

CATHOLIC EASTERN CHURCHES AND THEIR FAITH FORMATION

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Abstract

Is there something unique in the heritage of Eastern *Sui iuris* Churches with regard to their prime ministry of spreading the Christian faith? The fact that the East has the privilege to be the sacred birth place of the Son of God Jesus Christ adds its historical importance in the mystery of redemption. The early Eastern Christian communities gave the Universal Church the first joys of the fruits of salvation. This heritage is faithfully handed over by all the *Sui iuris* Churches in the East in an exceptional way. Eastern Churches traditionally perceive Catechesis as the most important ministry that highlights the initial-conversion, formation, deepening of Christ experience, educating the Christian discipleship and an emphasis on the constant conversion in everyday life. Thus, Catechesis is a school of faith, an initiation and apprenticeship in the entire Christian life. Prominently the Liturgy is an inevitable holy instrument to catechize the faithful in the East. The aspects of Holy Trinity, the Sacraments of Initiation, Liturgical Prayers, Hymns and Scriptural Texts, the dimensions of Silence and Divinization etc., are the steps for efficacious Catechesis in the Eastern Churches. The vitality and richness of the Eastern Churches will always remain as an inspiration for the Universal Church.

Keywords: Catechesis, Eastern Churches, Faith Formation, Inculturation, Sacraments of Initiation, *Sui iuris* Churches, Liturgy, Mystagogy

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Introduction

The coming of the great Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth, was the most momentous event of the East that significantly transformed the history of the world. Jesus was born in the East and it is there he shared his gospel of eternal life and wisdom. Being part of that privileged land, Jesus led the humanity towards the splendour of God's kingdom and dignity. On 30 November 1894 Pope Leo XIII issued the Apostolic Constitution *Orientalium Dignitas* in which he stated:

The Churches of the East are worthy of the glory and reverence that they hold throughout the whole of Christendom in virtue of those extremely ancient, singular memorials that they have bequeathed to us. For it was in that part of the world that the first actions for the redemption of the human race began, in accord with the all-kind plan of God. They swiftly gave forth their yield: there flowered in first blush the glories of preaching the True Faith to the nations, of martyrdom, and of holiness. They gave us the first joys of the fruits of salvation. From them has come a wondrously grand and powerful flood of benefits upon the other peoples of the world, no matter how far-flung.¹

Pope St John Paul II, while presenting the wonders of the Eastern Churches noted in *Ut Unum Sint*: “*The Church must breathe with her two lungs*” (no. 54). Thus, the saintly Pontiff emphasized the indispensable unity between Eastern Churches *sui iuris* and the Western Latin Church for the full functioning of the Universal Church with all its magnificence and splendour.

1. The Catholic Eastern Churches

The term Eastern Catholic Churches refers to 23 of the 24 autonomous particular Churches in communion with the Bishop of Rome. Every diocese is a particular Church, but not an autonomous one, in the sense in which the word is applied to these 23 Churches. They follow different Eastern Christian liturgical traditions: Alexandrian, Antiochene, Armenian, Byzantine, and East Syrian Rite. Canonically, each Eastern Catholic Church *sui iuris* or autonomous, all accept the spiritual and juridical authority of the Pope. Theologically, all the particular Churches can be viewed as “Sister Churches.” According to *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* (no. 3) these Eastern Churches share the “equal dignity, so that none of them is superior to the others as regards rite, and they enjoy the same rights and are

¹Pope Leo XIII, *Orientalium Dignitas*, on the Eastern Churches, The introductory lines.

under the same obligations also in respect of preaching the Gospel to the whole world under the guidance of the Roman Pontiff" (OE, no. 3). The Eastern Code in 621 #2 conspicuously hints at a suggestion of having a *General Catechetical Directory for Catechesis in the Eastern Catholic Churches sui iuris*. This treasure will surely help not only the Eastern Churches to identify their own rich traditions but also facilitate sharing in the profoundness of the Christian faith with the Universal Church. Such a venture will also bring all the Eastern Catholic Churches closer and in mutual appreciation and support.

1.1. The *Ecclesia Sui Iuris*

With the Second Vatican Council, there emerged the idea of better protection of the rights of the Christian faithful as well as those of the particular Churches on the model of the Constitutions of modern States. This issued in the project called *Lex Ecclesiae Fundamentalis (LEF)*. *Ecclesia sui iuris* is defined in CCEO Canon 27 as: "A group of Christian faithful united by a hierarchy according to the norm of law which the supreme authority of the Church expressly or tacitly recognizes as *sui iuris* is called in this Code of a Church *sui iuris*." *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, no.1 specifies that in these Churches shines the Tradition derived from the Apostles through the Fathers, which constitutes part of the divinely revealed, undivided heritage of the Universal Church.

1.2. Eastern Catholic Churches

The supreme authority of the Church has recognized 23 Eastern Catholic Churches. They are grouped under five Eastern traditions following their alphabetical order as in CCEO Canon 28#2: Alexandrian, Antiochene, Armenian, Chaldean and Constantinopolitan (Byzantine).

2. Catechesis in Churches *Sui Iuris*

After having described the richness, importance and identity of the Eastern Catholic Churches, let us now see the prominence and prime position of the ministry of catechesis in the lives of Churches *sui iuris*.

