

SALESIAN PONTIFICAL UNIVERSITY

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**CATECHISTS' UNION OF JESUS CRUCIFIED
AND OF MARY IMMACULATE**

**Towards a Renewal of Identity and Formation Program
from the Perspective of Apostolate**

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SUMMARY

List of Abbreviations.....	6
General Introduction.....	9

Part One

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION AND NATURE OF SECULAR INSTITUTES

Chapter I: Historical Evolution of Secular Institutes.....	18
Chapter II: Identity, Apostolate and Formation Program of Secular Institutes.....	61

Part Two

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION AND NATURE OF THE “CATECHISTS’ UNION”

Chapter III: Historical Origin and Development of the “Catechists’ Union”.....	119
Chapter IV: Identity, Apostolate and Formation Program of the “Catechists’ Union”.....	187

Part Three

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION AND NATURE OF CATECHETICAL ACTION IN THE CHURCH

Chapter V: Overview of the Historical Evolution of Catechetical Action in the Church.....	231
Chapter VI: Nature of Catechesis in the Church.....	267
Chapter VII: Identity, Apostolate and Formation of Catechists in the Church.....	298

Summary

Part Four

TOWARDS A RENEWAL OF THE “CATECHISTS’ UNION”

Chapter VIII: Renewal of the “Catechists’ Union” with a Focus on the Catechetical and Social

Apostolate.....	347
General Conclusion.....	419
Bibliography.....	425
General Index.....	463

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS*

1. Ecclesial Documents

AA	<i>Apostolicam Actuositatem</i> , Decree of Second Vatican Council on the Apostolate of Lay People
AG	<i>Ad Gentes</i> , Decree of Second Vatican Council on the Church's Missionary Activity
CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>
CD	<i>Christus Dominus</i> , Decree of Second Vatican Council on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church
ChL	<i>Christifideles Laici</i> , Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II on the Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People
CIC	<i>Codex Iuris Canonici</i> , Code of Canon Law, 1983
CSan	<i>Cum Sanctissimus</i> , An Instruction of the Sacred Congregation for the Religious Concerning Secular Institutes
CT	<i>Catechesi Tradendae</i> , Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II on Catechesis in Our Time
DV	<i>Dei Verbum</i> , Dogmatic Constitution of Second Vatican Council on Divine Revelation
EN	<i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i> , Apostolic Exhortation of Paul VI on Evangelization in the Modern World
FC	<i>Familiaris Consortio</i> , Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II on the Christian Family in the Modern World

* All abbreviations for biblical sources as well as biblical quotations used in this study are as in the: *New Jerusalem Bible*. Study Edition, London-Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 1994.

List of Abbreviations

FdC	<i>Formazione dei Catechisti nella Comunità Cristiana</i> , Document of Italian Episcopal Conference, Series N° 25, 1982
GCD	<i>General Catechetical Directory</i>
GDC	<i>General Directory for Catechesis</i>
GS	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> , Pastoral Constitution of Second Vatican Council on the Church in the Modern World
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> , Dogmatic Constitution of Second Vatican Council on the Church
MM	<i>Mater et Magistra</i> , Encyclical Letter of John XXIII on Christianity and Social Progress
OIFC	<i>Orientamenti e Itinerari di Formazione dei Catechisti</i> , Document of Italian Episcopal Conference, Series N° 59, 1991
PC	<i>Perfectae Caritatis</i> , Decree of Second Vatican Council on the Up-to-date Renewal of Religious Life
PF	<i>Primo Feliciter</i> , Motu Proprio of Pius XII Concerning Secular Institutes
PME	<i>Provida Mater Ecclesia</i> , Apostolic Constitution of Pius XII Concerning Secular Institutes
PO	<i>Presbyterorum Ordinis</i> , Decree of Second Vatican Council on the Ministry and Life of Priests
PP	<i>Populorum Progressio</i> , Encyclical Letter of Paul VI on the Development of Peoples
PT	<i>Pacem in Terris</i> , Encyclical Letter of John XXIII on Peace on Earth
RCIA	<i>Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults</i>
RdC	<i>Rinnovamento della Catechesi</i> , Document of Italian Episcopal Conference on the Renewal of Catechesis
RM	<i>Redemptoris Missio</i> , Encyclical Letter of John Paul II on the Mission of the Redeemer
RN	<i>Rerum Novarum</i> , Encyclical Letter of Leon XIII on the Condition of Labor
SC	<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> , Constitution of Second Vatican Council on the Sacred Liturgy
VC	<i>Vita consecrata</i> , Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II on Consecrated Life

2. Institutions and Conferences

AMI	Associazione di Maria Immacolata
CCAM	Casa di Carità Arti e Mestieri
CEC	Centro Evangelizzazione e Catechesi
CEI	Conferenza Episcopale Italiana
CELAM	Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano
CMIS	Conferenza Mondiale degli Istituti Secolari
CRIS	Congregazione per i Religiosi e Istituti Secolari
FRA	Figlie della Regina degli Apostoli
ROMI	Regia Opera della Mendicizia Istruita
SCDW	Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship
SCRIS	Sacra Congregazione per i Religiosi e Istituti Secolari
SI	Secular Institute
SII	Secular Institutes
UC	Unione Catechisti
UCN	Ufficio Catechistico Nazionale
USCC	United States Catholic Conference
UPS	Università Pontificia Salesiana

3. Other Abbreviations

[n.p.]	no place of edition
[n.y.]	no year of edition

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Today a major part of our world is found under a profound crisis in the religious, cultural, social, political and economic spheres. Young people in particular, in whom the future of the world depends, are facing grave challenges. In many cases, there is almost a situation of desperation. This, from the part of the Church, calls for a most urgent and a highly increased – both in quality and quantity – pastoral care. However, in many parts of the world, the pastoral care provided has remained to be inadequate. This is mainly due to the lack of sufficient well prepared persons who would work in collaboration in the heart of the Church and society.

The “Catechists’ Union,”¹ through its lay members, has been offering its contribution in the educational, catechetical and social fields from the time of its foundation. However, in the actual world context, it seems that the mission of the members is becoming more challenging. It seems that the members are being called to strengthen their identity and to prepare themselves more intensely for a wider and more demanding mission in the Church and in the world. Today if the Catechists’ Union is to contribute efficiently to the mission of the Church by way of the specific apostolate of its members, it needs to correspond to the actual demands of the world context and situate itself properly and adequately within the entire project and mission of the Church in the world. To respond to this “new call” it is indispensable for the Union to revise its experiences in all aspects and look forward towards a process of renewal of its identity, apostolate and, consequently, also a renewal in the formation programme of its members.

¹ The short form “Catechists’ Union” or simply the term “Union” is used here to refer to the Secular Institute “Catechists’ Union of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate.”

This is the exact motivation for this study which attempts to facilitate a process of renewal in the Union. Before proceeding with the systematic study, we will briefly highlight here the nature of the study specifying the focus of the analysis, the objectives to be achieved and the method to be followed.

1. Synopsis

As the title indicates, the main topic of this study is the “*Catechists’ Union of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate*”. The focus is on the analysis of the specific *identity, apostolate and formation programme* of the Union. Since the Union is a *Secular Institute* whose members are called to be *Catechists*, this study in its development will consider these dual aspects, i.e., on the one hand, it will try to analyse critically the nature of the Union as a Secular Institute confronting it with the real nature of Secular Institutes, and on the other hand, it will try to clarify the nature of the members as Catechists confronting it with the true nature of catechists in the Church.

These dual analyses will serve as criteria upon which this study will base itself for the formulation of a proposal towards *a renewal of the identity, apostolate and formation programme* of the Union. Before proceeding with the *systematic analysis* of the actual identity, apostolate and formation program of the given themes, i.e., of Secular Institutes, of the Catechists’ Union and of catechists in the Church, this study will first deal with a *historical analysis* of each one. However, this historical analysis is not purely done for finding out historical data, but for manifesting the gradual evolution of the nature of the given themes in time, and therefore, for a better understanding of the actual nature of these themes. We can say it is a genetico-historical development.

In this study, a particular emphasis and therefore a wider clarification will be given to the aspect of the *apostolate* since it is the main sphere calling for a major renewal. In addition, within this apostolate, a special regard will be given to the *young* since young people occupy a privileged place in the mission of the Union.

2. Status Questionis

In regard to the basic identity, apostolate and formation program of the Union, there are fundamental documents written by the founder Giovanni Garberoglio (a member of the “Brothers of the Christian Schools” known by his religious name Br. Teodoreto, 1871-1954). Among the most important ones are found a diary in four volumes and an epistolary. There are also basic documents prepared from time to time by the General Council of the Union and other very important writings from the part of the Catechists of the Union, Brothers of the Christian Schools and other authors. In addition, the Union continuously updates its experiences by way of conferences, retreats, ordinary and extraordinary assemblies, speeches and messages of the president, reflections and observations of its members. The results of these interventions are communicated mainly by way of the bi-annual bulletins as well as subsidies, circular letters, articles in certain periodicals, registered cassettes and CDs, and recently by way of a website in the internet. However, till now no systematic study has been made in regard to the nature of the Union. This is the first opportunity and tentative to make a study of the Union on the basis of a scientific method.

3. Objectives of the Study

According to the indications made in the *synopsis*, the objectives of the study can be stated as follows:

- Understanding and clarifying the historical development of the Union, starting from a general analysis of the historical development of the nature of Secular Institutes and in conformity with a general historical evolution of the nature of catechetical praxis in the Church;
- Exploring and highlighting what emerges in the documents of the Union in regard to its actual identity, apostolate and formation program, and, for a better clarification, identifying and examining current trends of thought and ecclesial orientations in regard

to the identity, apostolate and formation program of Secular Institutes and of catechists in the Church;

- Finally, on the basis of the analysis made, elaborating a proposal towards a renewed understanding of the identity of the Union and the apostolate of its members in the Church and in the society of today, and indicating concrete operational steps that include a formative orientation for the Catechists.

4. Method of the Study

In the development of these objectives, the study will use a *historical-critical* method in a *pastoral* perspective, in the sense that it consists in the description and analysis of the historical evolution of the nature of the given themes, and in the critical confrontation of the actual nature of the Union with the emerging trends of thought and ecclesial orientations on the nature of Secular Institutes and nature of catechetical praxis for the purpose of a concrete renewal.

Therefore, the study will take place in three perspectives:

- *The historical perspective* where each theme is clarified from a historical point of view, i.e., it consists in the analysis of the historical development of the nature of the Union, the historical evolution of the nature of Secular Institutes and historical evolution of the nature of catechetical action in the Church;
- *The critical or systematic perspective* where a systematic analysis of the actual identity, apostolate and formation programme of the Union is done on the basis of the documents of the Union and is confronted with and illuminated by a systematic analysis on the actual identity, apostolate and formation programme of Secular Institutes and of catechists in the Church which is developed on the basis of the actual teachings of the Church and the contributions of contemporary thinkers;
- *The pastoral perspective* where a proposal towards a concrete renewal of the identity and apostolate of the Union is elaborated including practical orientations in regard to the formation of the members.

5. Articulation of the Study

On the basis of the method, this study is articulated in four parts. The first three parts initiate with a chapter that presents a historical analysis of the evolution of the nature of each of the given themes and then continue with a systematic analysis of the actual nature of the themes. Accordingly, the *first part*, in the first chapter, analyzes the historical evolution of Secular Institutes and in the second chapter develops a systematic analysis of the identity, apostolate and formation program of Secular Institutes. The *second part*, in the third chapter, analyses the historical evolution of the Catechists' Union and in the fourth chapter develops the identity, apostolate and formation program of the Union. The *third part*, in the fifth chapter, presents an overview of the historical evolution of catechetical action in the Church, in the sixth chapter develops a theoretical analysis of the nature of catechesis, and in the seventh chapter analyzes the identity, apostolate and formation of catechists in the Church. Finally, the *fourth part*, in the eighth chapter, develops a proposal towards the renewal of the identity and formation program of the Catechists' Union from the perspective of the apostolate.

As we have mentioned before, the analysis on the nature of Secular Institutes is necessitated for a better clarification of the nature of the Union as a Secular Institute and will serve as a base for the proposal of renewal in the Union. Hence, the *first chapter* beginning from a brief analysis of the existence of secular forms of consecration in the early centuries goes on to the end of the nineteenth century, the period where the real beginnings of Secular Institutes is to be marked in the history of the Church. This chapter highlights the period of the promulgation of the apostolic constitution “*Provida Mater Ecclesia*” by which Secular Institutes were recognized by the Church as institutes of consecrated life and analyzes the progress made in the theological understanding of Secular Institutes particularly in the period from “*Provida Mater*” to the Second Vatican Council. It analyzes the teaching of the Vatican Council in reference to these Institutes and describes further developments that came after the Council till the moment when Secular Institutes found their place in the Code of Canon Law.

The *second chapter* continues with the systematic analysis of the actual identity, apostolate and formation program of Secular Institutes. It describes the nature of Secular Institutes which are defined by the Church through the common characteristic union of consecration and secularity. It analyses the biblical and theological foundations of secular consecration, the significance of secular consecration, the essential characteristics of Secular Institutes, the charism and spirituality, the modality of living the evangelical counsels in the world, and the ecclesial dimension of the presence and mission of Secular Institutes in the world. It presents a comprehensive understanding of the apostolate of Secular Institutes as an apostolate founded on consecration and on an authentic secularity and, in a broad sense, articulates the major forms of the apostolate of these Institutes. In relation to the apostolate, it also indicates the formative orientations in Secular Institutes.

Following the historical and systematic analysis on Secular Institutes, the study moves to the central theme, i.e., the Catechists' Union. Hence, the *third chapter* analyzes the historical development of the Catechists' Union. This chapter initiating with the biographical notes of the founder and his collaborator proceeds with the historical analysis of the remote origins of the Union, its early beginnings and progressive developments till the period when it was officially approved by the Church as a Secular Institute. It also presents biographical notes of the first General Presidents of the Union showing the specific role played by each one of them for its definitive consolidation. In addition, it includes a brief history of the expansion of the Union in the world.

Continuing the argument on the Catechists' Union, the *fourth chapter* articulates the actual identity, apostolate and formation program of the Union. It describes the fundamental aspects of the identity of the Union which include the charism, finality, spirituality and spirit of the Union. It shows the different categories of members in the Union as well as its internal organization. It articulates the specific apostolate which consists in the diffusion of the '*Devotion*' to Jesus Crucified and in the catechetical-educational-social service which is carried out in diverse modalities with a particular attention to the young and the needy. It shows the apostolic works and institutions proper to the Union. In addition, it describes the formative itinerary in the Union: admission, first formation and permanent formation.

After this the focus of the study shifts to the general catechetical praxis in the Church. As it has been mentioned, the analysis on the nature of catechetical action in the Church serves for a further clarification of the nature of the Union whose members are primarily called for a catechetical mission in the Church and also as criteria for confrontation in view of renewal of the Union. Accordingly, following the methodological procedure of this study, the *fifth chapter* presents a brief historical overview of the evolution of the nature of catechetical praxis in the Church. This chapter shows the earliest catechetical experiences in the apostolic period and analyses the developments made in the centuries that followed. It briefly deals with the patristic period when the catechumenate remained vital till its gradual disappearance in the sixth century, the middle-ages when the history of catechesis is generally identified with preaching or predication, the modern period when many catechisms were elaborated and diffused both from the part of the Catholics and the Reformers, and the contemporary period which is primarily characterized by the catechetical movements for the renewal of catechesis and the progressive restoration of the catechumenate.

The *sixth chapter* deals with a systematic analysis of the nature of catechesis on the basis of the actual teachings of the Church and the contributions of contemporary scholars. It clarifies and describes the term catechesis, highlights its biblical and theological nature. It shows the integral nature of catechesis highlighting its place and task in reference to the fundamental functions of the Church: *kerygma*, *diakonia*, *koinonia* and *leitourgia*. In reference to the individual person, it shows the authentic nature of catechesis highlighting its role in the transformation of the person in all aspects, i.e., in the cognitive, affective and operative components of the personality. It shows the ecumenical nature of catechesis highlighting its role in the promotion of dialogue and unity with other Christian Churches. Finally, it shows the contextual nature of catechesis highlighting its inculturizing, dialogic and liberating dimensions.

The *seventh chapter* deals with the identity, apostolate and formation of catechists in the Church. It describes the nature, the vocation, the common functional identity and spirituality of catechists. It deals with the apostolate of catechists with a particular reference to young people. It shows the role of catechists as companions of the young in the journey of faith by

means of biblical models that illuminate this apostolate providing methodological elements. Underlining the importance of formation for the vocational and apostolic realization of catechists, this chapter shows the different dimensions and aspects of formation of catechists which include the human, spiritual and ecclesial maturity; biblical and theological competency, knowledge of the human person, knowledge of the environment; pedagogical, methodological and didactic preparation. This implies a harmonious formation in the quadruple dimensions of ‘*being*’, ‘*knowing*’, ‘*knowing-how*’ and ‘*being-with*’. It also deals with the itinerary of formation and the preparation of formators.

Finally, the *eighth chapter* after highlighting the elements in the actual praxis of the Catechists’ Union which are in need of a major renewal proceeds with a proposal on how to improve them. This chapter, above all, invites the members of the Union to be open to the world context and to orientate their apostolic mission in a way that is responsive to the demands of the time, i.e., to the concrete experiences and needs of individual persons. It invites them to render their apostolate in the Church, particularly with young people, more relevant and also to intensify the social dimension of their apostolate looking forward towards the integral salvation of the human person. In addition, in respect to the apostolic exigency, this chapter indicates some elements that need to be considered in the process of formation of the members of the Union and concludes proposing certain elements for renewal in regard to the identity of the Union as a Secular Institute.

As a *conclusion*, the study recapitulates the main themes of the study and sums up the proposal for renewal stressing on three main aspects of the apostolate of the Union: the objective orientation of the apostolate, the field of apostolate and the mode of realizing the apostolate.

Part One

**HISTORICAL EVOLUTION AND NATURE OF
SECULAR INSTITUTES**

Chapter One

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF SECULAR INSTITUTES

Before dealing with the analysis of the historical development of the “Catechists’ Union of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate”, we will, in this chapter, analyse the historical evolution of Secular Institutes in general with the purpose of situating the “Catechists’ Union” within the general globe of this evolution and thus offering a better understanding of its historical development.

Secular Institutes before being officially recognized by the Church had gone a long way in history. Different testimonies show the existence of consecration in the world already in the early centuries of Christianity, which, with the process of institutionalization and with the beginning of monasticism started to disappear little by little. However, in the beginning of the modern period, such forms of consecration started to reappear in the Church, making a considerable development at the end of the nineteenth century where tentatives of real Secular Institutes are to be marked in the history of the Church. Many insistent requests were made from the part of the Institutes for an official recognition for which the Church had to resist for long time till 1947, the year of the promulgation of the apostolic constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia*, by which Secular Institutes, after a troublesome history, were finally recognized as Institutes of consecrated life obtaining their proper canonical and juridical status – though, even after this great event, difficulties had continued in regard to the theological understanding of the form of consecration presented by these Institutes. This chapter will articulate all these

major historical factors – both before the promulgation of the apostolic constitution *Provida Mater* and after – and will analyse the teaching of the Second Vatican Council in regard to these Institutes and the developments that came after the Council till the time of the insertion of Secular Institutes in the Code of Canon Law. It will also show the rapid rate of the expansion of Secular Institutes in the world.

1. From the Early Centuries of Christianity

All along the history of the Church, in different moments, in response to the needs of a particular period of time, the Holy Spirit has been intervening and by making use of chosen persons has brought forth immense works for the salvation and sanctification of peoples. Most of these works, which in an initial moment come as spontaneous activities, are later institutionalised by the Church. The Church authority has always been careful in judging if such initiatives truly come from the Holy Spirit and takes time to see their consistency and the fruits they bear. Only after a period of adequate discernment and matured reflection does the Church, by virtue of the divine mandate invested on it, recognizes and approves them as part of its organism. In fact, all the institutes of consecrated life and the various forms of Catholic movements in the Church have passed through this procedure during the initial period of their existence.¹

Following the earliest three or four centuries, in different moments, diverse forms of consecrated life have appeared in the history of the Church: from monasticism which initiated in the third-fourth century in the East, and later diffused to the West, to the mendicant Orders born in the thirteenth century, to religious Congregations, and to Societies of common life. And for women: from strictly cloistered monastery to a less rigid cloister, to religious Congregations and Societies of active life. All these forms of consecrated life aim at the sanctification of the members by means of a radical observance of the Gospel and the

¹ Cf L. MOROSINI MONTEVECCHI – S. SERNAGIOTTO DI CASAVECCHIA, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, Milano, Edizioni O.R., 1978, 9-10.

evangelical counsels; and at the same time all of them demand detachment or separation from the familial and social environment, and an obligatory life in common.²

Later on, in the twentieth century, the Church approved a new form of consecration to God, that of Secular Institutes. It is true that a form of consecration to God lived “in the world”³ was not something totally new as it already existed in the early centuries of Christianity; however, in the true sense of the word, “real Secular Institutes”⁴ date to the nineteenth century. These Institutes differ from all the above mentioned forms of consecration because remaining in the world is an essential element of the vocation of the members; in fact, it is as essential as the consecration itself. To comprehend this type of consecration, the Church had to make a long evolution of thoughts expressed in different documents. In fact, after the long history of religious consecration which was conceived in terms of separation or escape from the world, in terms of solitude, silence, common prayer, common dress and so on, it was not easy to comprehend this secular form of consecration. For this reason, despite its earliest presence in the Church, to acquire the appropriate juridical-canonical status and the correct theological understanding this form of consecration to God had to undergo a very long and difficult journey in history as it will be developed under this topic.

1.1. *Testimonies of Secular Form of Consecration in the Early Centuries*

The history of a secular form of consecration is as old as the history of the Church itself. Already in the apostolic times, there were Christians who consecrated themselves to God while living in the midst of the community and in their families.⁵ They were virgins or

² Cf *Ibid.*, 10-12. For a more complete reading on the history of consecrated life in the Church: Cf M. AUGÉ – E. SASTRE SANTOS – L. BORRIELLO, *Storia della vita religiosa*, Brescia, Editrice Queriniana, 1988.

³ The expression “in the world” signifies a form of living the evangelical counsels in the habitual familial and social environment, amidst the temporal realities of the world, participating in the ordinary life lived by other lay people of the society, without any obligation to a life in common. Otherwise, nobody ever ceases to live in the world. In addition, it is to be understood not as a pure sociological condition but assumes a theological significance as it will be shown in the second chapter.

⁴ The expression “real Secular Institutes” signifies SII viewed in terms of a possible juridical-canonical status or insertion and correct theological composition as they have today.

⁵ Cf SCDW, *Mos Virgines Consecrandi*. Introduction to the Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity, 31 May 1970, in *Notitiae* (1970) 314-315, nn. 1-2.

celibates “for the kingdom” and widows who, “called by the Lord to cling only to him with greater freedom of heart, body, and spirit, have decided with the Church’s approval to live in the respective states of virginity or perpetual chastity”.⁶

Besides what is written in the Synoptic Gospels in regard to celibacy,⁷ the existence of Christians, men and women, who opted for celibacy and virginity while continuing to live in the Christian community, is witnessed by S. Paul in around 57 A.D. (cf *1 Co* 7:25-34). In the Acts of the Apostles, there is a mention of the four daughters of one of the seven deacons, called Philip, who were unmarried and who had the gift of prophecy (cf *Ac* 21: 8-9). And in the first letter to Timothy, we read of a special category of widows who were enrolled to a kind of congregation and who were living in continence, dedicating themselves to works of charity and prayer (cf *1 Tm* 5:9-16).⁸

Outside the *New Testament*, the first text where the presence of celibates, with a well defined role inside the Christian community, appears is *Didaché*, a Judaic-Christian writing dating ca. 100 A.D. There is another writing of *Clement of Rome*, written around the end of the first century to the community of Corinth inviting those who have chosen to live in celibacy not to exalt themselves but to live that choice in faith and humility (cf *Ep. 1 ad Corinthios* 38, 2). A similar exhortation, was written by *Ignatius of Antioch* († ca. 110) in the letter to Polycarp, warning those who have chosen a life of chastity not to feel proud (cf *Ep. ad Polycarpum* 5, 2). This existence of men and women, inside the Christian community, who lived in chastity till the old age, soon became an apologetic motive. *Saint Justin* (ca. 150), saw in the Christian virgins an apologetic argument in favor of the Church in the Greco-Roman world, where there was a great moral decadence (cf *Apologia I*, 15, 6). *Athenagoras of Athens*

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994, n. 922.

⁷ In the Synoptic Gospels, the concept of celibacy is usually treated at the side of matrimony, always in view of the eschatological Kingdom. In *Mt* 22:23-33, it appears as the proclamation and realization of the reality of resurrection ahead of time. In *Mt* 19:11-12, it appears as vocation and grace. In *Lk* 18:29-30, it appears as a renunciation of temporal goods for a radical fellowship of Christ and service of brothers and sisters (Cf A. FAVALE, *Vita consacrata e società di vita apostolica*, Roma, LAS, 1992, 11).

⁸ Cf AUGÉ – SASTRE SANTOS – BORRIELLO, *Storia della vita religiosa*, 23; Cf FAVALE, *Vita consacrata e società di vita apostolica*, 11-12.

also wrote, in about the year 177, praising virginity as a way to a closer union with God (cf *Legatio pro christianis*, 33).⁹

This type of life of virginity, presented in its initial moments by the New Testament and the apostolic fathers, made further development and growth, both in the East and West, at the end of the 2nd and beginning of the 3rd century. In this period, there was a vast and more accurate production of writings on the theme of virginity. Among these can be mentioned: in Africa, Tertullian (ca. 155-220) in *De virginibus velandis* (written between 200 and 206), and Cyprian (200/210-258) in *De habitu virginum* (written in 249); in Alexandria, Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215) in *Stromata*; in Syria, the pseudo-Clement in the *Epistulae ad virgines* (written in the first half of the third century); in Asia minor, Methodius of Olympus († ca. 311) in *Symposium* (written at the end of the 3rd century); as well as in many other writings.¹⁰

In these first three or four centuries the virgins were living their consecration to God, in a more spontaneous and informal way, mainly in their familial environment, on the basis of an integral observation of the Gospel message; and distancing themselves from worldly luxuries and entertainments, they were dedicating “their time in works of penance and of mercy, in apostolic activity and in prayer, in keeping with their state of life and spiritual gifts.”¹¹ These early vocations were mainly lived among the Christians who were isolated and dispersed in a society with a majority of pagans, and were of much significance like hidden leavens among the mass of people. From the end of the 3rd century there were clear manifestations of institutionalization. The *Institute of Virgins* emerges in the Christian community as a characteristic group for which the bishop had special responsibility. And, in the fourth and

⁹ Cf AUGÉ – SASTRE SANTOS – BORRIELLO, *Storia della vita religiosa*, 23-24; Cf FAVALE, *Vita consacrata e società di vita apostolica*, 12-13; Cf J. QUASTEN, *Patrology. The Beginnings of Patristic Literature from the Apostles Creed to Irenaeus*, vol. I, Notre Dame, Ave Maria Press, 1986, 58-63, 196-219, 229-236.

¹⁰ Cf B. PROIETTI, *Il celibato per il Regno*, Milano, Editrice Ancora, 1977, 136-137; Cf AUGÉ – SASTRE SANTOS – BORRIELLO, *Storia della vita religiosa*, 24; Cf QUASTEN, *Patrology. The Ante-Nicene Literature after Irenaeus*, vol. II, 35, 130-133, 304-305, 306-307, 347-348.

¹¹ *Mos virgines consecrandi*, n. 2.

fifth centuries the community life in monasteries was evolving, with its greatest developments in the middle ages and practically consecration in the world disappeared till the modern age.¹²

1.2. *Before the Apostolic Constitution “Provida Mater Ecclesia”*

After a long history of monastic and religious form of consecration,¹³ in the beginning of the modern period started to appear associations of consecrated people with a form of consecration much different from what had become traditional; by the fact that, the members of such new associations, even after having professed the evangelical counsels, continued to dress like others, to live in their houses and to exercise their apostolate as lay persons. One of the first tentatives of such association of persons was that of Saint Angela Merici (1470/5-1540), who founded the “Society of the Virgins of Saint Ursula” (*Compagnia delle vergini di sant’Orsola*) in Brescia, Italy, in 1535. It started like an alternative to the monastic life for those women who felt the call for consecration but who did not want or were not able to embrace a cloistered life. They lived following the example of the consecrated virgins of the primitive Church, but forming groups according to the rules of life established by the foundress. It was institutionalized, but without the members having to dedicate themselves in a common activity, and without separating them from their habitual environment of life and work.¹⁴ As a new form of life, it was approved by Paul III in 1544 with the bull *Regimini Universalis Ecclesiae*. However, the members had to face juridical and canonical difficulties as well as strong adversities due to the mentality and social structures of that period, since in that time women did not have juridical independence and they did not have complete

¹² Cf MOROSINI – SERNAGIOTTO, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, 13; Cf L. BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, Milano, Editrice Ancora, 2008, 24.

¹³ Within this history, it is to be noted that “great founders like Francis and Ignatius did not originally intend the foundation of “Orders” as such, but of groups of consecrated laymen in the midst of the world, who were not to be externally distinguished from their fellowmen and were to be for them a model and a provocation” (H. U. von BALTHASAR, *The Laity and the Life of the Counsels. The Church’s Mission in the World*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2003, 246).

