REVISING THE NATIONAL CATECHETICAL DIRECTORY

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The new millenium brings with it a new project for fostering the catechetical ministry in the Philippines; it is the revision of the National Catechetical Directory, *Maturing in Christian Faith*, popularly known as the NCDP. This revision is sparked by the publication of the new *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC) in 1997, a revision of the *General Catechetical Directory* (GCD) of 1971. Beyond the simple need for updating, there are a number of reasons for this revision, most notably the publication of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* by Paul VI in 1975, *Catechesi Tradendae* by John Paul II in 1979, and especially the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in 1992-94. The context of the Philippine NCDP has also changed radically with the publication of the *Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, Acts and Decrees* (PCP-II) in 1992, and especially the national catechism, *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (CFC) in 1997, with its Filipino version *Katesismo para sa mga Pilipinong Katoliko* (KPK).

Before entering into the reasons and proposed guidelines for revising the text of the NCDP, it would be helpful to review briefly the nature, purpose, characteristics and actual functioning of the NCDP over the past fifteen years. This review will help sharpen our understanding of what the process of revision should keep in mind, so that we do not inadvertently discard some of the original NCDP’s positive values in our eagerness to update and revise the document.
KEY ELEMENTS OF THE NCDP

There were five basic guidelines in creating the NCDP. First, as a national catechetical directory its primary focus was on incultration—how to present the Gospel Message in and through Filipino cultural values and society. Secondly, the directory aimed at reducing the gap between the Christian message as taught, and the ordinary daily faith-life of Filipino Catholics. In this endeavor, a third guideline was followed, namely, presenting Faith as essentially tri-dimensional—Doctrine, Morals and Worship—the objective grounds for an experiential catechesis that could get beyond the “only head knowledge” syndrome by bringing together the believing, doing, and praying activities that make up the believer’s actual living out of the Christian Faith. A fourth principle was the key notion of integration, which soon was recognized as the center of NCDP’s catechetical methodology. Over the years seven different integrations were developed, covering the multiple aspects of catechesis in operation. Finally, to bring out the ecclesial dimension of every aspect of catechesis, its community-forming nature was emphasized (Roche, 1998).

In addition to these characteristics, the five specific goals of catechesis presented in NCDP (nos. 79-87) have proven exceptionally effective in providing a handy framework for designing and evaluating the objectives of catechetical and religious education programs. Furthermore, the NCDP has fostered a critically balanced creative adaptation of popular new catechetical thrusts such as the renewed emphasis on imagination and values education.

RATIONALE FOR REVISING THE NCDP

The main reason for revising the NCDP is clearly the need to update the document, originally composed some twenty years ago. In addition to the two new adult catechisms (CCC and CFC) and the guidelines offered in PCP-II, the major source of the project is the revised General Directory for Catechesis. What is sought is a practical exposition of an updated, renewed insight into the nature and objec-
tives of catechesis; this includes development of an effective use of its primary sources—Sacred Scripture, Church teaching (Tradition) and human (Filipino) experience—all within a distinctly ecclesial context. One goal depicted in PCP-II’s exposition of a renewed catechesis is to bring out the moral and spiritual formative dimensions of all authentic catechesis, grounded on the truth of Catholic doctrine. What is ardently sought, therefore, are guidelines for a more balanced and effective proclamation/communication of the whole gospel.

This description brings out today’s stress—often an over-stress—on methodology. In our age when most accept McLuhan’s famous adage “the medium is the message,” there is special need to emphasize a methodology that is not reduced to the level of some social science, but can truly be called a “pedagogy of the Faith.” It is a method that includes all major elements of the catechetical activity, including not only content, agents and means, but especially the catechized themselves. The NCDP has long been noted for insisting on the principle that “the single most determining factor in all catechetical methodology must always be the Gospel itself” (GDC, Part III, 151-73).

