives in order to transmit them to others. This is realizable through the following means:

a. Pedagogy of The Faith:

Generally speaking, Pedagogy is defined as “the art, science, or profession of teaching especially: EDUCATION” (*The Meriam Webster’s Dictionary*). This means the science of ways and means through which knowledge is imparted on different groups of people. The principles that govern the art of teaching such as experience, imagination, memory, intelligence are explored and made use of in the field of pedagogy.⁴⁶

The Church encourages the use of principles and methods developed in the field of pedagogy in communicating the Good News of salvation. However, she does not confine herself to these methods on purely scientific level alone, but elevates them to be at the service of the mystery of salvation.⁴⁷ The mystery of salvation involves both visible and invisible realities communicated to man by God.⁴⁸ Man is expected to respond to this communication by first of all seeing the convergence of these realities in God and secondly by assenting to the will of God. He (man) can only do this through the aid of faith. It is by

⁴⁶ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 70.

⁴⁷ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *New Directory for Catechesis*, no. 181.

⁴⁸ Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Dei Filius*, Solemnly Promulgated by His Holiness Pope Pius IX, on April 24, 1870, no 3.

faith that one accepts the message of the mystery of salvation. It is by faith that he communicates this mystery to others, who in turn accept it by faith.

Faith is one of the theological virtues. It is defined as “a supernatural gift of God, which enables us to believe without doubting whatever God has revealed.”⁴⁹ This is a summary of both the biblical teaching that “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1) and that of the Catechism of the Catholic Church that it is “a personal adherence of man to God. At the same time and inseparably, a free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed.”⁵⁰

In these definitions God does not only reveal himself to man, He offers man the grace to accept what He has revealed by completely submitting his intellect and will to God.⁵¹

Submitting one’s intellect and will to God does not rob one of one’s freedom or reason because according to St Thomas, “the act of believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the Divine truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God, so that it is subject to the free-will in relation to God.”⁵²

Again, “between faith and reason no true dissension can ever exist, since the same God, who reveals mysteries and infuses faith, has bestowed on the human soul the light of reason; moreover, God cannot deny Himself, nor ever contradict truth with truth.”⁵³

⁴⁹A *Catechism of Christian Doctrine Special Edition (Penny Catechism)*, no. 9

⁵⁰*Catechism of the Catholic Church (C.C.C.)*, no. 150.

⁵¹The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, Vatican II Council Promulgated by Pope Paul VI, on November 18, 1965, no. 5.

⁵² St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II – II, 2, 9. trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province Vol I, Benziger Brothers Inc. New York 1947.

⁵³The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, no. 4.

This is why in catechesis, pedagogy is placed at the service of the mystery of salvation and thus is described as pedagogy of the faith.

In fact, *The New Directory for Catechesis* traces the origin of the pedagogy of the faith back to God himself who from the very beginning “continued to communicate the truth of his mystery little by little, by degrees, until the fullness of revelation in Jesus Christ.”⁵⁴ It is the examples of this divine pedagogy that catechists are to follow, if they are to transmit the authentic doctrine of the Church.

b. Perseverance/Fortitude:

Following the example laid down by divine pedagogy is by no means an easy task. This is because according to *The New Directory for Catechesis*, “the faith demands to be known, celebrated, lived, and turned into prayer.”⁵⁵ Added to these is the fact that “every phase of life is open to the challenge of dechristianization and must above all be reinforced by ever new responses of Christian vocation.”⁵⁶ Thus, the need for fortitude on the part of those entrusted with the mission to catechize.

This is because Fortitude as one of the cardinal virtues “ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life.”⁵⁷ Firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good would enable those entrusted with the mission to catechize surmount the obstacles they encounter in their mission. It should be remembered that faced with similar situation, St. Paul admonished Timothy to “wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck

⁵⁴ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *New Directory for Catechesis*, no. 157.

⁵⁵ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *New Directory for Catechesis*, no. 79.

⁵⁶ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 170.