The word Catechesis comes from the Greek word *κατήχειν* (*Katechein*) which means the "instruction by word of mouth." Generally in the ecclesiastical usage, it means the religious instruction given to the beginners in the Christian faith.² Today, the name catechesis is given to "the whole of the efforts within the Church to

²Cf. M. Gatterer and F. Krus, *The Theory and Practice of Catechism*, translated by J.B. Culemans, New York: Frederick Pustet & Co., 1914, 7.

make disciples, to help people to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, so that by believing they might have life in his name, and to educate and instruct them in this life and thus build up the Body of Christ.”³ As defined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, catechesis is an education in the faith of children, young people and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life.⁴ The word catechesis means “to echo the teaching” and it signifies that catechesis or the teaching of the faith is an interactive process in which the Word of God re-sounds among the proclaimer, the one receiving the message, and the Holy Spirit! Eastern Churches historically perceive this ministry as a life-long process of initial-conversion, formation, experience, education, and on-going conversion. Through Word, Liturgy, Interiorization (*theosis* or *divinization*), Service, and Community, catechesis seeks to lead all God’s people to an ever deepening relationship with God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.⁵ In fact, catechesis involves with the lifelong effort of forming people into the witnesses of Christ and opening their hearts to the spiritual transformation given by the Holy Spirit.⁶ According to *General Directory for Catechesis*, “Catechesis is nothing other than the process of transmitting the Gospel, as the Christian community has received it, understands it, celebrates it, lives it and communicates it in many ways.”⁷ According to CCEO, “Each Church *sui iuris* and particularly their Bishops have the serious duty of providing catechesis, by which faith matures and the disciple of Christ is formed through a deeper and more systematic knowledge of the teaching of Christ and through an increasingly stronger commitment to the person of Christ.”⁸

2.1. Catechism of the Catholic Church and General Directory for Catechesis

Since the Churches *sui iuris* represent the universal Catholic Church, their catechesis should also carry together with their unique tradition, an identification with the universal Catholic aspects of the

³*Catechesi Tradendae* (CT), no. 1.

⁴*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 5; Cf. CT, 18.

⁵Cf. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/> retrieved on 17-10-2015.

⁶Cf. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/> retrieved on 17-10-2015.

⁷*General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 105.

⁸CCEO, Canon 617.

“Faith and Morals.” The whole Catholic Church is knitted together by the solemn promulgation of two important treasures: the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) and the *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC). These are two distinct but complementary instruments at the service of the universal Church’s catechetical activity. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is the statement of the Church’s faith and of Catholic doctrine, attested to or illuminated by the Sacred Scripture, the Apostolic Tradition and the Church’s Magisterium. The *General Directory for Catechesis* provides “the basic principles of pastoral theology taken from the Magisterium of the Church, and in a special way from the Second Vatican Council by which pastoral action in the ministry of the Word can be more fittingly directed and governed.”⁹ Hence, the Eastern Churches need to focus her attention on these two prime gifts of the universal Church for her renewal and development of catechesis. Fundamental tasks of catechesis are: helping to know, to celebrate and to contemplate the mystery of Christ;¹⁰ it primarily revolves around *promoting knowledge of the faith*. In fact, knowledge of the faith (*fides quae*) is required for adherence to the faith (*fides qua*).¹¹

2.2. Historical Review of Catechesis

The private instruction was the primitive form of catechesis. At the end of the second century, individual tutoring had been replaced by group instruction followed by group baptism. There were special Catechesis for those who wanted to become Christians and for their continued training, catechetical schools were founded.¹² Subsequently, groups were prepared for reception into the Church, and by the late third century “Catechesis” commonly described as what was transmitted in the “catechumenate” or sessions preparatory to baptism.¹³ Baptism was administered at Easter, making the liturgy and Catechesis mutually complementary.¹⁴ In the first five centuries of the Church’s history, catechesis focused primarily on the instructions given to adults as they prepared for baptism. By the 6th century, the organized catechumenate had all but disappeared. In places where Christianity had taken root the baptism of infants was common practice, and baptism of adults became the exception rather

⁹*General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 120.

¹⁰GDC, no. 85.

¹¹GDC, no. 85; Cf. DCG (1971) 36a.

¹²J.A. Jungmann, *Handing on the Faith*, New York: Herder K.G., 1959, 2.

¹³Cf. G.S. Sloyan, “Religious Education,” in M. Warren, *Source Book for Modern Catechesis*, Winona, Minnesota: Christian Brothers Publication, 1983, 112.

¹⁴Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, c. 19., quoted in J.A. Jungmann, *Handing on the Faith*, 2.

than the rule. With the mass conversions of the Franks and Germanic peoples, individuals were baptized after a preparation of only a few weeks, or with little or no instruction. From this time the Church in Europe faced the challenge of educating in the faith large groups of rude, unlettered people and their children. A new concept and style of catechesis emerged as entire tribes were brought en masse into the Church. To gain an idea of the content and flavour of the oral catechesis in the period from the 5th to the 11th centuries, study of the pastoral treatises, liturgical texts, hagiography, and directives of local councils is necessary.

