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Press Conference to present the Directory for Catechesis prepared by the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation

At 11.30 this morning, a press conference was held in the “John Paul II” Hall of the Holy See Press Office to present the Directory for Catechism prepared by the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation.

The speakers were Archbishop Rino Fisichella, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation; Archbishop Octavio Ruiz Arenas, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation; and Bishop Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst, delegate for Catechesis of the same Pontifical Council.

The following are their interventions:

Intervention by Archbishop Rino Fisichella

The publication of a *Directory for Catechesis* is a joyful event in the life of the Church. For those dedicated to the immense task of catechesis, it may be seen as a positive challenge because it makes them appreciate the dynamic nature of the catechetical movement, which has always had a significant presence in the life of the Christian community. The *Directory for Catechesis* is a document of the Holy See and entrusted to the entire Church. Much time and work has gone into its preparation, and its publication comes after a wide international consultation. Today we are presenting the Italian edition. However, translations are ready in Spanish (separate editions for Latin America and Spain), Portuguese (separate editions originating in Brazil and Portugal), English (separate editions originating in the United States of America and the United Kingdom), French, German and Polish. The *Directory* is directed in first place, to Bishops, the first catechists among the People of God because of their primary responsibility for the transmission of the faith (ref. n. 114). Responsibility for catechesis also extends to the Bishops' Conferences with their respective Catechetical Commissions, which contribute to the elaboration of a hopefully national project aimed at supporting the work of the individual dioceses in this field (ref. n. 413). However, those most directly involved in the use of the *Directory*, remain the priests, the deacons, the consecrated persons, and the millions of male and female lay catechists that, with generosity, hard work,

and hope, offer daily their ministry in their various communities. The dedication, with which they labor, particularly in a time of cultural transition like the present, is the tangible sign of how the encounter with the Lord can transform a catechist into an authentic evangeliser.

Today, what we are presenting is essentially the third catechetical Directory since the Second Vatican Council. The first of 1971, the *General Catechetical Directory*, and the second of 1997, the *General Directory for Catechesis*, have left their mark on these last fifty years in the history of catechesis. Not only have these texts had a primary role, but they have also been instrumental in helping catechesis to progress, not least by renewing its methodology and taking into account pedagogical considerations. The need for a new Directory was born of the process of inculturation which characterises catechesis in a particular way and which, especially today, demands a special focus.

Today the Church is facing a great challenge in the form of *digital* culture. Focusing on a phenomenon that imposes itself as global requires that those who are responsible for the formation do not prevaricate. In contrast with the past, when culture was limited to the geographical context, digital culture is entwined with the ongoing globalisation and even determines its development. The instruments created in this last decade manifest a radical transformation of behaviours that influence above all the formation of personal identity and interpersonal relations. The speed of linguistic change, and with it, behavioural relations, allows us to glimpse at a new model of communication and formation, which inevitably also affects the Church in the complex world of education. The various manifestations of the Church's presence in the vast world of the internet is certainly a positive fact, but digital culture goes much further. It goes to the root of the anthropological question which is decisive in every formative context and which cannot prescind from truth and freedom. The mere posing of this problem requires the verification of the adequacy of any formation proposal regardless of its provenance. For the Church, however, this verification is especially necessary in the light of her "competence" over humanity and her claim to truth.

This premise is perhaps, by itself, sufficient to require a new *Directory for Catechesis*. It is no exaggeration to say that twenty years in the digital age are like a half-century prior to its onset. Thus the need to have a Directory that would look with profound realism on recent cultural developments bearing in mind the requirements of catechesis. It is for this reason that the *Directory* presents not only the problems inherent in digital culture, but also suggests which paths to take so that catechesis becomes a proposal capable of being understood and adequate to the requirements of its context.

There is, however, a more theological and ecclesial reason that has required the preparation of this Directory. The highlighting of the synodal dimension cannot make us forget the recent Synods in the Church. In 2005, the Synod on *The Eucharist: Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church*; in 2008, the one on *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*; in 2015, the one on *The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and the Contemporary World*; and in 2018, the Synod on *Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment*. In all of these gatherings, constants emerge which touch closely on the theme of evangelisation and catechesis as can be verified from the documents that have followed them. More specifically, it is proper to highlight two complementary events which mark the history of this last decade with regard to catechesis: the Synod on *The New Evangelisation for the Transmission of the Christian Faith* of 2012, with the consequent Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* of Pope Francis, and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, both of which touch directly the competence of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation.

Evangelisation occupies the primary place in the life of the Church and in the everyday teaching of Pope Francis. It could not be otherwise. Evangelisation is the task that the Risen Lord has entrusted his Church in order to be, in the time of every age, the faithful announcement of his Gospel.