⁵⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (C.C.C.), no. 1808.

of their faith” (1 Tim. 1:18-19). Holding the faith and good conscience require fortitude.

However, it must be pointed out that in as much as fortitude ensures firmness and constancy, it does not abhor innovations, especially in the areas of appropriate methodology to be used in catechesis, in the face of new and ever-changing world. In fact, all the Church’s documents on catechesis encourage renewal of these methods in line with laid out principles. This is to prevent lethargy on the one hand and improvisation with its readiness for any venture on the other. According to *Catechesi Tradendae*, “Routine leads to stagnation, lethargy and eventual paralysis. Improvisation begets confusion...It is important for the Church to give proof today, as she has done at other periods of her history, of evangelical wisdom, courage and fidelity in seeking out and putting into operation new methods and new prospects for catechetical instruction.”⁵⁸

It is important to stress the role of the Holy Spirit in the whole process of acquiring these virtues.⁵⁹ In the words of Christ himself, "He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (Jn. 14: 26). And He added: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...he will declare to you the things that are to come" (Jn. 16:13).

Finally, we cannot end this paper without briefly mentioning some of the challenges those entrusted with the mission to catechize face in our time. Solution to these challenges would not be offered here. It is left for further discussions by each group bearing in mind our focus: formation of seminarians to be veritable instruments in the propagation of faith (catechesis).

⁵⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 17.

⁵⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 72.

6.0. CHALLENGES

The *New Directory for Catechesis* listed many challenges faced by those entrusted with the mission to catechize, but for our scope here, we shall concentrate on:

Catechesis in Situations of Pluralism and Complexity⁶⁰

Under this heading, the document outlines the reality of a heterogeneous and variable nature of contemporary cultures, which “needs to be interpreted in such a way that its *polyhedral* character be grasped and every aspect may be presented in its validity and uniqueness, while still in its intricate relationship with the whole.” According to it, adequate catechetical methods must be developed to suit the following socio-cultural contexts:

a. Urban/rural context:

Man by nature is a social being. He interacts with his fellow men on different levels in order to realize himself. Evidence shows that the way he interacts with his fellow men and women within the Urban and rural contexts differ significantly. This is because each context has a decisive role to play in everyday life of the human person, and to a great extent influences human understanding of life and faith. This means that in catechesis, serious efforts should be made in studying the peculiar situation of every context, in order to effectively catechize the men and women living in such ambient.

In the urban context, one can say that it is often identifiable with a serious sense of anonymity in matters of faith. In fact, it can be for many, “a singular opportunity for opening up new perspectives...it not rarely becomes the place of the greatest solitude, disappointment and distrust,” requiring therefore, “presenting in a creative manner a catechesis inspired by the catechumenate, capable of offering community context of faith.”⁶¹ The catechumenate is in the dilemma of choice, between the many opportunities of the city life, and interest in sound doctrines of faith. The rural context is not without

⁶⁰ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *New Directory for Catechesis*, no. 320.

⁶¹ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *New Directory for Catechesis*, no. 328.

its own challenge. Catechesis in such contexts, has the task of translating the gospel to the daily experiences of the people in their works, in their difficulties and even in the proper interpretation of their cultural heritage. As a general rule therefore, catechesis should be able to apply methods that address the various contexts.

b. Traditional local cultures:

Catechesis has the duty of going into dialogue with the culture of the people if it hopes to reach their hearts. As the fathers of the Vatican II council already laid down, it has the task to “gladly and reverently lay bare the seeds of the Word which lie hidden among their fellows.”⁶² The dialogue must be sincere and patient, since no culture is perfect. Thus, “being a catechist to indigenous peoples demands the humble relinquishing of attitudes of pride and contempt towards those who belong to a different culture.”⁶³

c. Popular piety:

