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Maturing in Christian Faith: National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines

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MATURING IN CHRISTIAN FAITH: NATIONAL CATECHETICAL DIRECTORY FOR THE PHILIPPINES. Pasay, Metro Manila: Daughters of St. Paul, 1984. 310 pages.

The *National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines (NCDP)*, issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference and approved by the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy in October 1984, provides the official guidelines and directives for the proper exercise, coordination and organization of the Catechetical Ministry in the Philippines. It was written and composed through the joint efforts of a number of specialists in the field under the direction of the Episcopal Commission for Education and Religious Instruction (ECERI).

The *NCDP* is divided into three sections. The first section has three chapters: chapter I describes the social, economic, political, cultural and religious *context* of the Filipino Catholics. Chapter II analyzes the nature, goals, sources and forms of catechesis; and Chapter III deals with those two realities which the *Directory* calls the "Foundation of Catechesis," namely Revelation and Faith.

The second section (chapters IV, V and VI), concentrates on the basic *content* of the Church's Catechesis. Chapter IV, titled "Catholic Doctrine," presents a popular synthesis of the Christian message contained in the *Creed*. Chapter V deals with "Catholic Morality" or *Code* with appropriate reflections on "General Moral Catechesis" and "Special Moral Catechesis." Chapter VI is on "Catholic Prayer and Worship" or *Cult*, a last chapter that treats successively of "Prayer, Worship, Liturgy and the Liturgical Year" followed by a study of "Word and Sign in the Liturgy of the Worshipping Community." It ends with the catechesis on the Sacraments and a few remarks on the "Sacramentals and the Liturgy's Mission."

Finally, section III, entitled "Channels and Means of the Church's Catechesis," concentrates in chapter VII on *methodology* in catechesis. After a short reference to the Philippine catechetical scene, we are given some fundamental directives in view of a "Pedagogy of Faith for the Filipino Today." Chapter VIII, the last chapter, focuses on "Organization, Personnel and Resources of Catechesis."

The *NCDP* ends with a very useful Analytical Index, Index of Biblical Quotations, Index of Biblical References and a Comparative Table of Paragraph Numbering.

The book shows the tremendous efforts that went into its making, and the laborious attempts made by the authors to strike the right balance between the different catechetical perspectives, while paying due attention to all levels of Religious Education, and to the diversity of catechetical situations in the country. Obviously, not all these attempts were successfully achieved. Nevertheless, those involved in the ministry of catechesis will find the guidelines and orientations of the *NCDP* very helpful. In particular, the trainers of cate-

chists have here an official document which, read critically, can very well serve as the basis for a quite comprehensive and systematic training program.

The introductory chapter with its survey of the Philippine socioeconomic, political and religious landscape, calls our attention to the need for a truly *contextualized* catechesis. The value and significance of this chapter does not lie only in the informative data which may well be known from other sources, but on its stress on contextualization of catechesis within an evolving society affected by the positive and negative impact of modernization, and on the need for inculturation of the Gospel within the Filipino value system.

There is a recognition at the beginning of chapter II of the clear catechetical advances which have taken place in the Philippines since the late sixties and the seventies, when, for the first time, the catechetical initiatives born here and then borrowed by other countries were aimed at bridging the gap between faith and life, between faith and culture, with a pedagogy of faith experiential and participative which tried to facilitate conversion to the Gospel values, faith-response to social issues and the building of ecclesial communities. Only now can one see the positive impact that such initiatives made on those exposed to them. But, as often happens, the new catechetical advances created new problems which the authors of chapter II try to resolve with some "proximate guidelines towards a more integral and balanced idea of catechesis, its nature and goals" (p. 45) vis-a-vis the nature and goals of evangelization and theology.

The search for an ever more integral and balanced idea of catechesis is a perennial challenge of the catechetical ministry. Yet when the search is led through a comparative analysis of the nature and goals of catechesis vis-a-vis those of theology and evangelization, the suggested answers do not seem to address the real questions.

The articles on "Revelation and Faith" (chapter II) offer an excellent presentation of these very important issues. The authors seem very much aware of the nuances with which these pivotal realities have to be expressed if Catholic catechesis is to be free from the pitfalls of the Biblical fundamentalism of some Protestant evangelists, and from the doctrinal arteriosclerosis of some Catholic catechetical trends. Certain statements, however, in other sections of the directory, do not reflect the same mastery of these subjects.

The synthesis of the "Christian Message" (chapter IV) is very rich. Good theology, spiritual insight and cultural sensitivity have produced a remarkable exposé of the content of the Creed. The same must be said about the section on "General and Special Moral Catechesis." Chapter VI begins with a short treatise on prayer which is precious, followed by a collection of thoughts, a bit random, on worship, Catholic liturgy, the liturgical year and the worshipping community, to end with twelve pages on the Seven Sacraments.

The treatment of the Sacraments, cut off from the treatment of the Church to which they organically belong, and misplaced after the chapter on

"Catholic Morality" which in its true Christian sense, is the moral response of the "new being in Christ" generated and nurtured by the Sacraments, is disheartening. It resuscitates the long outdated sequence CREDO-CODE-CULT of the late Medieval Catechesis and of the doctrinal catechisms of the Post-Reformation. One of the undisputable merits of the pioneers of the Kerygmatic movement was to denounce the theological incoherence of the sequence CREDO-CODE-CULT which, by replacing, during a period of Church's history, the more coherent structure of CREDO-CULT-CODE paved the way to moralism and sacramentalism in Catechesis. In line with the sacramental and moral theology of St. Paul, the Christian moral life was always seen in the Patristic Catechesis, in the catechetical writings of St. Thomas, and in the Roman Catechism as the grateful response of the Faithful to the "saving actions of God in History" (the Creed) actualized and made present by the "saving actions of Christ in mystery" (the Sacraments). In this instance, the *NCDP* departs not only from this well-established catechetical tradition, but also from the modern Kerygmatic Catechesis, the General Catechetical Directory and the Synod of Bishops on Catechesis. This obviously lowers the quality of the *NCDP*. The main reason given by the authors in favor of the sequence CREDO-CODE-CULT is to stress the need to integrate Christian Moral Witness with its basis in Doctrinal Truth. Precisely because of that, the reason is not convincing, for the sacraments are an integral part of that Doctrinal Truth on which the Moral Witness of the Faithful is based to make it authentically Christian.

One of the best chapters of the *NCDP* is chapter VII of section III on "Methodology." Each one of its parts, the "Philippine Catechetical Scene," the "Fundamental Directives regarding Methodology" and a "Pedagogy of Faith for the Filipino Today," has been worked out with great care and competence. It will be very useful for anyone involved in the Catechetical Ministry. The final chapter takes up matters concerning catechetical organization, personnel and resources. Kudos to St. Paul Publications for the excellent printing of the book, although the illustrations inserted between the sections are shockingly cheap. The outside cover, in attractive colors, suggesting the three components of an integral catechesis, is beautiful. The reproduction on the second page of the cover of the first catechism published in the Philippines in 1593, evokes four hundred years of catechetical efforts which are brought forward into the new generation by the publication of the *National Catechetical Directory of the Philippines*.

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