

who live but Christ who lives in me." And one step further: a "law," such as that of the Old Covenant, always has a purpose and presents an achievement, but Jesus' death, "because he loves me," is given purely *gratis*, from an unfathomable depth of love. Hence, my response must similarly come from a freely given love, which Paul calls "faith." It is because of this fact that Paul says he "died to the law" (Gal. 2:19-20).

Information, even when it is a creed, can remain totally objective because its very purpose is to express objectively that the Christian revelation is unlike all other religions. The illuminating statement, "God is love" (a statement no other religion could dare to make) holds up only if all major aspects of Christian truth are seen as an interrelated whole: the Trinity made manifest in the Incarnation; Jesus' Passion for us and his Resurrection; his Eucharist (*communio sanctorum scilicet rerum*) within an apostolic, visible Church; lifting the whole person, body and soul, into the eternal life of the Trinity ("resurrection"). In order to make this complex interrelatedness believable, the catechist must rely on good theology, the kind that does not lose itself in anemic, fruitless speculation, or suppress essential aspects of the faith for the sake of fashion or polemic,<sup>3</sup> but presents the main articles of revelation in a "form" that even "simple faith," the kind praised by Jesus, can comprehend at one spiritual glance. The catechist, therefore, has to make it clear to his listeners why the whole edifice is endangered, yes, might be destroyed, if a supporting stone is removed from the framework. There is no hierarchy of truth (*hierarchia veritatum*) among the essential elements that would permit downgrading what is uncomfortable. Only when Revelation and faith are totally integrated do they, in their unity, meet all human situations and all generations. Only this gives a satisfactory answer to the questions of why and wherefore asked by the old as well as the young.—Translated by Andrée Emery □

<sup>3</sup>An example of this: the sentence, "The Eucharist is a meal" is, of course, true, but is used mostly polemically against its sacrificial character. Yet it is clear that Christ's sacrifice (the *analogatum princeps* in the concept of sacrifice: all other "sacrifices" in paganism and Judaism at best foreshadow it) is not fulfilled without the participation of a loving mankind: the Mother and John under the cross are an expression of this. Whoever receives the one thus sacrificed in the eucharist cannot give thanks to the Father for it (*eucharistia*) without giving his whole self to and with Jesus' self-sacrifice (Heb. 7:27). Many prayers of the Mass express this.

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## Sources and transmission of the faith

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger

The crisis of catechesis and of the sources of our faith must be addressed if catechesis is to remain a vital function of the Church.

The last word the Lord addressed to his apostles ordered them to go into the whole world to make disciples (Matt. 28:19; Luke 16:15; Acts 1:7). The message is addressed to all because it is the truth, and man cannot be saved without the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). It is, therefore, of the essence of faith—the interiorization of the message—that it be transmitted. That is why catechesis, transmission of the faith, has been from the beginning a vital function of the Church, and it must stay that way so long as the Church endures. □

### 1. The crisis of catechesis and the problem of sources: general characteristics of the crisis

The present difficulties of catechesis are too well known to need any detailed description. The causes and consequences of the crisis have been often and abundantly described.<sup>1</sup> In the world of technology, which is a creation of man, it is not

<sup>1</sup>Episcopal Conference of France, *La catéchèse des enfants* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1980), pp. 11-26.

the Creator whom one first encounters; rather, man encounters only himself. The basic structure of the world of technology is to be "practical." Its certitudes are those of the calculable. That is why the question of salvation is not posed in terms of God, who appears nowhere, but in function of the power of man who wants to become his own constructor and the master of his own history. He no longer looks for the criteria of his ethics in a discourse on creation or the Creator, for these have become unknown to him. Creation no longer has an ethical resonance for him, but only speaks to him in a mathematical language in terms of technical usefulness, except when it protests against the violence to which creation has to submit. Even then the moral appeal which creation addresses to man remains indeterminate. In the final analysis morality is identified in one or another way with sociability, that of man to man and that of man with his milieu. From this point of view, ethics has become also a question of calculating the best conditions for future development. Society, too, has been deeply changed. The family, the nurturing cell of Christian culture, appears in the process of dissolution. When metaphysical bonds no longer count, other kinds cannot long maintain themselves. On the one hand, this new image of the world is reflected in the mass media, and on the other hand, it is fed by them. The representation of the world by the mass media makes a bigger impact today on consciousness than does personal experience of reality. All of this influences catechesis, for which the classical supports of a Christian society have been destroyed. Catechesis can no longer lean on a lived experience of the faith in a living Church; the faith seems condemned to remain dumb in a time when language and consciousness are nourished only from the experience of a world which thinks it is its own creator.