GDC says that Catechesis is a school of faith, an initiation and apprenticeship in the entire Christian life.¹⁵ In this sense the ministry of Catechesis has larger responsibilities attached to it. Faith and its witness in our modern times are very much interconnected. Hence, catechesis as redemptive instruction has greater role to play. The observation of GDC in its number 30 tells us that our faith formation is focused more on the aspect of 'Revelation' but the aspect of Tradition has not yet blossomed in such a way that the whole 2000 years of Church's practical living of faith (tradition) has not yet strengthened the preparation and handing on of faith. Hence every Church *sui iuris* has to ponder diligently on doctrine and praxis, 'Tradition and the Magisterium, each according to "its proper mode" and has to harmoniously enrich the catechetical transmission of the faith.'¹⁶ Today we can see the faith formation in three levels: catechumens and neophytes (Mystagogical catechesis), children (supplementary catechesis), adult (catechesis through liturgy + Sermon + special event catechesis like Marriage preparation, etc.).

In the Christian community the disciples of Jesus Christ are nourished through catechesis at a twofold table: "that of the Word of God and that of the Body of Christ."¹⁷ At the table of the Word of God, the homily occupies a privileged position, since it "takes up again the journey of faith put forward by catechesis and brings it to its natural fulfilment, at the same time it encourages the Lord's disciples to begin anew each day their spiritual journey in truth, adoration and thanksgiving."¹⁸

¹⁵GDC, no. 30.

¹⁶Cf. *Dei Verbum*, no. 10c.

¹⁷GDC, no. 70; cf. *Dei Verbum*, no. 21.

¹⁸Cf. CT 48; cf. SC 52; DV 24; DCG (1971) 17; *Missale Romanum, Ordo Lectionum Missae* (Editio Typica Altera), n. 24, Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1981.

3. Fundamental Aspects of Catechesis in Eastern Churches *Sui Iuris*

In our study about Churches *sui iuris* and Catechesis, we try to delineate the most important traits of these Churches. A true catechesis and deepening of the Christian discipleship are possible only when we employ these traits diligently in faith formation.

3.1. Centrality of the Holy Trinity

In the Eastern Churches, one cannot begin to discuss theology without the focal point being that of the Most Holy Trinity.¹⁹ Baptism of our Lord (Mt 3:13-17) and the final commissioning of the disciples (Mt 28:19) explicate the importance of Eastern foundational faith in the Holy Trinity. In every Christian believer the Baptism of the Lord initiates the Christian faith and completes the missionary invitation of proclaiming the Good News in the four corners of the world through the sacraments of Confirmation and Holy Eucharist. In fact, the Eastern emphasis on the faith in Holy Trinity is a dynamic spring that empowers the faithful to fulfil their personal holiness and communitarian mission in the world. Therefore, the Eastern vision of Catechesis should be founded on a formation for the Sacraments of Initiation which integrates our spiritual and social lives in the Father strengthened by the Son and anointed by the Holy Spirit. Participation in the Trinitarian life takes place through the liturgy and in a special way through the Eucharist, the mystery of communion with the glorified body of Christ, the seed of immortality.²⁰

3.2. Sacraments of Initiation and Catechesis

Catechesis on Baptism is central in the Eastern traditions by which the candidate is intimately united with Jesus, the Saviour, and the source of all grace. Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist clarify the identity, mission, and spirituality of Christian faith. The early Church Fathers compare the baptismal waters to the maternal womb while raising its recipients to the dignity of children of God. We find in Eastern Churches *sui iuris* that the Christian initiation is realized in one solitary act. Its wording and form were patterned in the second and third centuries. St Symeon of Thessalonica wrote concerning the Baptism and Chrismation as follows: “*If one does not receive the chrism*

¹⁹Robert J. Flummerfelt, “*The Mystery of Baptism*,” in Francis J. Marini, ed., *Comparative Sacramental Discipline in the CCEO and CIC – A Handbook for the Pastoral Care of Members of Other Catholic Churches Sui Iuris*, Washington, D.C.: Canon Law Society of America, The Catholic University of America, 2003, 13.

²⁰*Oriente Lumen*, no. 13.

(Myron), one is not perfectly baptized.”²¹ The model for all catechesis is the baptismal catechumenate in which, by specific formation, an adult converted to belief is brought to explicit profession of baptismal faith during the Paschal Vigil.²² This catechumenal formation should inspire the other forms of catechesis in both their objectives and in their dynamism.²³ “The life in Christ and the life in the Spirit are not two separate forms of spirituality: they are complementary aspects of the same road, leading toward eschatological deification.”²⁴ In divinization and particularly in the sacraments, Eastern theology attributes a very special role to the Holy Spirit: through the power of the Spirit who dwells in human being deification already begins on earth: the creature is transfigured and God’s kingdom inaugurated.²⁵

The holy Eucharist completes Christian initiation. Those who have been raised to the dignity of the royal priesthood by Baptism and configured more deeply to Christ by Confirmation participate with the whole community in the Lord’s own sacrifice by means of the Eucharist.²⁶ *Lumen Gentium* says: “Eucharistic sacrifice is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life.”²⁷ For the blessed Eucharist contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely, Christ himself, our Pasch.²⁸ The Early Christians, along with the Patristic traditions, understood the Eucharist as a Mystery of true and real communion with Christ Jesus. St John Chrysostom, in speaking of the Eucharist stated: “Christ even now present, even now operates.”²⁹ Our catechesis on Sacraments of Initiation is very decisive to pave a good foundation for Christian life.

3.3. Eastern Churches *Sui Iuris* and Mystagogical Catechesis

The *mystagogical* catechesis is the faith formation given to the neophytes, the newly baptized Christians, on the profound meanings of the mysteries of salvation they received. These mysteries are celebrated and through the interpretation and instruction, the believers are helped to deepen and mature their faith in Jesus Christ.