¹⁴ The members were professing the evangelical counsels but without making public vows. And they were dedicating themselves to the work of education and catechesis but without any apostolic insertion in the professional life (Cf J. BEYER, *Gli Istituti Secolari*, Roma, Città Nuova, 1964, 30); Cf ID., *Il diritto della vita consacrata*, Milano, Editrice Ancora, 1989, 445.

autonomy and responsibility which was necessary for them to live their consecration in the world as lay persons. So, after the death of S. Angela, the association was decisively directed towards a conventual form by Church authorities in that period. But the original charism did not disappear for ever, it remained like a seed buried inside the earth, and after three and half centuries, in 1866, it grew out again. Today it has recovered the identity desired by the foundress as a Secular Institute.¹⁵

Similar practices developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but had to face similar difficulties and adversities. A major development, which we could consider the real beginning of Secular Institutes, came in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when monastic life became impossible with the French Revolution.¹⁶ In this period arose several associations and movements, the members of which were following a similar form of life of perfection in their normal environment and, in one way or another, were making up for the life and apostolate of the religious congregations and orders which were persecuted or suppressed by liberal or revolutionary governments. Among the most remembered associations were the two ‘societies’ founded by J. Picot de Clorivière, SJ († 1820) in Paris, in 1791. One was male – the “Society of Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus” (*Società dei Sacerdoti del Sacro Cuore di Gesù*), and the other female – the “Society of the Daughters of the Heart of Mary” (*Società delle Figlie del Cuore di Maria*) – which he founded with the collaboration of Adelaide M. de Cicé. De Clorivière received the inspiration to found these associations in the same year, when the suppression of religious orders was decreed. The members of these associations, considered as a tentative to modern Secular Institutes, lived without any specific

¹⁵ Cf AUGÉ – SASTRE SANTOS – BORRIELLO, *Storia della vita religiosa*, 427-433; Cf MOROSINI – SERNAGIOTTO, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, 13-14. For a wider reading on the life and works of Angela Merici: Cf L. MARIANI – E. TAROLLI – M. SEYNAEVE, *Angela Merici. Contributo per una biografia*, Milano, Editrice Ancora, 1986. Text in English: *Angela Merici. Contribution towards a Biography*, Milano, Editrice Ancora, 1989.

¹⁶ The French Revolution began in May 1789. In February 1790, the suppression of religious orders and congregations was decreed by the constituent Assembly of the Revolution. The members of religious orders and congregations were violently persecuted. However, such a loss was greatly compensated in various ways. Many religious, though they were expelled from their monasteries and convents, stayed faithful to their consecration: offering reparations and engaging themselves in diverse forms of apostolate. Others promoted new forms of consecration adaptable to the situations of that time. In short, after the revolution, an extraordinary development of new forms of consecrated life started (Cf AUGÉ – SASTRE SANTOS – BORRIELLO, *Storia della vita religiosa*, 444-445; Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 25).

dress that would distinguish them from others, and without life in a community. They were professing the three evangelical counsels, to give testimony of their consecrated life in the environment where they had to find themselves.¹⁷ From the beginning, De Clorivière had made many tentatives to make contacts with Rome for pontifical approval. But due to the war, this was made possible only in 1801 and a “verbal approval”¹⁸ was granted by Pope Pius VII. However, by this approval, the members were allowed to emit simple annual vows only, and it was to be done under the local church authority. The intention of the Pope was to avoid any form of corporation for not provoking the suspicion of the government.¹⁹

In the same line, in France, in 1821, a secular priest Giuseppe Allemand († 1836), founded in Marsiglia the institute “*Opera della Gioventù*”²⁰ which included an external group of consecrated members. In 1844, Sofia Prouvier founded the institute of the “Virgins of Jesus and Mary” (*Vergini di Gesù e di Maria*), the members of which were either internal living in community or external living in their families, but all emitted the three vows. In 1852, always as a response to the unfavourable situation of that time for religious life, Enrichetta Désir founded the “Society of the Humble Daughters of Calvary” (*Società delle Umili Figlie del Calvario*) or – as it was known in Paris – “*Istituto Normale Cattolico*”; however, in 1866 they assumed a community life. In Italy, there was the *Institute of the Servants and Oblates of the Sacred Heart* (*Istituto delle Ancelle e Oblate del Sacro Cuore*), founded by Blessed Caterina Volpicelli, in Naples, in 1865, which included two distinct categories of members: those who lived in community and emitted the three vows, but without wearing any religious habit (*ancelle*), and those who made promise for observing the evangelical counsels but living in

¹⁷ Cf BEYER, *Gli Istituti Secolari*, 15-30; Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 25-26; Cf AUGÉ – SASTRE SANTOS – BORRIELLO, *Storia della vita religiosa*, 469.

¹⁸ The official approval, much desired by the founder, arrived only one year and a half after his death. In reality, after the death of the founder, the “Society of the Heart of Jesus” (*Società del Cuore di Gesù*), due to continuous oppositions, lack of direction and lack of uniting corporation, disappeared little by little, with the last member who died in 1886. But it was re-born again in 1918 and approved in 1919 by Pope Benedict XV and re-approved in 1925 by Pope Pius XI. In 1952 it was erected definitively as a SI of a pontifical right. The female association, “Daughters of the Heart of Mary” (*Figlie del Cuore di Maria*), obtained definitive approval from the Holy See, in 1857, as a religious Congregation, and this approval was renewed in 1948 by Pope Pius XII without any change of the Statutes (Cf BEYER, *Gli Istituti Secolari*, 25-28).

¹⁹ Cf *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁰ It was definitively approved by Pius IX in 1874 (Cf *Ibid.*, 34).

their families (*Oblate*). In Poland, the association founded in the period of tsarist persecution, by Blessed Venceslao Koźmiński,²¹ Capuchin, († 1916), is to be remembered. Blessed Venceslao took as a model and as a point of reference the hidden life²² of the holy Family of Nazareth.²³

As it is shown, in the nineteenth century, we find the first tentatives of true and proper associations of consecrated lay persons who lived in the world without any distinctive external sign. However, when the decree *Ecclesia Catholica*,²⁴ in 1889, and the apostolic constitution *Conditae a Christo*,²⁵ in 1900, gave a juridical recognition of state of perfection to male and female, clerical and lay religious congregations of simple and public vows, it did not take into consideration the new form of consecrated life without public vows, without life in common and without religious habit. The difficulty of obtaining an official recognition from the Church authority made some groups and movements disappear. Some of them joined religious congregations with the right of having external consecrated lay members (as in the case of the Institute of Volpicelli); others, instead, were transformed into societies of common life; while

²¹ Venceslao Koźmiński, named Onorato in religion, is founder, in Poland, of seventeen religious congregations still existing and of nine which have disappeared (Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 26); Cf F. DA RIESE, *Onorato Kozminski: animatore di vita consacrata, precursore degli Istituti secolari*, in “Vita consacrata” 12 (1976) 12, 608-621; Cf R. AUBERT et al., *Nuova Storia della Chiesa. La Chiesa nella società liberale*, vol. 5/I, Torino, Marietti, 1977, 140.

²² It is worth noting that for Blessed Venceslao this form of hidden apostolate was not a demand conditioned by the particular socio-political situation of Poland of that time, but was a postulate of the Gospel (Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 26).

²³ Cf BEYER, *Gli Istituti Secolari*, 31-32; Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 26; Cf AUGÉ – SASTRE SANTOS – BORRIELLO, *Storia della vita religiosa*, 469.

²⁴ In 1880 the archbishop of Naples gave recognition to the Institute of Volpicelli. And it was actually this fact which provoked the decree *Ecclesia Catholica*, emitted by the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regular Clergy, and confirmed by Pope Leon XIII on 11th August 1889. It is the only document which refers to SII before the promulgation of *Provida Mater Ecclesia* in 1947. In this document were presented norms for the approbation of the associations whose members were living in the world without religious dress and it was decided that they be approved as pious associations (Cf BEYER, *Gli Istituti Secolari*, 31-32); Cf SACRED CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS AND REGULAR CLERGY, *Ecclesia Catholica*. Decree, 11 August 1889, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 23 (1889-1890) 634-636.

²⁵ *Conditae a Christo*, promulgated by Pope Leon XIII on 8th December 1900, gave an official recognition and a canonical status to the societies of simple vows (societies of common life) as religious institutes. Many founders, like San Filippo Neri and San Vincenzo de’ Paoli, had renounced public vows in order to have more freedom and agility in their apostolate. The members had private vows and were living together in community. For these societies, the document *Conditae a Christo* is considered as the Magna Charta (Cf BEYER, *Gli Istituti Secolari*, 33-34); Cf LEON XIII, *Conditae a Christo*. Apostolic Constitution, 8 December 1900, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 23 (1900-1901) 341-347.

others preserved their original identity and were approved as pious associations. As pious associations their commitments were not to have official recognition from the Church and were not to be assumed under a superior but were to remain private to each member, and they had to be subjugated to the authority of the proper bishop. However, to be approved as pious associations was in itself a step forward because for so many centuries such a form of consecration to God without separation from the familial, social and professional environment was unthinkable. Of course, here it was not about their recognition as a form of consecration – as they were excluded as such – but at least there was an awareness that there existed associations of lay persons whose members, individually and privately, want to live the evangelical counsels in the world.²⁶

The birth of “Catholic Action” (*Azione Cattolica*)²⁷ in 1870, in Italy, had great influence in the formation of lay persons who would dedicate themselves to the religious and social apostolate according to the demands of the new situations. The authentic Christian formation received in this movement, in addition to the large number of priestly and religious vocations, has aroused in some of its members the desire to donate themselves wholly to God while remaining in the same condition of life, and in this way, the ideal of Secular Institutes was advancing strongly. In fact, in the first decades of the twentieth century arouse many new lay movements who, convinced of their vocation, felt the need of aggregating themselves into an association and were continuously asking for the approval of the Church.²⁸

²⁶ Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 27; Cf MOROSINI – SERNAGIOTTO, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, 13-15; Cf BEYER, *Gli Istituti Secolari*, 31-42.

²⁷ The “Catholic Action” is an association of lay persons dedicated to the service of the Christian community in a form of pastoral collaboration with the priests and the hierarchy in general. Cf R. MORO, «*Azione Cattolica Italiana (ACI)*», in F. TRANIELLO – G. CAMPANINI (Eds.), *Dizionario storico del Movimento Cattolico in Italia (1860-1980). I fatti e le idee, Vol. 1/2*, Torino, Marietti, 1981, 180-191; Cf G. VECCHIO, «*L’Azione Cattolica dopo il 1980*», in F. TRANIELLO – G. CAMPANINI (Eds.), *Dizionario storico del Movimento Cattolico. Aggiornamento 1980-1995*, Torino, Marietti, 1997, 159-166; Cf M. AGNES, «*L’Azione Cattolica Italiana*», in A. FAVALE (Ed.), *Movimenti ecclesiali contemporanei. Dimensioni storiche teologico-spirituali ed apostoliche*, Roma, LAS, 1982, 25-58.

²⁸ Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 27; Cf MOROSINI – SERNAGIOTTO, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, 16-17. The formation inside the “Catholic Action” was solidly organized under the impulse and the direction of Pope Pius XI, and has really penetrated into the heart of the society giving rise to the spirit of apostolic activity realized from the inside of the world by instruments common to it. History sufficiently shows that it was not the “Catholic Action” that gave origin to modern SII; however, it has a considerable influence in their full development. In fact, there are certain SII, the origin of which is closely tied to the

In 1904, by the will of Pope Pius X, it was decided that the work of codification of the ecclesiastical Law would start; and from 1906 this process of edition was already in action. The question of the new form of consecration was much noted to the codifiers. In fact, during the process of codification, in addition to the religious orders and congregations, they found several institutes without public vows and without life in common, under the jurisdiction of the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regular Clergy. This time, these institutes without public vows, without life in common and without religious dress, were not confused with simple ‘pious associations’ of the faithful; however, despite their noted presence, were not inserted in the Code. This official silence in the Code in regard to these institutes does not mean that the prelates and the consultants had ignored the issue. It was the contrary because the issue was sufficiently discussed during the process. In the observations made on the draft of the Code, in 1912, some bishops had expressed their desire that these new associations be given consideration on the basis of the definition that was given in regard to the religious state in the appropriate canon in the draft. Another observation stated that if these institutes wanted to become religious congregations, they had to submit themselves to the common requirements. And later, some modifications were added to the appropriate canon stressing the necessity of vows and common life, and it was stated that the institutes which did not have the complete formula of a religious state – because they did not have the three perpetual vows or any external sign of consecration – would be subject to the laws of clerical or lay institutes or religious institutes of simple vows,²⁹ though the exceptions foreseen in their proper

“Catholic Action” (Cf BEYER, *Gli Istituti Secolari*, 60-71). Von Balthasar states that the “Catholic Action” had its own limitations in the fact that from the start it was conceived “primarily to bridge the gap between the clergy, who represented the Church, and the secularized world outside, but secondarily also to bridge the gap within the Church between priest and layman. The essential point here is that “Catholic Action” in its original project was perceived as a kind of “extension” of the hierarchy into the world, allowing the official representatives of the Church, to make an approach to it through the mediation of the laity” (von BALTHASAR, *The Laity and the Life of the Counsels*, 49). As such “Catholic Action” primarily illuminates the relationship between the priestly state and the lay state, and not the relationship between the lay state and the state of the counsels (Cf *Ibid.*, 42).

²⁹ The Code of Canon Law promulgated in 1917 recognized the existence of three categories of persons in the Church: clerics, religious and lay. In the Canons 107 and 948, are considered “lay” those who are not clerics, even when these might be religious. While in the third part, dedicated to the laity, are comprehended, under that name, all those who are neither clerics nor religious. The “societies of common life” were inserted in the code. The religious congregations were treated equally with religious orders (Cf MOROSINI – SERNAGIOTTO, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, 17).

constitutions were to be respected. After the promulgation of the Code in 1917, the Sacred Congregation for the Religious recognized its competence only for the institutes inserted in the Code under the category of “De religiosis” and these secular institutes were entrusted to the Sacred Congregation of the Council, competent for all that regards the laity. It seemed that it was not yet the mature time. The mentality of that time was not sufficiently ready to comprehend such form of consecration.³⁰

In 1914, in Turin, the “Catechists’ Union of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate” was founded by Venerable Br. Teodoreto (1871-1954).³¹ Br. Teodoreto founded this ‘Union’ of Catechists in a close collaboration with the Servant of God Fr. Leopold Maria Musso, O.F.M. (1850-1922). It initiated as a pious association where the young members were devoted to the adoration of Jesus Crucified and to its diffusion, and were engaged in catechetical activity in the parishes and in the schools of the ‘Brothers of the Christian Schools’. In 1926, with the proposal of the Archbishop of Turin at that time, Monsignor Giuseppe Gamba, new Regulations were established and it became a ‘Lay Congregation’, composed of two categories of male Catechists: consecrated and associated.³² The consecrated Catechists were initially affiliated to the ‘Institute of the Brothers of Christian Schools’; later, with the proposal of the same Archbishop, they became autonomous, with their own General President and Council – but always maintained a spiritual relationship with the Institute of the Brothers.

In 1919, in Milano, the “Missionaries of the Royalty of Our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Missionarie della Regalità di Nostro Signore Gesù Cristo*) was founded by the collaboration

³⁰ Cf BEYER, *Gli Istituti Secolari*, 40-42; Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 29.

³¹ As it will be shown in the second chapter, Venerable Br. Teodoreto, called Giovanni Garberoglio, was a great educator in Turin. He belonged to the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools which was founded by St. John Baptist de La Salle. Most of his life was dedicated to the direction and supervision of the schools of his Institute in Turin and around Turin. For a wider reading: Cf L. DI MARIA, *Fratel Teodoreto (Prof. Giovanni Garberoglio)*, Torino, Casa Editrice A. & C., 1956.

³² As it will be shown in the third chapter, following the response of the Sacred Congregation for the Religious – on 1st February 1948 – that there was no impediment, on the 24th of June 1948, it was officially erected by the Archbishop of Turin, Maurilio Fossati, as a male SI of a diocesan right, though by the will of the founder it continued to maintain the name ‘Union’. And it is one of the first few SII who received a quick approval from the Church at a diocesan level. For a wider reading: Cf T. GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, Torino, Silvestrelli & Cappelletto, ³1984.

between Agostino Gemelli³³ and Armida Barelli.³⁴ Initially it started as a Franciscan movement. The ideal was of creating an association of women who, in response to the demands of the time, consecrate themselves to God in the world, staying in their familial and professional environment, for spreading the reign of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in various forms of apostolate, particularly in the associations of “Catholic Action” and in the University of the Sacred Heart. On 19th November 1919, in Assisi, were reunited the first nucleus of this association, known at that time as the “Tertiary Franciscan Congregation of the Reign of the Sacred Heart in Society” (*Congregazione delle Terziarie francescane del regno sociale del Sacro Cuore*) with a provisional ‘rule of life’ in the line of the Tertiary Franciscan Order. In the initial period, this congregation was dependent on the general superior of Minor Friars but later, in 1924, with the advice of Pius XI, was detached from the Franciscan Order and acquired a complete autonomy to carry out a more secular apostolate.³⁵ In 1928, after about ten years of positive experience realized in the female branch, Gemelli founded a male branch – “*Missionari della Regalità di Cristo*.”³⁶

In 1920, again in Milano, the “Society of St. Paul” (*Compagnia di san Paolo*) was founded by Don Giovanni Rossi (1887-1975), in the spirit of Cardinal Andrea Carlo Ferrari (1850-1921). After twelve years spent working with Cardinal Ferrari, Don Giovanni Rossi acquired the apostolic concern of the great cardinal, for a Christian animation of the society with means and instruments adapted to the religious and social demands of that time. And he concretized this pastoral desire in founding the “Society of St. Paul” which, for its internal structure and

³³ Agostino Gemelli, O.F.M. (1878-1959), is a great figure in the history of SII. He is an author of a great historical survey of the forms of consecrated life and is the founder of the Catholic University of Milan in 1921. For a wider reading: Cf M. STICCO, *Padre Gemelli. Appunti per la biografia di un uomo difficile*, Milano, Edizioni O.R., 1991.

³⁴ Armida Barelli (1882-1952), was the president of “Catholic Action” in Milano, at that time. For a wider reading: Cf A. BARELLI, *La «nostra» storia. L'Istituto Secolare delle Missionarie della Regalità di Cristo*, Milano, Edizioni OR, 1972; Cf M. STICCO *Una donna fra due secoli. Armida Barelli*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 1967.

³⁵ Cf AUGÉ – SASTRE SANTOS – BORRIELLO, *Storia della vita religiosa*, 472-474.

³⁶ From a sodality, the male branch was erected into a SI in 1951 and received definitive recognition from the Holy See in 1997 as a SI of pontifical right. The female branch received decree of approval in 1948 and was definitively recognized in 1953. In 1953, Gemelli founded also a branch for priests, known as “*Sacerdoti Missionari della Regalità di Cristo*” which received definitive recognition in 1978 as a SI of pontifical right (Cf *Ibid.*, 473-474).

specific end, came to be a Secular institute. This association essentially aimed at a social apostolate, and under the guide of Don Rossi several initiatives were undertaken. In 1921, when Cardinal Ferrari died, Don Rossi founded the association “*Opera Cardinal Ferrari*” in honor and memory of him.³⁷

In 1928, in Madrid, Don José Maria Escrivá (1902-1975) founded the “Priestly Society of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei” (*Società Sacerdotale della Santa Croce e dell’Opus Dei*).³⁸ It is one of the most diffused Secular Institutes. The members are divided into two groups: male and female. They receive a philosophical and theological preparation as the priestly formation in the Church. It has also very numerous members who are married or who want to marry. The aim of the Institute is living an honest civil profession with much dedication, with a purity of intention, with a fervent desire to grow interiorly, with a continuous and joyful self-denial, particularly in the sacrifice of a hard work where there is endeavor for perfection. They stress on the universal vocation to sanctity and on the concrete possibility of transforming daily work or any professional activity into an occasion of sanctification and fruitful apostolate. According to the founder any work has value in as much as it is transformed into a spiritual moment and as such it is elevated to the level of grace and becomes sanctifying, i.e., it becomes work of God – *Opus Dei*.³⁹

Other Secular Institutes founded in the beginning of the twentieth century were: the “Theresian Institute” (*Institución Teresiana*) founded in 1911, in Spain, by Pedro Proveda Castroverde (approved in 1951), the “Sisters of Mary of the Catholic Apostolate” (*Sorelle di Maria dell’apostolato cattolico*) founded in 1926, in Germany, by Joseph Kentenich

³⁷ Cf *Ibid.*, 471-472. Later in 1940, Don Rossi, together with a group of collaborators decided to consecrate his life under the bishop of Assisi, and in this way was born the association “*Pro Civitate Christiana*.” The aim of this Association – which actually began as a sodality – was to lead the society to the principles of the Gospel. The “Society of St. Paul” was approved in 1950 as a SI of pontifical right (Cf *Ibid.*). For a wider reading: Cf G. ROSSI, *Il Cardinal Ferrari*, Assisi, Edizioni Pro Civitate Christiana, 1956.

³⁸ It was recognized by the bishop of Madrid in 1941, and in 1943 approved by the Holy See as a communitarian institute with out public vows. In 1946, the centre of the Institute was transferred to Rome. It was the first SI to receive the pontifical decree of approval in 1947 and the definitive approval in 1950 (Cf AUGÉ – SASTRE SANTOS – BORRIELLO, *Storia della vita religiosa*, 474-475; Cf L. BORRIELLO – G. della CROCE – B. SECONDIN, *La Spiritualità cristiana nell’età contemporanea*, Roma, Edizioni Borla, 1985, 249-250). For a wider reading: Cf G. ROCCA, *L’ «Opus Dei»*. *Appunti e documenti per una storia*, Roma, Città Nuova, 1985.

³⁹ Cf AUGÉ – SASTRE SANTOS – BORRIELLO, *Storia della vita religiosa*, 474-475.

(generally approved in 1948 and definitively recognized in 1976),⁴⁰ and many others in other parts of Europe and other parts of the world.⁴¹

After such a rapid spread of Secular Institutes, the Sacred Congregation for the Religious was entrusted with the task of deepening the question and it studied the situation for some years. However, the conclusion it finally gave was unsatisfactory. In May 1938, with the authorization of Pius XI, A. Gemelli organized a real congress in Saint Gall,⁴² Switzerland, reuniting founders and representatives of about twenty associations of consecrated lay people from different nations. In the congress it was made evident that this form of consecrated life demanded a more attentive consideration from the Holy See. In 1939, Gemelli sent to Pope Pius XII,⁴³ to the Congregation of the Council and to the Cardinals, a historical and juridico-canonical memorandum,⁴⁴ in which, from his profound personal experience and from the synthesis of the congress in Saint Gall, clearly outlined the characteristics of this new form of consecration and courageously proposed that there should be, between the religious and non-religious states of life, an intermediate state of lay consecration. In November 1939, the Holy Office ordered him to withdraw this document from circulation. After this decision of the Holy Office, there was a situation of uncertainty and confusion. It seemed that there would be

⁴⁰ Cf BORRIELLO – della CROCE – SECONDIN, *La Spiritualità cristiana nell'età contemporanea*, 249-250; Cf R. AUBERT et al., *Nuova Storia della Chiesa. La Chiesa nel mondo moderno*, vol. 5/II, Torino, Marietti, 1979, 84.

⁴¹ In 1938, Giuseppe Lazzati (1909-1986), who was an ex-member of the first group of the “*Missionari della Regalità di Cristo*”, founded the association “*Milites Christi Regis*” which today is known as “*Christo Re*”. It was erected as a SI in 1952 and received definitive recognition in 1963 as a SI of pontifical right. Another SI to be remembered is “Our Lady of Life” (*Nostra Signora della Vita*), founded in Notre-Dame de Vie (France), in 1932, by father Maria Eugenio di Gesù Bambino (1894-1967). This Institute consists of three autonomous branches: that of women, lay men and priests (Cf AUGÉ – SASTRE SANTOS – BORRIELLO, *Storia della vita religiosa*, 474). For a more list of SII founded in this period: Cf FAVALE, *Vita consacrata e società di vita apostolica*, 223-228; Cf G. ESCUDERO, *Gli Istituti Secolari: che cosa sono e come vivono*, Milano, Editrice Ancora, 1957, 331-370.

⁴² In 1930, some founders or superiors of these institutes were reunited for the first time in Salzburg. However, it is very difficult to define the scope of these reunions which continued till 1935 and it does not seem that there had been a real congress in Salzburg (Cf BEYER, *Gli Istituti Secolari*, 45-46).

⁴³ Pope Pius XI, with whom Gemelli had had a very good relationship, had died in February of the same year.

⁴⁴ For the memorandum (later called “*Memoria*”): Cf A. GEMELLI, «*Le Associazioni di laici consacrati a Dio nel mondo. Memoria storica e giuridico-canonica*», in ID. et al., *Secolarità e vita consacrata*, Milano, Editrice Ancora, 1966, 361-442. This document which, at first, was condemned would be asked again in 1942 for re-examination; and later, in 1948 its formulas would be used by the Holy See (Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 30; Cf BARELLI, *La «nostra» storia*, 182-183).

no way out for these associations. Practically, unless for little modifications, everything remained like it was declared by *Ecclesia Catholica*.⁴⁵

The main difficulty consisted in the conception of the relationship between Church and the world that existed. In the nineteenth century, this relationship was still obscure, mostly conceived as a parallel, if not as an opposing relationship.⁴⁶ From the basis of this relationship it was difficult for the Church to approve a call that unites ‘consecration’ with ‘secularity’. Another difficulty came from a rigid theology of that time, which demanded solemn vows as essential to a consecration to God. And starting from Pius V, an enclosure was imposed to women consecrated in religious life and it became the only form of consecrated life officially recognized for them till 1900. It was necessary to demonstrate that consecrated life does not depend on public vows and the one who does vows is not necessarily religious, and that it is possible to dedicate oneself to God with out public vows, the essential factor being the total donation of one’s life which is an act of love.⁴⁷ It was very difficult; however, it was really in this critical moment that the role of lay people was rediscovered as an active role to be “exercised not only *in the world* – as moreover is that of so many religious – but *by means of the world*.”⁴⁸

2. Secular Institutes after “Provida Mater Ecclesia”

After some time, it was no longer easy for the Church to resist the strong determination of so many men and women who wanted to consecrate themselves to God while remaining in the world. Therefore, as it will be shown below, the Church started preparing the procedures for

⁴⁵ Cf MOROSINI – SERNAGIOTTO, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, 18-20; Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 30; Cf BEYER, *Gli Istituti Secolari*, 45-47.

⁴⁶ Today theology teaches that they have a relationship of unity in view of their ultimate end, and by the fact that one includes the other: the Church is in the world and the world is in the design of God. For a wider reading: Cf Y. CONGAR, *Chiesa e mondo*, in “Aggiornamenti Sociali” 16 (1965) 2, 3-24.

⁴⁷ Cf BEYER, *Il diritto della vita consacrata*, 443; Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 27-29; Cf H. U. von BALTHASAR, *Gli stati di vita del Cristiano*, Milano, Jaca Book, ²1984, 37-59; Cf ID., *The Laity and the Life of the Counsels*, 177-185 and 237-251; Cf ID., *La vita secondo i consigli oggi*, in “Vita consacrata” 7 (1971) 3, 185-196.

⁴⁸ J. BEYER, *Religious Life or Secular Institute*, Rome, Gregorian University Press, 1970, 136; Cf GEMELLI, «*Memoria storica e giuridico-canonica*», n. 32.

an official recognition which it finally granted in 1947. This topic will also analyze the role played by the Second Vatican Council and the further developments that came after the Council along with all the misunderstandings encountered in the process of such a great achievement.

2.1. *The Apostolic Constitution “Provida Mater Ecclesia”*

In 1941, Pope Pius XII entrusted the study of the problem of Secular Institutes again to the Congregation of the Council and the Congregation for the Religious, so that they can elaborate an adequate legislation for it. Agostino Gemelli was asked back for his *Memory* where he had previously made a demand for the juridical approval of this form of consecration corresponding to the new demands and orientations of the Christian society, without having to confuse it with other structures and other finalities not belonging to it and not corresponding to the function and to the work for which it came into existence.⁴⁹

After an accurate examination, in which a decisive role was played by Card. Larraona who was the under-secretary of the Sacred Congregation for the Religious,⁵⁰ on 2nd February 1947, Pius XII promulgated the apostolic constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia* – the Magna Charta of Secular Institutes which states:

[...] acutely conscious of Our responsibility in this field and not insensible to the claim of paternal love which these generous seekers of holiness in the world make upon us, We decided that what was needed was a wise, clear-cut differentiation of Institutes with full and authentic life of perfection as the test of authenticity; We were aware of the danger of thoughtless and feckless founders and the consequent proliferation of Institutes. We were also persuaded that deserving Institutes should have their own law based on their own meaning and purpose and condition. We have therefore decided to do for secular Institutes with this present document what Pope Leo XIII

⁴⁹ Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 31-32; Cf GEMELLI, «*Memoria storica e giuridico-canonica*», 441-442, n. 40.

⁵⁰ Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 31.

did for Religious Congregations of Simple Vows with the Apostolic Constitution *Conditae a Christo*.⁵¹

It was a historical document which gave the first positive response from the part of the authority of the Church to the demands for approval of Secular Institutes which, by that time, were already present in several countries.⁵² And so, after the long and troubled course of time, the new institutions of lay persons consecrated to God – and of regular priests – were recognized, with their own specific charism, as a form of “state of perfection”⁵³ and were given the name “Secular Institutes”.⁵⁴

With *Provida Mater*, the Pope approved the Statute of Secular Institutes, the peculiar law which establishes the modality of consecration with vows – a full and stable bond which unites the members with the Institute which is to have a necessary centre or common house, even if there is no community life. The Pope, showed the foundations of Secular Institutes and the laws that guide them; he clarified the internal government of these Institutes and their dependence on the Sacred Congregation for the Religious. In general, with this document, a

⁵¹ PIUS XII, *Provida Mater Ecclesia*. Apostolic Constitution Concerning Secular Institutes, 2 February 1947, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 39 (1947) 114-124, n. 24.