Practical theology has devoted itself energetically to this problem in the last decades, in order to work out new and better adapted ways for the transmission of the faith. Meanwhile, many indeed have become convinced that these efforts have contributed more to worsening than to resolving the crisis. It would be unjust to accept such a sweeping condemnation, but it would be just as wrong to deny it purely and simply. It was an initial and grave error to suppress the catechism and to declare obsolete the whole idea of catechisms. To be sure, the catechism as a kind of book only became common at the time of the Reformation, but the transmission of the faith, as a fundamental structure born of the logic of the faith, is as old as the catechumenate, that is to say, as old as the Church itself. It flows from

the very nature of the Church's mission, and so one cannot give it up. The rupture with the transmission of the faith as fundamental structure drawn from the sources of a total tradition has had as a consequence the fragmentation of the proclamation of the faith. The faith was arbitrarily dealt with in the way in which it was explicated, and some of its parts were called into question, despite the fact that they belong to a whole, separated from which they appear disparate and meaningless.

What lay behind this erroneous decision, so hasty and yet so universal? There are various reasons which up until now have hardly been looked at. It certainly has something to do with the general evolution of teaching and pedagogy, which is itself characterized by an excess of method in relation to the content of the various disciplines. The methods become criteria for the content rather than just the vehicle. The offer is determined by the demand; it is in these terms that the ways of the new catechesis were defended in the debate over the Dutch catechism.<sup>2</sup> Thus it was necessary to limit oneself to questions for beginners instead of looking for ways to go beyond to things not yet understood. Yet this latter is the only method which positively modifies man and the world. Thus, the faith's potential for change was paralyzed. From that point, practical theology was no longer understood as a concrete development of dogmatic or systematic theology but as having a value in itself. This corresponds perfectly with the new tendency to subordinate theory to praxis, which, in the context of Neo-Marxist and positivist philosophies, was making headway even in theology.<sup>3</sup> All these things have the effect of a restricting anthropology: the priority of method over content means the domination of anthropology over theology, in the sense that theology has to find a place for itself in a radical anthropocentrism. The decline of anthropology in its turn causes new centers of gravity to appear: the reign of sociology, again with the primacy of experience as new criteria for the understanding of the traditional faith.

Behind these and other causes one can find that, for the refusal of the catechism and for the collapse of classical catechesis, there is hidden a more profound process. The fact that one no longer has the courage to present the faith as an organic whole in itself, but only as selected reflections of partial anthropological experiences, is founded in a certain distrust of the totality. It is to be explained by a crisis of the faith, or more

<sup>2</sup>Details in J. Ratzinger, *Dogma und Verkündigung* (Munich, 1973), p. 70.

<sup>3</sup>J. Ratzinger, *Theologische Prinzipienlehre* (Munich, 1982), p. 334ff.

exactly, of the common faith of the Church of all times. The result was that one left dogma out of catechesis and attempted to reconstruct the faith directly from the Bible. Now, dogma is nothing other than interpretation of Scripture, but that interpretation, born of the faith of centuries, seemed unable to be accorded with the understanding of the texts to which in the meantime the historical method had led. So two apparently irreducible forms of interpretation seem to coexist: historical interpretation and dogmatic interpretation. But the latter, according to contemporary conceptions, could only be taken for a prescientific stage on the way to the new interpretation. Thus it seemed difficult to accord it a proper place. When scientific certitude is considered the only valid form of certitude, indeed the only possible one, then the dogmatic form had to be seen as either archaic or as something imposed by the will-to-power of surviving institutions.

*Catechesis, Bible, and dogma*

We are now at the central point of our subject, the problem of the proper place of the "sources" in the process of the transmission of the faith. A catechesis which develops the faith directly from the Bible, without passing through dogma, pretends to be especially derived from the sources. But here a curious phenomenon occurs. The sentiment of freshness provoked at first by direct contact with the Bible turned out not to last. At first, to be sure, it brought about much fecundity, beauty and richness in the transmission of the faith. One breathed in the "odor of the land of Palestine," one relived the human drama in the midst of which the Bible was born. More human and concrete truth resulted. But soon appeared the ambiguity of the project, which J.A. Möhler described classically already 150 years ago. What the Bible brings in the way of beauty and immediacy, which one cannot do without, is described thus by Möhler:

Without Scripture, the proper form of Jesus' own words would remain hidden, we would not know how the Son of man spoke, and I do not think I would want to go on living if I could no longer hear him.<sup>4</sup>

But Möhler at once underscored why the Scripture cannot be separated from the living community in which, alone, it can be "Scripture." He continues,

But, without tradition, we would not know who spoke nor what he announced, and the joy which comes from his way of speaking would also have evaporated.<sup>5</sup>

From another angle, the same evolution of a catechesis linked only to a literary study of the sources has been described by Albert Schweitzer in a book devoted to the historiography of research into the life of Jesus:

What happened to research into the life of Jesus is unique. It started out in search of the historical Jesus, and it thought it could place him in our time just as he was, as Master and Savior. It undid the bonds which, for centuries, united him to the rock of the Church's teaching and rejoiced in seeing his silhouette begin to live and move and the historic Jesus begin to come to meet us. But look what happened! He did not stop, he passed by our time and returned towards his own.<sup>6</sup>

In fact this process, the theological evolution of which Schweitzer thought he had stopped almost a century ago, repeats itself in a new way and with various modifications in modern catechesis. For the documents that one has tried to read without any other intermediary than that of the historical method get farther away as they become more distant from the historical fact. An exegesis which lives and understands the Bible no longer with the living organism of the Church becomes archeology, a museum of past things.