²¹David Petras, *Baptism, A Journey in Faith*, unpublished Manuscript, quoted in Francis J. Marini, 23.

²²GDC, no. 59.

²³1977 Synod, MPD 8.

²⁴John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, New York: Fordham University Press, 1987, 194-195.

²⁵*Oriente Lumen*, no. 14.

²⁶CCC, no. 1322.

²⁷*Lumen Gentium*, no. 11.

²⁸PO, no. 5, CCC, no. 1324.

²⁹John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, 201.

Sacrosanctum Concilium states that “because they [sacraments] are signs they also instruct.”³⁰ Because of this reason, the liturgy is a “*theologia prima*.”³¹ Since a Sacrament contains the signs of things that take place or have already taken place, words are needed to explain the power of signs and mysteries.³² In the early tradition of the Church, we find that such *mystagogical* catechesis enabled the Christian faithful to be the living witnesses of their faith. But we find that, “Only at the end of the fourth century, did the explanation take on the truly distinctive form of *mystagogical* catechesis.”³³ *Mystagogy* could be considered as the Liturgical Catechesis. *Instruction for Applying the Liturgical Prescriptions of the CCEO* gives a clear directive in this regard:

It is reiterated that in the East, as is also recommended in the Western Church today, Catechesis cannot be separated from liturgy, since the former takes its inspiration from the latter, as the mystery of Christ is celebrated. Such is the method adopted by numerous Fathers of the Church in the formation of the Faithful. By understanding what they celebrated and from the full assimilation of what they have celebrated, they draw a plan for life; *mystagogy* is thus the content of their existence, as redeemed, sanctified, and on the path of divinization and, as such, is the foundation of spirituality and the morals. Therefore, it is urged that the catechetical process of the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris* concretely have a starting point in their own specific celebrations.³⁴

Certainly, liturgy must be the privileged place of the transmission of Christian faith. It is in the liturgy, we discover the honoured moments of catechetical instructions, both verbal and non-verbal.³⁵ In the Eastern Christian tradition, the liturgy is also seen as a holistic catechesis and the liturgical year offers a programme for the yearlong catechesis. By participation in the liturgy, we respond to the divine revelation and express as well as nourish our faith in its true sense.³⁶ Hence, catechesis in these Churches *sui iuris* must ponder on this significant aspect.

3.4. Liturgical Prayers, Hymns and Scriptural Texts

The Sacred Scripture, prayers, and the hymns that we use during the Liturgy of Sundays and feast days within the frame of liturgical

³⁰*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 59.

³¹Geo Pallikunnel, “Syro Malabar Liturgy and the Adult Christian Faith,” in *The Quality of Adult Faith*, ed., Cleophas Fernandes, Bangalore: NBCLC, 2015, 359.

³²A. Mingana, ed. and trans., *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer and on the Sacrament of Baptism and Eucharist*, WS 6, Cambridge, 1933, 17.

³³E. Mazza, *Mystagogy: A Theology of Liturgy in the Patristic Age*, New York, 1989, x.

³⁴*Instruction for Applying the Liturgical Prescriptions of the CCEO*, no. 31.

³⁵Cf. Geo Pallikunnel, “Syro Malabar Liturgy and the Adult Christian Faith,” 358.

³⁶Cf. Geo Pallikunnel, “Syro Malabar Liturgy and the Adult Christian Faith,” 361.

seasons as well as in the sacraments are of prime importance to interpret the unique characteristics of each Church *sui iuris*. They are God's dialogue through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit with the members of the Church and our grateful responses to the Holy Trinity from our contexts to fulfil the saving grace in our present history. The faith is explained and celebrated during the liturgy so that the faithful freely commit themselves entirely to God making the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals.³⁷ God's self-revelation was a gradual process. So also, there is a gradualness in the unfolding of human efforts by means of Sacred Scripture and liturgy. Through the celebrations that take place in the liturgical seasons, the revelation of God's purpose of salvation and the mysteries of God and human life are revealed and well reflected for the formation of faith. Each Church *sui iuris* must delve deep into its legacy and tradition in order to receive the faith development and transformation of life in Christ. For example, if we analyse the Maronite liturgy on the Sunday of the birth of Baptizer, we find the first prayer in the holy Eucharist as follows:

May we be worthy to praise, confess and extol the Son, the eternal Word. His Father has sent to us the messenger of his coming to prepare the way for his birth in the flesh. Let us magnify the Godhead, whose divine and imponderable plan is announced this day by the birth of John the baptizer. Glory and worship to the Good One, for today infinity breaks the barrier of our world and fills it with the news of an astounding birth let us magnify him, now and forever. Amen.³⁸

The faith is celebrated during the liturgy and it penetrates into our consciousness and conscience inviting us to make transformation. Such powerful faith formation is the result of the Sacred Scripture, prayers and hymns we use in our liturgy.

The pre-eminence of the liturgical patrimony is even greater in the Eastern Churches because they have maintained in a special way the primacy of the liturgy as the summit of Christian life, remaining thus completely faithful to the spirit of the Church of the Fathers, when the liturgy became the locus where catechesis and religious teaching occurred; the Scripture was proclaimed and commented; the catechumens and penitents were prepared for Baptism and Reconciliation accordingly, in the period preceding Easter, in a perfect synthesis of instructions and symbols; even the *diakonia* found

³⁷Cf. *Dei Verbum*, no. 5.