This challenge has to do with the possibility of reconciling the content of catechesis and the religiosity of the catechized. There ought to be a careful consideration of the spirituality/piety that has arisen from the culture of the lowly, the recipients of catechesis. Catechists and pastors of souls need not force down their personal spirituality on the flock. There has to be some loving engagement. To understand this, it needs to be approached with “the gaze of the good shepherd, who seeks not to judge, but to love.”⁶⁴ Since the popular spiritual significance of popular piety is seen in the fact that “it manifests a thirst for God, which only the simple and the poor can know.”⁶⁵

d. Scientific mentality:

The increasing interest and acquaintance with the scientific life affects the faith development of our time. Scientific and

⁶² *Ad Gentes: Decree on the Mission Activities of the Church*, Vatican II Council Document, Promulgated by Pope Paul VI, on December 7, 1965, no. 11.

⁶³ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *New Directory for Catechesis*, no. 334.

⁶⁴ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *New Directory for Catechesis*, no. 336.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, no. 337.

technological developments attempt in different ways to convince the human person of his independence from God. The creation as an action of God, is put into question, and there is the ceaseless attempt to set man out as a god unto himself. This factor poses a challenge to catechesis in no small measure.

e. Digital culture:

The digital “is not only a part of the existing cultures, but is asserting itself as a new culture.”⁶⁶ This new culture continuously and rapidly poses serious challenges to catechesis, much more that has been discovered yet. It brings overwhelming and uncensored exposure that in no small way affects the understanding of life and faith. This new culture attempts the invention of it distinct language, believes and often is a source of “loneliness, manipulation, exploitation and violence, even to the extreme of the “dark web.”⁶⁷

f. Questions on Bioethics:

As the world develops and various scientific and technological discoveries are made, the value of life is continuously threatened by experts in many fields of human endeavour based on their ill formed personal convictions. The reality that God created life and all thing and declared them good makes little of no sense to such persons. This has led to various forms of crimes against human life today. It is interesting that most of these crimes are perpetuated without qualms of conscience. Questions like when does life begin? Why is life sacred? Why is In Vitro Fertilization wrong? Etc. are constantly on the lips of the modern man. It is a challenge for catechists and pastors to translate the Gospel message on life into convincing answers to these many questions.

g. Option for the poor:

The fundamental option for the poor need be highlighted in catechesis today. The poor have a special place in the Gospel of Jesus, and must continue to be so, for an authentic Gospel message.

⁶⁶ Ibid, no. 359.

⁶⁷ Ibid, no. 361.

There is the tendency to take favourable positions with the mighty of our society, neglecting the poor, who though form the majority of our brethren. This is a challenge that must be dealt with if the gospel must thrive. Catechesis must therefore not fail to note that “option for the poor contains a missionary dynamism that implies a mutual enrichment: to set them free but also to be set free by them; to heal their wounds but also to be healed by them; to evangelize them, but also to be evangelized by them.”⁶⁸ As such, mission to the poor should not be accompanied with the kind of aversion sometimes observable among catechists and pastors of souls.

For the above to be possible, adequate catechetical methods should be developed to address the challenges mentioned above. This should be done bearing in mind that “catechesis does not have a single method, but is open to evaluation of different methods, engaging in pedagogy and didactics and allowing itself to be guided by the Gospel necessary for recognizing the truth of human nature.”⁶⁹

7.0. CONCLUSION

Our intention was never to fully analyze every detail contained in the documents of the Church on catechesis. What we have done is to look at catechesis in the context of seminary formation and the need for seminarians to take catechesis seriously. Taking catechesis seriously means not only to learn the doctrines of the Church, but also to make them part and parcel of one’s life. This requires the acquisition of necessary virtues, some of which have been discussed here. It is only when one has successfully acquired these virtues that one would be disciplined enough to catechize others, not only in words, but also in deeds.

⁶⁸ Ibid, no. 387.

⁶⁹Ibid, no. 195.

Let us remember the very words of Pope Paul VI, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses."⁷⁰

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⁷⁰*Address to the Members of the Consilium de Laicis* (2 October 1974): AAS 66 (1974), p. 568. Quoted in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 41.