

# Directory for Catechesis

## PART ONE

### CHAPTER II: THE IDENTITY OF CATECHESIS

#### 5. SOURCES OF CATECHESIS

##### **Beauty**

106. Sacred Scripture presents, in an unmistakable way, God as the source of all splendour and beauty. The Old Testament shows creation, with humanity at its pinnacle, as something that is good and beautiful, not so much in the sense of order and harmony but of gratuitousness, free of functionalism. In the presence of creation, which is to be admired and contemplated for its own sake, one feels amazement, ecstasy, an emotional and affective reaction. The works of human beings, like the splendid Temple of Solomon (cf 1 Kgs 7-8), deserve admiration in that they are connected to the Creator.

107. In the New Testament, all beauty is concentrated in the person of Jesus Christ, revealer of the divine who “reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature” (Heb 1:3). His Gospel is captivating because it is news that is beautiful, good, joyful, full of hope. He, “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14), taking humanity upon himself, recounted through the parables the beauty of God’s activity. In his relationship with men and women he spoke *beautiful words* that with their efficacy heal the depths of the soul: “Your sins are forgiven” (Mark 2:5), “Neither do I condemn you” (John 8:11), “God so loved the world” (John 3:16), “Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28). He performed *beautiful actions*: he healed, he set free, he accompanied humanity and touched its wounds. Enduring the cruelty of condemnation to death as the one who “had no form or comeliness” (Isa 53:2), he was recognised as “the fairest of the sons of men” (Ps 45:2). In this way he led humanity, purified, into the glory of the Father, where he himself is found “at the right hand of the Majesty on high,” (Heb 1:3) and has thus revealed all the transformative power of his Passover.

108. The Church, therefore, bears in mind that in order to reach the human heart the proclamation of the Risen One must shine forth with goodness, truth and beauty. In this sense, it is necessary “that every form of catechesis [...] attend to the ‘way of beauty’ (*via pulchritudinis*)”<sup>10</sup>. All beauty can be a path that helps lead to the encounter with God, but the criterion of its authenticity cannot be only that of aesthetics. There must be discernment between true beauty and the forms that are apparently beautiful but empty, or even harmful, like the forbidden fruit in the earthly paradise (cf Gen 3:6). The criteria are found in the exhortation of St Paul: “whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil 4:8).

109. Beauty is always and inseparably steeped with goodness and truth. Therefore, contemplating beauty elicits within us sentiments of joy, pleasure, tenderness, fullness,

meaning, thus opening us to the transcendent. The way of evangelisation is *the way of beauty*, and therefore every form of beauty is a source of catechesis. In demonstrating the primacy of grace, manifest in a special way in the Blessed Virgin Mary; in making known the lives of the saints as true witnesses to the beauty of the faith; in giving prominence to the beauty and mysteriousness of creation; in discovering and cherishing the incredible and immense liturgical and artistic heritage of the Church; in valuing the highest forms of contemporary art, catechesis shows concretely the infinite beauty of God, which is also expressed in the works of human beings (cf SC 122), and leads those who are catechised toward the *beautiful* gift that the Father has made in his Son.

<sup>10</sup> EG 167; cf Pontifical Council for Culture, *The Via Pulchritudinis, Privileged Pathway for Evangelisation and Dialogue: Concluding Document of the Plenary Assembly, 2006*

## PART TWO

### Chapter VII: METHODOLOGY IN CATECHESIS

#### 4. LANGUAGE

##### **The language of art**

209. The images of Christian art, when they are authentic, disclose through sensory perception that the Lord is alive, present, and working in the Church and in history<sup>5</sup>. These therefore constitute a true language of faith. There is a famous saying: “If a pagan asks you, ‘Show me your faith’ [...] you will take him to a church and bring him before the sacred icons”<sup>6</sup>. This iconographic repertoire, albeit in a great and legitimate variety of styles, was in the first millennium a shared treasure of the undivided Church and played an important role in evangelisation, because in having recourse to the mediation of universal symbols it touched the deepest desires and sentiments that are capable of effecting an inner transformation. In our era, therefore, images can help people to have an experience of the encounter with God through the contemplation of their beauty. These images in fact bring to bear upon the one who contemplates them, the gaze of an invisible Other, providing access to the reality of the spiritual and eschatological world.

210. The employment of images in catechesis hearkens back to an ancient insight of the Church. Amongst other things, they help believers to get to know and to memorise the events of salvation history in a more rapid and immediate way. What is called the “*biblia pauperum*”, an organised collection, visible to all, of biblical episodes represented in various artistic expressions in the cathedrals and churches, is still a true form of catechesis today. When works of art are selected carefully, they can contribute to displaying in an immediate way multiple aspects of the truths of the faith, touching hearts and assisting in the internalisation of the message.