To ignore this premise would be tantamount to making the Christian community, one of just many meritorious associations, strong in its two thousand years of history, but not the Church of Christ. The perspective of Pope Francis, among other things, stands in strong continuity with the teaching of Saint Paul VI in *Evangelii nuntiandi* of 1975. Both do nothing but refer to the wealth arising from Vatican II, which, as regards catechesis, found its

focal point in the *Catechesi tradendae* (1979) of Saint John Paul II.

Catechesis, therefore, must be united intimately with the work of evangelisation and cannot be separated from it. It needs to take on the very characteristics of evangelisation, without falling into the temptation to become a substitute for it or to want to impose its pedagogical premises on evangelisation. In this relationship, the primacy belongs to evangelisation, not catechesis. This allows us to understand why, in the light of *Evangelii gaudium*, this *Directory* distinguishes itself in its support of a “*kerygmatic catechesis*”.

The heart of catechesis is the announcement of the person of Jesus Christ, who surpasses the limits of space and time to present himself to each generation as the good news offered to reach the meaning of life. In this perspective, a fundamental characteristic emerges which catechesis must make its own: mercy. The *kerygma* is an announcement of the Father's mercy directed at the sinner who is no longer considered as an excluded person, but as a privileged guest at the banquet of salvation, which consists in the forgiveness of sins. If we wish, it is in this context that the experience of the catechumenate acquires force as experience of the forgiveness offered and of the new life of communion with God which ensues.

The centrality of the *kerygma*, however, must be received in a non-temporal qualitative sense. It requires, in fact, that it be present in *all phases* of catechesis and in *every* catechesis. It is the ‘first announcement’ that is always made because Christ is the one thing necessary. Faith is not something obvious to be called upon in moments of need, but an act of freedom that engages all of life. The *Directory*, therefore, makes its own the centrality of the *kerygma* expressed always in a Trinitarian sense as a commitment of the entire Church. Catechesis as expressed by the *Directory* is characterised by this dimension and its repercussions in people's lives. In this vision, the whole of catechesis acquires a particular value that is expressed in the constant deepening of our understanding the gospel message. In short, catechesis is meant to lead to the knowledge of that Christian love which leads those who have embraced it to become evangelising disciples.

The *Directory* unfolds by touching on various themes, which only refer to the underlying objective. A first dimension is *mystagogy* presented through two complementary elements: a renewed appraisal of the liturgical signs of Christian initiation, then, the progressive maturation of the formation process in which the entire community is involved. *Mystagogy* is a privileged route to follow, but it is not optional in the catechetical journey. Its obligatory nature derives from the fact that through it we are inserted more and more into the mystery that is believed and celebrated. It is the awareness of the primacy of the mystery that leads catechesis not to isolate the *kerygma* from its natural context. The proclamation of faith is still an announcement of the mystery of God's love that becomes human for our salvation. One's response cannot go beyond accepting the mystery of Christ in itself in order to shed light on the mystery of one's personal experience (*Gaudium et spes*, 22).

Another new feature of the *Directory* is the link between evangelisation and the catechumenate in its various meanings (ref. n.62). There is urgency in carrying out a “pastoral conversion” in order to free catechesis from some chokeholds that prevent its effectiveness. The first such chokehold can be identified in the school model, according to which the catechesis of Christian Initiation is undertaken under a school paradigm. The catechist replaces the teacher, the school classroom becomes the catechetical room, the school calendar is identical to the catechetical one, etc. A second one is the mentality by which catechesis becomes the condition for receiving a particular sacrament of initiation, with a consequent void opening up once initiation has ended. A third is the exploitation of a sacrament in the name of pastoral strategy, so that the time frame for confirmation is dictated by the need *not* to lose the small flock of young people remaining in the parish rather than by the significance which the sacrament possesses of itself in the economy of the Christian life.

Pope Francis has written that ‘Proclaiming Christ means showing that to believe in and to follow him is not only something right and true, but also something beautiful, capable of filling life with new splendour and profound joy, even in the midst of difficulties. Every expression of true beauty can thus be acknowledged as a path leading to an encounter with the Lord Jesus... So a formation in the *via pulchritudinis ought to be part of our effort to pass on the faith*’ (*Evangelii gaudium*, 167). An innovative approach to catechesis lies in the *way of beauty*, above all by increasing awareness of the great heritage in terms of art, literature and music, which each local Church possesses. This is why the *Directory* has placed the way of beauty as one of the ‘sources’ of catechesis

(ref. n. 106-109).