³⁸Antony J. Salim, "*Captivated by Your Teaching: A Resource Book for Adult Maronite Catholics*," Tucson, Arizona: ET Nedder Publishing, 2002, 5.

its place there. The whole life of the Church was, therefore, summarized in the liturgy. Even today, it is this model which inspires the Eastern Churches and which constitutes their force. This model should be the inspiration especially for the necessary reevaluation of the “mystagogical” method for the formation of the faithful. From the liturgy, understood and assimilated, the true progress in the life of Christ is born. In the liturgy of the Eastern Churches, the liturgy is not a ritual, not just cult, not just the worship we offer God. It is first of all God’s coming to us in Christ. It is through liturgy that Christ feeds us, and we live.³⁹

3.5. Ontological Unity of Liturgy and Christian Living

Liturgy is a privileged ground of the divine encounter, a theophany, or revelation of God’s saving presence among us in the world today.⁴⁰ Theologically, we can conceive that the liturgy and Christian living are ontologically one. The liturgy itself is the primary expression of the Christian living, and the Christian living is actualized primarily in the liturgy.⁴¹ Joyce Ann Zimmerman observes that “The deep, dynamic structure of liturgy is identical to the deep, dynamic structure of Christian living. Liturgy and life are essentially related because they share a generic dynamic structure that gives access to an ever deepening experience of their common referent: the Paschal Mystery. Herein lies the key to our understanding of liturgical spirituality. What we celebrate in liturgy is nothing but what we live as Christians committed to entering into the ongoing redemptive work of the Risen Christ. What we live is the content of what we celebrate.⁴² According to Jean Corbon, a Melkite theologian, the “Christian liturgy is based on the reality of the Risen Christ called ‘*Liturgie de Source*.’”⁴³

Liturgy is a double-edged event. It is the celebration of salvific mysteries and it is also the celebration of humans’ lives on earth. Regrettably, we do not integrate the feasts of the nation or commemorations of our societies and regional celebrations which are

³⁹Robert F. Taft, *What Does Liturgy Do? Toward a Soteriology of Liturgical Celebration: Some Theses*, in *Primary Sources of Liturgical Theology*, in Dwight W. Vogel, ed., Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000, 146.

⁴⁰Robert F. Taft, *What Does Liturgy Do?...*, 139.

⁴¹Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community*, Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2006, 148.

⁴²Joyce Ann Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith: A Liturgical Spirituality*, Scranton, Penn: University of Scranton Press, 1993, viii.

⁴³Jean Corbon, *The Wellspring of Worship*, New York: Paulist Press, 1998.

social in nature. Coming to the liturgy, we are afraid even to bring those celebrations in our prayers. Thus, we create a prayer and worship detached from our own contexts and earthly and social milieus. We tend to create an imaginary world of holiness and some believe that God would be angry if we let our everyday life's aspects creep into our sacred sphere. By virtue of incarnation, God sanctified everything that comes in contact with humans and their lives. We believe that the sacred totally envelopes our human existence in and through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Hence, the Churches *sui iuris* need an openness to sanctify the world by bringing the contexts into the divine realm.

3.6. The Pedagogy of Christ

When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to humanity. The fundamental traits of the "pedagogy of Jesus"⁴⁴ has a very important role to inspire the ministry of catechesis of all the Churches *sui iuris*. The Jesuan⁴⁵ catechesis could be viewed as the prototype of all catechesis done by the universal Church. If we analyse the four Gospels we can gather five fundamental encounters of Jesuan Catechesis.

1. Natural Encounter: In Mk 6:34, when Jesus and his disciples got out of the boat, he saw a large crowd waiting for him. His heart was filled with pity for them, he began to teach (catechize) them "many things."⁴⁶ Jesus always started his catechesis from a *natural setting*. There was no forced teaching upon anybody. He respected human's freedom. However, Jesus made use of every public and private occasion of his life for effective catechesis.

2. Sensitive Encounter: In his catechetical ministry, Jesus generally used the parables, stories, and metaphors to substantiate his ideas and teachings. In the Gospel of St Matthew we read: "Jesus used parables to tell all these things to the crowds; he would not say a thing to them without using a parable" (Mt 13:34-35). He chose the

⁴⁴GDC, no. 140.

⁴⁵Coining of the word '*Jesuan*' (of Jesus) is first done by James Naduvilakuttu CMI, professor of Christology in 1988. Cf. Anto Amarnad, "Jesuan Catechesis," in *Third Millennium* 5, 1 (2002) 96-109.

⁴⁶Jesus taught them about the Kingdom of God, the holiness of the children of God, and the new way of sanctifying oneself and the world. The concept of 'descending mediation' describes how the catechesis becomes a sharing of the truth of God. Jesus announced what he heard from his Father. Catechesis is the mission of God the Father achieved through his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, and empowered by the working of the Holy Spirit.

day-to-day instances and conditions of his people to imprint in them the profound eternal truths. The discussion about salt and light (Mt 5:13-16), birds of the air and flowers of the field (Mt 6:26-30), the parable of the sower (Lk 8:4-8), parable of Mustard Seed, Yeast, Weeds, Hidden Treasure, Pearl, Net, Lost Sheep, Unforgiving Servant, Tenants in the Vineyard, Two Sons, Wedding Feast, Ten Virgins, Talents and Three Servants, the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, etc., are catechetical and some examples of Jesuan sensitive encounter in his faith formation ministry.