⁵² Cf BEYER, *Gli Istituti Secolari*, 48-56.

⁵³ SII were approved as a third of the “states of perfection”: the first, declared as canonically more perfect – by virtue of the public vows – was that of the Religious Orders and Congregations and the second was that of the Societies of the Common Life who, often, possessed a common habit (e.g. the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul) and a common life (sometimes a very exacting one, e.g. the White Fathers), but without public vows and this, especially for the women, was done to avoid enclosure (Cf BEYER, *Religious Life or Secular Institute*, 127-128). Later it was to be clarified that “they are not a *third* state of perfection after Religious Institutes and Societies of the Common Life, but an autonomous institution, in which the consecration to God and to souls is complete and authentic: in other words not a diminished or reduced consecration but one which is real, true, total” (*Ibid.*, 136). SII should also not be confused with associations of faithful like the Catholic Action or with Tertiary Orders, Confraternities, Pious Unions or sodalities. The expression “authentic” or “original form” of consecration is important, also because, later on, SII were being confused as “modern forms of religious life” or as “intermediary state of life between the religious and the lay”. Here it is also important to note that today we don’t use the terminology “state of perfection” anymore; it has been offensive to many who strived for perfection in married life. We use instead terms like: “a form of consecrated life” or simply “a form of life” (Cf von BALTHASAR, *The Laity and the Life of the Counsels*, 243-244 and 182-183; Cf MOROSINI – SERNAGIOTTO, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, 26-27).

⁵⁴ Initially, the Holy Office had suggested the name Religious “Sodalities” or “Unions”, but Pope Pius XII preferred and approved the name “Secular Institutes” (Cf BEYER, *Religious Life or Secular Institute*, 128); Cf ESCUDERO, *Gli Istituti Secolari: che cosa sono e come vivono*, 63-65.

decisive progress has been made for these Institutes, above all, at the theological and juridico-canonical level.⁵⁵

However, as some experts, in that time, showed the document *Provida Mater Ecclesia* did not respond adequately to the ideal of the life of lay consecration, in the sense that it insisted more on the aspect of consecration without specifying much the ‘secular’ character of these Institutes. In fact, re-read today, a difficulty in entering into the conception of the new form of consecration can be noted in it. There is a tone of thought that is used to see an authentic consecration in the line of religious life, that’s why a constant reference is made to the religious consecration as the unique possible terminology for comparison. For example, for affirming that the consecration in Secular Institutes is full and authentic, it says that it is almost religious.⁵⁶ It says the members of Secular Institutes remain in the world for a peculiar vocation and for renewing families, professions, and the civil society in a Christian way with a direct and daily contact of a life totally consecrated to perfection. And then it uses terms that seem to indicate their apostolate as supplementary to that of the religious and of the priests. The impression of adapting religious life to the demands of secularity is more notable in the peculiar Law which accompanies the Constitution. It states that the Secular Institutes are neither Religious nor Societies of common life. But it does not specify that the members live or can live in their proper families or proper social and professional environment, stating only that not all of them are required for a life in common. Thus, the necessity of common houses, where those who are in authority of governing, those in formation, and those who are sick or old can live, is affirmed. The vow of poverty is presented only as a defined and limited use of temporal goods; and that of obedience as being, always, morally subject to and under the guidance of Superiors. It does not say anything in regard to the personal responsibility of the members; and though it mentions it in another part, under this section it does not specify the apostolate of the members in the professional and social environment, stating only that the members devote themselves entirely to God and to the works of charity. It describes the

⁵⁵ Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 31- 33.

⁵⁶ Cf *PME*, n. 17 (~ n. 9). Since some modifications in numbering and errors in translation exist in the 3rd English edition of the documents of SII compiled by CMIS in 1998, the parallel Italian edition is consulted for comparison: CMIS (Ed.), *Gli Istituti Secolari. Documenti*, Roma, Città Nuova, ⁸1998.

apostolate as multiform, emphasizing much on the quantity rather than the quality of the action. For these reasons, some of the Institutes had remained in perplexity after the promulgation of the document. To go to the Sacred Congregation for the Religious for approval and to be dependent on it was also a point of doubt. In this situation of uncertainty some of Institutes decided to take time.⁵⁷ This perplexities and resistances were directly made known to Pope Pius XII:

What had happened was this. In the course of a conversation with Armida Barelli, foundress of the Missionaries of Christ the King, Pius XII asked her if she was pleased with the approval granted to her Institute by *Provida Mater Ecclesia*. To the pope's astonishment, she replied that the document did not concern her Institute at all! The result was a completely fresh examination of the question [...].⁵⁸

Therefore, Pius XII specified the doctrine related to the Secular Institutes with the Motu Proprio *Primo Feliciter*, on 12th March 1948. This document not only clarified *Provida Mater* but also offered its correct interpretation. It insisted on the fact that the consecration in Secular Institutes is a true and proper form of consecration giving much stress to the aspect of secularity, not in the sense that secularity is seen as more important than the consecration but in the sense that it came to be explicitly defined as an essential element – as the very reason for which Secular Institutes exist.⁵⁹

The transference of an Association of the Faithful to the higher canonical status of a Secular Institute must not obscure, even in special cases, the proper and specific character of the Institutes, namely, that they are secular and that this is the real nature of their calling. Everything about them must be clearly secular. There will be no paring down of the full profession of the Christian perfection, solidly founded on the evangelical counsels and essentially the same as that of Religious, but perfection is to be lived and professed *in the world*, therefore adapted to secular life,

⁵⁷ Cf MOROSINI – SERNAGIOTTO, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, 21-23; Cf J. LA CROIX BONADIO, «Note sugli Istituti Secolari», in A. OBERTE (Ed.), *Gli Istituti Secolari: consacrazione, secolarità e apostolato*, Roma, A.V.E., 1970, 114-115.

⁵⁸ BEYER, *Religious Life or Secular Institute*, 130; Cf BARELLI, *La «nostra» storia*. 323-325.

⁵⁹ Cf MOROSINI – SERNAGIOTTO, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, 24; Cf BEYER, *Gli Istituti Secolari*, 57-58.

all along the line, i.e. in all things that are lawful and compatible with the duties and apostolate of such a life of perfection.⁶⁰

In this document, there is more clarification of the apostolate of Secular Institutes in the social and professional environment and in the general circumstances of secular life. It states: “not only is this apostolate something that happens in the world, but it may almost be said to grow out of the world: its existence is in professions, activities, forms, places, circumstances of a secular nature and so it must remain.”⁶¹ While in *Provida Mater*, there is tendency of adapting religious life to the secular circumstances, in *Primo Feliciter*, the tone changes to the necessity of maintaining all that which is proper to the secular life, on condition that it does not oppose the consecration.⁶² It insists in remaining in the world for a divine will and comprehends the apostolate as infiltrating the society by living in it like:

a salt, a seasoning, kept salt by the vocation given, unfailing, a light which shines out and is not overcome in the darkness of the world, and the little yeast, always and everywhere at work, kneaded into every kind of society, from the humblest to the highest, to permeate each and all by word, example and in every way, until it forms and shapes the whole of it, making of it a new paste in Christ.⁶³

Primo Feliciter does not insist on the specific works of the apostolate, but affirms that the entire life of the members of Secular Institutes must be transformed into an apostolate. “This apostolate of one’s whole life is so deeply and sincerely experienced in the Secular Institutes as to give the impression that, with the help and guiding wisdom of Divine Providence, the thirst for souls and zeal for their salvation have not only happily given occasion for a consecration of life but have largely imposed their own way and form upon it”.⁶⁴ Finally, it

⁶⁰ PIUS XII, «*Primo Feliciter*». Motu Proprio, 12 March 1948, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 40 (1948) 283-286, n. 5. Still in *Primo Feliciter*, to say that the consecration in SII is true and authentic, comparison is made to the religious consecration stating that it is ‘essentially the same as that of Religious’ (Cf *Ibid.*; Cf MOROSINI – SERNAGIOTTO, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, 24).

⁶¹ PF, n. 6; Cf GEMELLI, «*Memoria storica e giuridico-canonica*», n. 32.

⁶² Cf MOROSINI – SERNAGIOTTO, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, 24-25; Cf PF, nn. 5 and 7.

⁶³ PF, n. 2.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, n. 6.

can be affirmed that while *Provida Mater* expressed the juridical foundation of Secular Institutes, *Primo Feliciter* expressed the life of the members with clear-cut and cheering terms.⁶⁵

Some days after the emanation of *Primo Feliciter*, on 19th March 1948, the Sacred Congregation for the Religious, to which Secular Institutes were entrusted by *Provida Mater*, clarified some points of the papal documents with the instruction *Cum Sanctissimus* which is a kind of official commentary of directives related to Secular Institutes, particularly in regard to the procedures for approval. This document offers the possibility for Secular Institutes to have, in addition to the members in the strict sense, other members “attached and incorporated in various degrees, who aspire to the perfect life of the gospel, and try to live it in their own situation but do not, or cannot, rise to a commitment to all three counsels at the higher level.”⁶⁶

With these pontifical documents, a decisive step was done for Secular Institutes. However, even after these basic documents, the phenomenon of Secular Institutes was not clear to many and a period of major reflection had begun in which some critical positions as well as open disapprovals came out. In spite of the clarifications presented in the above documents, it was still very difficult for many to reconcile full consecration with full secularity, especially for many religious and clergymen who had the tendency of identifying the secular condition with the matrimonial state, and consecration with the religious state. In fact, in the first moments, it was very difficult to draw from the Constitutions of various Secular Institutes an exact equilibrium between the requirements of the consecration and those of secularity; above all, it was difficult to distinguish in the consecration between what is essential and what is secondary, which was an important factor that determines the real form of life of the Institute. There was also the problem of creating an authentic discipline of life which does not repeat the models of religious life but which is attentive to the familiar and existential conditions of one who lives in the world.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Cf MOROSINI – SERNAGIOTTO, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, 25.

⁶⁶ SACRED CONGREGATION FOR THE RELIGIOUS, *Cum Sanctissimus*. An Instruction Concerning Secular Institutes, 19 March 1948, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 40 (1948) 293-297, n. 10; Cf MOROSINI – SERNAGIOTTO, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, 25; Cf BEYER, *Gli Istituti Secolari*, 58-59.

⁶⁷ Cf MOROSINI – SERNAGIOTTO, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, 25-30.

Therefore, the Church, in various occasions, continued to offer ulterior teachings to deepen the nature of Secular Institutes. In fact, Pope Pius XII had treated the issue in the congresses that regarded consecrated life in 1950. These problems were also treated in an international meeting of Secular Institutes in Castelnuovo Fogliani (Italy), in July 1954, where there was a participation of thirty two Institutes; and again in Venasque (France), in July 1963, in which representatives of forty Institutes from ten different countries participated. The themes discussed in these meetings regarded the disciplinary, formative, organizational and canonical aspects of Secular Institutes; the characteristics of a secular vocation and its difference from the religious vocation, characteristics of the vows, and problems of consecrated life in the world were discussed.⁶⁸

Many of the ideas and instructions of Gemelli were taken up in the basic doctrines. As Gemelli had already indicated in his *Memory*, juridical recognition of this new form of consecration was beneficial in the sense that it helped to control the spread and development of such institutes which were already exceeding and guaranteed the seriousness, stability, organization and efficiency of their apostolate.⁶⁹

2.2. *Secular Institutes and the Second Vatican Council*

The Second Vatican Council has clearly affirmed certain principles in which are found more profound and more valid motivations of the vocation of the laity consecrated to God in the world.⁷⁰ *Gaudium et Spes*, affirms the substantial goodness not only of the world created by God but also of the progresses man has realized in history with the talents received from God, stating “Christians ought to be convinced that the achievements of the human race are a sign of God’s greatness and the fulfilment of his mysterious design.”⁷¹ It affirms the duties and

⁶⁸ Cf *Ibid.*, 30; Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 38; Cf G. BRASCA, «Le conclusioni del Convegno di Castelnuovo Fogliani (1954)», in A. OBERTI (Ed.), *Nel mondo per il mondo. Gli Istituti Secolari oggi*, Roma, Editrice A.V.E., 1972, 233-243.

⁶⁹ Cf GEMELLI, «*Memoria storica e giuridico-canonica*», n. 40; Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 32-37.

⁷⁰ Cf MOROSINI – SERNAGIOTTO, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, 31-32.

⁷¹ VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Gaudium et Spes*. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 7 December 1965, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966) 1025-1120, n. 34.

responsibilities of every person in the world to be realized according to the vocation received from God, stating that “the Christian who shirks his temporal duties shirks his duties towards his neighbour, neglects God himself, and endangers his eternal salvation.”⁷² In regard to the sinful situations of the world it states that they “must be purified and perfected by the cross and resurrection of Christ.”⁷³ And *Lumen Gentium* affirms the participation of the laity in this mission of Christ in the world, stating “they are called by God that, being led by the spirit to the Gospel, they may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially by the witness of their life, resplendent in faith, hope and charity they must manifest Christ to others.”⁷⁴ *Lumen Gentium* affirms the universal vocation to sanctity by which “all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love, and by this holiness a more human manner of life is fostered also in earthly society.”⁷⁵

These are concepts to be found at the base of every consecration in the world and their official proclamation was a great confirmation for the validity of the vocation of Secular Institutes. However, the Second Vatican Council, in explicit terms, has said very little in regard to Secular Institutes.⁷⁶ Actually, “it was only at the last minute that they managed to secure the approval of their particular vocation within the Church.”⁷⁷

Seeing such fundamental concepts, one could normally expect from the Council a particular attention to Secular Institutes. Even if the case had been such that Secular Institutes never existed, such concepts could have recalled the Council of such possibility of a form of life with an entirely committed presence in the world and with profound evangelical spirit that would reach up to the profession of the evangelical councils. And one could possibly think that such a form of life could have been born under the impulse of the Council itself. That was why it was surprising for many that this form of life that was already consolidated in the

⁷² *Ibid.*, n. 43.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, n. 37.

⁷⁴ VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Lumen Gentium*. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 21 November 1964, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 57 (1965) 5-71, n. 31; See also: nn. 32-38, 41.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, n. 40; See also: nn. 39-42.

⁷⁶ Cf MOROSINI – SERNAGIOTTO, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, 32.

⁷⁷ BEYER, *Religious Life or Secular Institute*, 132.

Church with an official approval did not get the desired attention.⁷⁸ It seemed that *Lumen Gentium* had completely ignored them:

Lumen Gentium, for them, as for many Institutes devoted to the apostolate, came as a bitter disappointment. It was the monastic tradition that found expression in this text: the work of benedictine abbots, and theologians cast in the monastic mould, who conceived the religious vocation as a consecrated life fully separated from the world, wholly concerned with personal holiness, with eschatological sign and ecclesial witness.⁷⁹

In reality, in the constitution *Lumen Gentium*, in chapter six, we find a text about Christians who make profession of evangelical counsels, and refers to members of Secular Institutes.⁸⁰ The text states:

The Christian who pledges himself to this kind of life binds himself to the practice of the three evangelical counsels by vows or by other sacred ties of a similar nature. He consecrates himself wholly to God, his supreme love. In a new and special way he makes himself over to God, to serve and honor him. True, as a baptized Christian he is dead to sin and dedicated to God; but he desires to derive still more abundant fruit from the grace of his baptism. For this purpose he makes profession in the Church of the evangelical counsels. [...] The bonds by which he pledges himself to the practice of the counsels show forth the unbreakable bond of union that exists between Christ and his bride the Church. The more stable and firm these bonds are, then the more perfect will the Christian's religious consecration be [...].⁸¹

⁷⁸ Cf G. LAZZATI, «Il Concilio e gli Istituti Secolari», in GEMELLI et al., *Secolarità e vita consacrata*, 249-250.

⁷⁹ BEYER, *Religious Life or Secular Institute*, 132-133.

⁸⁰ Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 41; Cf BEYER, *Religious Life or Secular Institute*, 133. The fact that the text of *Lumen Gentium* n. 44 refers to SII was further ratified by Pope Paul VI in his message to the 1st International Congress of SII, where he, in addition to n. 11 of *Perfectae Caritatis*, explicitly referred to *Lumen Gentium* n. 44 (Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 41). The message of the Pope states: "We could speak of the theology of Secular Institutes according to the Vatican Council (*Lumen gentium* 44, and *Perfectae caritatis* 11), the canonical assessment of the institutional forms which you, living bodies of Christians consecrated to our Lord, are taking in these days, we could spell out for you the place and function of Secular Institutes in the Structure of the People of God, the specific distinctive marks, the forms, the dimensions in which they are seen to live and work" (PAUL VI, «*Apostolic Efficacy Depends of Personal Sanctification*». To the 1st International Congress of Secular Institutes, 26 September 1970, in CMIS (Ed.), *Secular Institutes. Documents*, Rome, Città Nuova, 1998, 78, n. 5).

⁸¹ *LG*, n. 44.

However, more problematic was the fact that the secular forms of consecration to which the above text of *Lumen Gentium* refers as “other sacred ties” is included with that of the religious, under the title “Religious”.⁸² No reference is made to *Primo Feliciter* which had rich theological formula in regard to the consecration lived to its full in the midst of the world. *Lumen Gentium* n.31 is very important in the sense that it gave an exact notion of the identity of the laity in the Church, the nature of their apostolate and its significance, and as such is applicable to the members of Secular Institutes. However, it was also problematic for them because “as one of the Commission’s theologians put it, secular Institutes seemed likely to become religious or associations of catholic action.”⁸³

Many had expressed their worry and had made requests that Secular Institutes be considered with the exact attention which they deserved. “*Lumen Gentium* would certainly have accelerated such a movement, but for the appearance shortly afterwards of *Perfectae Caritatis*.”⁸⁴ During the elaboration of the decree *Perfectae Caritatis*, two particular requests were made: one was of inserting at least one paragraph explicitly reserved for Secular Institutes and the second was of changing the title of the decree, as this decree is concerned with the religious life. The first request was accepted, and as a matter of fact, a paragraph was inserted for Secular Institutes. *Perfectae Caritatis*, n. 11 is the only text of Vatican Second which is explicitly dedicated to Secular Institutes.⁸⁵

⁸² This was by the very fact that the Council attributes to the term “consecrated” a more theological significance rather than canonical. In *Lumen Gentium*, all faithful are given a place within the totality of People of God. Three categories are indicated and a chapter is dedicated to each of them: *the hierarchy* in chap. 3, *the laity* in chap. 4, and *the religious* in chap. 6 where all who consecrate themselves to God in diverse forms by vows or by “other sacred ties” are included (Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 42).

⁸³ BEYER, *Religious Life or Secular Institute*, 133. *Lumen Gentium* n. 31 states that the “secular character is proper and peculiar to the laity” and states that in using the term laity it refers to “all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the Church.” Pope Paul VI, in some of the discourses he gave to the members of SII had mentioned it as applicable to them. However, there is no link with the consecrated state. In addition, it opposes the ‘secular’ who are in the Holy Order and those who are of religious status, i.e., the lay-religious (Cf E. GAMBARI, «*Gli Istituti Secolari*», in OBERTI, *Nel mondo per il mondo*, 110).

⁸⁴ BEYER, *Religious Life or Secular Institute*, 133.

⁸⁵ Cf A. OBERTI, «*Gli Istituti Secolari nel decreto Perfectae Caritatis*», in GEMELLI et al., *Secolarità e vita consacrata*, 350-354.

It is very important to read the draft of this paragraph to understand better the amendments that were done later. In reality, this paragraph of *Perfectae Caritatis*, where Secular Institutes have found the only place has a troublesome story.⁸⁶ The draft stated:

Secular Institutes carry with them a true and *essentially* complete profession, recognized as such by the Church, *although lived out in the world*. This profession, *truly religious in its substance*, confers on those who live in the world, men and women, clergy and laity, *a consecration similar to that of other states of perfection*. Their manner of practising perfection supposes that the members of these Institutes live the evangelical counsels in the world. Hence care must be taken that the proper and specific character of these Institutes, their secular character, should not be changed by alien forms. The origin and spread of these institutes is to be sought above all in the demands of a more effective and extended apostolate, one whose exercise is both in the world and, in a sense, of the world, in order that all human activities and all forms of life may be inspired by Christ and renewed by him [...].⁸⁷

This text was about to be submitted for definitive approval of the fathers of the Council. There was no problem in regard to the two essential characteristics of Secular Institutes – consecration and secularity. The main difficulty came from the fact that, it was inserted in a document dedicated to the *religious* – the renewal of religious life – where a paragraph is dedicated to each of the different exemplars of religious life: institutes entirely dedicated to contemplation (n. 7), institutes dedicated to various apostolic works (n. 8), monastic life (n. 9), lay religious life (n. 10) and therefore Secular Institutes (n. 11). It looked as though Secular Institutes were recent forms of Religious life.⁸⁸

There was a considerable difficulty in the re-elaboration of this paragraph. Many initiatives were taken insisting again for a change of the title of the entire scheme or for a different collocation of the paragraph on Secular Institutes. But the phase for elaboration and

⁸⁶ Cf J. BEYER, «*Storia del Decreto Perfectae Caritatis*», in A. OBERTI (Ed.), *Vocazione e missione degli Istituti Secolari*, Milano, Editrice Ancora, 1967, 49-78; Cf MOROSINI – SERNAGIOTTO, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, 34.

⁸⁷ BEYER, *Religious Life or Secular Institute*, 134-135; Cf OBERTI, «*Gli Istituti Secolari nel decreto Perfectae Caritatis*», 352-354.

⁸⁸ Cf OBERTI, «*Gli Istituti Secolari nel decreto Perfectae Caritatis*», 354-355.

for the proper procedures was exhausted and the text seemed to be destined to remain in this ambiguity. Some of the fathers even suggested of taking this paragraph (n. 11) out of the text and of putting it in the appendix of the decree.⁸⁹ However, unfair as it was, it did not get acceptance and on the very last moment, “an amendment was introduced into the text of the decree, on the eve of its solemn promulgation in the Council, to the effect that Secular Institutes were not religious Institutes.”⁹⁰ The paragraph of *Perfectae Caritatis* states:

While it is true that secular institutes are not religious institutes, at the same time they involve a true and full profession of the evangelical counsels in the world, recognized by the Church. This profession confers a consecration on people living in the world, men and women, laymen and clerics. Therefore, they should make it their chief aim to give themselves to God totally in perfect charity. The institutes themselves ought to preserve their own special character – their secular character, that is to say – to the end that they may be able to carry on effectively and everywhere the apostolate in the world and, as it were, from the world, for which they were founded [...].⁹¹

In *Ad Gentes*, Vatican Second affirms that the missionary service applies also to the lay people consecrated in the world. It states: “Since, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, secular institutes are growing daily in the Church, their work, under the authority of the bishop, can be fruitful in many ways for the missions especially as an example of total dedication to the evangelization of the world.”⁹² However, there is nothing more. It is also surprising that in *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, a decree on the apostolate of the lay people, Secular Institutes, which exist just for this lay apostolate in the world, are not even mentioned.⁹³

⁸⁹ Cf J. BEYER, «Gli Istituti Secolari», in ID. et al., *Gli Istituti Secolari dopo il Vaticano II*, Milano, Editrice Ancora, 1969, 12.

⁹⁰ ID., *Religious Life or Secular Institute*, 134; Cf OBERTI, «Gli Istituti Secolari nel decreto *Perfectae caritatis*», 355-358.

⁹¹ VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Perfectae Caritatis*. Decree on the Up-to-date Renewal of Religious Life, 28 October 1965, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966) 702-712, n. 11.

⁹² VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Ad Gentes*. Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, 7 December 1965, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966) 947-990, n. 40.

⁹³ Cf VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, 18 November 1965, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966) 837-864.

Finally, looking back today, what can be concluded is that in this silence there is really the action of the Holy Spirit. It was not yet mature time and it was good that there were not much formal declarations.⁹⁴ Again today, it can be affirmed that Vatican Second though it did not explicitly say much about Secular Institutes, implicitly has provided a fertile soil for the full comprehension of Secular Institutes.⁹⁵ In this regard, in 1970, Cardinal Antoniutti, in the opening speech to the 1st International Congress of Secular Institutes stated:

It has been said that there is not a great deal about Secular Institutes in the documents of the Vatican Council. But it must be admitted and appreciated that the Council summarized what had been said and done by the Popes and gave as a clear, positive, solemn recognition not only of their canonical independent existence but also of what they set out to do in the apostolate, the aims and objects which inspire them and from which they take their bearings.⁹⁶

The ecclesiology that emerged from Vatican Second has become the key for a much better understanding of the phenomenon of Secular Institutes. It has deepened the theological foundation of Secular Institutes in regard to the two essential features: consecration and secularity.⁹⁷ As Pope Paul VI, in the 25th Anniversary of *Provida Mater*, declared, “to get a true picture of Secular Institutes you have to see them in the perspective which the Council contemplates the Church – a living reality both visible and spiritual.”⁹⁸ In the same occasion, the Pope re-affirmed that:

[...] there is a deep, providential, unmistakable link – you might say identification – between the charism of Secular Institutes and one of the clearest and most important themes of the Council, the Church’s presence in the world. In fact the council documents underline the various relationships between Church and world: the Church is part and parcel of the world, destined to serve the world,

⁹⁴ Cf MOROSINI – SERNAGIOTTO, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, 33.

⁹⁵ Cf F. MAGGIONI, «*Concilio Vaticano II e Istituti Secolari*», in OBERTI, *Vocazione e missione degli Istituti Secolari*, 157-187.

⁹⁶ I. ANTONIUTTI, «*To the 1st International Congress of Secular Institutes*», 20 September 1970, in CMIS, *Secular Institutes. Documents*, 168, n. 11.

⁹⁷ Cf CRIS, «*Secular Institutes: Their Identity and Their Mission*». Document for the Plenary Assembly Held in May 1983, 6 January 1984, in CMIS, *Secular Institutes. Documents*, 135.

⁹⁸ PAUL VI, «*A Presence and an Action which Will Transform the World from Within*». On the 25th Anniversary of the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia*, 2 February 1972, in CMIS, *Secular Institutes. Documents*, 84, n. 5; Cf *LG*, n. 8.

to be the leaven in the lump or the soul in the body, for the Church is called to sanctify and consecrate the world, to shed upon it the pure light of the supreme values of love, justice and peace.⁹⁹

For reassuring the members of Secular Institutes, the paragraph in *Perfectae Caritatis* is enough. It is a very short but very decisive and fundamental text whose profoundness was revealed more and more with time. With it, every fundamental question raised in regard to Secular Institutes can be answered. In *Perfectae Caritatis* the forms of consecrated life are present not according to the juridical traditional category which puts first Religious Orders, then Congregations, then Societies of Common life, and then Secular Institutes. They are presented according to their intimate nature, like Institutes of contemplative life, of apostolic life, and secular life. It does not speak of “state of perfection” anymore, but of state of consecrated life by means of profession of evangelical counsels.¹⁰⁰

Secular Institutes obtained further recognition and clear distinction from the religious when the Sacred Congregation, by the Apostolic Constitution, *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*,¹⁰¹ 15th August 1967, changed its name to “Sacred Congregation for the Religious and Secular Institutes” setting up two autonomous sections with two Undersecretaries with separate duties headed by one Prefect and one Secretary.¹⁰² The new section of Secular Institutes took as an urgent task the edition of the complementary legislation which regulates Secular Institutes.¹⁰³

2.3. *Secular Institutes after Vatican Second*

After the Second Vatican Council the study of Secular Institutes has been enriched by the periodical meetings of the Institutes and by the discourses and messages addressed to them by

⁹⁹ PAUL VI, «*A Presence and an Action which Will Transform the World from Within*», 85, n. 7.

¹⁰⁰ Cf MOROSINI – SERNAGIOTTO, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, 34; Cf J. L. VILLOTTA, «*Nel 20° anniversario della “Provida Mater Ecclesia”*», in BEYER et al., *Gli Istituti Secolari dopo il Vaticano II*, 44-45.

¹⁰¹ Cf PAUL VI, *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*. Apostolic Constitution, 15 August 1967, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 59 (1967) 885-928.

¹⁰² Cf CRIS, «*Secular Institutes: Their Identity and Their Mission*», 137-138.

¹⁰³ Cf VILLOTTA, «*Nel 20° anniversario della “Provida Mater Ecclesia”*», 45.

the Popes in different times and occasions. Various clarifications and reflections were also given by the Sacred Congregation.¹⁰⁴

The 1st *International Congress of Secular Institutes* was convoked in 1970, from 20 to 26th of September, in Rome. It was preceded by two years of preparation and study sessions and was participated by ninety-three Secular Institutes from 27 different countries.¹⁰⁵ Subjects of an existential nature which directly concern the Institutes were discussed and deepened.¹⁰⁶ The discussions were very beneficial because they gave clarifications to the diversity that existed among the different Institutes and helped them to accept these diversities. There were Institutes with apostolic activities that are totally secular, and others with institutional as well as inter-ecclesial activities such as catechesis;¹⁰⁷ there were Institutes which fulfil their apostolic work basically through personal witness, and those engaging themselves in works undertaken as “community or group”;¹⁰⁸ besides the majority of the Institutes which defined secularity as specific to the laity, there were clerical or mixed Institutes which stressed the secularity of the Church as a whole; there were clerical Institutes who felt the need of

¹⁰⁴ Cf CRIS, «*Secular Institutes: Their Identity and Their Mission*», 138.

¹⁰⁵ Cf A. OBERI, «*Preparazione, significato e prospettive del Convegno Internazionale degli Istituti Secolari*», in ID., *Nel mondo per il mondo*, 11-31.