A final dimension offered by the *Directory* can be found in its effort to insert us progressively into the mystery of the faith. This characteristic cannot be delegated to a single dimension of the faith or of catechesis. *Theology* investigates the revealed mystery with the tools of *reason*. *Liturgy* celebrates and evokes the mystery with sacramental life. *Charity* recognises the mystery of the brother or sister who holds out their hand. Catechesis, in the same way, gradually guides us to accept and live the mystery completely in our daily existence. The *Directory* adopts this vision when it asks that catechesis be formulated in such a way as to maintain the unity of the mystery while articulating the different phases of its expression. The mystery when embraced in its profound reality requires silence. A true catechesis will never be tempted to try to say everything about the mystery of God. On the contrary, its task is to guide us to the contemplation of the mystery by making of silence its conquest.

The *Directory*, therefore, presents *kerygmatic catechesis* not as an abstract theory, but rather as an instrument with a strong existential value. This catechesis finds its strength in the *encounter* that allows one to experience the presence of God in the life of each one of us. A God who is near, who loves us and who follows the events of our history because the Incarnation of the Son engages him directly. Catechesis ought to involve everyone, the catechist and the catechised, in experiencing this presence and in feeling involved in the work of mercy. In short, this type of catechesis allows us to discover that before it is a moral proposal, faith is really an encounter with a person and that Christianity is not a religion of the past, but an event of the present. Such an experience promotes the understanding of personal freedom as the fruit of the discovery of the truth which sets us free (ref. *John* 8:31).

A catechesis that gives primacy to the *kerygma* is the opposite of any imposition, even that of a body of evidence which cannot be denied. The option of faith, in fact, before considering the contents to which adhere to through one's assent, is an act of freedom because one discovers that one is loved. In this context, it is good to consider carefully what the *Directory* proposes regarding the importance of the act of faith in its twofold articulation (ref. n. 18). For too long catechesis has focused on making the contents of the faith known and on the best pedagogical methods by which to reach this end, omitting the most crucial moment which is the act of deciding for faith and the giving of one's assent.

We hope that this new *Directory for Catechesis* will be of real assistance and support for the renewal of catechesis in the one process of evangelisation that the Church has not tired of carrying out in two thousand years, in order that the world come to meet Jesus of Nazareth, the son of God made one of us, for our salvation.

Intervention by Archbishop Octavio Ruiz Arenas

Pope Benedict XVI, in transferring responsibility for catechesis to the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelisation, wanted to emphasise the very important role of catechesis in the realisation of the fundamental mission of the Church: evangelisation. Indeed, in one of the final sessions of the XIII General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith", he expressed this intention, which he made tangible on 16 January 2013 with the publication of the Apostolic Letter *Fides per Doctrinam*, which affirms that faith needs to be sustained with a doctrine capable of enlightening the minds and hearts of believers, since the particular historical moment in which we live, marked among other things by a dramatic crisis of faith, requires an awareness that responds to the great hopes that arise in the hearts of believers because of the new questions that challenge the world and the Church. The intelligence of faith, therefore, always requires that its contents be expressed in a new language, capable of presenting the hope present in believers to all those who ask what their reason is (cf. 1 *Pet* 3:15).

Catechesis is called to a renewal that cannot consist merely of a change of strategy, or simply the development of more attractive discourses. From the beginning, therefore, this Pontifical Council has had as one of its main prerogatives the transmission of faith as an essential part of the fulfilment of the mission which the Lord has

entrusted to the Church, together with an awareness of how the witness of faith is lived in today's society. Indeed, the Church no longer lives in a regime of Christianity but in a secularised society, in which the phenomenon of distance from the faith is aggravated by a now lost sense of the sacred, and the range of Christian values called into question. Many of the faithful are not always fully convinced of what they believe, or aware of the foundations of the faith they profess, and sometimes they do not have an authentic experience of it. On this basis we must be aware that many baptised people have never received Christian initiation, have not been encouraged by the *kerygma*, have not achieved a personal encounter with Christ or have not had the support and accompaniment of the Christian community.

In order to deepen the relationship between catechesis and evangelisation, this Pontifical Council has organised a series of meetings with the bishops and those in charge of the departments of new evangelisation and catechesis in the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America, Europe and the United States. Then, in March 2015, here in Rome, a study seminar with experts from the academic world and pastoral organisations in the field of catechesis worked to provide a global view of the situation of catechesis. It was also considered necessary to further our the understanding of how catechetical activity fits into the process of new evangelisation. Thus, in May 2015, a draft document entitled "Catechesis and the New Evangelisation" was drawn up which, starting from the *General Directory for Catechesis*, responded to what Pope Francis indicated in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*. This draft was presented to the Members of this Pontifical Council during the Second Plenary Assembly, held from 27 to 29 May 2015, and in the end it was decided that it would be more appropriate to update the 1997 Directory.