3. Transformative Encounter: We find Jesus making use of special incidents and occasions as moments of transformation. These moments were faith-generating moments and the instances of personal transformation for many. For example, the encounter with Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10), the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:5-29), Healing at the Pool (Jn 5:2-9), the Woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:2-11), etc. Every catechetical session that the Church offers must be an occasion for personal transformation.

4. Validating Encounter: Faith without action is lifeless and unauthentic. The true faith always demands an appropriate response. There was no dichotomy between what Jesus taught and how he lived. He brought a perfect blending of the message and his life. In itself, this harmony between the message and life was a great source of inspiration to impart his faith to his disciples and other followers. Very often, teachers of the law taught and spoke high ideals but they did not care to practise them. Jesuan methodology underscores the authenticity of message and its praxis. For example, we notice the great moments of validity of his message and life in the episode of Jesus' washing the feet of his disciples (Jn 13:15). He said: "I have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you." Again, we see, Jesus speaking on the necessity of putting into practice the message in one's own life: "Now that you know this truth, how happy you will be if you put it into practice" (Jn 13:17). Catechetical training must lead the believers to the authentic witness of the Christian faith in their life.

5. Supportive Encounter: Jesus' message was not meant only for this world, but he always referred to a life after death. Immortality is the gift of his catechesis. When the death of Jesus made the disciples utterly confused, disappointed and feeble-minded, Jesus came in person to reinvigorate and reassure them. Jesuan catechesis was intended for an eternal and infinite realization. Therefore, Jesus guaranteed his continued presence with his disciples until the end of the world

through the institution of Eucharist. The resurrection of Jesus and his sending of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples and believers are the proof for his supportive catechesis and the authenticity of his message. Our faith in Jesus Christ gives us salvation. It functions as a divine aid in our earthly pilgrimage until we reach our eternal destiny.⁴⁷

GDC also proposes a pedagogy of the Church for the ministry of catechesis.⁴⁸ Catechesis, as communication of Divine Revelation, is radically inspired by the pedagogy of God, as displayed in Christ and in the Church. Catechesis is an active pedagogy in the faith which is the salvific action of God. As it is seen as a pure grace,⁴⁹ GDC considers "catechesis as an "untiring echo" of God's salvific action and it continually seeks dialogue with people in accordance with the directions offered by the Magisterium of the Church."⁵⁰ Thus catechesis becomes an essentially ecclesial act.⁵¹ The true subject of catechesis is the Church, which, continuing the mission of Jesus the Master, and, animated by the Holy Spirit, is sent to be the teacher of the faith. The Church imitates the Mother of the Lord in treasuring the Gospel in her heart. The Church proclaims it, celebrates it, lives it, and she transmits it in catechesis to all those who have decided to follow Jesus Christ.⁵² This transmission of the Gospel is a living act of ecclesial tradition.⁵³

3.7. Dimensions of Silence and Divinization

Silence is a unique virtue sought after in the Eastern spirituality. The process of *theosis* or *Divinization* is achieved through the silent contemplation and interiorization of the divine mysteries. Silence is a process of knowing in which one becomes what one knows. Hence, silence opens the gate of transformation. Our Lord's forty days of silent contemplation is the best example of the transforming power of silence. Pope St John Paul II speaks about the value of silence:

This is what man needs today; he is often unable to be silent for fear of meeting himself, of feeling the emptiness that asks itself about meaning; man who deafens himself with noise. All believers and non-believers alike, need to learn a silence that allows the Other to speak when and how he wishes, and allows us to understand his words.⁵⁴

⁴⁷Anto Amarnad, "'Jesuan Catechesis': A Prototypal Methodology for Faith Formation," *Third Millennium* 5, 1 (2002) 96-109.

⁴⁸GDC, no. 143.

⁴⁹GDC, no. 144.

⁵⁰Cf. Paul VI, Lett. enc. *Ecclesiam Suam*, l.c. 609-659.

⁵¹Cf. EN 60 which speaks of the ecclesial nature of any evangelizing activity.

⁵²Cf. LG, 64; DV, 10a.

⁵³Cf. DCG (1971), no. 13.

⁵⁴*Oriente Lumen*, section, 16.

In fact, the illumination is the result of an incubation period. This incubation process is being done in the silence of our mind although it is the most dynamic activity of the mind. The after effect is a reward of fitting solution that engenders an efficient formation and transformation of human mind and personality.⁵⁵

According to Thomas Spidlik, "The ancient Christian East understood the practice of theology only as a personal communion with *Theos*, the Father, through the Logos, Christ in the Holy Spirit."⁵⁶ Every movement of the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us, aims at bringing us into a living communion with Christ and with the Father,⁵⁷ in "deifying us." The terminology of 'deification' and 'divinization' (*theosis*, *theopoeisis*), according to the Fathers is capable of expressing the newness of the condition to which man had been restored through the incarnation of the Son of God.⁵⁸ The deification of man corresponds to the 'man-becoming' God.⁵⁹ This process deals with a mysterious exchange by which "each takes on the qualities of the other."⁶⁰ In the words of Epictetus, "You are a fragment of God; you have within you a part of him,"⁶¹ which is being assimilated in this process. We find the equivalent expressions from Ignatius of Antioch in his usage of "God bearers" (*theophoroi*)⁶² and "full of God" (*theougemete*).⁶³ In fact, in the writings of Clement of Alexandria we find the true expression of this doctrine and usage of the terminology of deification: "the Word of God became man in order that you may