¹⁰⁶ Cf J. METGE, «*Sintesi delle conclusioni dei Gruppi di studio del Convegno Internazionale degli Istituti Secolari*», in *Ibid.*, 289-315.

¹⁰⁷ As it will be shown in the next chapter, the “Catechists’ Union of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate” is one of the SII whose members dedicate themselves in parishes or in the diocese in general for a catechetical service.

¹⁰⁸ There were (and still are) Institutes which retained secularity above all as an interior attitude in regard to the world, and wanted their members, in the totality of the conditions of life, not to be separated or distinguished in anything from the other lay people. Such Institutes generally don’t have specific apostolic works which is obligatory and exclusive for their members. The members like any other lay person are dedicated to their own profession by means of which collaborate in the construction of the society according to God’s design and participate in various acts of charity and apostolate inside the Church under a personal responsibility. The Institute gives them the basic doctrinal and spiritual formation. Instead, there were (and still are) other Institutes which also hold secularity essentially as an interior attitude, but without any difficulty in offering to their members, or at least to some of them, a form of life in common (non-canonical), a proper apostolic work and therefore, a specific apostolic formation. And depending on the type of the Institute the vows of poverty and obedience can have different modalities. The form of insertion in the local church also changes: for the first type of Institutes, the insertion is personal to each of the members; while for the second type, there is an institutional insertion, i.e., the Institute itself, with its specific activity, is a member of the local church (Cf MOROSINI – SERNAGIOTTO, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, 36-37).

incardinating themselves in the local diocese as necessary to their secularity, and those who had obtained their own incardination.¹⁰⁹

Such a “great variety”¹¹⁰ demonstrates the potential action of the Holy Spirit Who gave rise to such multiple forms of secular consecration responding to the multiple needs of the time. However, such variety also creates different problems and confusions. The diverse experiences of different Secular Institutes resulted in a non-uniform conception of secularity. That’s was why the Congress proposed as an objective to deepen together this fact for elaborating a theology of secularity that would permit to establish the concept of secularity upon elements that are universally valid.¹¹¹

In fact, in the opening speech of the Congress, Cardinal Ildebrando Antoniutti who was the prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Religious and Secular Institutes, decisively expressed the need for clarification. He affirmed that secularity is not a simple external phenomenon of Secular Institutes but “their badge, the justification for their existence.”¹¹² In regard to the true nature of secularity he stated that it is “the positive constituent quality of one who lives “as a human being among human beings”, “just one more Christian”, who “has the feeling of being just one of the rest”, and at the same time “is certain of a vocation to total and permanent consecration to God and to souls”.”¹¹³ He specifies three essential features which are equally necessary and indispensable for Secular Institutes as “the stuff of which they are made:”¹¹⁴ the first is the profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, obedience; the second is the acceptance of these counsels as an enduring, binding commitment made by vow, promise or oath, recognized in and governed by Church Law; and the third feature is secularity expressed in the whole of life, permeating all apostolic activities.

¹⁰⁹ Cf CRIS, «*Secular Institutes: Their Identity and Their Mission*», 138-139.

¹¹⁰ In regard to the pluralism of the forms of life in SII, Pope Paul VI, in 1972, stated that “the requirements of life in the world and the options open to anyone who would work in the world with the world’s own tools, are so many and various that one must expect great variety in ways of achieving the ideal: individual, corporate, private and public” (PAUL VI, «*A Presence and an Action which Will Transform the World from Within*», 88, n. 16); Cf G. LAZZATI, «*Pluralismo negli Istituti Secolari*», in OBERTI, *Nel mondo per il mondo*, 49-62.

¹¹¹ Cf MOROSINI – SERNAGIOTTO, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, 37-39.

¹¹² ANTONIUTTI, «*To the 1st International Congress of Secular Institutes*», 170, n. 21.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 172, n. 29.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 172, n. 33.

“An association lacking anyone of the three could not be a Secular Institute. Its fundamental charism would be other: it would yet have to find canonical identity and status.”¹¹⁵ Secular Institutes should not try to imitate religious forms of life, and in the same way Religious Institutes should not try to assume the secular forms of life, as there is a clear, precise, and intrinsic difference between the two.¹¹⁶

In the Congress, Pope Paul VI clarified, above all, the psychological and spiritual aspects of the special dedication of the members of Secular Institutes to the fellowship of Christ.¹¹⁷ He specified the significance of a secular vocation as a choice that does not cut off from the world with all its profanity and worldly scale of values; as a form of consecration while continuing to be like everybody else facing the moral principles of the world which are often threatened by pressure of temptation.¹¹⁸ And so the Pope exhorts the members of Secular Institutes stating: “Discipline, moral discipline, eternal vigilance, is what you need: you must be fending for yourselves all the time: the plumb line straightness of your every act must come from your sense, your realisation of the consecration you have made, and this for twenty-four hours of every day.”¹¹⁹ The Pope underlines the demanding commitment to which the members are called; specifies the twofold finality of Secular Institutes as a personal sanctification of the members and the consecration of the world; describes the “*sensus Ecclesiae*” of the members, their sense of belonging to the church with the unique quality of lay-consecrated, as an element which should never be missing.¹²⁰

During the Congress a commission was set up by Paul VI for the purpose of studying and proposing statutes for a World Conference of Secular Institutes (CMIS). The statutes were officially approved by the Sacred Congregation, and later, with a Decree of May 23rd 1974, the Conference received an official recognition.¹²¹

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 173, n. 34.

¹¹⁶ Cf *Ibid.*, 173, n. 36.

¹¹⁷ Cf PAUL VI, «*Apostolic Efficacy Depends of Personal Sanctification*», 78, n. 6.

¹¹⁸ Cf *Ibid.*, 80, n.13.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 80-81, n. 14.

¹²⁰ Cf *Ibid.*, 81-82, nn. 15 and 17.

¹²¹ Cf CRIS, «*Secular Institutes: Their Identity and Their Mission*», 138.

The discourses of Paul VI are of unique importance for Secular Institutes as they, attentive to God's design, have greatly illuminated the nature of Secular Institutes and have offered reassuring affirmations for all times. Among these, it is very important to remember the very rich message communicated on the 25th Anniversary of *Provida Mater* Ecclesia, on 2nd February 1972. One of the most important reflections presented by the Pope in this occasion was on how to live the evangelical counsels in the secular life.¹²² The Pope did not abolish what was said in the *peculiar Law*, in *Provida Mater*, in regard to obedience and poverty, but goes beyond. He views the evangelical counsels in harmony with the personal responsibility and spirit of initiative of the members, suggests the way of their realization in the world, and indicates the efficacy of witness of life. It is true that the fundamental theological principles in regard to the evangelical counsels derive from the teachings of the Gospel (the spirit of Beatitudes, prayer, union with God) and as such are always the same and cannot be changed. But there are diverse ways of applying them in life. Therefore, it is about finding ways and appropriate forms for realizing them in the secular life, with the means and among the circumstances found it; and this not with the purpose of making them less austere but for giving them full significance, correspondent to the situations where the consecration is to be lived.¹²³

On 20th September 1972, the heads of all Secular Institutes met in Castel Gandolfo. In this assembly Pope Paul VI communicated again a dense message with many new indications. The Pope recognizes in Secular Institutes a special way of living the mystery of Christ in the world, and of making the mystery of the Church visibly present in the world.¹²⁴ He specifies:

To be in the world, that is, to be committed to secular values, is your way of being the Church, of making the Church present, of working out your own salvation and being heralds of redemption. The condition in which you live, your life-description in human society becomes your theological self and your way of bringing salvation into the realm of reality for all the world to see. In this way you are an advance guard of the Church "in the world": you are yourselves an expression of the

¹²² Cf PAUL VI, «A Presence and an Action which Will Transform the World from Within», 87, n. 14.

¹²³ Cf MOROSINI – SERNAGIOTTO, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, 44-46.

¹²⁴ Cf PAUL VI, «A New and Original Form of Consecration». To the First Assembly of the Heads of Secular Institutes, 20 September 1972, in CMIS, *Secular Institutes. Documents*, 92, n. 5.

Church's mind: to be in the world in order to shape it and sanctify it "as from within, like leaven in the dough" (*Lumen Gentium*, 31) – a task, remember which falls mainly on the shoulders of the laity. You are a clear, tangible, telling proof of what the Church sets out to do for the building of the world of "*Gaudium et Spes*".¹²⁵

This affirmation has a great importance showing a great step forward in comparison to the first documents on Secular Institutes. Primo Feliciter (n. 5) recognizes in the members of Secular Institute a full consecration *though* to be lived in the world. Paul VI, instead, affirms that this consecration is characterized and is distinguished from others *just because* the members remain in the world. The existential and sociological condition of the members characterizes their way of being Church and their mission in the Church and as such is essential to their consecration, and becomes for them a theological reality. The way the Pope defines consecration is also very efficient.¹²⁶ He stated that consecration indicates "the personal, unseen structure supporting your inmost self and all you do,"¹²⁷ and presents it as a deeper radicalization of the baptismal consecration by a greater claim of love.

Therefore, both secularity and consecration are equally essential to Secular Institutes; none of the two is to be considered prior or more important than the other.¹²⁸ The aspect of secularity distinguishes them from the religious, and the aspect of consecration distinguishes them from the faithful of simple associations. Secularity only does not distinguish them from other lay faithful and with consecration only they would be part of other religious people. Secular Institutes, represent a unitary vital synthesis of these two elements that make them different from other forms of consecration that existed before. And as such there is a new and original form of consecration at a level of juridical institution, enabling the Church, by way of the silent and hidden life of the members, to penetrate in the vital faculties of a society such as in politics, economy, education system, and others.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 93, n. 12.

¹²⁶ Cf MOROSINI – SERNAGIOTTO, *Breve storia degli Istituti Secolari*, 47.

¹²⁷ PAUL VI, «A New and Original Form of Consecration», 94, n. 13.

¹²⁸ Cf *Ibid.*, 93, n. 11.

¹²⁹ Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 39-40.

In this first assembly of the heads of Secular Institutes it was decided that such meetings continue in every four years. These meetings, above all, served in uniting the Institutes together for sharing experiences and for an open discussion among them. In fact, through successive meetings on national and continental levels, they were enabled to clearout uncertainties and to make further researches.¹³⁰

On various occasions, the Popes had continued to communicate basic doctrinal messages to the heads and to all members of Secular Institutes. Again Paul VI: on 25th August 1976, to the *II Assembly of the Heads of Secular Institutes*; and on 2nd February 1977, in the occasion of the 30th Anniversary of *Provida Mater*. John Paul II: on 28th August 1980, to the 2nd *International Congress of Secular Institutes*; on 6th May 1983, to the *Plenary Assembly of C.R.I.S.*; on 28th August 1984, to the 3rd *International Congress*; on 26th August 1988, to the 4th *International Congress*; on 24th July 1992, to the 5th *International Congress*; on 1st February 1997, on the *International Symposium for the 50th Anniversary of Provida Mater*; on 28th August 2000, to the 7th *International Congress*.¹³¹ In addition, John Paul II explicitly refers to Secular Institutes in the documents *Christifidelis Laici*, (specifically n. 56), and *Vita Consecrata*, (in various numbers). Pope Benedict XVI, also delivered a profound message for the members of Secular Institutes in the *International Symposium for the 60th Anniversary of Provida Mater*, on 3rd February 2007, where he encountered them for the first time. Moreover, important discourses were delivered by Cardinals particularly in the opening speeches for the above mentioned Papal interventions. The Cardinal Prefect has also been addressing messages in other events such as the *Latin American Congresses of Secular Institutes*. In the Latin American context, in 1979, the phenomenon of Secular Institutes was also treated in the 3rd *General Conference of Bishops*.¹³²

In addition to the above mentioned discourses and messages delivered by the Prefect, the Sacred Congregation has also given its contribution by providing subjects for reflection. In 1976, a study paper was prepared by the commission which was set up by Paul VI in 1970,

¹³⁰ Cf CRIS, «*Secular Institutes: Their Identity and Their Mission*», 138-139.

¹³¹ Cf *Ibid.*, 139-140.

¹³² Cf CELAM, *Puebla. Evangelization at Present and in the Future of Latin America, Conclusions, Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops*, London, Slough, 1980, nn. 774-776.

proposing a number of clarifications without claiming to have the last word. In a first, shorter section, this study presented theological statements explaining the value of consecrated secularity; and in a second, longer section, treated Secular Institutes at a level of experience and touched some juridical aspects. In the same year, another reflection made in the Sacred Congregation was given in regard to the place of married people in Secular Institutes, mentioning the possibility of their belonging in a wider sense and encouraging the establishment of appropriate associations, while reconfirming that chastity is an essential element in Secular Institutes. In 1980, a document was prepared to help Secular Institutes in the formation of members. This document, basing itself on some principles and on experience, suggested concrete formative orientations. In 1981, a circular letter was issued recalling the teaching of the Church in regard to the essential nature of the evangelical counsels and reminding the need of specifying the modality on how they can be adopted to be suitable to the condition of secularity. All these gave way towards a definition of Secular Institutes.¹³³

3. The New Code and the Expansion of Secular Institutes

With the promulgation of the new Code of Canon Law,¹³⁴ on 25th January 1983, a new phase started not only for Secular Institutes but also for the entire Church, particularly for consecrated life. Though the Code did not introduce any substantial novelty,¹³⁵ it was very decisive and significant for Secular Institutes to be placed in it. This topic will analyze some of the essential Canons and will also show the rapid rate of expansion of Secular Institutes in the world.

¹³³ Cf CRIS, «*Secular Institutes: Their Identity and Their Mission*», 140-141.

¹³⁴ Some of the schemes of the Code on SII presented in the process of preparation are shown in: J. BEYER, *Verso un nuovo Diritto degli Istituti di vita consacrata*, Milano, Editrice Ancora, 1976, 243-267.

¹³⁵ The juridical norms applicable to SII were already presented in the apostolic constitution “*Provida Mater*”, in the motu proprio “*Primo Feliciter*” and in the instruction of the Sacred Congregation “*Cum Sanctissimus*,” and were matured by the affirmations of the Second Vatican Council, by the discourses of Pope Paul VI which were precious and decisive, by the experiences and reflections shared among the members and heads of SII in the various assemblies, and by other reflections and studies offered by the Sacred Congregation.

3.1. *Secular Institutes in the Code of Canon Law*

The Code which entered into force on 27th November 1983 presents, in Book II in a section on Institutes of Consecrated Life, a systematic and up-to-date legislative framework complete in itself.¹³⁶ Today, Secular Institutes are governed by Canons 573-602 and 606 which are norms common to all Institutes of Consecrated Life, and canons 710-730¹³⁷ which contain norms proper to Secular Institutes.¹³⁸

Canon 710 defines a Secular Institute as “an institute of consecrated life in which the Christian faithful, living in the world, strive for the perfection of charity and seek to contribute to the sanctification of the world, especially from within.” As institutes of consecrated life, they permit their members to consecrate themselves fully to God and to people, assuming the evangelical counsels to follow Christ more closely in the secular condition of his life, particularly his hidden life in Nazareth. As an institute it includes clerics and laity, who according to its proper law dedicate themselves with vows or other sacred bonds that are temporary but to be renewed, or definitive or perpetual, to live the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, forming a true fraternity based on the charism of the Institute. Their characteristic apostolate is that of a presence in the proper ecclesial and social environment sanctifying it in a form of a leaven.¹³⁹

Canon 711¹⁴⁰ is of a major importance not only for the general right of the members in the Church but also for the correct significance of a secular consecration. The fact of consecration

¹³⁶ Cf CRIS, «*To the Directors General of Secular Institutes*». Notice on the Code, 18 January 1984, in CMIS, *Secular Institutes. Documents*, 159; Cf ID., «*Secular Institutes: Their Identity and Their Mission*», 148-156.

¹³⁷ Jean Beyer commenting on this title that contains the canons specific to SII, states that it has a more formal and juridical aspect and that it lacks in giving doctrinal inspiration as do the other preceding titles. The reason was that the text was elaborated by a group who worked outside the commission and when the text was presented it was already too late to deepen and re-elaborate it. It contains repetitions and, above all, a doctrinal canon which synthesizes the approved doctrine on SII, like can. 607 for Religious Institutes, is missing (Cf BEYER, *Il diritto della vita consacrata*, 448).

¹³⁸ Cf F. MORLOT, «*Gli Istituti Secolari: breve commento del nuovo Codice* », in A. OBERTI (Ed.), *Gli Istituti Secolari nel nuovo Codice di Diritto Canonico*, Milano, Edizioni O.R., 1984, 9-59; Cf A. OBERTI (Ed.), «*Codice di Diritto Canonico: canoni di riferimento*», in *Ibid.*, 97-121.

¹³⁹ Cf BEYER, *Il diritto della vita consacrata*, 448-449.

¹⁴⁰ This Canon states: “The consecration of a member of a secular institute does not change the member’s proper canonical condition among the people of God, whether lay or clerical, with due regard for the prescripts of the

does not change the canonical condition of a member of a Secular Institute. If the person is lay, remains lay, if the person is a secular-cleric remains secular-cleric. In this way, for the first time and in an explicit manner was sorted out the question in regard to the forms of life in the Church: a cleric is distinguished from the lay which was defined as non-cleric; clerics or lay persons can be religious.¹⁴¹ A cleric can be religious or secular, like a lay person can be religious or secular. A religious-cleric or a lay-religious¹⁴² is not 'secular'. The clerical status and lay status are forms of life, like is the religious status. Accordingly, there are three groups of persons: clerics, religious and lay. The cleric is an ordained minister, while the lay is not. The religious separates oneself from the world to be distinguished from other group of persons; while the 'secular', in consecrated life, remains secular - in the previous state of life. Therefore it is necessary to distinguish cleric and lay in relation to the sacred order; religious or secular in relation to the mode of presence in the world; consecrated and non-consecrated in relation to the consecration by way of the evangelical counsels.¹⁴³

Can. 711 puts the question of whether it is possible to have a double state of life: secular and consecrated; secular-cleric and secular-lay, both of them consecrated. First, the cleric was normally member of the diocesan clergy, the lay was a simple faithful, and the religious was first of all religious. It was already difficult to talk of a lay-religious or of a religious-cleric. Today in Secular Institutes a lay-consecrated remains lay-secular and a secular-cleric remains secular, diocesan.¹⁴⁴ But it is not only the members of Secular Institutes who have double state of life. The Council had allowed married men to be deacons and as such have double state of life: that of matrimony and that of diaconate, the first is a lay status and the second is a clerical status.¹⁴⁵

law which refer to institutes of consecrated life" (*Codex Iuris Canonici*. 25 January 1983, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 75/II (1983) n. 711).

¹⁴¹ Cf *LG*, n. 43b.

¹⁴² Cf *PC*, n. 10.

¹⁴³ Cf BEYER, *Il diritto della vita consacrata*, 449-450.

¹⁴⁴ A cleric who is member of a personal prelacy is secular without being diocesan; he would have been diocesan if the prelacy had been recognized as a particular church, personal diocese (Cf *Ibid.*, 450-451); Cf VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*. Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, 7 December 1965, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966) 991-1024, n. 10b.

¹⁴⁵ Cf BEYER, *Il diritto della vita consacrata*, 450-451.

It can be concluded that Can. 711 strongly expresses the vocation to the secular consecration as the reinforcement of the state of life in which the call was received. A Secular Institute cannot change the original condition of life of its members. Incardination of a cleric into a Secular Institute has a contradictory sense, because it opposes the normal incardination in the secular clergy of a diocese.¹⁴⁶ As it is already stated both the cleric and the lay can have a consecrated life – religious consecration or secular consecration. In the case of a secular consecration both of them conserve their previous state of life; in fact, the previous state of life is reinforced by force of this secular consecration. Therefore, the cleric after such consecration is inserted in his *presbiterium* with a new title and continues to live in the diocese where he was working and remains diocesan subject to the diocesan bishop.¹⁴⁷

The Code provides rules that are binding for all the Institutes. These rules are valid for all, even when the *Constitution or Statute*, which is the fundamental approved text of each Institute, does not repeat them. When the Code speaks of the Institute's "own law" or "*proper law*" it includes, besides the constitutions or statutes, other normative texts of the Institutes, such as directory, enforcement or complementary provisions, or rules.¹⁴⁸

The *Constitution* may be more exacting than the norms laid down by the Code; however, it cannot propose anything against the Code. It must contain a clear presentation of the Institute, such as the nature, aim, spirituality, characteristics and all other specifications that are essential in defining a Secular Institute, and, in particular, in defining a given Institute. The *Constitution* has to present the modality in which the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience are to be assumed and the obligations they entail in a secular style of life. It has also to make a fundamental provision on government, i.e., to specify the authority of the directors and of the assemblies, to specify the form or way of governing, to specify the procedure for appointing the directors, the length of time they have to stay in office, and so on. Moreover, it has to provide fundamental provisions regarding the various commitments of the members and regarding the incorporation and training procedures. In addition, the Code states

¹⁴⁶ Cf *Ibid.*, 452. On the other hand, if one has never been incardinated in a diocese, it cannot be said that the canonical condition of the cleric is changed (Cf *Ibid.*).

¹⁴⁷ Cf *Ibid.*, 451-452; Cf *CIC*, n. 715.

¹⁴⁸ Cf CRIS, «*To the Directors General of Secular Institutes*», 159-160.

that the Institutes can lay down precise regulations on specific items as the Institute's "own law". For example, besides those provided by the Code, they can add eventual qualities that the institute requires for admission of members and in regard to the evangelical counsel of poverty, concrete rules can be made in regard to the availability and utilization of property, on how the property of the Institute is to be administered, and so on.¹⁴⁹

3.2. *Expansion of Secular Institutes in the World*

Ten years after *Primo Feliciter*, in 1958, the number of Secular Institutes was 49.¹⁵⁰ From these 12 were of Pontifical right and 37 of diocesan right; 13 of them were male Institutes (7 clerical and 6 laical) and 36 female. These Secular Institutes had their origin in different countries: 2 in Austria, 1 in Belgium, 1 in Canada, 2 in Colombia, 7 in France, 2 in Germany, 1 in England, 21 in Italia, 1 Yugoslavia, 1 in Mexico, 7 in Spain, 2 in Switzerland, and 1 in Uruguay. This demonstrates efficiently the universality of Secular Institutes. The single countries mentioned here indicate only the country of origin of the Institutes, otherwise, just in this time, many of them, especially those of pontifical right, were diffused in many other countries. In addition, there were 197 Associations (Pious Unions, Sodalities, Confraternities, Tertiary Orders) who, aspiring to be Secular Institutes, had made demand for approval to the Sacred Congregation for the Religious.¹⁵¹

In 1970, on the occasion of the 1st *International Congress of Secular Institutes*, the statistics made shows the presence of 100 Secular Institutes approved by the Church distinguished in the following way (excluding *Opus Dei*¹⁵²): 21 Institutes of pontifical right and 79 of diocesan right; 2 of them were mixed Institutes (clerical, male-laical and female), 9

¹⁴⁹ Cf *Ibid.*, 160-164.

¹⁵⁰ These were SII who had obtained the right to take this name according to the norms of the Instruction *Cum Sanctissimus*, and had received from the Holy See the decree of first approval or definitive recognition (Cf S. CANALS, *Gli Istituti Secolari*, Brescia, Morcelliana, 1958, 136); Cf *CSan*, nn. 3-8.

¹⁵¹ Cf CANALS, *Gli Istituti Secolari*, 136-137.

¹⁵² The *Opus Dei* had given a negative response to the invitation to participate in the Congress, not recognizing itself in the category of SII (Cf OBERTI, «Preparazione, significato e prospettive del Convegno Internazionale degli Istituti Secolari», 17). Today *Opus Dei* is transformed into a personal prelacy (Cf ROCCA, L' «*Opus Dei*», 89-115).

clerical and male-laical, 82 female, 4 clerical, 3 male-laical. There were about 30,000 female members, 3,000 priest members, 400 lay-male members. Many of these Institutes had also a great number of members in a wider sense.¹⁵³ After five years, in 1975, there were 117 Secular Institutes: 29 of pontifical right and 88 of diocesan right; 3 of them were mixed Institutes (clerical, male-laical and female), 8 clerical and male-laical, 96 female, 6 clerical, 4 male-laical.¹⁵⁴ In 1992, there were 163 Secular Institutes: 53 of pontifical right and 110 of diocesan right; 139 female, 19 clerical, 5 male-laical. The approximate number of the members was 45,000 of which about 33, 000 belonged to the Institutes of pontifical right.¹⁵⁵ The Pontifical Yearbook of 2009 lists 80 Secular Institutes of pontifical right: 63 female, 11 clerical, 6 male-laical.¹⁵⁶

Today the phenomenon of Secular institutes “illustrates the strength and vitality of the Church renewing its eternal youth with fresh and invigorating resources.”¹⁵⁷ As Cardinal Eduardo in his message to the 2nd Latin American Congress of Secular Institutes stated:

Secular Institutes, if they are truly faithful to their charism of consecrated secularity, have a very important word to say in the Church today. Their mission is more than ever providential. They will be a privileged means of evangelization, of explicit proclamation of the Love of the Father manifested in Christ, of an authentic and profound human advancement and of a real evangelical liberation, effected in the spirit of the Beatitudes. They will be a concrete means to overcome the tragic dualism between faith and life, the Church and the world, God and man.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ Cf OBERTI, «Preparazione, significato e prospettive del Convegno Internazionale degli Istituti Secolari», 20-21.

¹⁵⁴ Cf BEYER, *Verso un nuovo Diritto degli Istituti di vita consacrata*, 243-245.

¹⁵⁵ Cf FAVALE, *Vita consacrata e società di vita apostolica*, 294.

¹⁵⁶ Cf *Annuario pontificio per l'anno 2009*, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009, 1513-1515 and 1738-1745.

¹⁵⁷ ANTONIUTTI, «To the 1st International Congress of Secular Institutes», 171, n. 25.

¹⁵⁸ E. PIRONIO (Card.), «Message Addressed to the Second Latin American Congress of Secular Institutes», 12 July 1979, in CMIS, *Secular Institutes. Documents*, 196, n. 11.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have analysed the development of Secular Institutes and we have seen the challenging experiences encountered to reconcile the conflict which divided secularity and consecration and the strong efforts made to bring a new synthesis between them two directing them towards the divine plan for the integral salvation of the world. Secular Institutes with great determination and courage, taking many risks, have given proof to such an original potential. In fact, today, in Secular Institutes, the “experimental laboratory in which the Church tests the concrete ways of her relations with the world”¹⁵⁹ has given much positive results as it is shown by their vitality and increasing expansion in the world. It can be concluded that the delay of the Church in giving an official recognition has been of great benefit in the sense that it allowed a better comprehension and a clearer definition of this form of life. However, still today, the original characteristics and specific mission of Secular Institutes is not sufficiently known and understood by many. Hopefully, the analysis which this chapter made on the historical evolution of Secular Institutes, together with the analysis and description of their actual identity, apostolate and formation program which will be done in the next chapter, will contribute for a better understanding of the real nature of the “Catechists’ Union of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate” as a Secular Institute.

¹⁵⁹ PAUL VI, «*A Living Presence in the Service of the World and of the Church*», 25 August 1976, in CMIS, *Secular Institutes. Documents*, 97-98, n. 4.

Chapter Two

IDENTITY, APOSTOLATE AND FORMATION PROGRAM OF SECULAR INSTITUTES

As it has been shown in the previous chapter, all Secular Institutes are characterized by their essential relationship with the world. This, together with consecration and apostolate, is the fundamental constitutive element of Secular Institutes without which they would be considered as forms of life fundamentally different from what we call Secular Institutes.¹ However, it is also important to consider that each Secular Institute has its own originality that corresponds to the special gift of the Holy Spirit received to realize a particular mission; and as a result of this particular charism, each Secular Institute assumes its own particular physiognomy. But what defines a form of life as such and determines its nature as different from other forms of life is the essential constitutive element which in the case of Secular Institutes consists in the relationship between consecration and secularity that is expressed in a life of apostolate. Here, we will analyse the fundamental common elements of the identity, apostolate and formation program of Secular Institutes in the present time with the purpose of understanding better the nature of the “Catechists’ Union of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate” which will be treated later in a specific way.

¹ As it has been shown in the first chapter, with only ‘secularity’ without the element of ‘consecration’ a SI would not be distinguished from the other associations of lay faithful; and with only ‘consecration’ without the element of ‘secularity’ it would be part of the Religious.

1. Identity of Secular Institutes

Secular Institutes are defined by the Church through the common characteristic union of consecration and secularity, which however, as mentioned above, is to be understood within the context of each institute. Taking this into consideration, we will analyse the biblical and theological foundations of secular consecration, the nature and essential characteristics of Secular Institutes, the significance of secular consecration, the modality of living the evangelical counsels in the world, the charism and spirituality of Secular Institutes and the ecclesial dimension of their presence and mission in the world.

1.1. *Biblico-Theological Foundations*

God created everything out of love; every thing was created with an ultimate purpose and everything was 'very good'.² God created man in his image and likeness and gave him the task of leading all created realities in the world through wisdom and action towards the ultimate end. The word 'world'³ refers to the entire humanity together with all those realities amidst which man lives and works. Thus, the destiny of the world is bound with that of man; and as such, the world, was involved in the initial fall of man and had 'lost its purpose'.⁴ But it was also involved in the redemption fulfilled by Christ, who redeemed man to become once again son of God, capable of living and working in the world according to God's plan. The world, corrupted by sin as it is, cannot save itself by its own efforts, but is called to share in the

² Cf *Gn* 1:30.