Concretely, this is seen in the fact that the Bible falls apart as Bible, to become nothing more than a collection of heterogeneous books. This then raises the questions of how to assimilate that literature and by what criteria choose the texts with which to build a catechesis. Just how far this has gone can be seen by a letter sent to a review in Germany, suggesting that new editions of the Bible be printed with all the superannuated passages in small type. But what is outmoded, and what remains valid? In the final analysis, it is left to taste to decide, and the Bible would be reduced to serving our good pleasure. There is another way the Bible falls apart. In looking for the primitive element, the only thing considered reliable and sure, one is in collision with sources that are older, knowledge of which we can reconstruct from the Bible, although the Bible has come to be considered more important than the real source. A German mother told me one day that her son, who was in primary school, was being introduced to the Christology of the so-called "logia of the Lord"; but he had not yet heard a word of the seven sacraments or the articles of the Creed. The point of this little story is

<sup>4</sup>J.A. Möhler, *L'unité dans l'Eglise* (Paris, 1938), p. 52.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>W.G. Kümmel, *Das Neue Testament-Geschichte der Erforschung seiner Probleme* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau, 1958), p. 305.

this: with the criterion of the most ancient literary stratum as the surest historical witness, the real Bible disappears to make way for a reconstructed Bible, a Bible as it ought to have been. It is the same thing with Jesus: the "Jesus" of the gospels is considered to be a Christ who has been considerably rearranged by dogma, behind whom we must come back to the Jesus of the *logia* or some other supposed source to find the real Jesus. But this "real" Jesus does and says only what we want him to. He spares, for example, the cross as expiatory sacrifice; the cross is reduced to the dimensions of a scandalous accident, on which one should not dwell excessively. The Resurrection becomes also an experience of the disciples according to which Jesus, or at least his "reality," continues. One no longer dwells on the events but rather on the consciousness of the disciples or the "community." The certitude of faith is replaced by confidence in the historical hypothesis. I find this process irritating. Confidence in historical hypothesis, in many presentations of catechism, takes precedence over the certitude of faith. This latter has fallen to the level of a vague confidence without precise outlines. But life is not a hypothesis, and neither is death; one locks oneself up in an intellectual ivory tower, which is self-constructed and just as easily ceases to exist.

**B**ut coming back to our subject, let us sum up what has been said to this point. If before it was the case that the Bible entered into the teaching of the faith only under the aspect of a doctrine of the Church, now one tries to have access to Christianity by means of a direct dialogue between present experience and the biblical word. The gain from that approach was an increase in concrete humanity in the exposition of the Christian fact. In doing this, dogma was usually not directly denied, but it fell to the level of providing a kind of general frame of orientation of little importance for the content and the structure of the catechesis. In the background, there was a certain perplexity about dogma. That was due to the lack of clarification of the relationship between dogmatic reading and an historical-critical reading of Scripture. As this evolution went on, Scripture, left to itself, seemed to dissolve. It was constantly submitted to new "readings." In this seeking to make the past present, personal or community experience became the decisive criterion of what remains relevant. Thus was born a kind of theological empiricism, in which group experience of the community or that of

"experts" becomes the last source. The common sources are then channelled in such a way that one no longer recognizes much of their original dynamism. They used to reproach the traditional catechesis for leading to the sources only after filtering, but today the old channels seem like torrents compared to the new methods of controlling the sources. A central question poses itself today, then, and this question focuses our subject: how is the water of the sources to be conserved pure during the transmission of the faith? With that question two essential problems appear for the present situation: the relation of dogmatic exegesis to historical-critical exegesis and relationships between method and content, between experience and faith.

The first question, on the relation of dogmatic to historical-critical exegesis, is also the question of the relationship which needs to be established between the living tissue of the tradition on the one hand, and rational methods of reconstituting the past on the other. However, it is also the question of the two levels of thought and life: what is then in fact the place of the rational articulation of science in the whole of human existence and its encounter with the real?

The second question seems to us to consist in the determination of the relationship between method and content, between experience and faith. It is clear that faith without experience can only be verbiage of empty formulas. The reverse is also evident: to reduce faith to experience is to rob it of its kernel. We would wander into the domain of the untried, and, being imprisoned in the narrowness of our own experiences, we could not say with Psalm 31, "You have given me space to move."