**PRINCIPLES GUIDING THE NCDP’S REVISION**

In order to work effectively to revise the NCDP, a certain number of simple guidelines can be formulated, outlining in some detail what is needed to arrive at the desired outcome. The first guideline is undoubtedly the need for a clear, decisive understanding of the nature and function of a national directory. One cannot proceed in the revision without a consensus on what precisely constitutes a national catechetical directory and what it is supposed to achieve. This entails spelling out how it is related to, yet distinct from [a] the GDC, which provides the universal guidelines, [b] the two official adult catechisms, the CCC and the CFC, which implement and actualize the directory’s guidelines, and [c] any regional or local directories that may be produced by diocesan groups.
A second general guideline focuses on three specific qualities which are sought in the revised text. First in order would be simple clarity: the directory should be “reader-friendly,” expressed in straight-forward, direct, unambiguous language, that avoids both highly technical academic jargon, on one side, and the opposite—“trendy,” faddish slogans—on the other.

The second quality sought is practicality. This quality is not so easy to achieve! For example, when work began on the NCDP in 1979, there was very little enthusiasm for the project—most catechetical leaders did not see any particular value in producing another book of guidelines. They already had more “directives” than they could handle in practice. What was the sense of creating new ones? What they needed, they said, was financial support for their catechetical programs. Nevertheless, a group persevered and published the first draft of the NCDP in 1982.

What practicality means here is that the text should not merely repeat theoretical, universal norms, but actually get down to the national level and focus on actual catechesis in present-day Philippines, for Filipinos and by Filipinos. This means highlighting national catechetical needs and resources, with specific guidelines as to how to work more effectively in a truly “contextualized, inculturated” catechesis.

A third quality is brevity or conciseness. It must be admitted that this quality is often lacking in official documents; the original GCD exceeded 100 pages, while its revision, the GDC, reaches over 300 pages. However, more is sought in this quality than the mere cutting out of all unnecessary repetition. There seems to be a common temptation among many experts to try to say something about every imaginable aspect of the topic in question. Their rule seems to be “nothing is to be presumed” and every general practice is spelled out, as if no one had ever done such a thing before. This temptation—it is a temptation—goes far in reducing the potential for good that the text could offer. It must be recognized that most catechists do not have the time or the inclination to plow through long, abstract generalities on what they are already doing!
Secondly, this attitude presumes the average catechist or religion teacher cannot—or must not be called to—creatively adapt the general principles to her/his specific catechetical context. This not only insults the native intelligence and capacity of the catechists and indirectly endangers their proper formation, but more importantly, gravely inhibits the major factor in the effective use of a directory, namely, its creative adaptation to the concrete catechesis in operation.

A third general guideline, learned from the experience of launching the NCDP in 1985, is to look beyond its publication to practical means for making it known and easily available to all, including seminars on how to use it most profitably. There is a real need to actively publicize and disseminate the document so that it becomes well known, especially in catechist formation centers. Obviously, the document cannot achieve its purpose if its very existence is not known. Even more important in the practical realm are seminars and workshops for training catechist formators on how the directory should be used. For practical effectivity, such workshops could profitably follow the Jesuit pedagogical adage: a few principles, many examples, very many exercises.

SPECIFIC PROPOSALS FOR REVISING BASIC SECTIONS OF THE NCDP

A. General Structure

In drawing up a parallel outline of the general structure of the GDC and of the NCDP, it is clear that each follows the same basic framework. This should facilitate the revision considerably. NCDP’s Preface needs to be updated, including the major reasons for its revision, and a clear, explicit exposition of the nature, qualities and functions of the revised NCDP in the Philippine Church’s catechetical ministry in the 21st century. The paragraph numbers should begin in the Preface and continue consecutively throughout the chapters, in order to facilitate easy access and reference to the various sections of the document. Chapter One needs to be revised, especially in
terms of the relevant data from PCP-II, the CBCP Pastoral Exhortations preparing for the Jubilee Year, the "Message of the National Pastoral Consultation on Church Renewal" (January 2001) and selective use of GDC (nos. 17-23, 29-30).