To carry out this task, a Commission of experts was convened in Rome to examine the *General Directory for Catechesis* and to request proposals for updating. This Commission was composed of twelve experts from Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, the United States and various European countries (Croatia, France, Italy, Poland, the United Kingdom, Spain and Ukraine), in addition to the superiors of the Pontifical Council, a bishop of the Eastern Churches, six priests, one religious, three lay people and one lay person. Three meetings were held during the year 2016. In the first, the aforementioned *Directory* was examined and the points to be reviewed and updated were noted; in the second, the various suggestions were shared; and finally, in the third, a document was drafted which sought to reflect the conclusions reached during the three sessions. This text was extensively studied and it was concluded that it was more appropriate to rework a new *Directory* that would respond more directly to the challenges facing the Church today, taking into account the great cultural changes that have occurred in recent years and also the rich pontifical magisterium of this period. Having prepared a first draft, it was sent in April 2017 to more than a hundred experts from the five continents: cardinals, bishops, priests, men and women religious and lay people competent in Sacred Scripture, theology, catechesis, liturgy and pastoral theology. Several Episcopal Conferences and universities were also consulted, as well as members of the International Council of Catechesis (*Co.In.Cat.*), and the comments received were taken into consideration for the preparation of a second draft. In September 2017 a meeting was held with the consultors of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation, in which particular attention was paid to the theme of youth and popular piety, important themes in the preparation of the *Directory* itself.

During the Fourth Plenary Assembly (27-29 September 2017), the Eminent and Excellent Members approved in substance the fourth draft of the *Directory* and on 16-17 October the International Council for Catechesis met to discuss some topics of interest for the new *Directory* such as youth, digital culture, popular piety and catechesis for and with persons with disabilities.

Starting from these meetings, further consultations were carried out, with the necessary corrections, until the current text of the new *Directory for Catechesis* was reached: after twelve drafts and almost six years of work it was approved by the Holy Father on 23 March last, in the liturgical memory of Saint Turibius of Mogrovejo, and he ordered its publication.

After the presentation by the president and the secretary of the contents and guidelines of the new *Directory*, I would finally like to briefly mention some aspects that are important for working with the new document in these times.

It seems to me that there are seven points on which we need to reflect.

1. The new *Directory* is very attentive to the signs of the times and tries to interpret them in the light of the Gospel - as the Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, says.

Indeed, these are the main challenges of a digital culture, the context of the transmission of faith in the family in its intergenerational composition.

In addition, the new *Directory* pays great attention to all issues related to the ecological crisis and, as far as catechesis is concerned, refers to the Papal Encyclical *Laudato si'*.

In this consideration of the signs of the times, the *Directory* that does not take a unilateral and undifferentiated position, but rather helps to consider opportunities and limits in an appropriate way. This reflection creates the motivation to act appropriately in a corresponding field of catechetical learning.

2. In this context, the new *Directory for Catechesis* gives more courage to the content of faith. Based on the Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis *Evangelii gaudium*, the *kerygma* is therefore not understood in the strict sense of the word as a faith summarised in certain sentences, but as a witness that gives rise to new witnesses.

3. With reference to the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* of the year 1975, and largely inspired by the document *Evangelii gaudium*, the new *Directory* underlines the importance of catechesis as an indispensable part of a wider process of evangelisation. Also in this sense the current *Directory* represents continuity and innovation at the same time.

Emphasising the specific responsibilities for catechesis - from the bishop as first catechist of his diocese, to grandparents - catechesis cannot be delegated but is the most intimate essence of all forms and ways of preaching the faith.

4. Like the previous *Directory* of the year 1997, the present document guides the process of any catechesis based on the catechumenate as an original way of Christian initiation. Especially under the current challenges of a missionary pastoral ministry, the catechumenate is becoming a paradigm in content and structure for teaching and internalising the faith personally. This is how the possession of a Christian and ecclesial identity grows.

5. Beginning with the Apostolic Letter *Amoris laetitia*, the new *Directory* also promotes the development of a marriage-catechumenate, in this sense in analogy to the process of initiation, to emphasise the preparatory phase of marriage in its catechetical meaning.

6. More than the previous *Directories* of 1971 and 1997, the current document underlines a central idea of the Apostolic Letter *Evangelii gaudium*. In the latter Pope Francis expressly speaks of the importance of the *via pulchritudinis* as a central starting point for evangelisation in the postmodern era. This outlines the understanding that beauty should not be misunderstood as aestheticism, but rather - in accordance with the teachings of Pope Benedict XVI - that truth is beautiful and beauty is true.

7. The great expectation of the new *Directory for Catechesis* - especially in the Anglo-Saxon countries and in Southern and Eastern Europe, in the United States and North and South America, in Africa and Asia - shows that catechesis needs the exchange of Churches in the world. The great commitment of many local Churches in the development of their diocesan directorates for catechesis will acquire new inspiration and motivation from the new document.

This is my experience derived from the many conferences on catechesis that I have been able to attend in recent years in the various local Churches, and from the considerations that many people have expressed to me, together with their great expectation and joy for the new document.