³ According to the Second Vatican Council the 'world' refers to "the whole human family seen in the context of everything which envelops it: it is the world as the theatre of human history, bearing the marks of its travail, its triumphs and failures, the world, which in the Christian vision has been created and sustained by the love of its maker, which has been freed from the slavery of sin by Christ, who was crucified and rose again in order to break the stranglehold of the evil one, so that it might be fashioned anew according to God's design and brought to its fulfilment," and the mystery of the Church "resolutely addresses not only the sons of the Church and all who call upon the name of Christ, but the whole of humanity as well, and it longs to set forth the way it understands the presence and function of the Church in the world of today" (*GS*, n. 2); Cf E. SCHILLEBEECK, «*La Chiesa e il mondo – Significato dello schema 13 del Concilio Vaticano II*», in H. U. von BALTHASAR et al., *Comprensione del mondo nella fede*, Bologna, Edizioni Dehoniane, 1969, 159-177; Cf J. RATZINGER, «*Il Cristiano e il mondo d'oggi – Riflessioni sullo schema 13 del Concilio Vaticano II*», in *Ibid.*, 183-199; Cf J. B. METZ, *Sulla teologia del mondo*, Brescia, Editrice Queriniana, 1969, 9-100.

⁴ Cf *Rm* 8:20.

salvation brought about by Christ, a salvation that is achieved when man, regenerated in faith and baptism, and incorporated in the Church, participates in the paschal mystery. This salvation penetrates the entire course of human history with its light and life; it enlarges and extends its action to all creation, to purify and re-establish it again in God.⁵

The Church as a society of persons reborn in Christ is the sacrament of renewal of the world, which will have its 'eschatological fulfilment'⁶ when all the powers of evil, sin and death will be destroyed, and every thing will be subordinated in Christ to the Father. In every Christian, baptism gives rise to a new relationship with the world. The Christian, in solidarity with all other men of good will, dedicates himself to the task of 'reordering temporal realities'⁷ according to God's design, for the good of all humanity, respecting the legitimate autonomy of terrestrial realities. It is by living this new relationship with the world that the baptized cooperate with Christ in the redemption of the world. Consequently, the 'secularity' of a baptized person, in the sense of existence in the world and participation in its activities, can never be understood outside this essential relationship. All are called to live this essential relationship but in different ways. In virtue of this, the 'fundamental unity of the Mystical Body of Christ',⁸ the Church, manifests itself in 'the complementary diversity of its members',⁹ who live and work under the action of the Spirit for the building up of the Body. In fact, 'the universal vocation to sanctity'¹⁰ in the Church assumes various forms of life and is realized in various functions according to a specific vocation. There are differences in accordance to the different divine gifts that accompany a person to live one's vocation; there are also differences in the realization of these vocations on the basis of the free personal

⁵ Cf SCRIS, «*Riflessioni sugli Istituti Secolari*», 22 aprile 1976, in CMIS (Ed.), *Gli Istituti Secolari. Documenti*, Roma, Tipografia P.U.G., ⁴1981, 178-180, nn. 4-7; Cf CRIS, «*Secular Institutes: Their Identity and Their Mission*», 142-145; Cf K. RAHNER, *Considerazioni teologiche sulla secolarizzazione*, Roma, Edizioni Paoline, 1969, 63-79.

⁶ Cf *I Co* 15:20-28.

⁷ Cf AA, n. 7.

⁸ Cf *Ep* 4:4-13.

⁹ Cf *I Co* 12:4-17.

¹⁰ Cf *LG*, nn. 40-41.

response of each individual and as a result of the different ways in which Christians give concrete form to their baptismal relationship with the world.¹¹

For every Christian, following Christ signifies an absolute preference for him as a testimony of love even to the point of martyrdom.¹² However, Christ invites some of his faithful to follow him unconditionally dedicating themselves totally to Him and to a fuller realization of his Kingdom. This is a call to an irrevocable act implying a complete donation of oneself to the person of Christ to share his life, his mission, his destiny, and, as a result, the renunciation of one's own self. This renunciation is lived as a condition enabling the person to adhere to the love of God without hindrance and radiate his love towards creation. Such a decision, by virtue of its total and definitive response to the demands of love, assumes the character of vow of absolute fidelity to Christ. It presupposes the baptismal premise of living as a faithful follower of Christ, but is distinguished from it, perfecting it. By virtue of its content, this decision radicalizes the relationship of the baptized to the world, because one's renunciation to certain temporal things witnesses the provisional value of things and foretells the eschatological kingdom. In the Church the content of this donation has assumed the form of the practice of the evangelical counsels concretely lived in different ways. In Secular Institutes it is lived in the midst of the world and assumes a special significance of liberation from the obstacles that prevent one from seeing and putting into practice the order desired by God.¹³

The reality of Secular Institutes can be located in the theology and ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council which in presenting the theological foundations of the 'Church-world relationship',¹⁴ also presents the theological foundations that sustain Secular institutes. In fact, as Pope Paul VI stated: "To get a true picture of Secular Institutes you have to see them in the

¹¹ Cf SCRIS, «*Riflessioni sugli Istituti Secolari*», 180-183, nn. 8-15.

¹² Cf LG, n. 42; Cf H. U. von BALTHASAR - L. GIUSSANI, *L'impegno del cristiano nel mondo*, Milano, Jaca Book, 1978, 88-95.

¹³ Cf SCRIS, «*Riflessioni sugli Istituti Secolari*», 183-185, nn. 16-20.

¹⁴ Cf G. MOIOLI, «*Considerazioni teologiche sugli Istituti Secolari*», in GEMELLI et al., *Secolarità e vita consacrata*, 170-183; Cf Y. CONGAR, «*La Chiesa e il mondo*», in von BALTHASAR et al., *Comprensione del mondo nella fede*, 129-158.

perspective which the Council contemplates the Church.”¹⁵ The Church has in itself a triple dimension: sacramental, institutional, and charismatic. The mystery of the Church is manifested in its external, visible, institutionalized structure of the ‘ecclesial states’; however this structure is to be perceived within the charismatic dimension of the Church which animates and nourishes the Church in a dynamic way according to life in the Spirit. The theology of Secular Institutes, therefore, can not be considered merely in terms of the institutionalized structure of the ‘states of life’ existent in the Church, but rather in terms of the charismatic dimension of the Church. The synthesis between consecration and secularity constitutes the greatness and the particularity of the charism of Secular Institutes, sharing in the authentic secular dimension of the entire Church, the root of which is the mystery of the incarnated Word. In this sense the Church is present in the consecrated lay members as light, salt and yeast in the human activities in the world. It is in this way that the reality of Secular Institutes is to be understood in the Church; not as a piece of stone inserted in a mosaic but as a component which contributes in giving sense to the totality of the mosaic.¹⁶

Therefore, it can be affirmed that at the basis of the lay consecration there is the theology of incarnation and the ‘ecclesiology of communion’.¹⁷ The theological reflection, elaborated in the light of Revelation,¹⁸ insists on the fact that the mystery of incarnation has impressed on

¹⁵ PAUL VI, «*A Presence and an Action which Will Transform the World from Within*», 84, n. 5. Pope John Paul II also affirms this in the following paragraph where he indicates various references from the Conciliar documents: “these institutes are intended to be faithful expressions of that ecclesiology which the Council reconfirms when it emphasizes the universal vocation to holiness (cf. *LG*, Chap. 5), the inherent tasks of the baptized (cf. *LG*, Chap. 4, *AA*), the Church’s presence in the world in which she must act as leaven and be the ‘universal sacrament of salvation’ (*LG*, 48; cf. *GS*), the variety and the dignity of the various vocations, and the ‘particular honour’ which the Church pays towards ‘total continence embraced on behalf of the kingdom of heaven’ (*LG*, 42), and towards the witness of evangelical poverty and obedience (*ibid.*)” (JOHN PAUL II, «*Secular Institutes, Faithful Expression of the Council’s Ecclesiology*». Allocution to the Plenary Assembly of the CRIS, 6 May 1983, in CMIS, *Secular Institutes. Documents*, 56, n. 1).

¹⁶ Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 76-88; Cf H. U. von BALTHASAR, *Sponsa Verbi*, Brescia, Morcelliana, 1969, 409-442.

¹⁷ Cf A. DULLES (Card.), *Models of the Church*, New York, Doubleday, 2002, 39-54; Cf JOHN PAUL II, *Christifideles Laici*. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Lay Members of Christ’s Faithful People, 30 December 1988, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 81/I (1989) 393-521, nn. 18-20.

¹⁸ In regard to the evangelical foundation of SII, the attitudes of the life of Jesus, and his teachings, that have inspired the founders of SII are presented as follows: 1) *the mission of Jesus in the world and the mandate*: “As the Father sent me, so am I sending you” (*Jn* 20:21). The vocation of the members of a SI is based on these words of Jesus as an invitation to continue his mission in the world; 2) *the mystery of Incarnation*: “The Word became

the entire Church a secular dimension; and this secularity of the Church is the basis where the theology of lay consecration is founded. Christ is made man, among men, for realizing the project of the love of the Father in history. The life and activity of consecrated lay people roots itself and develops around this mystery of incarnation of Jesus, God-man. Conforming to him, they are called to make synthesis between the human and the supernatural reality, between life in the world and consecration to God. The theological foundation of secular Institutes is also sustained by the ecclesiology of communion which is not only Christological but is essentially Pneumatological since such a model of the Church underlines first of all the role of the Holy Spirit sent from the Father in Christ, constituting the community of faithful and giving rise to diverse charisms for the construction of the unique Church active in the world in full solidarity with humanity and its history.¹⁹ In fact, with a model which is purely Christological, Christ is considered as a founder of a Church-society, which implies that he has founded a Church in the form of a society that is hierarchical, and therefore, results the pyramidal model of the Church. On the other hand, the action of the Spirit can not be considered in separation from the work of Christ in the Father; therefore, the theology which sustains the ecclesiology of communion is truly and profoundly Trinitarian. And for this reason, at the level of theological reflection, the phenomenon of Secular Institutes remains as a fact which is not yet sufficiently understood in its nature.²⁰

flesh, he lived among us" (*Jn* 1:14). The members of a SI are called to live in the world in imitation of Christ who was incarnated and lived among men in the common socio-cultural environment; 3) *the hidden life of Jesus in Nazareth*. Jesus, in his hidden donation of self to the Father in perfect chastity, obedience and poverty while remaining in one's proper familial and social environment, is the model for the consecrated lay people; 4) *the mystery of transfiguration*. This mystery reveals all the divine force that existed in Jesus, who was in the eyes of the men of his time 'a man like all the others'. The mystery of Jesus momentarily glowing in his divinity and then returning back to the common aspect of every day life gives the consecrated lay people an interior light and force for hope particularly when internal fruits are scarce. Jesus had this experience before his passion, as if to be supported in the redemptive action that would bring him to death, but which had to lead him to this glory (Cf S. RECCHI (Ed.), *Novità e tradizione nella vita consacrata. Riflessioni teologiche e prospettive giuridiche*, Milano, Editrice Ancora, 2004, 82-84).

¹⁹ Cf C. ROCCHETTA, «L'ecclesiologia del nuovo Codice e gli Istituti Secolari», in OBERTI, *Gli Istituti Secolari nel nuovo Codice di Diritto Canonico*, 63-65; Cf DULLES, *Models of the Church*, 45-49.

²⁰ Cf A. OBERTI, *Per una teologia degli Istituti Secolari*, Milano, Edizioni O.R., 1983, 57-61; Cf G. MOIOLI, «Consacrazione e Istituti Secolari», in OBERTI, *Gli Istituti Secolari: consacrazione, secolarità e apostolato*, 251-259.

1.2. *Nature and Essential Characteristics of Secular Institutes*

Provida Mater gave the classical definition of Secular Institutes as “Societies, clerical or lay, whose members make profession of the evangelical counsels, living in a secular condition for the purpose of Christian perfection and full apostolate.”²¹ As it has been shown in the first section, this definition, in the totality of the descriptions that follow it, has proved to be insufficient; while *Primo Feliciter*, in respect to *Provida Mater*, has provided a much better description of Secular Institutes but it also included some concepts that might create ambiguity and difficulty.

Among many others, we can mention here the definition given by Jean de la Croix in 1970 who defined Secular Institutes as:

a community which, following Christ in a radical and absolute form, manifests and lives an authentic and full secularity with an apostolic commitment; that is, while remaining in the common conditions of life and everyone in one's proper environment works for the renewal of temporal values according to Christ and for the integral development of the universe, of humanity and of man with means suitable to their nature.²²

In this definition ‘community’ does not imply life in common but implies a link with a concrete institute to which the members adhere with a voluntary and deliberately matured act. The function of this community is to be a place for dialogue, communion, and fraternal support and correction. It is to be the place for renewal, conversion and purification of heart and mind; the place for formation and for a charismatic insertion in the Body of Christ. Here, following Christ in a ‘radical and absolute form’ does not imply a radical choice in regard to Christ but in regard to a certain form of life. The terms ‘radical’ and ‘absolute’ signify the totality and the depth of self-donation; they indicate the total consecration by means of

²¹ PME, Art. I.

²² LA CROIX, «Note sugli Istituti Secolari», 120: “una comunità che, seguendo Cristo in una forma radicale e assoluta, esprime e vive un'autentica e piena secolarità con un impegno apostolico; cioè, rimanendo nelle condizioni comuni di esistenza e ciascuno nel proprio ambiente si ricerca il riordinamento dei valori temporali secondo Cristo e lo sviluppo integrale del cosmo, dell'umanità e dell'uomo con i mezzi conformi alla loro natura.”

evangelical counsels. An 'authentic and full secularity' signifies a life lived in the habitual sociological environment, such as family, profession, social environment, etc. The 'apostolic commitment' implies, above of all, the fact of assuming the common conditions of life such as family and professional responsibility, commitment for the progress of the society - both spiritually and technically, commitment for the creation of more human and more just values; in short it means dedicating oneself fully, in the common conditions of life, for the fuller establishment of the Reign of God on earth.²³

The Code of Canon Law defines a Secular Institute as "an institute of consecrated life in which the Christian faithful, living in the world, strive for the perfection of charity and seek to contribute to the sanctification of the world, especially from within."²⁴ As it is already shown in the first section of this chapter, this definition is completed by the description which follows in Cann. 711, 713-715. Three essential elements are presented in these Canons: total consecration of life, the choice to remain in the world and the commitment for apostolate and witness. Consecration, secularity and apostolate are constitutive elements for a Secular Institute that without them it can not be called a Secular Institute.²⁵ These three elements are also highlighted by Pope John Paul II who in the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* stated:

One thinks in the first place of members of secular Institutes seeking to live out their consecration to God in the world through the profession of the evangelical counsels in the midst of temporal realities; they wish in this way to be a leaven of wisdom and a witness of grace within cultural, economic and political life. Through their own specific blending of presence in the world and consecration, they seek to make present in society the newness and power of Christ's Kingdom, striving to transfigure the world from within by the power of the Beatitudes. In this way, while they belong completely to God and are thus fully consecrated to his service, their activity in the ordinary life of the world contributes, by the power of the Spirit, to shedding the light of the

²³ Cf *Ibid.*, 118-120.

²⁴ *CIC*, n. 710; Cf MORLOT, «*Gli Istituti Secolari: breve commento del nuovo Codice*», 30-32.

²⁵ Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 49; Cf D. M. HUOT, «*Originalità e significato degli Istituti Secolari*», in GEMELLI et al., *Secolarità e vita consacrata*, 214-223.

Gospel on temporal realities. Secular Institutes, each in accordance with its specific nature, thus help to ensure that the Church has an effective presence in society.²⁶

The aspect of fraternal life is so important for Secular Institutes that it can be added as a fourth characteristic quality of these Institutes.²⁷ The Code states that: “Members of the same institute are to preserve communion among themselves, caring solicitously for a spirit of unity and a genuine relationship as brothers or sisters.”²⁸ A special communion exists among the members of a particular Secular Institute. Their consecration in a given institute creates reciprocal bonds that are manifested in different ways. Their solidarity is manifested in the relationship with the superiors, as all members have same superiors; it is manifested in life, as all share the same Rules of life; it is manifested in the regular meetings; it is manifested in the reciprocal help offered under different forms, e.g. the members help one another towards a better realization of their vocation, help each other in different moments of need particularly in old age.²⁹ In short, there is a fraternal communion and active participation in the life of the institute which is indispensable for the mission of Secular Institutes.³⁰

1.3. *Significance of Secular Consecration*

The Code of Canon Law states that: “the consecration of a member of a secular institute does not change the member’s proper canonical condition among the people of God.”³¹ Even after consecration, the ‘secular’ or ‘lay’, remains ‘secular.’ Remaining ‘secular’ signifies being in the world (*secolo*) in the condition of the previous state of life, and realizing there the

²⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata*. Apostolic Exhortation on Consecrated Life, 25 March 1996, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 88 (1996) 377-486, n. 10.

²⁷ This fourth characteristic aspect can be expressed as ‘the link of the members with the Institute’ which is necessary for realizing the ecclesial dimension of their mission in a recognized form (Cf M. ALBERTINI, *Istituti Secolari: una vocazione nel cuore del mondo*, in “Rogate ergo” 40 (1977) 2, 10).

²⁸ CIC, n. 716, § 2.

²⁹ Cf J. J. HAMER (Card.), «To the 3rd World Congress of Secular Institutes», 27 August 1984, in CMIS, *Secular Institutes. Documents*, 203-207.

³⁰ Cf CIC, n. 716, § 1 and CIC, n. 602; Cf M. POMA, «La fraternità», in OBERTI, *Gli Istituti Secolari nel nuovo Codice di Diritto Canonico*, 80-84.

³¹ CIC, n. 711.

proper vocation of consecration to God.³² In this regard, Pope Paul VI in his message to the heads of Secular Institutes, stated:

‘Secularity’ means that your place is in the world. But it does not mean simply a position, a function which happens to coincide with life in the world and a ‘secular’ job or profession. It must mean, first and foremost a realization that you are in the world as ‘your very own field of Christian responsibility. To be in the world, that is, to be committed to secular values, is your way of being the Church, of making the Church present, of working out your own salvation and being heralds of redemption. The condition in which you live, your life-description in human society becomes your theological self and your way of bringing salvation into the realm of reality for all the world to see.³³

In the above paragraph, secularity is presented not only as qualifying element of this form of consecrated life but also assumes a theological value.³⁴ Secularity is a constitutive dimension of the existence of human beings and their relationship with others in all levels. For this reason, in the existential-sociological sense, secularity signifies being of the world and in the world. While in the theological sense it signifies assuming one’s proper and principal secular condition in order to transform it in a ‘theological reality’, i.e., in order to transform it in that qualifying dimension of the vocation of lay consecration. In this sense, secularity is not to be understood as a pure sociological condition but rather as a Christian style of living the

³² Cf G. LAZZATI, «Secolarità e Istituti Secolari», in GEMELLI et al., *Secolarità e vita consacrata*, 49-58; Cf ID., «Consacrazione e Secolarità», in OBERTI, *Gli Istituti Secolari: consacrazione, secolarità e apostolato*, 29-31; Cf J. BEYER, «Significato e realizzazione della vocazione secolare», in OBERTI, *Vocazione e missione degli Istituti Secolari*, 129-140.

³³ PAUL VI, «A New and Original Form of Consecration», 93, n. 12.

³⁴ It is worth noting that the Code of Canon Law in n. 713 § 2, for defining lay secularity uses the term “in the world and from the world” (*in saeculo et ex saeculo*). It is a formula originally presented by A. Gemelli in his *Memory* which was first published in 1939. It is a synthetic formula of great and extraordinary efficacy. Gemelli used this formula to describe not only the mere phenomenological and sociological condition but also the theological condition of the consecrated laity who by the very reason of their consecration, and not despite of it, live in the world like in a proper and peculiar place, for working with the same instruments of the world. (Cf A. OBERTI, «La secolarità, elemento qualificante degli Istituti Secolari», in ID., *Gli Istituti Secolari nel nuovo Codice di Diritto Canonico*, 72; Cf GEMELLI, «Memoria storica e giuridico-canonica», 424-425, n. 32).

Gospel message in the world with all its challenges in order to renew it and lead it towards God.³⁵

For the members of Secular Institutes secularity is not simply “an external condition. It is rather an attitude, the attitude of people who are aware that they have a responsibility, being in the world, to serve the world, to make it as God would have it”.³⁶ In this regard, Pope John Paul II stated:

You are in the world but not just in the social sense, classified as secular, but put there, personally, every bit of you. Being there must be a thing of the heart, what you really mean and want. So you must consider yourselves part of the world, committed to the sanctification of the world, with full acceptance of its rights, its claims upon you, claims inseparable from the autonomy of the world, of its laws.³⁷

This explains the vocation of the members of Secular Institutes whose primary apostolate is that of a presence in the world sanctifying it from the inside in the form of a leaven trying to permeate every reality with the spirit of the Gospel. Secularity is the typical element that constitutes the reason for the existence of Secular Institutes. However, secularity in itself does not constitute any peculiarity as it is the normal and common condition in the world; its peculiarity consists only in respect to its fusion with a true and genuine consecration. The members of a Secular Institute are distinguished from other lay faithful because their apostolic commitment is solidly founded upon a total consecration to God.³⁸

³⁵ Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 53. In a similar way, Pope John Paul II stated that: “to be present and active in the world is not only an anthropological and sociological reality, but in a specific way, a theological and ecclesiological reality as well” (Cf *ChL*, n. 15).

³⁶ PAUL VI, «*A Presence and an Action which Will Transform the World from Within*», 87, n. 15.

³⁷ JOHN PAUL II, «*To Change the World from the Inside*». Discourse to the 2nd International Congress of Secular Institutes, 28 August 1980, in CMIS, *Secular Institutes. Documents*, 53, n. 13.

³⁸ Cf J. L. VILLOTA, «*Secolarità consacrata*», in OBERTI, *Gli Istituti Secolari: consacrazione, secolarità e apostolato*, 100-103; Cf LAZZATI, «*Consacrazione e Secolarità*», 30-44; Cf G. COTTIER, *Aspetti teologici della consacrazione secolare*, in “Dialogo” 2007/35, 21.

In the theological-spiritual level, consecration is the full realization of the baptismal life, and therefore, the realization of a life lived evangelically.³⁹ In regard to this, addressing the members of Secular Institutes, Pope Paul VI stated that:

‘Consecration’ [...] indicates the personal, unseen structure supporting your inmost self and all you do. Here is the deep, hidden human potential for which the people you live with have no explanation, often no idea. Your baptismal consecration has been more deeply and strongly rooted by a greater claim of love. It is the stirring of the Holy Spirit. It is not identical with that of Religious. Nevertheless it impels you to a fundamental life-option of the beatitudes of the Gospel, so that you are really consecrated and really in the world. “You are in the world and not of the world but for the world” [...]. You live a true, genuine consecration according to the evangelical counsels but without the fullness of visibility...⁴⁰

The members of Secular Institutes hidden in the temporal reality dedicate themselves unconditionally to the service of the world. The price which they pay in following Christ more radically is not the negation or despise of the world but the assumption of a greater responsibility in the world, the readiness to donate and offer oneself to the world in a total denial of oneself as a consequence of one’s consecration to God. The evangelical donation of oneself lived in its fullness becomes a silent testimony for the men of today. In fact, the apostolate of secular Institutes is viewed more in terms of “being” or “transforming presence” rather than “doing.”⁴¹ Again, Pope Paul VI, in regard to the consecration of the members of Secular Institutes stated:

It is deep down in your hearts that the world becomes something consecrated to God (cf *Lumen Gentium*, 34). If that is how you live, then it is quite certain that the mutual understanding and feeling between you and the world will not become worldliness or naturalism but will tell the

³⁹ Cf VILLOTA, «*Secolarità consacrata*», 102-103; Cf K. RAHNER, *Missione e grazia*, Roma, Edizioni Paoline, 1966, 541-586.

⁴⁰ PAUL VI, «*A New and Original Form of Consecration*», 94, n. 13.

⁴¹ Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 61-64; Cf J. BEYER, «*Secolarità e consacrazione della vita negli Istituti Secolari*», in OBERTI, *Gli Istituti Secolari: consacrazione, secolarità e apostolato*, 88; Cf J. METGE, *Laico a parte intera. Riflessioni sul ruolo dei membri degli Istituti Secolari*, in “Dialogo” 1981/49, 32-37.

world that Christ loves us and has been sent forth to us by the Father. Your consecration is the root of hope, which must always support you, even when visible results are scanty or non-existent. Rather than by visible good works your life is fruitful for the world above all through the love of Christ which has impelled you to make the gift of yourselves to God in a life that will give witness to him in the conditions of everyday life.⁴²

As the above paragraph states, the efficacy of the apostolate of the members of Secular Institutes depends on their personal sanctity. In fact, Secular Institutes have a twofold purpose to be achieved: first the sanctification of the members and then the consecration of the world.⁴³ The members of Secular Institutes undertake in the world a function like that of the soul in the body,⁴⁴ working to bring it to perfection and to holiness so that things which are necessarily a part of life in the world may be integrated into the spiritual and supernatural reality without themselves being taken over by the temptations of being inserted into the passions and evil inclinations of the world. The prayer of Jesus to the Father assumes a special significance for them: “I am not asking you to remove them from the world, but to protect them from the Evil One. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. Consecrate them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world, and for their sake I consecrate myself so that they too may be consecrated in truth.”⁴⁵

Secular Institutes show that the relationship between secularity and consecration is not one of dichotomy but an interactive and complementary relationship.⁴⁶ And there are no such that ‘more consecrated’ or ‘more secular’ vocations, but are only vocations in which the totality of ‘consecration’ and of ‘secularity’ is manifested in different ways.⁴⁷ Acquiring a harmonious synthesis between the two might not be an easy task, as Pope Paul VI, referring to members of Secular Institutes stated: “You are walking on an inclined plane. It would be easy to go down,

⁴² PAUL VI, *«A Presence and an Action which Will Transform the World from Within»*, 86-87, n. 13.

⁴³ Cf PAUL VI, *«Apostolic Efficacy Depends of Personal Sanctification»*, 81, n. 15.

⁴⁴ Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 64.

⁴⁵ *Jn* 17:15-19; Cf E. PIRONIO, *«Opening Speech to the Assembly of Directors General»*, 23 August 1976, in CMIS, *Secular Institutes. Documents*, 184, n. 17.

⁴⁶ Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 65.

⁴⁷ Cf MOIOLI, *«Consacrazione e Istituti Secolari»*, 256-257.

it is hard work to go up, but a challenge. You are spiritual mountaineers with a stiff climb before you”⁴⁸ but despite the difficulty and challenge the result is effective.

1.4. *Practice of Evangelical Counsels in Secular Institutes*

The consecration of the members, founded on the spirit of beatitudes and evangelical counsels, is stimulated and illuminated by their presence in the world, i.e., by their involvement in it; and without being conditioned by it, is to be adapted to it “all along the line, i.e. in all things that are lawful and compatible with the duties and apostolate of such a life of perfection.”⁴⁹ The practice of the evangelical counsels of chastity poverty, obedience, should not “detract the members of Secular Institutes from the world”, nor “paralyze their temporal action”, but give it “life and dynamism, greater realism and efficacy; freeing it of dissatisfactions, interests and quests, which are somehow related to egoism.”⁵⁰

The practice of the evangelical counsels is assumed by a free choice, as a response to a call from God, to belong fully to him, for always in an act of love, sharing his own life, interests and mission among people in the world. The practice of evangelical counsels in Secular Institutes is not to be understood as less austere or less demanding.⁵¹ Though it is to be lived “with a peculiar style”⁵² and is in the major part binding in conscience, it includes the same intensity and fidelity in regard to the radical fellowship of Christ, which implies an absolute preference for him and a total availability to his service, without any conditions, up to a total oblation of oneself. The consecrated lay persons in the exclusive search for God and his will,

⁴⁸ Cf. PAUL VI, «*Apostolic Efficacy Depends of Personal Sanctification*», 81, n. 15.

⁴⁹ PF, n. 5; Cf G. SOMMARUGA, *Vocazione secolare e consigli evangelici*, Milano, Edizioni O.R., 1983, 12-13.

⁵⁰ PIRONIO, «*Message Addressed to the Second Latin American Congress of Secular Institutes*», 195, n. 8.

⁵¹ Cf J. M. PERRIN, «*Consigli evangelici e secolarità*», in BEYER et al., *Gli Istituti Secolari dopo il Vaticano II*, 55-57.

⁵² Cf CRIS, «*Secular Institutes and Evangelical Counsels*». Reflections on the Basic Teaching of the Church's Magisterium, 15 May 1981, in CMIS, *Secular Institutes. Documents*, 129. This ‘peculiar style’ of living the evangelical counsels, above all, regards the counsels of poverty and obedience which have to be suited to the type of commitment of the person, to the social condition, to the specific responsibility, to the demands of work and profession. Therefore, they have to be lived respecting the secular nature of the consecration; however, without mutating the substance of the counsels (Cf MOIOLI, «*Considerazioni teologiche sugli Istituti Secolari*», 207-210). In general, the new and original way of living the evangelical counsels in SII has contributed to a wider and deeper comprehension of the essence of evangelical counsels.

as a response to their specific vocation, participate in the life of the world and involve themselves in its realities. The practice of the three evangelical counsels expresses a unique attitude of loving adherence, abandonment, search, attraction towards the Absolute in the dynamism of ordinary life. It involves renunciation to matrimonial life in order to belong to him fully with undivided heart; a commitment to a life of obedience in order to be liberated from the dominion of one's will and adhere to the will of God and follow him carrying one's cross; and commitment to poverty in order to be liberated from the slavery of temporal things.⁵³ Here we will analyze the significance and value of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience lived in the world.