## 2. Towards overcoming the crisis: what is the faith?

Only an unacceptable academicism would want to wait until "the discussion is finished" before undertaking a renewal of catechesis. Life does not wait for theory to have finished its elaboration. Rather, theory needs the initiatives of life which is always of "today." Faith is itself *anticipation* of that which is presently inaccessible. It is thus that it rejoins the inaccessible in our lives and leads us to surpass ourselves. To put it another way: for a proper renewal, both theoretical and practical, of the transmission of faith and a true renewal of catechesis, the questions which have just been posed have to be recognized as real questions and brought to some kind of a conclusion. Now the impossibility of our renouncing theory, even in the Church and as regards faith itself, does not mean that faith has to be

dissolved into theory, nor that it depends totally on theory. Theological discussion is possible, in principle, and is meaningful only if and because there is, permanently, an advance on the real. That is what the First Letter of John is talking about so insistently, apropos of a crisis very similar to our own: "You have the anointing that comes from the Holy One, so that all knowledge is yours" (1 John 2:20). This means: your baptismal faith, the knowledge that was transmitted to you by the sacramental anointing, is a contact with reality itself, which has, from that point on, an advance over all theory. It is not the faith given in baptism that has to justify itself in the eyes of theory, but rather theories which have to justify themselves in the light of reality, before the knowledge of the truth which is granted in the baptismal confession. A few verses later the Apostle draws a clear line around the intellectual demands which are called "gnosis." For what is at issue is the very existence of Christianity or its recuperation by the philosophy of the time. The Apostle says:

The anointing you have received (*the knowledge of the faith in communion of the Spirit with the Church*) remains in you, and you do not need someone to teach it to you. But since his anointing instructs you about everything (*his anointing: the christological faith of the Church, gift of the Spirit*) and because it is true and without deception, as the Church has taught you, you are to dwell within it (1 John 2:27).

This passage, by the authority of him who had touched the Incarnate Word, warns the faithful to resist theories which would dissolve the faith in the name of the authority of pure reason. It tells Christians that their judgment—that of the simple faith of the Church—has a higher authority than that of theological theories, for their faith expresses the life of the Church, which is above theological explications and their hypothetical certitudes.<sup>7</sup>

Now with these references to the primacy of the baptismal faith over all didactic and theological theories, we are at the heart of the answer to the fundamental questions which have been raised. But in order to elaborate better and deepen these views, we must formulate our question more sharply. What we need is a better understanding of what is meant by faith and by source of faith.

The ambiguity of the term "to believe" comes from the fact that it applies to two different spiritual attitudes. In everyday language, "to believe" means "to think that, to suppose," which is a lower degree of knowledge about a reality concerning which we do not yet enjoy certitude. Now it is commonly admitted that Christian faith itself is a set of supposi-

tions about subjects concerning which we have no exact knowledge. But such a view completely misses its object. The most important Catholic catechism, *The Roman Catechism*, published under Pius V following the Council of Trent (and to which we shall refer often below) says—on the subject of the goal and content of catechesis, which is the summation of Christian knowledge—in conformity with a saying of Jesus reported by Saint John:

Eternal life is that they know You, the true God, and the One whom You have sent, Jesus Christ (John 17:3).<sup>8</sup>

Having said this, *The Roman Catechism*, meaning to make precise the content and finality of all catechesis, explains in a fundamental manner what faith is: to believe is to find and realize life, true life. It is not a question of some power or other which one can pursue or leave alone, but rather of the power of learning to live, and to live a life which can last forever. St. Hilary of Poitiers, who wrote a work on the Trinity in the fourth century, similarly described the starting point of his own search for God: he had finally understood that life is not given in order to die. He recognized at the same time that the two goals of life, which are the content of life, are insufficient—neither the possession nor the tranquil enjoyment of life are sufficient. "Goods and security"—that is just what life cannot be content to be, lest man obey primarily his stomach and his laziness.<sup>9</sup>

The summit of life can only be reached at the point where there is something much more: knowledge and love. Only *relation* gives life its richness: relation with the other, relation with the universe. Nevertheless, that double relation itself is still not enough, "for eternal life is in knowing You." Faith is life because it is relation, that is to say, it is knowledge which becomes love, love which comes from knowledge and which leads to knowledge. Just as faith designates a power different from that which comes from individual actions—the power of living—so too it possesses another domain than that of knowledge of particular beings, that of fundamental knowledge itself, thanks to which we become aware of our foundation: we learn to accept it, and thanks to it we can live. The essential duty of catechesis,

<sup>7</sup>This is the basic position of St. Irenaeus in his confrontation with gnosticism, so important for the foundation of Catholic theology, foundational in a decisive manner for the doctrine of the Church and received as such.

<sup>8</sup>*Catechism of the Council of Trent*, Art. 10.

<sup>9</sup>St. Hilary of Poitiers, *De trinitatis* I, 1 and 2.

then, is to lead to the knowledge of God and of the One he has sent, just as the Catechism of Trent says.