B. Revelation, Faith, Evangelization and Catechesis

The introduction of the phrase "New Evangelization," with its numerous and sometimes contradictory interpretations, has unfortunately been the unwitting cause for much confusion. One example is the surprising option taken by the GDC to explain Faith not as a response to Revelation (see Dei Verbum, 5 and the CCC, 150-75), but rather as a response to Evangelization (46, note 28). What at first sight might seem just a dispute over terms, upon further reflection takes on more serious importance. The NCDP prefers relating Faith to Revelation, following the descriptive definition of Faith given in Vatican I and quoted in Vatican II (CF, 118; ES, 3008):

...we are bound to yield by faith the full homage of intellect and will to God who reveals Himself. The Catholic Church professes that this faith... whereby, inspired and assisted by the grace of God, we believe that which he has revealed as true ... because of the authority of God Himself who reveals them....

From this it seems clear that the proper object of Christian Faith is God's Self-Revelation, not the specific catechetical communication employed in any particular evangelization, new or old.

Another difficulty has been raised about the order in which the NCDP treats the fundamental concepts explained in the second and third chapters. The NCDP prefers to put the nature, source and forms of catechesis before treating Revelation and Faith, because these basic realities are taken up precisely from the specific perspective of catechesis. The NCDP is not a theological manual but a catechetical directory. Not to be alert to this distinction is bound to mislead and inhibit a proper understanding of the nature and function of a national catechetical directory.
A further difficulty is raised regarding the proliferation of terms used: catechesis, religious education, religious studies, etc. The key distinction here is whether or not Faith is assumed in the study. In general, both catechesis and to a lesser extent religious education have traditionally been exercised within a faith perspective, whereas the term “religious studies” has usually referred to objective, “scientific” studies of religion such as “History of Religions,” “Philosophy/Psychology of Religion,” and “Comparative Religions,” which do not suppose any faith commitment. The NCDP clearly presupposes a faith commitment.

The relationship between evangelization and catechesis was spelled out in clear detail by John Paul II in *Catechesi Tradendae*. While the GDC itself does not claim any revision of that position, some commentators, stressing their own interpretation of “New Evangelization,” want to create a revision. The recommendation here is to remain with NCDP’s following of *Catechesi Tradendae*, which can be developed by drawing on an insightful article which locates both evangelization and catechesis within the Church’s total salvific mission (cf. Pilarczyk):

- the mission of the Church is that of Christ, to bring salvation to the world;
- salvation consists in sharing the life of the Risen Christ;
- sanctification in Christ is announced and offered in the process called evangelization;
- what is announced and offered is further clarified, articulated, described, structured in a set of teachings traditionally called catechesis.

The same article warns against placing too much emphasis on “boundaries.” While there is reason to distinguish evangelization from catechesis, it must be recalled that actual evangelization always involves catechesis, and catechesis is a moment in the on-going process of evangelization. It would seem that the emphasis should be on inter-penetration of both in each other rather than hard and fast lines of
division. In his public ministry, Jesus did not evangelize on one day and catechize on another—rather it was one ministry that He exercised.

A further point of discussion arising from the GDC regards the temporal parameters of this process of salvation/sanctification which embraces both evangelization and catechesis. Is it “once-and-for-all” or an ongoing process? Is it a catechesis that is “good for life” or must the catechetical process be a life-long reality? Both from the nature of salvation itself and from the fact that humans are always changing, it is clear that the process must be ongoing and life-long, always beginning again, like the call to daily personal conversion. Based on this insight, GDC’s effort to draw a hard and fast distinction between “catechesis as basic initiation” and “continuing education in the faith” denoting a “second grade of catechesis” (cf. 51, note 64) seems misleading and counterproductive, especially in the actual Philippine context.

