

Chapter One

Revelation and its transmission through evangelization

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...[for] he has made known to us the mystery of his will.” (Eph 3:1–10)

God’s providential plan is revealed to us

[36] The fundamental starting point is this:
God, whose word creates and sustains everything,
offers us humans constant evidence of divine presence
through created things.

For our part, we, by our nature and vocation,
are able to perceive this
and to be certain of God’s presence and power.
Revelation, Vatican II taught, is that act by which God
communicates God’s own self to us
making us participants in the divine nature,
and thus, accomplishing God’s plan of love.

[37] This divine plan of God,
revealed in Christ
and realized in the power of the Spirit,
leads us to see
the true dignity of the human person,
the offer of God’s grace to all people,
and the call to be the family of God.

[38] God uses a teaching style or method
of making the divine heart present to us.

Hence, in the very words of Vatican II,
“...Revelation is realized by deeds and words,
which are intrinsically bound up with each other.
As a result, the works performed by God
in the history of salvation
show forth and bear out the doctrine and realities
signified by the words;
and the words, for their part,
proclaim the works,

and bring to light the mystery they contain.”

(Constitution on Divine Revelation, article 2)

[39] Well, evangelization is also done
through words and works.

Catechesis transmits both, providing the proclamation
and also leading people to live by what they believe.
It recalls the marvels worked by God in the past
but also connects them to life today
where God’s plan is now being realized.

Jesus Christ: mediator and fullness of Revelation

[40] Down through the ages, God has revealed himself
to us, culminating in Christ,
who completed and perfected Revelation.

Jesus Christ is God’s own Son,
the final event among all the events of salvation history.

[41] Catechesis begins here:
it must show who Jesus Christ is,
his life and ministry,
and present Christian faith as the following of Christ.

Hence, catechesis must be based on the gospels.

In short, Christ is the center point of catechetical ministry.

The Church transmits Revelation through the Holy Spirit

[42] God wishes all people to be saved,
and to know the truth.

[43] To fulfill this aim,
Christ founded the Church
and gave the apostles the Holy Spirit.

The apostles then used words and deeds
to preach to the whole world.

The entire Church is responsible for continuing this work,
the pastors and all the faithful,
because the gospel is conserved whole and entire
within the Church itself.

And while the Church (all the faithful)
contemplates and meditates on this,
the Spirit continually causes the Church to grow.

[44] We can trust that the Revelation we have received is authentic

because it is carried through the centuries
by the Church's own teachers,
the Magisterium.

- [45] Hence the Church is a sacrament of salvation,
announcing the Good News through the sacraments
and communicating the divine gifts to all.

Evangelization: the purpose of the Church

- [46] Indeed, the very purpose of the Church
is to evangelize.

There are various aspects of this, which are all connected.

First there is the call to proclaim,
then to make disciples and teach,
then to witness to Christ personally,
then to baptize,
then to do this in memory of Christ,
and finally, to love one another in the process.

These are the means by which the gospel is passed on,
the means, in other words,
of evangelization.

The process of evangelization

- [47] For its part, the Church evangelizes
through witness, dialogue, and presence in charity,
through proclamation of the gospel and the call to conversion,
through the catechumenate and Christian initiation,
and through the formation of community
by means of the sacraments and their ministers.

- [48] Hence we might say the Church evangelizes
by renewing the whole world in charity,
by witnessing to Christ by the way we live,
by explicitly proclaiming the gospel and its call to conversion,
by initiating those who follow Christ into the community,
by constantly nourishing the faithful
through teaching,
celebrating sacraments,
and practicing charity,
and by arousing a sense of mission,
by word and deed,

throughout the world.

[49] Evangelization, then, varies based on its audience.

It occurs in “sacred moments” and unfolds slowly.

There is, first, missionary activity directed

toward non-believers

and those who live in religious indifference.

Then there is initial catechetical activity for those

who choose the gospel

or need to complete their initiation.

There is also pastoral activity directed toward

Christian people of mature faith

living within the community.

These moments flow together

and may be repeated

as the needs of each person and the community

call for it.

[50] In the ministry of the word

it is essential that

the name,

the teaching,

the life,

the promises,

the reign of God

and the mystery of Jesus, the Son of God,

be proclaimed explicitly.

They must be proclaimed to everyone,

including those already baptized.

The *words* used in this proclamation

must always point to the *works* of God,

to the witness of Christians,

and to the transformation of the world.

The human words used in this proclamation

are the means by which the Holy Spirit,

(who is the principal agent of evangelization)

does the divine work of salvation.

Functions and forms of the ministry of the word

[51] Here are the principal functions

of the ministry of the word:

First there is the call

both to community and to faith.

This call is issued to non-believers,
to those who have chosen unbelief,
to Christians on the margins of the Faith,
to those who follow other religions,
and to the children of Christian families.

Second there is initiation.