Our reflections have brought us to think about what we might call the personal character of our faith. But that is only half of the story. The other half is also described in the First Letter of St. John. In the first verse, the Apostle characterizes his experience as a "vision" and a "contract" with the Word, who is life and who offers himself to the touch because he became flesh. Hence the mission of the Apostles, which is to transmit what they have seen and heard "in order that you, too, with us, can enter into communion" with that Word (1 John 1:1-4). The faith is not then just an encounter with God and the Christ, but it is also this contact which opens a contact with those to whom God has communicated himself. This communion, we should add, is the gift of the Spirit, who throws down a bridge for us towards the Father and the Son. Faith then is not only an "I" and a "Thou," it is also a "We." In this "we" lives the memorial which makes us rediscover what we had forgotten: God and the One he has sent.

To put it another way, there is no faith without Church. Henri de Lubac has shown that the "I" of the Christian confession of faith is not the isolated "I" of the individual but the collective "I" of the Church.<sup>10</sup> When I say, "I believe," it means that I go beyond the frontiers of my subjectivity, in order to integrate myself with the "I" of the Church, which at the same time means integrating myself with its knowledge which goes beyond the limits of time. The act of faith is always an act by which one enters into communion with a whole. It is an act of communion through which one lets oneself be integrated into the communion of witnesses, so that through them we touch the intangible, hear the inaudible, see the invisible. Cardinal de Lubac has also shown that we do not believe in the Church as we believe in God, but that our faith is fundamentally an act accomplished with the whole Church.<sup>11</sup> Every time one thinks he can neglect the faith of the Church to be able, in catechesis, to draw directly from the Scriptural source a more direct and precise knowledge, he enters into the domain of abstraction. For then he no longer thinks, lives and speaks in function of a certitude which goes beyond his own personal possibilities and which is founded on a memory anchored in the bases of the faith and derived from it. One no longer speaks then in virtue of a delegation which goes beyond the powers of the individual; on the contrary, one plunges into that other kind of faith which is only opinion, more or less founded on the unknown. Under these

circumstances, catechesis is reduced to being only one theory alongside others, a power like the others. It can no longer be the study and reception of true life, of eternal life.

#### What are the "sources"?

When we look at the faith like that, even the question of the "sources" gets posed differently. When about thirty years ago I tried to make a study of the way Revelation was treated in thirteenth-century theology, I collided with an unexpected fact: nobody in that period ever thought to call the Bible "Revelation," nor was it called "source." It is not that they held the Bible in less esteem than today. On the contrary, they had a less conditional respect for it, and it was clear that theology must not and could not be anything else but interpretation of Scripture. It was their idea of the harmony between Scripture and life that was different. That is why they applied the word "Revelation," on the one hand, only to an act which was never expressible in human words and by which God made himself known to his creature and, on the other hand, to the reception by which the divine condescendence became perceptible to man under the form of Revelation. Everything that must be fixed in words, thus Scripture itself, testifies to the Revelation without being that Revelation in the strict sense of the word. Only Revelation itself is properly speaking "source," a source on which Scripture itself also draws. If one detaches it from the vital context of the divine condescendence in the "us" of believers, from that point faith is ripped out of its natural soil, and reduced to being nothing but "letter" and "flesh."<sup>12</sup> When, much later, the historical concept of "source" was applied to the Bible, one eliminated its internal capacity for going beyond itself, a capacity which nonetheless belongs to its very essence, and one thus reduced it to one of the dimensions of its possible readings. This single-dimension reading could attain nothing but the historically likely. But that God

<sup>10</sup>Henri de Lubac, *Paradoxe et mystère de l'Eglise* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1967).

<sup>11</sup>Henri de Lubac, *La foi chrétienne: essai sur la structure du Symbole des Apôtres* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1969; 2nd ed. 1970), pp. 201-234. See also J. Ratzinger, *Theologische*, pp. 15-27. Important and illuminating in this regard is what Louis Bouyer underlines in *Le métier de théologien* (Paris: France-Empire, 1979), pp. 207-227.

<sup>12</sup>For the general problematic see de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, 3 vols. (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1959, 1961, 1964).

acts is something which cannot be made to be contained in the categories of the "historically likely" as judged by the human historian.

If one considers the Bible as nothing but a source in the sense of modern historical method (which it *is* also, of course), then logically only the historian is competent to interpret it. Then, however, it can only furnish us with historical information. The historian as such must make of the notion of God acting in some time and place a useless hypothesis.