1.4.1. *Chastity Lived in the World*

Chastity is a sign of consecrating one's whole being to God without abandoning the world and is realized in the offering of oneself to the person of Christ, to share in his life, and to participate more intimately in the mystical nuptial union between him and his Church expressing the 'eschatological dimension'⁵⁴ of consecrated life living down on earth as children of resurrection. Chastity is the most transparent sign of a total self-donation; it is the essence of one's consecration and as a vow has a central place around which the other two come. A consecrated lay person renounces matrimonial love, in order to enlarge one's capacity and dimension for loving, i.e., the person does so in order to love more and to be friend of all. For the members of Secular Institutes, the way of living chastity is not one of solitude but one of staying with others, one of searching others in order to give them the love of Christ and is manifested in an internal and external attitude of openness, simplicity, optimism, joy, dynamism, prudence, sobriety.⁵⁵

For the consecrated lay people, even though the life of virginity might be difficult in relation to the context in which they live, it allows them for a fuller realization of oneself and

⁵³ Cf. SOMMARUGA, *Vocazione secolare e consigli evangelici*, 12-24; Cf. ID., «Consacrazione nel secolo», in OBERTI, *Vocazione e missione degli Istituti Secolari*, 201-214.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Lk* 20:35-36; Cf. *Mt* 22:23-33.

⁵⁵ Cf. SCRIS, «Riflessioni sugli Istituti Secolari», 206, nn. 93-98.

for an increased availability in the service of others. The renunciation of the sexual dimension of life is not a renunciation of the life of communion with the 'other'. The consecrated lay people live a life of communion between two, where the 'other' is Christ, and in him the entire humanity. Therefore, they live a life of intense love rich of spiritual fruits, and the more they hold tight to the love of Christ, the more they find force to overcome temptations that would deviate them from the love of God.⁵⁶

Consecrated lay people give testimony to the world that beyond the circle of family, one can open oneself up to the entire world by the power of Whom who binds them to himself by a bond of an infinite love. The consecrated lay people give a particular light to the matrimonial life of those living around them whose matrimony is to be seen in the mystery of creation and redemption.⁵⁷ By "giving himself or herself completely to the Church in the hope that Christ may give himself to the Church in the full truth of eternal life," the consecrated lay person "keeps alive in the Church a consciousness of the mystery of marriage and defends it from any reduction and impoverishment."⁵⁸

The chastity of a consecrated lay person is an apostolic chastity: it is open, understanding, attentive and available to all, particularly the abandoned ones. The love for God becomes love for all.⁵⁹ This chastity tells the world that it is possible to love without self interest and exhaustion and that it is possible to dedicate joyfully to all without being tied to anyone.⁶⁰ Purified by God it becomes more pure, more liberal, more extended and universal, more ready for a fraternal relationship which come not from blood ties but from God. In this way, "chastity comes to mean being a living model of self control, life in the spirit, tending, stretching out all the time to heavenly things, and this in a world which has no thought but for itself, no rein or brake on its human instincts."⁶¹

⁵⁶ Cf SOMMARUGA, *Vocazione secolare e consigli evangelici*, 25-30.

⁵⁷ Cf *Ibid.*, 30-34; Cf JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris Consortio*. Apostolic Exhortation on the Christian Family in the Modern World, 22 November 1981, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 74 (1982) 81-191, n. 16.

⁵⁸ *FC*, n. 16.

⁵⁹ Cf SOMMARUGA, *Vocazione secolare e consigli evangelici*, 34-41; Cf E. TRESALTI, *La missione degli Istituti Secolari laicali*, Milano, Edizioni O.R., 1982, 29-30.

⁶⁰ Cf SCRIS, «*Riflessioni sugli Istituti Secolari*», 208, n. 100; Cf PAUL VI, «*A New and Original Form of Consecration*», 94, n. 14.

⁶¹ PAUL VI, «*A Presence and an Action which Will Transform the World from Within*», 87, n. 14.

1.4.2. *Poverty Lived in the World*

Poverty is a sign of orientating every temporal good to the reign of God so that man's conditions of life may be improved and that the world be governed in justice and in sanctity. Temporal things have value as long as they are used for the purpose of realizing the plan of God on man and on creation. All temporal realities: talents, money, power, energy, culture, and other goods are values to be oriented to God by way of Jesus Christ for the benefit of all without falling into the temptation of idolizing them or using them in a banal, egoistic and merely material way, and without ruining and wasting them.⁶²

In regard to temporal goods, for the consecrated lay person, poverty implies assuming one's proper responsibility towards them without conforming to them. By virtue of poverty, the consecrated lay people are invited towards an extremely positive relationship with all created realities.⁶³ They are called to be free from the greed 'in having' and 'in becoming.' Poverty has a liberating action that renders a person more available for service. For the consecrated lay people, poverty implies internal freedom; it implies the radicalism of their orientation towards God, their exclusive search for him in every circumstance of every day life; a profound detachment from oneself which renders a person capable of accepting, with a poor spirit, one's limits as creature; it implies a continuous attention for the Reign of God, a continuous attention for justice and liberation of one's brothers and sisters. It also means placing one's trust and hope only in God from whom everything comes and being serene in face of uncertainties and insecurity. It means fulfilling one's duty with simplicity exclusively for the glory of God, not seeking recognition for one's service. The consecrated lay people are called to contemplate the poverty of Jesus during his ministry of salvation, above all, in the Cross.⁶⁴

In regard to material things, it might not be a radical poverty as the consecrated lay people, by reason of the social condition in which they find themselves, normally do not renounce to

⁶² Cf SOMMARUGA, *Vocazione secolare e consigli evangelici*, 42-46; Cf S. BEAUMIER, «La povertà volontaria vissuta in una vita di impegno nel mondo», in BEYER et al., *Gli Istituti Secolari dopo il Vaticano II*, 61-73.

⁶³ Cf TRESALTI, *La missione degli Istituti Secolari laicali*, 24-26.

⁶⁴ Cf SOMMARUGA, *Vocazione secolare e consigli evangelici*, 46-55.

the possession of things. For them poverty implies the making use of a minimum possible and of renouncing the superfluous or the unnecessary. Conserving, in the maximum line, the right of possessing necessary things, they are called to have the attitude of being only administrators of what they possess; retaining that nothing belongs to them but is meant to serve others as well as a sign of charity and justice.⁶⁵ Therefore, they are called even to renounce what is necessary for the purpose of sharing it with others. As such poverty signifies being attentive to what is necessary for others; it implies solidarity particularly with the poor and those in need by offering help, sympathy, comprehension, etc. and accepting a life lived in communion with them.⁶⁶ It reaches its fullness in these words of Jesus' prayer to the Father: "All I have is yours and all you have is mine"⁶⁷ and it situates itself in the depth of the Trinitarian life.⁶⁸

An attitude of poverty implies also the acceptance and respect of oneself and of one's neighbour; recognizing the values present in every one. It also signifies the will and the capacity to develop and to make use of one's talents in the activity of work and in the edification of the world society in general, and avoiding any form of careerism, to transform one's temporal responsibility into service for fellowmen. It signifies being free from being conditioned by economic ties for a real mobility in one's activities, and as such, for the consecrated lay people, poverty assumes a particular form such as the acceptance of a situation of insecurity, precariousness, and risk.⁶⁹

1.4.3. *Obedience Lived in the World*

Obedience is a sign of availability to God, adhering to him in such a way as to be a docile instrument for him in giving an effective impulse to human history towards the Reign, i.e., to collaborate in the realization of the salvific project of God in history. The spirit of obedience

⁶⁵ Cf SCRIS, «*Riflessioni sugli Istituti Secolari*», 210-211, nn. 109-115; Cf BEAUMIER, «*La povertà volontaria vissuta in una vita di impegno nel mondo*», 69-73; Cf E. STRACOTINSKY, «*La Povertà negli Istituti Secolari*», in A. OBERTE (Ed.), *Spiritualità degli Istituti Secolari*, Milano, Editrice Ancora, 1973, 216-224.

⁶⁶ Cf SOMMARUGA, *Vocazione secolare e consigli evangelici*, 55-60.

⁶⁷ *Jn* 17:10a.

⁶⁸ Cf BEYER, *Il diritto della vita consacrata*, 453.

⁶⁹ Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 111-114.

in Secular Institutes consists in this: intending history as the realization of every person on earth, moment after moment, in the way towards the Reign. For the consecrated lay people, it implies openness to the circumstances of life for understanding the significance; it means inserting oneself in the history of mankind and accepting the norms of common life: ‘in family, in work, in the social, civic and political spheres;’⁷⁰ it means interrogating ‘the signs of times’ or the events of time and being attentive to every message, to every real novelty of life in the world, and responding according to the plan of God, in view of the Reign. In other terms, it is a search for truth, a search for the project of God as a loving Father and the full realization of one’s history, immersed in the history of mankind, in the way it should be, i.e., according to the project of God.⁷¹

Thus, obedience is to be identified with the full development and salvation of created reality. Deep down, it means a response of “yes” to God and to man kind. It is an act of faith and humility. It is a renunciation to individualism – which proposes one’s proper projects – and is the opening of the self to the development of created reality in the way God himself had planned for it in creating it. In this sense, obedience implies, above all, respect for created reality which is to be revealed in an attentive observation and progressive knowledge of created reality. It also means respecting their autonomy and avoiding every form of abuse for other ends rather than that willed by God. The consecrated lay people are called to realize this type of obedience in their life to the end that God’s plan will be realized in history.⁷²

As a member of a particular institute, for a consecrated lay person, obedience means in a particular way, adhesion to the charism of the institute as expressed in its Constitutions. It is manifested in prayer, in the dialogue with the persons in responsibility, and with the other fellow members. The consecrated lay person, by accepting to be part of a certain institute, also accepts the persons in responsibility, elected and nominated according to certain rules for a particular service, with their particular fragility as human beings. Therefore, one has to accept the mediation of those in responsibility. In this regard, obedience implies collaboration and co-

⁷⁰ For a wider reading in regard to the significance of obedience in the familial, professional, social, civic and political spheres (Cf G. MARTELET, «*L’obbedienza secolare*», in OBERTI, *Nel mondo per il mondo*, 166-170).

⁷¹ Cf SOMMARUGA, *Vocazione secolare e consigli evangelici*, 61-72.

⁷² Cf TRESALTI, *La missione degli Istituti Secolari laicali*, 27-28.

responsibility based on reciprocal trust, listening, sincerity and all what is necessary for the realization of the plan of God by the mediation of the institute.⁷³

On the other hand, since Secular Institutes have no life in common, there is no daily contact or direct dependence on those in responsibility. Thus, a regular reflection and an intelligent study of the Constitutions and other writings of the Institute is indispensable in order to find light in them for taking a particular decision. In fact, for the consecrated lay person, it is important to construct a strong personality capable of taking position in every situation of life even in the most difficult one with personal autonomy which implies a considerable degree of maturity in discerning and a considerable sanctity of life.⁷⁴ In this regard, Pope John Paul II, referring to the members of Secular Institutes stated: “You must seek, in the light of faith, adequate solutions for the practical problems which will come up from time to time; often enough you will have to take the risk of a solution which is no more than probable.”⁷⁵

As such, the obedience of a consecrated lay person is a difficult experience to live. It has to be lived reconciling personal responsibility with a type of dependence which is difficult to configure in a precise and stable way: it demands a continuous discernment of one’s proper attitude in order to do what is only in harmony with the design of God; it demands an attentive listening to the illumination of the Holy Spirit; a faithful observance of the Constitutions of the Institute; a full disposition to accept the indications and directives of those in responsibility; an effort for dialogue because every search for truth is completed by the others.⁷⁶ This implies that the consecrated lay person has to be a person who has acquired a considerable synthesis of life, capable of harmonizing the natural with the supernatural. In this case, the ‘guidance of a spiritual director’⁷⁷ is also indispensable.

⁷³ Cf. SOMMARUGA, *Vocazione secolare e consigli evangelici*, 74-81; Cf. J. VILNET, «L’obbedienza negli Istituti Secolari», in OBERTI, *Spiritualità degli Istituti Secolari*, 184-194.

⁷⁴ Cf. BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 115; Cf. BEYER, *Il diritto della vita consacrata*, 455-456; Cf. M. CANEPA, *Obbedienza come libertà responsabile*, in “Incontro” 8 (1996) 4, 30-32.

⁷⁵ JOHN PAUL II, «To Change the World from the Inside», 54, n. 15.

⁷⁶ Cf. SCRIS, «Riflessioni sugli Istituti Secolari», 214-215, nn. 125-132; Cf. E. FRANCESCHINI, *Per un impegno evangelico nel mondo*, Milano, Edizioni O.R., 1971, 69-73.

⁷⁷ The Code recalls attention to the importance of this efficacious instrument of spiritual direction by stating that the members “are to obtain freely necessary direction of conscience and to seek counsel of this kind even from

Obedience in the realization of the plan of God implies also obedience to the Church; a spontaneous adhesion to the Church and its pastors which comes out of love and which gives rise to a sense of initiative and personal responsibility in the Church. It “becomes witness of the humble acceptance of the mediation of the Church and, in general of the wisdom of God governing the world through created causes.”⁷⁸ For the consecrated lay person, it implies also, the duty of knowing the teachings and orientations of the Church particularly regarding the life of consecration in the world, regarding the reality and problems of men, their poverty and suffering, regarding fraternal love, etc.⁷⁹

1.5. *Charism and Spirituality of Secular Institutes*

The fundamental charism of Secular Institutes is their *secular consecration* enabling the members to incarnate the Gospel message in the history of daily life primarily by the testimony of their life; enabling them to lead the world towards God by the exercise of divine laws hidden but active in the world; to edify the world immediately and directly starting from the exercise of the just laws of the earthly reality; to reconcile the world with the Kingdom of God; to be a fermenting or transforming presence in a highly secularized world, i.e., to consecrate the entire world to God in a form of a leaven. The charism of Secular Institutes has a prophetic dimension announcing that which is beyond history and that which is the ultimate goal of history, indicated by faith and not by historical, political, economic or cultural instruments.⁸⁰ It can be seen as a sign of the realization of the relationship between the Church and the world revealing and manifesting in a new way the secular nature of the Church and

the moderators, if they wish” (CIC, n. 719, § 4). In SII, the spiritual director – who can also be the person in responsibility of the Institute – assumes a double role: that of a formator and that of a fraternal guide (Cf L. BREVIGLIERI, «La direzione di coscienza», in OBERTI, *Gli Istituti Secolari nel nuovo Codice di Diritto Canonico*, 89-96).

⁷⁸ PAUL VI, «A Presence and an Action which Will Transform the World from Within», 87, n. 14; Cf MARTELET, «L’obbedienza secolare», 177; Cf H. U. von BALTHASAR, *L’obbedienza negli Istituti Secolari*, in “Vita consacrata” 7 (1971) 11, 737-744.

⁷⁹ Cf SOMMARUGA, *Vocazione secolare e consigli evangelici*, 72-74.

⁸⁰ Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 70-75.

illuminating the secular nature of the world.⁸¹ As Pope Paul VI stated: “there is a deep, providential, unmistakable link – you might say identification – between the charism of Secular Institutes and [...] the Church’s presence in the world.”⁸²

Inside the unique vocation of secular consecration are found diverse gifts, diverse calls and diverse responses. Thus, each Secular Institute has its proper physiognomy that derives from a specific charism that unites its members and gives them a particular spirituality. Charism is the source of vocational identity in two levels: in a personal level and communitarian level. It is not entrusted to single members but to the institute in general, i.e., it is a gift of the Spirit given to all the members of the institute according to the measure of grace of everyone and no one can possess it nor can understand it fully. Therefore, it is meant to be shared, to be developed and fulfilled together with others. As such, there is a real interaction between the vocational identity of a given institute and the vocational identity of the single members, i.e., the discovery of the fundamental charism of the institute and the recognition of the identity of the single members go hand in hand.⁸³

It is very important to conserve the original charism of a given institute. As Pope John Paul II stated:

Institutes of Consecrated Life are thus invited to propose a new the enterprising initiative, creativity and holiness of their founders and foundresses in response to the signs of the times emerging in today’s world. This invitation is first of all a call to perseverance on the path of holiness in the midst of the material and spiritual difficulties of daily life. But it is also a call to pursue competence in personal work and to develop a dynamic fidelity to their mission, adapting forms, if need be, to new situations and different needs, in complete openness to God’s inspiration and to the Church’s discernment. But all must be fully convinced that the quest for ever greater conformity to the Lord is the guarantee of any renewal which seeks to remain faithful to an Institute’s original inspiration.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Cf OBERTI, *Per una teologia degli Istituti Secolari*, 46-55.

⁸² PAUL VI, «*A Presence and an Action which Will Transform the World from Within*», 87, n. 14

⁸³ Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 67-69.

⁸⁴ VC, n. 37; Cf PC, n. 2.

The original charism of a given institute is the authentic criteria for a continuous verification and renewal of the identity, apostolate and formation program of the institute. The members have the duty of knowing, discerning, conserving and developing the charism of their institute. The lack of fidelity to the original charism which makes the members share the living experience of the founder might gradually lead the institute to die or to lose its identity. However, charism is to be understood in a dynamic sense; it grows and is open to interpretation in the light of the Spirit in accordance to the historical context with a continuous return to the original one for verification.⁸⁵

The members of a Secular Institutes living their charism faithfully also live their particular spirituality which derives from it. Profoundly the spirituality of the consecrated lay people consists in living a life according to the Spirit in the fellowship of the *Word made flesh* hidden in the world. Though it is not very easy to trace out the exact lines of spirituality of a lay state, there are three elements which contradistinguish the spirituality of the members of Secular Institutes: incarnation, presence and witnessing. The specific vocation of the consecrated lay people in respect to other lay Christians consists in living among men with the same rights and duties, with the same personal and professional responsibility but as consecrated, for inventing, in the docility to the Spirit, always-new ways of evangelic life. Concretely it is part of the spirituality of the consecrated lay people to love and cultivate authentic values of the world with a responsible participation, with the exercise of secular profession and living the evangelical counsels in the spirit of the beatitudes in the historical and social environment in which they find themselves. It is a *concrete spirituality* of living “the parables of the Reign of God”.⁸⁶ It is a *spirituality of service* or a *spirituality of an apostolic dedication* in the world and for the world, in fraternal solidarity, for the construction “of the world of *Gaudium et Spes*”.⁸⁷ It can be said that it is a ‘*spirituality of incarnation*’,⁸⁸ intrinsically tied to the

⁸⁵ Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 69-70; Cf SCRIS, «*Riflessioni sugli Istituti Secolari*», 199, n. 66.

⁸⁶ Cf *Mt* 6:33; *Mt* 13: 4-52; *Mk* 4: 2-34; *Lk* 8: 4-18.

⁸⁷ PAUL VI, «*A New and Original Form of Consecration*», 93, n. 12; Cf OBERTI, *Per una teologia degli Istituti Secolari*, 52-53.

theology of earthly realities,⁸⁹ among which is highly valorised ‘work’ by means of which the consecrated lay person is called to orientate temporal realities in a way in which the creative work of God is revealed in them.⁹⁰

The Code of Canon Law speaking about the life of prayer in Secular Institutes starts from the premise that exclusive times of prayer are indispensable for the consecrated lay people in order to respond faithfully to one’s proper vocation to an integral apostolic consecration since the apostolic action which flows out from one’s union with God is continuously alimented and renewed in prayer.⁹¹ In this regard, Card. Pironio in his message to the 2nd Latin American Congress of Secular Institutes stated that:

‘Secular prayer’ is not easy, but it is indispensable. It is the only way of life of a member of a Secular Institute: God must be the uninterrupted source of your life while you follow your profession and the hopeful sorrow of humanity. It is difficult, but at times one must have the courage to cut away from everything (in order to subsequently return to the world) and seek a moment and a place for prayer.⁹²

Perseverance in prayer consists in finding appropriate times each day, long or short but always, times searched out with love and wanted at every cost in the reality and circumstances of every day life. It requires a continuous and attentive listening to God who is the point of reference for every thing; giving a wide space to the Eucharist as a loving and intimate contact

⁸⁸ Cf M. ALBERTINI – Y. DAMIANI, *Introduzione alla spiritualità degli Istituti Secolari*, Milano, Edizioni O.R., 1981, 29-40; Cf F. ZENNA, *Consigli evangelici e spiritualità dell’incarnazione*, in “Incontro” 16 (2006) 3, 25-29.

⁸⁹ As the Second Vatican Council, in regard to the lay spirituality in general, states: “Family cares should not be foreign to their spirituality, nor any other temporal interest; in the words of the apostle: ‘Whatever you are doing, whether speaking or acting, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to the Father through him’ (Col. 3:17)” and it states that: “The lay spirituality will take its particular character from the circumstances of one’s state in life [...], from one’s state of health and from one’s professional and social activity” (AA, n. 4).

⁹⁰ Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 89-99; Cf ALBERTINI – DAMIANI, *Introduzione alla spiritualità degli Istituti Secolari*, 15-40; Cf D. CASTENETTO, *La spiritualità degli Istituti secolari*, in “Incontro” (2008) 4, 27-38; Cf M. MIDALI, *Spiritualità apostolica: personali e vitali riferimenti fondanti*, Roma, LAS, 1994, 23-48 and 59-63.

⁹¹ Cf CIC, n. 719, §§ 1, 2, 3; Cf E. TRESALTI, «La preghiera negli Istituti Secolari», in OBERTI, *Nel mondo per il mondo*, 193-203; Cf G. BRASCA, «La preghiera negli Istituti Secolari», in OBERTI, *Spiritualità degli Istituti Secolari*, 225-243.

⁹² PIRONIO, «Message Addressed to the Second Latin American Congress of Secular Institutes», 197, n. 15.

with Christ who is the source of force for every action; a constant reading of the Scriptures as the basic source of alimentation in the search for God and his plan in the history of men and in one's proper history; a frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance as a necessary condition for staying faithful to one's vocation, as a sign of a continuous conversion and renewal, a sign of a humble recognition of one's weaknesses and of a trustful abandonment to the mercy of God leading to a renewed peace with God and with fellow men; finding times for retreat, for revising and renewing one's life and as such for acquiring a greater intimacy with God.⁹³

By this perseverance, progressively, the entire world would become a place of prayer for the consecrated lay person, where the values and tensions of one's time, the daily joys and the fatigues, all aspirations and efforts are shared with and sanctified by Christ. It is about a life which becomes prayer, by presence and by witness; a life transformed into prayer by the very reason of one's continuous union with God.⁹⁴ Card. Pironio, again in his message to the 2nd Latin American Congress of Secular Institutes, highlights this contemplative dimension of Secular Institutes stating:

In order to interpret in God the things that occur in the world, to discover the anxieties of men and the demands of God, one must be contemplative. This means men and women of prayer, who stop in the rhythm of their work to listen to God; who, from time to time dare to retire to the desert to meet Him in solitude; who, above all, know how to create in their innermost self a deep and unchangeable area of active silence.⁹⁵

Living in the world does not make silence impossible. "Everything depends on an interiority that is pacified and centred on God. What opposes true silence is not external noise, activity or words; what really opposes silence is one's own self constituted as the centre."⁹⁶ On the other hand, having moments of solitude does not mean isolation that might indicate

⁹³ Cf G. SOMMARUGA, «La preghiera», in OBERTI, *Gli Istituti Secolari nel nuovo Codice di Diritto Canonico*, 85-88.

⁹⁴ Cf ID., *Vocazione secolare e preghiera*, Milano, Edizioni O.R., 1981, 7-21.

⁹⁵ PIRONIO, «Message Addressed to the Second Latin American Congress of Secular Institutes», 197, n. 15.

⁹⁶ ID., «Opening Speech to the Assembly of Directors General», 190, 45.

egoism, illusion, being closed up in oneself or refusing others. It indicates being alone with Christ in order to listen to him and be more available to others with serenity of heart.

The spirituality of incarnation opens the consecrated lay people into a profound Marian spirituality because in her the Word became flesh in the profoundness of her faithfulness to the annunciation and in the fullness of her fidelity to the Holy Spirit. It is with her that they work for the transformation of men in the world to the glory of God. It is also very important for the consecrated lay people to have an ecclesial spirituality, living in profoundness the ecclesial communion at the local and universal level, because it is in the Church and for the Church that they are sent to the world in the name of Christ.⁹⁷

1.6. *Ecclesial Dimension of Secular Institutes*

A characteristic note of Secular Institutes is their lively insertion in the Church; they have full availability to the needs of the Church in the spirit of service. Secular Institutes are a gift of the Holy Spirit to the entire Church. They were not born exclusively as a result of new pastoral exigencies but were born, first of all, as a result of the fruitful communion of the Church. They are a sign of the vitality of the whole Church increasing its internal sanctity and apostolic dynamism. The Church, in the essential unity of its nature and mission, has welcomed this gift as a new way of its presence in the world. Secular Institutes manifest in a profound and concrete way the relationship between the Church and the world. They manifest the harmony that exists between the natural and the supernatural order, between love of neighbor and love of God, between life and faith, between work and prayer, between time and eternity. Each member of a Secular Institute is in the Church and the Church is present in them; and in the measure in which they live their consecration radically and their secularity faithfully, they will become an evident and effective sign of the evangelizing presence of the Church in the world.⁹⁸ Pope Paul VI, referring the members of Secular Institutes, stated:

⁹⁷ Cf ID., *Identità attualità e missione degli Istituti Secolari*, Milano, Edizioni O.R., 1985, 102-103.

⁹⁸ Cf *Ibid.*, 97-99.

Church enters into you as part of the awareness, the conscience, which we have just been thinking about. It becomes part of your mind, a meditation unintermittent, your *sensus Ecclesiae*, your ‘feel of the Church’. It is within you, the air which your spirit breathes. [...] there is one which should never be missing, the unique quality of your membership of the church. To your special life as consecrated seculars belongs a special membership of the Church.⁹⁹

In Secular Institutes there is a deep ecclesial sense of the Church manifested, first of all, in the universal dimension of the life and mission of the members. It is essential for the consecrated lay people to go beyond the boundaries of one’s country and assume the pains and hopes of humanity in general; to ‘live permanently the Passion of the Body of Christ – the Church, in the world’;¹⁰⁰ to have a truly universal heart and a missionary zeal, not only in the sense of making new members and spreading out, but in the sense of stabilizing a new, specific and original presence of the risen Christ – the hope of humanity.¹⁰¹ This feeling penetrates their spiritual life and prayer as stated below:

This ecclesial sense ensures that our prayer will have a profoundly human and cosmic dimension, that it will be directed towards men and history. A prayer that illuminates and epitomizes the sorrow and the joy of man and, from within history, offers them to the Father. A prayer that tends to transform the world “saved in hope” (cfr. *Rom* 8,24) and to accelerate the final coming of the kingdom.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ PAUL VI, «*Apostolic Efficacy Depends of Personal Sanctification*», 81-82, n. 17.

¹⁰⁰ In this regard, Pope John Paul II in his message to the 4th International Congress of SII stated that, for the consecrated lay people, “another fundamental requirement consists in the generous and conscious acceptance of the mystery of the Cross. Every ecclesial action is objectively rooted in the work of salvation, in Christ’s redemptive action. It draws its strength from the sacrifice of the Lord, from his blood shed upon the Cross. Christ’s sacrifice, ever present in the work of the Church, constitutes her strength and her hope, her most mysterious and greatest gift of grace. The Church well knows that her history is one of renunciation and sacrifice. Your situation as consecrated laity makes you verify the truth of that everyday, even in the area of your activity and mission. [...] Precisely this evangelic life, followed sometimes in conditions of loneliness and suffering, is the life which gives you hope, because in the Cross you are sure to be in communion with our Redeemer and Lord” (JOHN PAUL II, «*Spread the Work of Redemption by Traveling the Evangelic Way of the Cross*». To the 4th Congress of Secular Institutes, 26 August 1988, in CMIS, *Secular Institutes. Documents*, 67, n. 5).

¹⁰¹ Cf PIRONIO, *Identità attualità e missione degli Istituti Secolari*, 100.

¹⁰² ID., «*Opening Speech to the Assembly of Directors General*», 185, n. 20.

The ecclesial sense of Secular Institutes is also expressed in the ‘faithfulness of the members to the particular or local Church’¹⁰³ where they are to be found. This is essential because it is in the local Church that they realize their specific mission and in it they become concrete witnesses of the risen Christ. As such, it is very important for them to assume the pastoral demands of the local Church which invites for a greater love of the local Church and communion with the bishops and its pastors, walking together with the local Christian community.¹⁰⁴ In this regard Pope John Paul II stated that:

secular institutes must understand and adopt the pastoral urgencies of the particular Churches, and encourage their members to live the hopes and toils, the projects and concerns, the spiritual riches and limitations with diligent participation; in a word, the communion of their concrete Church. This must be a point for greater reflection for the secular institutes, just as it must be a concern of the pastors to recognize and request their contribution according to their proper nature.¹⁰⁵

Finally, this ecclesial sense is manifested in the profound faithfulness of each member to one’s identity as a consecrated lay person. The apostolate or mission of a member of a Secular Institute, which we will analyze below, is always realized starting from this unfailing faithfulness to one’s identity. Any deviation from one’s consecration and from one’s secularity would fundamentally change one’s vocation and mission. In this case it is also very important that the bishops have clear information about the nature of the vocation and mission of the consecrated lay people and about their charism.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ The members by being faithful to the local Church are faithful to the universal Church as “The particular Church does not come about from a kind of fragmentation of the universal Church, nor does the universal Church come about by a simple amalgamation of particular Churches. Rather there is a real essential and constant bond uniting each of them and this is why the universal Church exists and is manifested in the particular Churches” (ChL, n. 25).

¹⁰⁴ Cf PIRONIO, *Identità attualità e missione degli Istituti Secolari*, 100-101.

¹⁰⁵ JOHN PAUL II, «*Secular Institutes, Faithful Expression of the Council’s Ecclesiology*», 58, n.4.

¹⁰⁶ Cf PIRONIO, *Identità attualità e missione degli Istituti Secolari*, 101.