What should be introduced into the revised NCDP in this section on “Forms” is a treatment of “those to be catechized” (cf. GDC Part IV), with a revised “Youth Catechesis” (NCDP, 290-92).

C. Doctrine, Morals and Worship

As the GDC used the CCC in presenting “The Gospel Message,” (119-30), so the revised NCDP will refer to the CFC for its basic source of its brief presentation of Catholic Doctrine, Morals and Worship (Sacraments). A careful explanation similar to that in the GDC (120) will explain the complementary functions of the directory and the catechism, as well as the relationship between the national directory and catechism with local and regional catechetical guides and catechisms (GDC 131-36). But a major addition is envisioned in the revised NCDP by adapting and incorporating GDC’s superb presentation of the “Criteria for Presenting the Message” (97-118).
D. Catechetical Methodology

Chapter Seven of the NCDP has by all accounts been one of the most fruitful parts of the whole document. The recommendation, therefore, is to keep the basic structure and divisions of the chapter, while updating its content by adapting and integrating GDC's "pedagogy of Faith" (GDC, Part III). Further emphasis must be placed on arousing the personal activity and creativity of those being catechized, since all learn best through free doing and creative activity.

Greater emphasis must be placed on inculturation, drawing on GDC's extensive treatment as well as on PCP-II and the CBCP's Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Culture (CBCP, 7-36; Huang, 48-58; Roche 1999, 37-47).

E. Organization, Personnel and Resources

The original NCDP integrated into one chapter what other directories had spread over two or three chapters. This was a conscious option taken on the evaluative position that too much time, money and concern have frequently been committed to what might be termed the "catechetical bureaucracy" in comparison to support given to the actual catechizing operation (catechists in the field, the materials being used, actual support systems needed like transportation and food allowance). An additional evaluation judged that the intense interest and concern regarding the means of communication can tend at times to overshadow the Gospel message. Both these evaluations did not in any way deny the obvious need for good organization and for effective use of modern communications media to carry on fruitful catechesis today, but they were—and still are—needed cautious to avoid some of the abuses suffered in the recent past.¹

Positive additions from GDC's Part V: "Ministry of Catechesis in Particular Churches and its Agents" can fill out NCDP's section on personnel. In addition, given the enormous advance in communications over the past twenty years, it comes as no surprise that NCDP's section on "Resources" needs updating, particularly regarding communications and mass media.
CONCLUSION

This piece is one interpretation of the exciting challenge presented to all who are engaged in the catechetical ministry in the Philippines today. The local Church possesses an excellent tool in the NCDP which is crying out to be updated and brought to its full possible effectivity. Pope John Paul II frequently notes: “Be not afraid.” In God’s good time and Providence, He will accomplish it.

ABBREVIATIONS

CBCP - Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines
CC - Congregation for the Clergy
CCC - Catechism of the Catholic Church
CF - The Christian Faith (Nuener-Dupuis)
CT - Catechesi Tradendae (John Paul II)
ECCCE - Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education of CBCP
ECERI - Episcopal Commission on Education and Religious Instruction of CBCP
EN - Evangelii Nuntiandi (Paul VI)
ES - Enchridion Symbolarum (Denziger-Schönmetzer)
PCP-II - Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (1991)
REFERENCES


**NOTE**

1 A recent local example of what might reasonably be termed an “abuse” is the illustration of the whole catechetical operation in terms of a TV set and its power supports. If approached uniquely from a communications point of view, such a detailed, worked out comparison might generate a condescending smile—such is today’s climate, especially among the youth. But once any accurate reflection takes place on the reality of God revealing Himself in Jesus Christ through Scripture and Church teaching, of the responsible free act of Faith which catechesis is calling for, of the interior inspiration of the Holy Spirit as chief “agent” in all authentic catechesis, it becomes immediately clear that such an illustration constitutes a complete deception. Not one of the many comparisons in the illustration is true. It represents rather a perfect caricature of every dimension of authentic catechesis (De Guzman, 14-20).