If, on the contrary, the Bible is the condensation of a process of Revelation which is much greater and inexhaustible, if its content is perceptible to the reader only when he is open to that much higher dimension, then the sense of the Bible is not diminished. What changes utterly is the competence to interpret it. That means that this competence belongs to a whole network of references by which the living God communicates himself in the Christ by the Holy Spirit. That means that it is expression and instrument of the communion thanks to which the divine "I" and the human "Thou" touch one another in the "We" of the Church through the intermediary of Christ. It is then part of a living organism from which it draws its origin, an organism which, through the vicissitudes of history, nonetheless conserves its identity and which, as a result, can, so to speak, claim its "rights of authorship" from the Bible as a resource which is its own. That the Bible, like any work of art and much more than any work of art, says more than we are now able to comprehend from its letter, comes from the fact that it expresses a Revelation, reflected but not exhausted by the word. That also explains why, where the Revelation has been "perceived" and is once again become living, there follows a union with the Word more profound than that which is analyzed as a text. The "sympathy" of the saints with the Bible, their sufferings shared with the Word, makes them understand more profoundly than the savants of the "Enlightenment" were ever able to. That is a completely logical result. But at the same time it makes understandable both the phenomenon of Tradition and that of the Magisterium of the Church.<sup>13</sup>

What does all this have to do with our subject? If what we have said is right, then it means that the historical sources must always flow together with the source par excellence, which is God who acts in Christ. That source is accessible in no other way than in the living organism which he has created and keeps alive. In that organism the books of Scripture and the commentaries of the Church which explain the faith are no

longer dead witnesses of past events but elements which bear a new life. They have never ceased to be present there and to open the frontiers of the present. From the moment they lead us towards him who holds time in his hand, they render the frontiers of time penetrable. The past and the present rejoin in the today of the Faith.<sup>14</sup>

*The structure of catechesis: the four master components*

The internal cohesion between the Word and the organism which bears it prepares the way for catechesis. Its structure appears through the principal events in the life of the Church, which correspond to the essential dimensions of Christian existence. Thus is born from the earliest time a catechetical structure, the kernel of which goes back to the origins of the Church. Luther used that structure for his catechism just as naturally as did the authors of the Catechism of Trent. That was possible because it was not a question of an artificial system, but simply of the synthesis of mnemonic material indispensable to the faith, which reflects at the same time elements vitally indispensable to the Church: the Apostles' Creed (also known as the Symbol of the Apostles), the Sacraments, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. These four classical and master components of catechesis have served for centuries as the depository and résumé of Catholic teaching. They have also opened access to the Bible as to the life of the Church. We have just said that they correspond to the dimensions of Christian existence. That is what the *Roman Catechism* affirms in saying that we find there what the Christian should believe (the Creed-Symbolon), hope (Our Father), and do (Ten Commandments) and in what vital space he is to accomplish these things (sacraments and Church).<sup>15</sup> At the same time, the agreement with the four degrees of exegesis, so well known to the Middle Ages, becomes obvious, and also answers the questions posed by the four stages of human existence.

There is, first of all, the *literal* sense of Scripture,

<sup>13</sup>The biblical presuppositions of these relations and the necessity of reading the Bible in its own perspective are dealt with from a linguistic point of view by P.G. Müller, *Der Traditionsprozess im Neuen Testament* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau, 1981); an important point of view in H. Gese, *Zur biblischen Theologie* (Munich, 1977), pp. 9-30.

<sup>14</sup>Thus the "today" and "tomorrow" in the Advent and the Lenten liturgies is not just a verbal game but rather the faith's interpretation of reality.

<sup>15</sup>*Catechism of the Council of Trent*, Art. 12.

which comes from attending to the historic roots of the events in the Bible. Then follows the *allegoric* sense, that is to say the intuition and interiorization of these events with a view to going beyond them—thanks to which the reported historic facts are part of a salvation history. Finally, there are the *moral* and *anagogical* senses, which bring to view how action follows from being and how history, beyond the event, is hope and sacrament of the future.<sup>16</sup> We need to renew this old study of the four senses of Scripture; it explains the indispensable place of historical exegesis, but it just as clearly shows its limits and its necessary context.

There is an internal logic to this mnemonic collection of master components which we have just outlined. That is why the *Roman Catechism* properly characterized them as “the place of biblical exegesis.” In today’s scientific language one would say that they are to be taken as fixed points in the topics and hermeneutics of Scripture.<sup>17</sup>

I do not see why anyone wants simply to abandon this simple structure, just as correct theologically as it is pedagogically. At the start of the new movement in catechetics this structure was taken to be naive. It was thought they could build a Christian systematization which would be utterly logical and convincing. But such research belongs to theology, not to catechetics, which rarely lasts much longer than its authors. At the opposite extreme they proposed abolition of all structure, and the blind choice made in function of the present situation was an inevitable reaction to the excesses of systematic thought.

#### *Reflections on two problems of content*

The goal of this article is not to spell out the details of those four master parts of catechesis. I am only treating here problems of structure. Still, I cannot avoid a few brief reflections on two elements of that structure which seem today especially menaced: our faith in God the Creator and in creation, and the Ten Commandments.