⁵⁵"The creativity theory speaks of an incubation period during which the human mind undergoes a concentrated effort to discover the meaning, connections, and solutions for the problems and allowing the entire person and the components of self to involve in the same venture... In catechetical teaching also a time of withdrawal, silence or a period of incubation is essential to welcome the fruits of creativity... This incubation period will consequently lead to a personal transformation which we expect through the catechetical training." Anto Amarnad, *Creative Catechesis: A Creative and Psycho-Social Approach to Faith Formation*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2015, 332.

⁵⁶Tomas Spidlik, *The Spirituality of the Christian East*, trans., Anthony P. Gythiel, Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications Inc, 1986, 1.

⁵⁷Albert van den Daele, *Indices Pseudo-Dionysian*, Louvain, 1941, 139; Cf. C.E. Rolt, *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology, hyperennoomai*, London: SPCK, 1977.

⁵⁸See Irene Henri Dalmais in DS 3:1376, quoted in Tomas Spidlik, *The Spirituality of the Christian East*, 45.

⁵⁹See Irenaeus, *Adversushaereses*, III.19.1; PG 77:1356BC.

⁶⁰Theodore of Ancyra, *Imnativitatem* 5; PG77:1356BC.

⁶¹Arrian's Discourses of Epictetus II.8.11; ed., H. Schenkl, *Epicteti Dissertationes ab Arrianolitterismandatae*, Leipzig, 1898.

⁶²Letter to Ephesians 9:2.

⁶³To the Magnesians 14.1; quoted in Tomas Spidlik, *The Spirituality of the Christian East*, Cistercian Publications Inc., 1986, 46.

learn from man how man may become God.”⁶⁴ Although Athanasius, clearly identified the sonship and deification, he took great care to note that this assimilation was not an identification: it does not make us “as the true God or his Word, but as it has pleased God who has given us that grace.”⁶⁵ The teaching of the Cappadocian Fathers on *divinization* passed into the tradition of all the Eastern Churches and is part of their common heritage. This can be summarized in the thought already expressed by Saint Irenaeus at the end of the second century: God passed into man so that man might pass over to God. This theology of divinization remains one of the achievements particularly dear to Eastern Christian thought.⁶⁶ Our catechesis must take this aspect of *theosis/divinization* and its relevance in the spiritual life as a most influencing aspect of Eastern spirituality.

3.8. Inculturation

If preaching the Gospel is to be understood as Good News of salvation, it should be expressed in the language and culture of those to whom it is announced. There is an exigency of inculturation, which proposes appreciation of the culture of the people to whom the Gospel is preached.⁶⁷ In the early Church, we find this in Clement of Alexandria who became a remarkable example for the appreciation of Greek Philosophy. He recognized Greek Philosophy as a preparation of the Greeks for the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the Law of Moses prepared the Jews for the same Gospel.⁶⁸ Second Vatican Council in its Decree on “Missionary Activity of the Church” invited the Catholic faithful to “recognize, preserve and promote those spiritual and moral good things as well as the socio-cultural values which are to be found among the followers of other religions.”⁶⁹ Basically, inculturation means “to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of a culture or cultures.”⁷⁰ The theological basis for inculturation is the very mystery of incarnation of *eternal Word- Logos*, who immersed himself into the human condition. This model of God becoming a human being must be taken as a valuable strategy in all Churches *sui iuris* in their attempts to catechize the believers in different contexts and cultures.

⁶⁴Protrepticus 1.8; SCH 2bis (1949) 63. [Tr. Exhortation to the Greeks 1:8; ANF, vol. 2, 174], in Tomas Spidlik, *The Spirituality of the Christian East*, 46.

⁶⁵*Against the Arians* III.19; PG, 26:361C-364A; LNPF, 4:404; cf. 24-25 (col. 373-376); *Decretis* 31; PG 25:473.

⁶⁶*Oriente Lumen*, section, 14-15.

⁶⁷George Nedungatt, *Renewal of Life and Law: An Indian Contribution*, 139-140.

⁶⁸Cf. George Nedungatt, *Renewal of Life and Law: An Indian Contribution*, 140.

⁶⁹*Nostra Aetate*, no. 2.

⁷⁰CT, no. 53; GDC nos. 109, 202.

3.9. Rite of Eastern Christian Initiation of Adults (RECIA)

In the early Church, a catechumen underwent a period of introduction in local faith community and had the instruction on the mysteries of the faith, lasting up to two years. Then the candidate received the mysteries of initiation. A period of follow-up (period of *mystagogia*) ensured that the newly initiated Christians received the support needed to strengthen the bonds of faith and love further. The Western Church has revived this programme of the catechumenate in its Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). This is a commendable practice which we in the Eastern Churches *sui iuris* ought to study and develop for our use in the ecclesial communities. Hence, a catechesis known as Rite of Eastern Christian Initiation of Adults (RECIA) could be positively thought of and developed. CCEO Canon 617 states it not only in general terms, but a clear and specific position is taken:

Each Church *sui iuris* and particularly their Bishops have the serious duty of providing catechesis, by which faith matures and the disciple of Christ is formed through a deeper and more systematic knowledge of the teaching of Christ and through an increasingly stronger commitment to the person of Christ.