2. Apostolate of Secular Institutes

In Secular Institutes, not only is there multiple form of apostolate depending on the particular vocation and charism of each Institute but normally even the members of a single Institute concretize their particular apostolate in diverse ways and it is very difficult to talk about specific forms of apostolate. Here, we will consider the common nature of the apostolate of Secular Institutes as an apostolate founded on consecration and on an authentic secularity, and as an apostolate that is to be carried out in secrecy; and in a broad sense we will articulate the major forms of the apostolate of Secular Institutes as apostolate of personal sanctity and apostolate of profession, and describe their apostolate in the apostolic works of the Church.

2.1. *Apostolate Founded on Consecration*

The members of a Secular Institute, according to their vocation, are called to live the apostolate common to all laity. However, their apostolate is also to be distinguished from the general apostolate of the laity by the fact that it is solidly founded upon consecration.¹⁰⁷ In fact, as the Code of Canon Law states “members of these institutes express and exercise their own consecration in apostolic activity.”¹⁰⁸ Thus, their apostolic activity derives from and is an expression of the consecration that roots their life in Christ, and the more the interior life is rooted in Christ the more fruitful is the apostolate and becomes inextinguishable.

In regard to the concept of apostolate, the fundamental question lies not on what one should *do* but on what one should *be* in carrying out the apostolate. This means that in Secular Institutes the question of apostolate is more about *way of being* rather than *doing*.¹⁰⁹ It signifies *being an apostle* of Christ in the world, living fully in him till his love within oneself starts to flow out towards others. Thus, it is not something external but something that expands initiating from inside, and individual persons do not become apostles just because they decide to dedicate all their life to the spread of the doctrine of Christ or decide to defend the Church

¹⁰⁷ Cf G. BRASCA, «La dimensione apostolica degli Istituti Secolari», in OBERTI, *Gli Istituti Secolari consacrazione, secolarità e apostolato*, 150-152; Cf von BALTHASAR, *Sponsa Verbi*, 435.

¹⁰⁸ CIC, n. 713, § 1.

¹⁰⁹ Cf LAZZATI, «Pluralismo apostolico degli Istituti Secolari », 65-66.

from all those who are against it, etc, rather become apostles in as much as they give themselves for love from which all works flow.¹¹⁰ As such the members of a Secular Institute are called to “vitalize their lives with charity and, to the extent of the capability of each give concrete expression to it in works.”¹¹¹

The apostolate of the members of a Secular Institute is above all an ‘*apostolate of presence*’ – a ‘*transforming presence*’.¹¹² It implies an intensely Christian presence among others following the example of Jesus, the Word of God made man, who lived among men in the human society. The members of a Secular Institute are called to transmit the love and the message of Christ to others primarily through testimony of life – *apostolate of witness*. Their apostolate embraces the whole life and it has a universal dimension embracing all humanity especially those in need.¹¹³ The document *Primo Feliciter* states:

The whole life of a member of a Secular Institute, sacred to God by the profession of perfection, must become an apostolate so continuous and holy, with such sincerity of mind, interior union with God, generous self-forgetfulness and courageous self denial, such love of souls, as to nourish, unceasingly renew and outwardly express the spiritual reality within. This apostolate of one’s whole life is so deeply and sincerely experienced in the Secular Institutes [...].¹¹⁴

Therefore, it is very important for the consecrated lay people to cultivate, by means of their consecration with evangelical counsels, a profound internal life of union with God so that their apostolic life would come out as a fruit of their transformation in God. However, they have also to live fully immersed in the world.¹¹⁵ Here, it is very important to remember the event of ‘transfiguration of Christ’.¹¹⁶ In this supernatural event, the apostles were totally

¹¹⁰ Cf G. SOMMARUGA, «A servizio di Cristo e della Chiesa nell’apostolato», in OBERTI, *Gli Istituti Secolari consacrazione, secolarità e apostolato*, 162-163.

¹¹¹ AA, n. 16.

¹¹² Cf J. BEYER, «L’avvenire degli Istituti Secolari », in GEMELLI et al., *Secolarità e vita consacrata*, 305-312; Cf von BALTHASAR - GIUSSANI, *L’impegno del cristiano nel mondo*, 88-95.

¹¹³ Cf SOMMARUGA, «A servizio di Cristo e della Chiesa nell’apostolato», 163-164; Cf P. SCHINETTI, *Secolarità consacrata: riflessioni teologico-pastorale. L’apostolato del secolare consacrato*, in “Vita consacrata” 13 (1977) 6/7, 350-357.

¹¹⁴ PF, n. 6.

¹¹⁵ JOHN PAUL II, «Spread the Work of Redemption by Traveling the Evangelic Way of the Cross», 66-67, n. 4.

¹¹⁶ Cf Mt 17:1-10; Cf Mk 9:2-9; Cf Lk 9:28-37.

transformed and totally immersed in it that they wanted to remain there – expressed by Peter – to continue contemplating that event. However, they had to go down again to the normal environment to fulfill their mission among the people. In the same way, the life of apostolate of the consecrated lay people should be preceded and continuously nourished by this event of transformation in God, but they have also to be fully present to the events of the world.

2.2. *Secular Nature of the Apostolate*

The apostolate of Secular Institutes is not only “something that happens in the world, but it may almost be said to grow out of the world: its existence is in professions, activities, forms, places, circumstances of a secular nature.”¹¹⁷ The expression ‘*in saeculo e ex saeculo*’ signifies not only the fact that the members live in the world, but also the fact that they use the instruments of the world in order to evangelize, i.e., to give, by means of them, their testimony of the Truth so that men could know it from within their own activities.¹¹⁸ *Evangelii Nuntiandi* states:

Their primary and immediate task [...] is to put to use every Christian and evangelical possibility latent but already present and active in the affairs of the world. Their own field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, but also the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media.¹¹⁹

Every form of individual or collective apostolate of Secular Institutes must be characterized by secularity – taking into consideration the correct significance of the term. Secularity necessarily implies an *active* presence in the world, an assumption of responsibility in various levels, for reordering every temporal reality in the world in conformity to the design

¹¹⁷ *PF*, n. 6.

¹¹⁸ Cf. E. FRANCESCHINI, «L’apostolato negli Istituti Secolari», in OBERTI, *Gli Istituti Secolari consacrazione, secolarità e apostolato*, 128.

¹¹⁹ PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World, 8 December 1975, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 68 (1976) 5-76, n. 70; Cf. R. SALVINI, *Aspetti teologici relativi a «L’evangelizzazione e gli Istituti Secolari alla luce di ‘Evangelii nuntiandi’*», in “Dialogo” 1980/44, 39-48; Cf. A. OBERTI, *Gli Istituti secolari di fronte all’evangelizzazione e promozione umana*, in “Vita consacrata” 12 (1976) 11, 553-573.

of God. In regard to Secular Institutes, cannot be called ‘secular’ the one who lives in the world in a passive way, i.e., the one who does not take responsibility in regard to the world, living or accepting such a responsible presence with the unique end of evangelization, making use of life in the world as instrument for achieving this end. One is ‘secular’ in the full sense as long as the work for the salvation of the world characterizes one’s entire being, existence and activities in the world.¹²⁰

“Our time is one of great cultural and social upheaval”, and “the contemporary world appears particularly sensitive to the witness of those who can courageously assume *the risk and responsibility of discerning the times* and of the plan for building a new and more just humanity.”¹²¹ Today, as much as the new evangelization program of the Church is concerned, the profound cultural and social transformations frequently create obstacles rather than promote this activity. Members of Secular Institutes, conscious of these challenges, are called to face them because “The Holy Spirit has granted them the grace of being more radically conformed to Jesus in the path he walked to reconcile mankind with God, to break down the walls of enmity (cf. Heb 2:14) and to create the New Humanity.”¹²² As such:

Secular Institutes are asked to make theirs an extraordinary involvement in witnessing to the newness of the Gospel. [...] New methods are also required for communicating the newness of the Gospel to the world. Towards such an end members of Secular Institutes must be open to new forms of communication offered to them by the progress of technology. However, they must not forget that the communication must also be adapted to the newness that it is called to spread.¹²³

Today in our world there is a rapid spread of forms of religious expressions attempting to respond to the desire for communion with God, to the search for the ultimate truth about him and about humanity’s destiny. However, in many cases, these experiences are totally detached

¹²⁰ Cf G. LAZZATI, «*Pluralismo apostolico degli Istituti Secolari*», in OBERTI, *Nel mondo per il mondo*, 66-69.

¹²¹ JOHN PAUL II, «*Bearing Witness to Christ in Secular Life*». On the Occasion of the International Symposium to Mark the 50th Anniversary of *Provida Mater Ecclesia*, 2 February 1997, in CMIS, *Secular Institutes. Documents*, 75, n. 6.

¹²² A. SODANO (Card.), «*Builders of Christian Culture in the Mission of the New Evangelization*». On the Occasion of the 5th World Congress of Secular Institutes, 24 July 1992, in CMIS, *Secular Institutes. Documents*, 69-70.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 70.

from reality and from humanity's concrete history and imply an ambiguous concept of God far from that offered by Revelation. On the other hand, there is a false concept of secularity in which God has nothing to do in human history, and in which, the relationship with him is considered subjective that can be tolerated in as much as it does not claim to have any influence on culture and society. In this case, the major apostolate of the members of Secular Institutes – an apostolate that derives from their nature of consecrated secularity – is to reconcile this conflict and bring a new synthesis between God's initiative and the longing of creation, between faith and secular life, between the Gospel and human history.¹²⁴

By the very fact that the members of Secular Institutes are lay people they can participate in every form of apostolate according to their inclination and competence, usually taking personal initiative and responsibility.¹²⁵ As *Apostolicam Actuositatem* states:

Laymen ought to take on themselves as their distinctive task this renewal of the temporal order. Guided by the light of the Gospel and the mind of the Church, prompted by Christian love, they should act in this domain in a direct way and in their own specific manner. As citizens among citizens they must bring to their cooperation with others their own special competence, and act on their own responsibility; everywhere and always they have to seek the justice of the Kingdom of God. The temporal order is to be renewed in such a way that, while its own principles are fully respected, it is harmonized with the principles of the Christian life and adapted to the various conditions of times, places and peoples. Among the tasks of this apostolate Christian social action is pre-eminent. The Council desires to see it extended today to every sector of life, not forgetting the cultural sphere.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ JOHN PAUL II, «*Bearing Witness to Christ in Secular Life*», 73-75, nn. 3, 4 and 5.

¹²⁵ Normally the members of a SI can concretize their apostolate in various forms under their own initiative and as such on the greater part there is a personal responsibility and the 'superiors' do not take much responsibility for them in daily life. If those in responsibility of the Institute were to direct the members in daily life there would not be much spontaneous initiative – though for the SII who have their own apostolic works, those in responsibility necessarily have to give directions to the members who dedicate themselves in these works. But for those Institutes who exclusively intend to carryout their apostolate by their presence in the structures, places and circumstances of the world, there is full personal responsibility in all their activities (Cf BRASCA, «*La dimensione apostolica degli Istituti Secolari*», 155-156; Cf GAMBARI, «*Gli Istituti Secolari*», 113-114).

¹²⁶ AA, n. 7.

On the other hand, there are many Secular Institutes whose members specialize in a particular form of apostolate. As in the case of the *Catechists' Union of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate*, the members specialize in the catechetical apostolate which is to be considered very precious but important is that the secular character gives a unique tone to their apostolate in this field. For example, as lay people, they need to manifest a unique capacity in carrying out this catechetical activity in various places and circumstances of the world where such apostolate appears to be particularly important.¹²⁷

Many Secular Institutes, again as in the case of the *Catechists' Union of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate*, have collective apostolic activity, i.e., proper apostolic works tied to the proper charism of the Institute given by the founder. This is the main reason for apostolic plurality in Secular Institutes. In this case it is very important for Secular Institutes to be attentive in maintaining the secular character of their members. The primary commitment of the members of Secular Institutes is that of carrying out secular responsibility linked with a life testimony among other people. If these apostolic works of a particular Institute would cause the members to leave aside or diminish the real sense of their secularity, then this Institute would be a Secular Institute only by name but in reality it would not be.¹²⁸

2.3. *Hidden Apostolate*

The members of a Secular Institute, particularly in regard to their apostolate, need to have 'secrecy'.¹²⁹ However, it is very important to understand this concept of 'secrecy' (*riserbo*) correctly. It does not mean that the members have to deceive others in regard to their condition of life but indicates the choice made that one's condition of being consecrated be manifested

¹²⁷ Cf LAZZATI, «*Pluralismo apostolico degli Istituti Secolari*», 68-69.

¹²⁸ Cf *Ibid.*, 69-70; Cf LAZZATI, «*Pluralismo negli Istituti Secolari*», 60-61.

¹²⁹ Till recent time, the concept of 'secrecy' (*riserbo*) in SII was understood as an absolute value. It was seen not only as a characteristic note that distinguishes the members of SII from those of Orders and religious Congregations but was considered as an indispensable condition – *conditio sine qua non* – for the fruitfulness of their apostolate (Cf FRANCESCHINI, «*L'apostolato negli Istituti Secolari*», 139-140; Cf BRASCA, «*La dimensione apostolica degli Istituti Secolari*», 154-156). Instead, today, this concept is interpreted with a new light and depth. It is neither to be understood as an absolute value, nor as a constitutive element of the charism of SII. It only indicates the modality with which some values proper to their identity are to be lived (Cf M. MALASPINA, *Dal riserbo alla profezia*, in "Incontro" (2009) 1, 22).

more by facts of life rather than by canonical or juridical declarations. Therefore, it is not a question about telling one's identity or not, but highlights the fact that one's condition of life be recognized by others without the person having to tell about it – though in occasions of necessity one has to reveal it. At the same time, it is a call to the members to examine if their way of being and doing corresponds to their consecration, inviting them to be and to become what they need to be independently from the fact that their choice of life can be known, appearing equal in everything – in what regards human activity – with those among whom they live and work. It implies an attitude, a way of living one's identity, a style, which respects the specific values of secularity.¹³⁰

It implies a silent witnessing presence, and as such, the profound significance of the concept of 'secrecy' is interior life – the precious pearl of one's intimacy with Christ. Such a treasure has to be conserved and nourished with a sense of 'reserve' that acts silently, communicating itself silently to all who are around. However, sometimes, pushed by a joyful enthusiasm or feeling the need for confirmation or for witnessing, one might feel the need for communicating it by words. Here the concept of 'secrecy' can be correctly interpreted as 'discretion'. The silent presence is at the same time a dialoguing presence – in an explicit way – when the moment or the situation offers an opportunity. As such the 'secrecy' (*riserbo*) becomes prophesy: a call to become signs of God in the world, signs of love and hope, interpreting and communicating the divine will, above all by life but also by words.¹³¹

This is the constructive sense of 'riserbo': silent humble presence – to work but without immediate fruits, to give all but without recognition or privilege. This style has its roots in the life of Jesus and Mary. Jesus was the Savior and Redeemer but he was neither a priest nor a rabbi, he was living like the other people sharing in all human reality of his society. In the way to Emmaus, with the two disciples, he was very reserved in revealing himself, which he did only by explaining the Scriptures and breaking the bread. On the other hand, Jesus did not deny that he was Son of God but he did so for making it an element of universal fraternity, a

¹³⁰ Cf MALASPINA, *Dal riserbo alla profezia*, 24-25; Cf FRANCESCHINI, «L'apostolato negli Istituti Secolari», 139-140.

¹³¹ Cf MALASPINA, *Dal riserbo alla profezia*, 22-29; Cf C. MARAZZI, *Il riserbo degli Istituti secolari: ringiovanito*, in "Incontro" (2009) 2, 46-47.

sign of his link with humanity so that every person could receive God as a Father. The same was with the life of Mary, who collaborated in the redemption of the entire world but living like any other woman in her society, while conserving the great mystery of the Son; however, she was not scrupulous in revealing it for the good of others like in Cana.¹³²

This 'hidden' apostolate of Secular Institutes is realized in two major ways which become characteristic notes, not in the substantial sense but in regard to the circumstance in which Secular Institutes actualize their finality. These are the apostolate of personal sanctity and the apostolate of profession.¹³³

2.4. *Apostolate of Personal Sanctity*

Every Christian is called to sanctity and one way for realizing this call is the way of living the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience. Both the religious and the members of Secular Institutes live the evangelical counsels by means of vows; however for someone living in convent the evangelical counsels are means for actualizing and defending the life of perfection, while for someone living in the world among others the evangelical counsels also become formidable arms for apostolate.¹³⁴ Therefore, for the members of

¹³² Cf MALASPINA, *Dal riserbo alla profezia*, 23-27.

¹³³ Cf FRANCESCHINI, «*L'apostolato negli Istituti Secolari*», 128; Cf ID., *Per un impegno evangelico nel mondo*, 74-90.

¹³⁴ Cf ID., «*L'apostolato negli Istituti Secolari*», 128. In a SI consecration is not a means for carrying out a specific end; it is not something functional aiming towards a specific service, like how it is conceived in respect to many religious congregations born in function of specific apostolic works; it is the first content of the mission of SII. However, today, for many people the life of evangelical counsels is conceived as useless, for some it is unnatural, while for many others it is conceived as very difficult if not impossible. It is true that the evangelical counsels are difficult values because they are not in the simple human line, but represent a value that is beyond; they are ferments of a new humanity that is to be found fully by participating in the mystery of the death and life of the Risen Christ. For this reason, only a consecration lived in the joy of resurrection becomes interesting and will have the power of provoking others even non believers. Evangelical counsels will have evangelizing impulse only when they become principal animators of men. For example, the difficult value of chastity will no longer be strange but amazing if it is communicated through a joyful language of resurrection, as a transparent testimony of a realized humanity; the difficult value of poverty will no longer be insignificant if it is communicated through a language of service, above all, besides the poorest of the world; the difficult value of obedience becomes eloquent and comprehensible if it uses a language of fraternal communion and unity. Only in this encounter between evangelical values and human values, does consecration avoid appearing like an aristocratic hypothesis and becomes a serious way, possible for all, and above all, capable of communicating the newness of the Gospel

Secular Institutes the first apostolate is that of exercising the evangelical counsels: it can be said the *apostolate of chastity, poverty and obedience*. It does not matter that these vows are private and hidden, what is important is that their light radiates in ordinary life. The world can see that the denial of proper human rights in regard to the body, temporal goods and personal liberty is not purely human but an act sustained by something beyond.¹³⁵ The document *Apostolicam Actuositatem* states: “A special form of the individual apostolate is the witness of a whole lay life issuing from faith, hope and charity; it is a sign very much in keeping with our times, and a manifestation of Christ living in his faithful.”¹³⁶

In the concrete situation of our time, the life of chastity, poverty and obedience has so much to say to the world. Today, there is a lot of egoistic use of sexuality, usually not considering the finality indicated by God but aiming only at individual satisfaction in the search for non-equilibrated pleasure. There is so much ambition for possessing, usually not considering the temporary value of wealth and power and their finality for fraternal service. There are also a lot of abuses in regard to individual liberty, usually not respecting the liberty of others, and there are many happenings in which individuals cannot stop themselves from doing what they want and do it at any cost even by taking off the life of another.¹³⁷

Naturally, a life testimony of someone who lives in chastity with serenity and joy, in simplicity and humility of character, opening oneself towards others without reserve in total abandonment to God and to his grace, is a powerful form of apostolate. The same is true with the life of poverty. The testimony given by a person, who can severely control the use of one's proper real needs without searching for commodities and for what is extra, in total detachment from temporal things, is a silent form of apostolate. Obedience is also another extraordinary form of apostolate when one gives good example in the way of relating with all legitimate authorities, both in regard to the Church and civil society, in regard to the Secular Institute where one belongs, and also in regard to the fellow men in family or in work, as an expression

(Cf E. MASSERONI, *La secolarità consacrata “segno” nel mondo della speranza cristiana*, in “Incontro” 15 (2005) 6, 10-11).

¹³⁵ Cf FRANCESCHINI, «L'apostolato negli Istituti Secolari», 128-130.

¹³⁶ AA, n. 16.

¹³⁷ Cf M. BADALONI, *Vocazione secolare e impegno professionale*, Milano, Edizioni O.R., 1980, 43-48.

of a vow given to a supernatural Authority. It is all an expression of the dedication of one's proper self to the glory of God, a participation in the salvific action of the Church and in the spread of the Kingdom of God.¹³⁸

2.5. *Apostolate of Profession*

The professional field is the principal means by which a consecrated lay person concretizes one's apostolate. This requires, first of all, a firm conviction of the human and Christian value of work.¹³⁹ *Gaudium et Spes* states:

Individual and collective activity, that monumental effort of man through the centuries to improve the circumstances of the world, presents no problem to believers: considered in itself, it corresponds to the plan of God. Man was created in God's image and was commanded to conquer the earth with all it contains and to rule the world in justice and holiness: he was to acknowledge God as maker of all things and relate himself and the totality of creation to him, so that through the dominion of all things by man the name of God would be majestic in all the earth. This holds good also for our daily work. When men and women provide for themselves and their families in such a way as to be of service to the community as well, they can rightly look upon their work as a prolongation of the work of the creator, a service to their fellow men, and their personal contribution to the fulfillment in history of the divine plan. Far from considering the conquests of man's genius and courage as opposed to God's power as if he set himself up as a rival to the creator, Christians ought to be convinced that the achievements of the human race are a sign of God's greatness and the fulfillment of his mysterious design.¹⁴⁰

The consecrated lay people in the professional field have a particular duty of affirming and making known this Christian vision of work, of scientific and technological research, and of guiding it towards the good of individuals and of the society by the witness of one's own actions. Today, more than ever, the mission of consecrated lay people in the professional field

¹³⁸ Cf. FRANCESCHINI, «L'apostolato negli Istituti Secolari», 130-131; Cf. BRASCA, «La dimensione apostolica degli Istituti Secolari», 152-154.

¹³⁹ Cf. BADALONI, *Vocazione secolare e impegno professionale*, 15-16; Cf. K. RAHNER, *Meditazioni teologiche. Cose d'ogni giorno*, Brescia, Editrice Queriniana, 1966, 10-12.

¹⁴⁰ GS, n. 34.

is that of orientating the fruits of work and the achievements of science and technology towards a social order that guarantees justice and liberty for all. The consecrated lay people have to dedicate themselves in avoiding and correcting deviations both in the use of means and in the application of the results of progress so that no harm will be done to human life.¹⁴¹

What is valuable is not the quality of profession but true dedication, fidelity and good example in what ever profession one might find oneself. The apostolate of profession is twofold. The first is linked with the duties of justice and consists in the exercise of the profession in a perfect way in as much as the physical and intellectual powers allow. If the consecrated lay person, wants to open the world of science and technology to the action of the Church, first of all needs to be an exemplar citizen in this world of science and technology, because only in this way can one's testimony be effective for opening the way to the profound and active presence of God in human history. The second aspect of the apostolate of profession is linked with the duties of charity and consists in helping one's companions, sharing with them the joys, sufferings, needs, hopes of every day life.¹⁴² In a similar way, Pope John Paul II presents this twofold apostolate of profession as follows:

It seems ever more apparent that the Christian mission in the world cannot be reduced to giving a pure, simple example of honesty, competence and fidelity to duty. All this is presupposed. It is a question of putting on the mind of Jesus Christ in order to be signs of his love in the world. This is the meaning and the goal of authentic Christian secularity, and thus the purpose and value of the Christian consecration lived in secular institutes.¹⁴³

According to proper inclinations and competence, the consecrated lay people can also engage themselves in the exercise of authority in the socio-political field, dedicating themselves in a completely disinterested service of society in the administration of common goods, in the promotion of peace and justice. *Gaudium et Spes* states that: "The Church praises and esteems those who devote themselves to the public good for the service of men and take

¹⁴¹ Cf BADALONI, *Vocazione secolare e impegno professionale*, 16-22.

¹⁴² Cf FRANCESCHINI, «L'apostolato negli Istituti Secolari», 131-132.

¹⁴³ JOHN PAUL II, «*Bearing Witness to Christ in Secular Life*», 75, n. 6.

upon themselves the burdens of public office.”¹⁴⁴ The consecrated lay people are called to defend human rights critically and courageously but in an objective and constructive sense, sustaining their critics by life testimony and by a readiness to engage themselves in the improvement of the situation.¹⁴⁵

Though not exclusively, in the major part the apostolate of profession is indirect in the sense that it does not directly aim at souls but at the temporal activities themselves. However, this does not mean that the consecrated lay people do not dedicate themselves in a direct apostolate. First of all, what they do in the professional work, in as much as they do it united with the Church in a spirit of service, has a great significance for the life of the Church because it is by means of them that the Church carries out its mission of re-ordering temporal realities according to the project of God. And then, though the professional activities occupy the major part of their time, still the consecrated lay people maintain their proper function in the structures of the Church.¹⁴⁶

2.6. *Apostolate in the Apostolic Works of the Church*

The Church as the depository of all apostolic mandates is always engaged with apostolic works that, directly or indirectly, help it in fulfilling its mission. The Holy Spirit always continues to bring forth such works of apostolate in response to the needs of a particular time. Many Orders and religious Congregations of active life have engaged themselves in different apostolic works throughout the centuries. It is also true that many Secular Institutes have come into existence around a determined work of apostolate. However, though the Church documents do not give explicit indications in this regard, normally, Secular Institutes are not demanded to have proper apostolic works, rather it is not advisable for them; more advisable is that they engage themselves in the apostolic works of the Church. As it has already been mentioned, the reason is that in as much as they start to have their own apostolic works, there

¹⁴⁴ GS, n. 75.

¹⁴⁵ Cf M. BADALONI, *Vocazione secolare e impegno sociale e politico*, Milano, Edizioni O.R., 1981, 14-21.

¹⁴⁶ Cf FRANCESCHINI, «L’apostolato negli Istituti Secolari», 132-134; Cf LAZZATI, «Pluralismo apostolico degli Istituti Secolari », 69.

is risk of diminishing their essential quality of secularity and of diminishing their effectiveness in social penetration. This does not mean that Secular Institutes should exclude any apostolic work of their own or should go invading apostolic works of others – they actually have a territory as vast as the human activity itself – rather it means conserving their proper physiognomy as Secular Institutes since, as it is shown before, they are called to work not only *in saeculo* – as this is done also by the Orders and religious Congregations of active life – but *ex saeculo*, i.e., from the world, by means common to the world.¹⁴⁷

Therefore, the primary mission of Secular institutes is not that of having proper apostolic works but that of forming men and women, according to the particular physiognomy of each Institute given by its Constitutions, for all kinds of services in the Church, i.e., preparing the members to an exclusive service of the Church. The works of the Church are many and always go on multiplying in the effort of travelling effectively side by side with every human progress. And Secular Institutes by not having proper works of apostolate remain open and ready to the service of the entire Church. This aspect is compatible with the profession of the members in the world, with their relative apostolate and with their secular character leaving a wide space for the personal initiative of the members. While if a Secular Institute is to have its own works of apostolate, a need may arise that the ‘superiors’ propose to the members to assume a determined activity and dependence on ‘superiors’ might be inevitable, and it might be no more like a Secular Institute but more like a religious Congregation.¹⁴⁸

In regard to the missionary mandate of the Church, Secular Institutes can be bearers of a new way for carrying out the Good News where it has not yet reached – a way constituted primarily, and above all, by a life lived in service.¹⁴⁹ In regard to this missionary dimension of Secular Institutes, the Second Vatican Council states that “their work, under the authority of the bishop, can be fruitful in many ways for the missions especially as an example of total dedication to the evangelization of the world.”¹⁵⁰ In the technical sense of the term, some

¹⁴⁷ Cf FRANCESCHINI, «L’apostolato negli Istituti Secolari», 134-135.

¹⁴⁸ Cf *Ibid.*, 135-136; Cf J. CLEMENCE, «Il discernimento delle vocazioni agli Istituti Secolari», in BEYER et al., *Gli Istituti Secolari dopo il Vaticano II*, 139-140.

¹⁴⁹ Cf TRESALTI, *La missione degli Istituti Secolari laicali*, 36.

¹⁵⁰ AG, n. 40.

Secular Institutes are qualified as missionary, i.e., their members are ready to leave one's country and go to other territories for the sake of evangelization. Others, though not defining their vocation in this sense, are also open to this missionary mandate of the Church.¹⁵¹

Members of Secular Institutes in the more developed countries can also collaborate for the general development of the poor countries. Like in the other aspects of secular testimony, even here, the members, by virtue of their consecration, dedicate themselves in less comfortable situations that demand a considerable effort for adaptation, not only in the physical sense but also, in virtue of a life totally dedicated to God, in making one's presence a testimony of a totally uninterested availability, i.e., a presence not tied to political or economic interests, but offered for a sincere service, sustained by love which seeks nothing for self.¹⁵² In this regard the members of Secular Institutes also need to "collaborate with other Christians, with non-Christians and especially with members of international associations, always bearing in mind that 'the structure of the earthly city should be founded on the Lord and directed to him.'"¹⁵³

2.7. *Apostolate of Priests Belonging to a Secular Institute*

In regard to Secular Institutes of priests the question of apostolate is presented in a manner much different from the other Secular Institutes of lay members. For the priests the sacrament of Ordination already confers a specific mission among the People of God. And if the priests have to be engaged in diocesan or inter-diocesan offices, this mission is to be conferred exclusively by the ecclesiastical authority and the Institute does not interfere in this matter.¹⁵⁴ The task of the Institute is limited in helping the priests, in view of an apostolic life, in the

¹⁵¹ Cf TRESALTI, *La missione degli Istituti Secolari laicali*, 34.

¹⁵² Cf *Ibid.*, 34-35.

¹⁵³ AG, n. 41.