The first point is that of our faith in God the Creator and in creation as an element in the symbol of the faith of the Church. From time to time there surfaces the fear that too much emphasis on that can somehow harm Christology.<sup>18</sup> In some presentations of Neo-Scholastic theology, the danger seems real enough. Today, though, it is the opposite that is to be feared. The marginalization of the doctrine of creation reduces the notion of God and, as a result, Christology with it. The religious

phenomenon is no longer explained except in psychological and sociological terms. The material world is confined to the domain of physics and technology. But it is only if being, including matter, is conceived as coming from the hand of God and as being maintained by the hand of God that God is really our Savior and our life, the true life. The tendency today is to avoid the issue wherever the message of faith puts us in the presence of matter and to stay in the symbolic realm. That starts with creation, it continues with the virgin birth of Jesus and his Resurrection, and it finishes with the real presence of Christ in the consecrated bread and wine, as well as with our own resurrection and the Parousia of the Lord. It is not just a minor theological discussion that is at issue when one places the individual resurrection at the moment of death, and thus denies the reality of the soul and the reality of salvation for the body.<sup>19</sup> That is why a decisive renewal of faith in the creation constitutes a necessary condition for the credibility and the deepening of Christology as well as for eschatology.

The second element of the catechetical structure menaced today is the Ten Commandments. It was because of a basic misunderstanding of St. Paul’s criticism of the Law that many came to think that the Ten Commandments as law must be eliminated from catechesis and replaced by the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount. This was not only a misunderstanding

<sup>16</sup>Cf. H. de Lubac, *Histoire et esprit. L’intelligence de l’Ecriture d’après Origène* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1950).

<sup>17</sup>The Introduction of the *Roman Catechism*, 12, speaks of these four common places (*lieux commun*) of theology; Chapter 13 treats of the first of these four components; the word “source” means that every biblical pronouncement can be reduced to one of these *lieux commun*, to which the catechist should refer “as to the source of the doctrine which is to be explained.” That seems to me important, both for the use of a “source” and for a practical understanding of what Christian teaching contains: the Bible is not considered to be the source of the four components of the Faith (in a hierarchical perspective); rather, it is from the four components that are the source from which flow the biblical pronouncements. This applies as well for the Decalogue in its relationship to the juridic books of the Old Testament, as H. Gese, *Zur biblischen*, pp. 55-84, showed with a scientific exegesis. One can show it in an analogic way for the other four components.

<sup>18</sup>This fear is recalled by the French Episcopal Conference, *La catéchèse des enfants*, p. 37, which rightly recalls elsewhere, “one cannot speak Christianly of God the Creator except in the light of Jesus Christ risen.”

<sup>19</sup>On this problematic see J. Ratzinger, *La mort et l’au delà. Court traité d’espérance chrétienne* (Paris: Fayard, 1979), and my article, “Entre la mort et la résurrection,” *Revue catholique internationale Communio* 5, no. 3 (1980): 4-19.



ing of the Decalogue but also of the Sermon on the Mount and, indeed, of the whole internal structure of the Bible. St. Paul, on the contrary, characterized the passage from the Law to the New Testament as "the fulfillment of the Law by love," and to explain that fulfillment he referred expressly to the Decalogue (Rom. 13:8-10; cf. Lev. 19:8; Exod. 20:13ff.; Deut. 5:17).<sup>20</sup> When the Decalogue is pushed out of catechesis, it is the fundamental structure of catechesis which suffers. There is no longer any real introduction to the faith of the Church.<sup>21</sup>

#### *The formal structure of catechesis*

I would like to finish with two observations on the essential theological questions which occupied the first part of this essay: the relations between dogmatic exegesis and historical exegesis, and between the method and the content of catechesis.

At the start of the return to Scripture, at the same time as the abandonment of traditional dogmatic catechesis, there was fear that a connection with dogma would not leave true liberty for a comprehensive reading of the Bible. The way in which the dogmatic tradition had effectively practiced scriptural exegesis amply justified that fear. But today we note that only the context of the ecclesial tradition puts the catechist in a position to hold to the whole Bible and the true Bible. Today, we see that it is only in the context of the communal faith of the Church that one can accept the Bible quite literally and hold what it says for actual reality as much for our world today as for its history. This state of affairs legitimizes the dogmatic interpretation of the Bible even from an historical point of view: the hermeneutic locus which is the Church is the only one which can get the writings of the Bible admitted and accepted as Holy Scripture and their declarations accepted as meaningful and true. Nevertheless, there will always be a certain tension between new questions of history and the continuity of the faith. But at the same time it is clear to us that the traditional faith does not constitute the enemy but rather the guarantor of a fidelity to the Bible which is conformed to the methods of history.