3.10. Steps for Efficacious Catechesis in the Churches *Sui Iuris*

In order to express its vitality and to be efficacious, catechesis in the Churches *sui iuris* today needs to undertake the following challenges and directions according to GDC: 1. Present catechesis as a valid service to evangelization of the Church with an accent on missionary character; 2. Catechesis should address itself to those who have been and continue to be its privileged recipients: children, adolescents, young people and adults; 3. Based on the example of catechesis in the patristic era, it needs to form the personality of the believer, and therefore, catechesis must be presented as a true and proper school of Christian pedagogy; 5. It needs to announce the essential mysteries of Christianity, promoting the Trinitarian experience of life in Christ as the centre of the life of faith; and 6. It needs to consider as its primary task the preparation and formation of catechists in the deep riches of the faith.⁷¹

We observe that faith formation faces the challenges presented by life in a highly secularized society and culture. Through the ministry of catechesis the faith needs to be constantly nourished and sustained in all *sui iuris* Churches. It has to seriously take note of: 1. The context

⁷¹Cf. GDC, no. 33.

of the catechized; 2. The element of “memory” of the Church which vividly maintains the presence of the Lord; 3. Presenting the Gospel in its integrity; 4. Knowing how to inculturate the Gospel; 5. Encouraging more importantly the vocation and formation of the Catechists; 6. Providing all believers an initiation into the mission of the Church; 7. Synchronizing the value of liturgy and life; 8. Educating everyone, even the children, for the Christian community life; 9. Expressing clearly the intrinsic Trinitarian, Christological and ecclesiological aspects of Mariology and Marian devotion; 10. Uphold a true Christian moral formation and make conscious of the social teachings of the Church; 11. Showing vital interest in ecumenism and dialogue with other religions; 12. Providing strong catechesis in relation to the “new religious movements;” 13. Promoting the popular devotions; 14. Teaching the believers how to pray; 15. Making available the methods suited to various ages, stages, and special groups of believers; 16. In our cyber age, emphasize the integration of the Mass Media Communications for the greater efficiency in catechesis; 17. Teaching earnestly the ecological values and attitudes; 18. Stimulating the learning of the history and unique characteristics of one’s own Church *sui iuris*, and finally, 19. Making catechesis in Churches *sui iuris* as a transformative education that inspires and empowers the believers to keep their fidelity to God and to human persons.⁷² The challenges are many and the avenues are wide opened. In our postmodern time, the Churches *sui iuris* have greater responsibilities to shoulder for framing an efficient and appropriate catechesis.

Conclusion

Oriente Lumen observes that today we often feel that ourselves are the prisoners of the present. It is as though man had lost his perception of belonging to a history which precedes and follows him. This effort to situate oneself between the past and the future, with a grateful heart for the benefits received and for those expected, is offered by the Eastern Churches in particular, with a clear-cut sense of continuity which takes the name of Tradition and of eschatological expectation.⁷³ The Vatican Council II, in its Decree on Ecumenism, states:

The very rich liturgical and spiritual heritage of the Eastern Churches should be known, venerated, preserved and cherished by all. They must recognize that this is of supreme importance for the faithful preservation

⁷²Cf. GDC, nos. 154, 195-198, 200, 201, 206, and 209.

⁷³*Oriente Lumen*, no. 8.

of the fullness of Christian tradition, and for bringing about reconciliation between Eastern and Western Christians.⁷⁴

This great clarion call will be fulfilled only by an appropriate catechesis in the universal Church. The vitality and richness of the Eastern Churches will always shine like a lamp placed on the mountain top which would transmit the delightful light to enlighten the human hearts and witness the power of the Gospel lived and reflected through the liturgy and catechesis.

Let me conclude this paper with the recent intervention of Pope Francis who called the whole Church for a reorientation of the Catholic Church's way of catechizing people in the faith. He said that the process of catechesis should steer away from using "simply the scholastic sphere" in teaching people to encounter and follow Christ. He offered a new definition for a term that has long muddled many Church observers, redefining the "new evangelization" as an effort by Catholics to manifest their faith by working to help those on society's peripheries. Pope Francis said that the times in which we live are ones of great changes. Truly, these changes are a happy provocation to gather the signs of the times that the Lord offers the Church so that it may be able to bring Jesus Christ to the people of our time. The mission is always identical, but the language with which to announce the Gospel asks to be renovated, with pastoral wisdom. Hence, we must not have the fear to make the times of great challenges ours. According to him, the new evangelization is "to take the awareness of the merciful love of the Father to ourselves as the instrument of salvation for our brothers." Regarding the process of catechesis the pontiff said that the question of how to catechize the faithful "is not rhetorical but essential." His emphasis on taking the faith formation beyond the academic sphere could represent a significant shift for the global Catholic Church, where catechists and bishops frequently refer to the rather disciplined and lengthy *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in their teachings. He guides the Church by pointing the necessity to bring out the catechesis from a dogmatic realm to an experiential realm. Pope expressed his hope for these changes to happen in the 'Year of Mercy' which was formally opened on 8, December, 2015.⁷⁵

⁷⁴*Unitatis Redintegratio*, no. 15.

⁷⁵Reported by Joshua J. McElwee, May 29, 2015, NCR Today.