This is how those who are moved by grace
and decide to follow Jesus
are introduced into the life of faith.

The work of catechesis is closely connected
to the sacraments of initiation.

This work is done

with nonbaptized adults,
with baptized adults returning to their faith,
with baptized adults not yet fully initiated,
and with children and the young,
who are really newcomers to the Faith.

Even Christian education in families and schools
is initiatory in character.

Third is ongoing education in faith,
sometimes called permanent catechesis.

It is intended for Christians already initiated
but needing to nourish and deepen faith
throughout their lives.

Fourth is the liturgical function.

The homily is a chief way this is accomplished,
but celebrations of the word of God
and sacramental instruction are other ways.

Above all is the participation of the faithful
in the Eucharist
which is the primary means of education
in the Faith.

And finally, fifth is the theological function
which involves the systematic treatment
and scientific investigation of the truths
of Faith.

[52] Sometimes these functions and forms occur together and in the same action, as when a homily is both a call to Faith and an instruction.

Conversion and faith

[53] In Mark 1:15, Jesus called us to “repent and believe the good news.” Today we speak of this as “conversion and faith”; evangelization invites us to both.

Conversion is first. It is the full and sincere adherence to the person of Christ and the decision to walk in his footsteps.

Faith is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, making oneself a disciple, and it demands a permanent commitment to think, judge, and live like him.

Toward this end, the believer is united to the community of disciples and takes on the faith of the Church.

[54] Coming to faith this way involves a twofold movement within the believer: trusting abandonment to God and assent to God’s revelation.

This is possible only with the power of the Holy Spirit.

[55] And all of this, of course, demands a change of life, a *metanoia*, as it’s sometimes called, on the part of the believer.

Our interior life of prayer and assent to God, our part in the mission of the Church, our married and family life, our professional life, and our part in economic and social work— all these are affected profoundly.

Thus everything we humans can hope for, everything that brings happiness, everything that fulfills the deepest human longing is all found in superabundance only in coming to faith.

Faith responds to the “waiting”
which many of us experience
even when we don’t realize it.
We are waiting for the fresh water of the good news
of Jesus Christ.
Faith, which is a gift, will be born in our hearts
at the right moment.
Grace empowers us and we respond
in complete freedom,
turning our hearts toward God—
and lo! Faith is born.
We venerate Mary because her response
was lived so fully.

Continuing conversion

[56] Once we come to faith,
continuing conversion is set in motion
and lasts the rest of our lifetime.
Here again, several “moments” occur
in this lifelong process.
First is an initial interest in the gospel,
even without any firm decision.
This first movement of the Spirit
provides an inclination to belief.

Second is conversion itself
which occurs after a period of searching
but is fundamental in the Christian life.
This “turning toward the face of God”
leads to study, reflection, and prayer.

Third is the profession of faith.
Catechesis initiates the new believer
in the knowledge and ways of faith,
and a progressive change occurs
until one is ready to profess one’s faith fully.
There is both challenge and joy in this period.

Fourth is the journey toward perfection,
the lifelong process of growth in faith,

moved by the Spirit,
empowered by the sacraments,
nourished by prayer,
lived in the practice of charity,
and assisted by ongoing education.

[57] The ministry of the word
is at the service of this process.

The religious situation of the world today

[58] There are three basic situations in today's world
which require careful consideration.

First, there is the situation of the non-baptized
where catechesis is directed mainly to young people and adults
and invites them to conversion.

The baptismal catechumenate is the usual form.

Second are communities possessed of a strong faith,
living a witness to the gospel
and made up of people with a profound Christian outlook.

In this, catechesis for children and young people
which helps them arrive at adulthood
with mature faith
is essential.

Third are so-called Christian lands
where, however, people have lost
a living sense of faith
or where Christian reference is purely exterior
to life.

These situations require a new evangelization
directed at the already-baptized.

[59] Now, these three situations
often coexist in the same city or neighborhood,
and certainly within the same nation.

The non-baptized mingle with the fervent,
while those who have lost faith
live together with those of great faith.

In a single pastoral setting, therefore,
all three forms of evangelization are needed

and they will influence, stimulate, and assist each other.
In order to achieve a proper balance
these three principles must always be in play:
First, the primary task entrusted to the Church by Christ
is the call of non-believers to faith.
We can never supplant it
with any other form of evangelization,
no matter how urgent.
Second, the model for all catechesis
is the baptismal catechumenate
which leads adults to a specific proclamation
of faith.
This form should inspire all others
both in their objectives and their dynamism.
Third, catechesis for adults must be considered
the chief form of catechesis.
All other forms with other age groups
are in some way oriented to it.
What is needed is a coherent catechetical program
which meets local pastoral needs
based on these principles.
Catechesis will then be situated in the context
of evangelization
and the missionary mandate of Jesus
will be accomplished in the world.