The second and last reflection brings us back to the question of the relationships between the method and the content of catechesis. The modern reader may be surprised to learn that the *Roman Catechism* of the sixteenth century has a very vivid awareness of catechetical method. We read in it, for instance, that a certain teaching should be delivered in such and such a

manner. Catechesis, then, must be up on the age, the capacity for understanding, the life style and the social situation of the hearers, in order to be all things for all. The catechist must know who needs milk and who needs solid food in order to adapt his teaching to the needs of each. The striking thing for us is that the *Roman Catechism* left the catechist more freedom than present-day catechesis. It leaves to the catechist the choice of the order in which things are to be presented, with regard to the hearers and the circumstances. It presupposes also, it is true, that the catechist live and make his own the matter of his teaching through a continuous meditation and an interior assimilation, and that, in the choice of his own outline, he not fail to keep in mind the necessity of ordering it in relation to the four master elements of catechesis.<sup>22</sup>

The *Roman Catechism* does not prescribe a certain didactic method. Rather, it says that regardless of the order chosen by the catechist, it has chosen for its book the way of the Fathers.<sup>23</sup> In other words, it puts at the catechist's disposal the fundamental and indispensable structure along with the materials with which to fill it; but it does not eliminate the need for the catechist to find for himself the appropriate transmission for his use in a particular concrete situation. Without doubt, the *Roman Catechism* presupposes the existence of a secondary literature, thanks to which the catechist would be helped in his task, but which does not presume to preprogram the catechesis to meet all particular situations.

That distinction of levels is, in my own view, essential. The misery of the new catechesis lies in the failure to distinguish the "text" from its "commentary." The "text," that is to say the content of that which is to be announced, is diluted more and more in the commentaries; but the commentary has nothing left to comment on; it has become its own measure and loses, by that very fact, its importance. I believe that the distinction made by the *Roman Catechism* between the fundamental text (the content of the faith of the Church) and the spoken or written texts used in its transmission belongs to the very essence of cate-

<sup>20</sup>H. Gese, *Zur biblischen*.

<sup>21</sup>The French Episcopal text, *La catéchèse des enfants*, p. 59, has the merit of having situated correctly the Decalogue. Likewise what is said (on p. 57) about catechesis as "a sacramentally structured process (*démarche*)" agrees with our position.

<sup>22</sup>*Catechism of the Council of Trent*, Art. 13.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

chesis. On the one hand, it serves the necessary freedom of catechism in the treatment of particular situations; but on the other, it is indispensable for guaranteeing the identity of the content of the faith. The objection that all human discourse relative to the faith is already a commentary and not the primitive text does not hold, for the Word of God can never be imprisoned in human words. The truth that the Word of God is always infinitely greater than any human word, greater even than the inspired words of the Scripture itself, takes away from the message of the faith neither its visage nor its contours. On the contrary, it obliges us all the more to safeguard our ecclesial faith as a common good. That is what we must try to explicate in ever-changing situations, with ever new words, in order to correspond, through time, with the inexhaustible riches of Revelation. I think it necessary, therefore, to distinguish once again as clearly as possible the degrees of catechetical discourse, even in the books destined for catechesis. That means we have to try to present catechesis as a catechism, in order that the commentary can remain a commentary, and that the sources and their transmission can rediscover their exact relationship.

I could not find a better ending for these reflections than the words used by that often-mentioned *Roman Catechism* to describe catechesis itself:

The goal of doctrine and of the teaching of it must be the love that never ends. One can always outline what one ought to believe, hope or do; but above all one must cause to appear the Love of Christ, so that each understands that every act of perfectly Christian virtue has no other origin than Love and no other end but Love.<sup>24</sup>

—Translated by Thomas Langan<sup>25</sup> □

<sup>24</sup>*Catechism of the Council of Trent*, Art. 10.

<sup>25</sup>This article was first delivered as a conference at Notre-Dame de Fourvière (Lyon) and Notre-Dame de Paris, 15 and 16 January 1983.

Author's address: 11 Piazza del S. Uffizio, Roma, Italy

## The birth of the catechism

Guy Bedouelle

We must understand the genesis of the catechism to prepare for its "rebirth" in our own day.

A reading of the "pastoral visits" made by the bishops of Geneva or their delegates in their large diocese in the sixteenth century is somewhat alarming. These inquiries reveal in particular the ignorance of certain priests and faithful in the area of Christian doctrine.<sup>1</sup> Even if the blame does not extend to a majority of pastors, the documents reveal among these pastors a disquieting proportion of "debiles scientiae," "ignari," and even "totaliter ignari"—a proportion which might have been apparent if all priests were asked to explicate the Canon of the Mass which they were supposed to be celebrating. One can easily deduce that the faithful were not likely to be better informed in the faith of the Church, and one can surmise that such a situation was not peculiar to the diocese of Geneva.

A century and a half later another bishop of Geneva, though removed from his city, devoted himself to catechizing the children whom he called together by the joyful ringing of bells and by his cries, "To Christian doctrine, to Christian doctrine which will teach you the way to Paradise."<sup>2</sup> This

<sup>1</sup>Louis Binz, *Vie religieuse et réforme ecclésiastique dans le diocèse de Genève pendant le Grand schisme et la crise conciliaire (1378-1450)* (Genève, 1973), pp. 339ff., 496.

<sup>2</sup>Roger DeVos, *Saint François de Sales par les témoins de sa vie* (Annecy, 1967), p. 192.