¹⁵⁴ As it is shown in the first chapter, today, after consecration in a SI, the secular-cleric remains secular, i.e., diocesan, in the same way as the lay-consecrated remains lay-secular; they remain in their previous state of life. Therefore, the cleric after such a consecration continues to live in the diocese where he was working and remains subject to the diocesan bishop (Cf BEYER, *Il diritto della vita consacrata*, 450-451). In this sense, the orders of the persons in responsibility of a SI should not oppose those of the bishops in the field of their authority; instead should fortify obedience to such an authority. For example, in the limited field of authority, the lay-consecrated members cannot reject the orders of the person responsible for the place where they exercise their profession with the pretext that they belong to a SI; in a similar way the priests cannot reject the orders of the diocesan bishop with the reason that they belong to a SI (Cf SCRIS, «*Riflessioni sugli Istituti Secolari*», 231-232, n. 178).

fellowship of Christ through the profession of evangelical counsels so that by force of consecrated chastity they can open themselves to a universal apostolic charity; by poverty can guide the people entrusted to them with full liberty of heart; and by obedience can be more docile to the mission which they have received.¹⁵⁵

The priests participate in the activity of the Institute, i.e., in assemblies, meetings, retreats, etc. but this participation is always subordinated to their priestly ministry and is oriented towards it, and the Institute does not put any form of pressure. In this sense it can be said that the consecration through the profession of evangelical counsels in a Secular Institute is at the service of the priestly consecration of the members; it is an act that expresses the will for giving a maximum dedication for the demands of the Ordination.¹⁵⁶ Therefore, the belongingness of priests to a certain Secular Institute is not an additional lateral commitment that might distant the priests from their priestly ministry but is a reinforcement of the ministry itself and of the cooperation of the priests in the pastoral and missionary work of the diocese.¹⁵⁷ In fact, in the message of Card. Antoniutti to the 1st International Congress of Secular Institutes we read:

Members are taught that they are not only united with the Bishop by the bond of their Ordination Promise but also by a second bond of obedience arising from membership of a Secular Institute. In these constitutional provisions we find it stated in so many words that in all pastoral activities members work in total and exclusive dependence on the Bishop: he may place them wherever he chooses and appoint them to any post, and they undertake to be ready and available for posts which require the highest degree of loyalty and commitment.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Cf *Ibid.*, 236-240, nn. 188-193.

¹⁵⁶ It might seem strange for a priest already consecrated by Ordination to make a consecration in a certain SI by means of evangelical counsels. But it would not be surprising if one thinks at the fact that the Church had recognized the legitimacy and utility of such a consecration through evangelical counsels even though there is already the baptismal consecration that contains in itself the germ and the radical demand for a life of sublime charity. Therefore, it is not contradictory; rather it respects and develops the profound significance and the demands of the priestly consecration (Cf *Ibid.*, 226-229, nn. 170-173).

¹⁵⁷ Cf *Ibid.*, 226-229, nn. 170-174; Cf PAUL VI, «*A Presence and an Action which Will Transform the World from Within*», 89, n. 18.

¹⁵⁸ ANTONIUTTI, «*To the 1st International Congress of Secular Institutes*», 178, n. 62.

For priests who are members of a Secular Institute ‘secularity’ does not consist in the exercise of a temporal profession, though this is not also to be excluded. The priests, unlike the lay-consecrated, – though there are exceptions – do not exercise their responsibility in regard to the world with a direct and immediate action in the temporal order, but through their ministerial service and their mission as educators in faith. For them, secularity consists in the active presence in the world lived in the light of the Gospel; it signifies not being separated from men, sharing the life of the people wherever they are sent, being close to them in joy and suffering, knowing their spiritual and material needs, and, therefore, encountering them always in the totality of their life and problems.¹⁵⁹

3. Formation in Secular Institutes

The members of a Secular Institute in order to realize their apostolate more effectively need to get a proper formation that suits their vocation and mission. The formation process in Secular Institutes is very difficult as it demands a continuous effort to unify consecration and secular life, which also explains why it has to be very serious and very realistic. It is also strictly dependent on the condition of life of the members who usually have other commitments of life. For this reason it can be slow and it can involve a very long period. Taking into consideration the relationship of formation with the apostolate of the members, some indications can be considered on the: prerequisites for admission, basic characteristics and particular aspects of formation, formation periods, formators and formation planning, methods and means of formation.

3.1. Prerequisites for Admission

The persons to be admitted into a Secular Institute need to manifest a true search for Christian perfection in a commitment of fidelity, attracted to live in intimacy with Christ and

¹⁵⁹ Cf SCRIS, «*Riflessioni sugli Istituti Secolari*», 233-236, nn. 179-187; Cf PAUL VI, «*A Presence and an Action which Will Transform the World from Within*», 88, n. 17; Cf F. ZENNA, *La secolarità dei presbiteri*, in “*Incontro*” (2008) 4, 57-66; Cf *PO*, nn. 3, 6 and 8; Cf *LG*, n. 31.

to an apostolate in the world. They need to manifest a will to dedicate themselves in a permanent presence in the world, as an essential act of their vocation, in a profound respect for the human values found in it, in order to serve the Church in this way.¹⁶⁰ Though nothing impedes a Secular Institute from admitting young candidates who are still students, usually it is preferable if the persons have already acquired a certain profession. The reason is that formation takes place in the actual life situation taking in consideration its demands and difficulties and it will be more effective when it takes place with candidates who are already inserted in a professional life where their apostolate is to take place in a major way. This indicates also the fact that the person to be admitted needs to have a certain age of maturity – usually a more advanced age than that required in religious communities – necessary for leading one's proper life: psychological, intellectual, affective and spiritual maturity.¹⁶¹ Once the presence of the essential elements of the vocation is confirmed – in as much as the human capacity allows – the person is to be admitted into the formation process in view of a preparation for consecration.¹⁶²

3.2. *Basic Characteristics of the Formation*

In a given Institute there is a common aspect of the vocation of the members and, in the formation process, there are elements of content and method that are shared by all. However, the fact that vocation is a personal call necessitates that the formation process primarily be personal. It should be actively willed and assumed by the person, who should take on the responsibility to continuously strive to grow in the light of God. Formation received passively would not be effective. Formation should take into consideration the personality of the individual persons in all their gifts and limitations, as well as their concrete life situation. It is very important that the individuals be helped to realize their personal vocation, which is an

¹⁶⁰ Cf A. OBERTI (Ed.), «*La formazione negli Istituti Secolari*», in *Gli Istituti Secolari dopo il Vaticano II*, 157-158; Cf CLEMENCE, «*Il discernimento delle vocazioni agli Istituti Secolari*», 140-149.

¹⁶¹ Cf BEYER, *Il diritto della vita consacrata*, 488-495; Cf CIC, n. 721, § 3; Cf P. GRIGNOLO, *Problemi psicologici circa l'orientamento vocazionale negli Istituti Secolari*, in "Rogate ergo" 40 (1977) 2, 12-13.

¹⁶² Cf M. JOYCE et al. (Eds.), *Procedural Handbook for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life*, Washington D.C., Canon Law Society of America, 2001, 245-248.

expression of the specific vocation of the Institute, in their specific life context. They also need to be helped in the capacity of developing a deep sense of fraternity for an authentic communion with others, particularly with the members of the same Institute. Therefore, the formation can be said to be personal but in view of communitarian integration.¹⁶³

Formation must include all aspects of life even if the Institute is not required to give equal contribution to each of these aspects. For example, in regard to the direct competence of the members, such as the professional field – in the technical sense of the term – most of the time the members of a Secular Institute acquire a formation outside the Institute. Even in the less technical aspects, the members, as lay persons, have possibility of formation outside the Institute. But this does not mean that the formation program in the Institute should be restrained to the transmission of the vocation and specific charism of the Institute. It is true that it should, above all, provide a solid basic formation in this aspect; but it also needs to help the members, directly or indirectly, to acquire the personal formation they need to respond to the call of the Institute and to carry out their own mission more effectively.¹⁶⁴

Thus, before proceeding with what is specific to the Institute, the formation process needs to begin from the concrete reality such as the basic personal formation of the individuals, their social and professional duties, the possibilities which their life situation offers, and so on. It requires sufficient knowledge of the individuals in the spiritual aspect as well as in the human aspects of intelligence, openness, sensibility, balance, affective and moral maturity, capacity for independent commitment, etc. The formators need to discern where formation is still necessary, what gap needs to be filled up, and where updating is urgent and vital, indicating

¹⁶³ Cf CRIS, «*Formation in Secular Institutes*», 6 April 1980, in CMIS, *Secular Institutes. Documents*, 117, nn. 22-25. Taking into consideration the actual situation of the world, in a SI formation needs to have the following basic characteristics. First of all, it has to be a permanent configuration to Christ. It is him who has to be formed in each of the members who are called to incarnate Christ in the contemporary reality; and formation in Christ implies formation to a fidelity to Christ. Secondly, formation should be based on an open mentality and should transmit a certain capacity to perceive the signs of times in order to discover the passage of Christ in history. Thirdly, there is a necessity of formation to hope for not being discouraged. It is necessary to present elements that show the newness of life so that one might not fall to monotony, exhaustion, frustration or even desperation. The members of a SI need to be formed in such a way that they would always be new in the risen Christ, with a new capacity for discovering the reality and a capacity to remain in a permanent joy of hope (Cf PIRONIO, *Identità attualità e missione degli Istituti Secolari*, 62).

¹⁶⁴ Cf CRIS, «*Formation in Secular Institutes*», 117-118, nn. 26-28.

means of formation outside the Institute, but also providing it, in as much as possible, inside the Institute for what cannot be found outside and coordinating the various elements in order to bring the desired unity in every subject.¹⁶⁵

3.3. *Particular Aspects of Formation*

In Secular Institutes formation embraces the following major aspects: spiritual, doctrinal (biblical and theological), psychological, moral, ascetical, professional, and formation to the secular apostolate. These various aspects of formation, particularly in what concerns spirituality and apostolate, have their line of unification in the Constitution of each Institute, in so far as it is the concrete project of the vocation of the Institute and contains the radical lines of the spiritual physiognomy of a person called to this vocation.¹⁶⁶

3.3.1. *Spiritual Formation*

Spiritual formation is the fundamental aspect of formation and aims in preparing the members in the basic demands of the life of grace or the life of faith in order to be effective members of the Institute and, as a consequence, effective apostles as persons consecrated to God in the world. Basically, this spiritual formation aims in the development of the baptismal grace and consists in helping the members to be open to the action of grace in order to be inwardly renewed and be able to live concretely according to the evangelical counsels and give oneself entirely to God and men in fidelity to the calling to secular consecration within the specific Institute.¹⁶⁷

Spiritual formation signifies formation to spirituality lived in the context of the world. It is not a disincarnated spirituality and it is not any kind of spirituality: monastic, religious, etc; it is a spirituality of a lay person consecrated in the midst of the world, and as such, it demands a

¹⁶⁵ Cf *Ibid.*, 118, n. 28.

¹⁶⁶ Cf *Ibid.*, 121, n. 47.

¹⁶⁷ Cf OBERTI, «*La formazione negli Istituti Secolari*», 158-159; Cf CRIS, «*Formation in Secular Institutes*», 118, n. 30.

very concrete formation.¹⁶⁸ The candidates need to be taught to live the evangelical counsels through gestures and attitudes of donation to God in the service of men. They need to be helped to perceive the presence of God in the history of men and in the history of each one, and to live accepting the cross in their life. In this way initiates a general spiritual formation and becomes specified according to the charism of the Institute and its spirituality. However, there are elements that should always be present in the process of formation, though with varying intensity. These are: formation to prayer and to live in God's presence; the deepening of baptismal life in the specific consecration, practice of the theological virtues and of an adult faith so that the whole being may belong to God; listening to the Word of God, individually or in common, in obedient meditation; deepening the 'ecclesial sense' with an awareness that through consecration the entire person is given to the Church and shares in its mission; formation that enables the person to bring spiritual values in every human situation.¹⁶⁹

3.3.2. *Doctrinal, Psychological and Moral Formation*

Spiritual formation is sustained by doctrinal formation, i.e., by a study of the Bible and of the teachings of the Church. It is very important to read the Holy Scriptures very seriously; to study and understand it according to one's capacity. The work of the Spirit in us is facilitated and sustained by one's efforts to open the heart in this way by studying the Scriptures, particularly the New Testament. The same is true for the teachings of the Church; it is very important to know and understand the Council documents and the Magisterium of the Pope and bishops in order to live one's faith more consciously and to be more fully inserted in the ecclesial community. Biblical and theological studies can be done in the diocese; however, the Institute should take care of the teachings of the Church in regard to Secular Institutes.¹⁷⁰

Psychological and moral formation is not so much for a theoretical knowledge of psychology or morality, but is meant to help the person in formation to understand better one's proper self and environment, and to foresee the problems that might be encountered. To form

¹⁶⁸ Cf PIRONIO, *Identità attualità e missione degli Istituti Secolari*, 69.

¹⁶⁹ Cf CRIS, «*Formation in Secular Institutes*», 118-119, nn. 31-32.

¹⁷⁰ Cf *Ibid.*, 119, nn. 33-36.

a mature and responsible personality, rich in human qualities, it is necessary to search for factors of equilibrium, self control and openness to others. All these is done in order to correspond better to the gift of grace by way of a constant personal conversion and permanent revision of one's proper life. Therefore, to the aspect of intellectual knowledge, should correspond, an effort for auto-formation where the virtues of self-denial and mortification are practiced in order to follow Jesus carrying one's cross.¹⁷¹

3.3.3. *Professional Formation*

As it has already been said, the Institute as such is not competent to intervene directly on the professional preparation of the members. Nevertheless, it is very important for the formators to be aware that for a member of a Secular Institute the professional field constitutes the basis for personal sanctification and apostolate, and that the value of witnessing depends greatly on this field. Thus, it is very important to help the members be aware that they need to have, in as much as possible, a higher level of competence in their professional duty, to have an optimal relationship with their work environment, and to prepare themselves to make valid choices in the cultural, social, political sectors. These are indispensable conditions for giving testimony in a world where culture and technical skills are predominant and where professional responsibility is frequently lacking. The need for professional competence should be looked on as an authentic service to the world in line with the specific vocation of Secular

¹⁷¹ Cf *Ibid.*, 119-120, nn. 37-38. In regard to the aspect of psychological formation, today, in as much as the life style of the members of a SI is concerned, it is strongly felt, to deepen the aspect of *affectivity*. It is very important to deepen the aspect of sexuality as an intrinsic value, helping the members in formation in how to direct it towards a love open to all, which is even more intense; a love which requires the sacrifice of certain human aspects 'for the Kingdom'. Usually vocational crisis happen also due to the lack of a sufficient psychological maturity particularly at the level of affectivity. By way of an attentive reflection on all the aspects connected to it, a suitable pedagogy can be proposed. Today, the value of friendship is perceived more and more as an integrating factor of affectivity and therefore as factor of equilibrium of the person, in as much as the friendship is the expression of a completely free heart and mature affectivity. This explains also the great necessity of fraternal life among the members of the Institute. Of course, a continuous interior state of prayer and intimate union with God is the base and the essential factor for integrity – considered under the aspect of spiritual formation (Cf SCRIS, «*Riflessioni sugli Istituti Secolari*», 208-210, nn. 101-106).

Institutes.¹⁷² In addition, the members need to be helped on how to live the relationship which exists between prayer and profession, virtue and profession, ascetics and profession. And this consists not only in giving instructions but in helping them exercise in the acquisition of the necessary habit so that these relationships can be realized in the concrete reality.¹⁷³

3.3.4. *Formation to the Secular Apostolate*

Work and professional activity, and every type of presence in society must become means of personal sanctification and means for sanctifying the world from within by inserting into it Christian values, above all charity. Hence in the process of formation, stress should be made on the importance of putting the members of the Institute hand in hand with the progress of the world, helping them to open out to wide horizons and to be courageous in assuming their responsibilities.¹⁷⁴ For a fruitful apostolate in the society, an accurate study of the environment and of men is indispensable. A person dedicated to open the action of God in the respective environment of life has to be prepared to respond to certain questions, to indicate solutions to certain problems and to intervene prudently when necessary. It is also very important to be prepared in the use of the ‘language’ of the environment – a contemporary, alive, comprehensible language.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, the members need to be helped to grasp the changes of mentality and of structures in the world and to penetrate into the way of thinking and

¹⁷² Cf CRIS, «*Formation in Secular Institutes*», 121, nn. 44- 46; Cf ISTITUTO FRA, *Le relazioni in ambito lavorativo*, in “Incontro” (2008) 5, 19-40.

¹⁷³ Cf OBERTI, «*La formazione negli Istituti Secolari*», 161; Cf E. DALLA ZUANNA, *Spiritualità e lavoro: perché tutto divenga più umano*, in “Incontro” (2008) 5, 11-18; Cf J. BEYER, *Gli Istituti secolari oggi. La formazione negli Istituti secolari laicali*, in “Vita consacrata” 12 (1976) 3, 175-182.

¹⁷⁴ Cf CRIS, «*Formation in Secular Institutes*», 120, nn. 39- 40. Normally in a SI the apostolate in the world is carried out with personal responsibility and there is a wider liberty of action. In this regard, during the formation process, it is very important to deepen seriously the aspects of liberty and authority. They are fundamental concepts which, today, are in great crisis. The candidates in formation need to be helped to deepen the fundamental concept that liberty is authentic only in as much as it helps them to be themselves, i.e., in as much as it helps them to be what God wants them to be and to do, and that it achieves its maximum value only in the moment in which their will is identified with God’s Will. In this way, authority on one’s being and actions becomes an instrument of service, and this authority in its turn, in conformity to the Authority of God, helps the person to grow in liberty (Cf E. TRESALTI, «*Appunti sulla formazione negli Istituti Secolari*», in OBERTI, *Nel mondo per il mondo*, 210).

¹⁷⁵ Cf FRANCESCHINI, «*L’apostolato negli Istituti Secolari*», 133-134.

feeling of men of today so as to be able to judge and interpret all things in a truly Christian sense.¹⁷⁶

The Institute has, therefore, the task of favouring a formation to secularity, i.e., to a secular outlook, understood not only as a social condition, but also as a value that enters in the life style, in the practice of the evangelical counsels and in the realization of the apostolic task. It has also to favour a formation to the evangelizing and sanctifying mission of the Church in the world. Thus, it is a formation for an apostolate of presence and witness in one's proper environment and professional life and a formation for a visible and more direct apostolate by making oneself available in the ecclesial community.¹⁷⁷

3.4. *Formation Periods*

Formation should be systematic in the early period of life in the Institute, but is not to be limited to this; rather it assumes its perfect configuration little by little when choices become more precise, i.e., during the entire life. All the aspects of formation described above are applicable for both the 'first period of formation'¹⁷⁸ and the ongoing formation, though the stress will be different. Even the formation to the spirituality and to the specific charism of the Institute, more important in the initial period, must continue because in the concrete way of living them, the charism and spirituality undergo their own evolution, depending on times, places, the directives of the Church and the needs of the world. The specific task of ongoing formation has many facets: it makes up for inevitable gaps during first formation; it constitutes

¹⁷⁶ Cf CRIS, «*Formation in Secular Institutes*», 120, n. 40.

¹⁷⁷ Cf *Ibid.*, 120-121, nn. 41-43; Cf PIRONIO, *Identità attualità e missione degli Istituti Secolari*, 72.

¹⁷⁸ The duration of the first period of formation differs from one institute to another. Generally speaking, before initiating the proper period of formation there is usually a period for a first individuation of the vocation which can be six months or more (Cf TRESALTI, «*Appunti sulla formazione negli Istituti Secolari*», 213-216). The duration of the proper initial period of formation, in the time between the entrance into the Institute and the first incorporation, should not be less than two years (Cf *CIC*, n. 722, § 3). The Constitutions can fix a longer period and give it greater elasticity stabilizing a minimum and maximum duration. However, it is not advisable to make the period of initial formation too long. In regard to an individual person it should be the persons in responsibility who have to take decision (Cf MORLOT, «*Gli Istituti Secolari: breve commento del nuovo Codice*», 46). Some Institutes prolong the time for definitive incorporation hoping to acquire a greater stability of life; and so incorporation becomes definitive after many years of annual commitments, it can be after 10 or 15 years (Cf BEYER, *Il diritto della vita consacrata*, 499). According to the Code, definitive incorporation can not be inferior to five years from the time of the first incorporation (Cf *CIC*, n. 723, § 2).

an indispensable help for a continuous updating in discerning authentic values and in enlightening the signs of the times; it helps to overcome difficult moments that come as a result of an intense life, isolation, age or other circumstances; it sustains the constant effort for spiritual renewal so as not to lack in fidelity; it renders attentive to the new demands of apostolic presence.¹⁷⁹

Between the period of first formation and what follows there might be a gap that could give rise to crisis. In fact, the initial period is marked by a normal presence of a responsible guide devoting time to interpersonal relationships and formation meetings. Later on, this might be lacking or will be much reduced, and there is no physical community that would substitute it. Therefore, it is useful to prepare for this solitude through experience of independence and personal responsibility.¹⁸⁰

3.5. *Formators and Formation Planning*

It is extremely important to make a careful choice of formators. Formators need to have a deep spiritual life and be characterized by their fidelity to the Institute. They should be persons who live the consecration to God integrally, according to the spirit of the Institute where they belong, in such a way as to become a living testimony of the orientation which they have to give to others. They need to have a very solid life of prayer and be profoundly inserted in the life of the Church. On the other hand, they need to be persons very well inserted in the temporal reality, open to the moral, civil, professional, political problems of the time. They need to have an awareness that the relations which they establish with the members entrusted to them, have as an end the realization of the mystery of Christ in them, 'a work more divine than human'.¹⁸¹ Therefore, they need to know how to collaborate in the realization of this

¹⁷⁹ Cf CRIS, «*Formation in Secular Institutes*», 122, nn. 51-53.

¹⁸⁰ Cf *Ibid.*, 122, n. 54.

¹⁸¹ Since the process of formation is a work which is more divine than human there are some dispositions essential for formators: spirit of poverty, hope and love. A profound spirit of poverty opens the heart to prayer and contemplation and enables the formators to be instruments in the hands of God who is the principal protagonist in the formation of a person. In addition, the formators need to have the steadiness of hope that God will fulfill everything, and the sincerity of love since it is the most powerful force for the transformation of a person (Cf PIRONIO, *Identità attualità e missione degli Istituti Secolari*, 75).

mystery with prayer more than with action, and contribute their part in an attitude of trust and humility.¹⁸²

Formators need to have a very rich and integrated personality manifested in equilibrium of life, maturity of thought and behavior, objectivity of judgment, capacity of discernment, and self-control. They also need to have the necessary qualities for entering into contact with others such as psychological intuition for understanding other persons; capacity for communication, for stimulating, maintaining and developing relations; respect and trust in the potentiality of others; capacity for listening others. Finally, formators need to be aware of the gravity of the responsibility entrusted to them and need to have the necessary time to dedicate themselves seriously to it. However, it is preferable that they would not be completely detached from their professional activity for not losing their contact with the world which is very precious to understand better the situations of the time and so to offer a better help to the subjects in formation. It would be better to reduce the number of members entrusted to a certain formator rather than the formator be obliged to stop one's professional activity.¹⁸³

Formators need to be prepared by a specific formation which, in one way, is the same as that of the other members while in another way is distinct.¹⁸⁴ For example, formators need not only know the Gospel but also the pedagogical techniques by which it can be transmitted; they need to communicate the content of the Constitutions of the Institute in an effective way and know the various possible ways – and also be creative in inventing new ones – on how to live them; they are required to know the basic elements of psychology that are indispensable for dealing with life situations and to have the capacity for providing a right judgment for a

¹⁸² Cf OBERTI, «*La formazione negli Istituti Secolari*», 169; Cf E. MASSERONI, *Essere formatore in un Istituto Secolare*, in "Incontro" 14 (2004) 1, 36-43.

¹⁸³ Cf *Ibid.*, 168-169. The fact that the formators need to be involved in professional activities makes the task of formation very demanding. In some Institutes, one or more than one candidates are entrusted to one person possibly living near them, someone who can be contacted more easily, and others are entrusted to another. In some other Institutes, for each one of the candidates, one member of the Institute is dedicated for their formative accompaniment till their definitive consecration (Cf BEYER, *Il diritto della vita consacrata*, 495).

¹⁸⁴ Formators need to be prepared by programmed study sessions. They also need to meet regularly in order to share experiences and together search for solutions for diverse problems that might be encountered. In addition, they need to have special meetings or retreats to help them be constantly aware of their responsibility and to stimulate them for their own continuous formation (Cf OBERTI, «*La formazione negli Istituti Secolari*», 171); Cf E. MASSERONI, *La formazione del formatore: problemi e prospettive*, in "Incontro" 14 (2004) 2, 24-30.

particular person in a particular situation in accordance to the requirements of the vocation and consecration in a Secular Institute.¹⁸⁵

It is also necessary to prepare a plan of formation even if it has to be sufficiently flexible for adapting it to the real situation of the persons: distance, age, professional occupation, family situation and all other factors which can possibly influence the formation program. The whole program needs to be planned on the basis of the Word of God, the teachings of the Church, the Constitutions, and the contributions of other persons, and has to be fruit of previous reflections and experiences. The formative plan should have a clear aim, though open in regard to the way of application, and it has to be developed gradually according to the periods of formation. It needs to consider the various cultural aspects of a certain place though it has also to maintain the specific vocation of the Institute. It is evident that the study and deepening of the Constitutions occupies a central place in any formative plan.¹⁸⁶

3.6. *Methods and Means of Formation*

Giving primary importance to the spiritual formation, the means suitable for it must be studied and explicitly presented. It may include spiritual exercises, periodical retreats, liturgy and the sacraments, personal and communitarian reflection on the Word of God, daily meditation, sharing faith experiences, personal or collective reflection on the Constitutions, etc. In front of these diverse means of spiritual formation, whether they are directly provided by the Institute or not, it is very important that every one participates actively and be responsible for appropriating them.¹⁸⁷

There can be many ways of contacts with the Institute – contacts oriented towards an integral and unified formation. These contacts may include exchanges between two individual persons, between an individual and a group, or even a communication from afar. In regard to the person to person contacts, priority is given to the regular relationship between the

¹⁸⁵ Cf CRIS, «*Formation in Secular Institutes*», 122-123, nn. 55-56; Cf SCRIS, «*Riflessioni sugli Istituti Secolari*», 223-224, nn. 161-166; Cf PIRONIO, *Identità attualità e missione degli Istituti Secolari*, 76-77.

¹⁸⁶ Cf CRIS, «*Formation in Secular Institutes*», 123, nn. 57-58; Cf SCRIS, «*Riflessioni sugli Istituti Secolari*», 218-219, nn. 140-145.

¹⁸⁷ Cf CRIS, «*Formation in Secular Institutes*», 123-124, nn. 59-60.

candidate and the formator. In this relationship the candidates are helped to assume the various elements of their vocation with responsibility and in line with personal gifts, and to make a harmonious synthesis in their life. There can be periodical conversations, written presentations and regular correspondences; however, it is very important that the formator does not limit only to these relations, but tries to meet the candidates in ordinary moments of life and know their place of life. This will help the formator to know their concrete life situation and thus to know better the particular aspects of their personality which will help in knowing how to relate with them. They are moments that help for individualizing the pedagogical lines, adapting them to a particular circumstance, so that the individual in formation is helped to discover, develop and deepen the significance of commitment and personal responsibility.¹⁸⁸

Besides contacts with the formator, it is particularly important that the members in formation have fraternal contact with every other member of the Institute. However, individual contact is not enough; it must be completed with periods of community life, i.e., with those fraternal meetings indispensable for specific formation, verification and mutual support. These moments of fraternal life may vary notably from one Institute to another, but their formative efficacy is undeniable. These meetings, not only offer an aspect of human friendship but, above all, they constitute moments of confrontation with the Word of God, to incarnate it in the concrete situations that are different for everyone but are shared in communion. In fact, the

¹⁸⁸ Cf *Ibid.*, 124, nn. 61-63. Fundamental methodological norms important in this process of formation include: 1) Searching the design of God for the individual persons in formation and help them individualize better their vocation by an attitude of listening and prayer; 2) Prudence in going on gradually by establishing necessary steps and proceeding step by step to arrive at the desired end; 3) Following the logic of the Word - incarnation, cross and resurrection - as the way for development; 4) Respecting their liberty, i.e., helping and guiding them in developing but without constraining or compelling them (Cf TRESALTI, «*Appunti sulla formazione negli Istituti Secolari*», 217-226). In addition, during the formative itinerary it is very important to: 1) put at the centre the persons in formation and not 'the things' to be communicated; 2) believe in the capacity of the persons to walk, to mature, and to encounter God for being at the service of others; 3) think about what steps the individual persons need to follow at that specific time and place; 4) be able to turn back to see the journey accomplished and look forward with trust to go on without repetition and without jumping any step of the itinerary; 5) be able to communicate faith through relations: witnessing, good example, dialogue are the principal means for communicating faith (Cf P. GRIGNOLO, *Alcune riflessioni sulla formazione in generale e sui corsi per formatori*, in "Incontro" 9 (1997) 5, 45-46).

value of dialogue whether bilateral or at a group level lies in the common search for the will of God in reciprocal sharing.¹⁸⁹

Within these meetings there is also the transmission of the history of the Institute – its charism, foundation, first steps, developments, etc – a knowledge which is fundamental for understanding the personal vocation and insertion in the mission of the Church. At times, possibilities for fraternal meetings might encounter great difficulties; hence, comes the necessity to take into consideration written means of formation, even if oral formation is more efficacious. Among these instruments of formation may be listed all the writings of the Institute: letters, circulars, bulletins, questionnaires, reviews, etc. which are to be used according to the traditions of the Institute, but to which all the members, according to their capacity, should give a contribution, and which, above all, should be welcomed as instruments which maintain fraternal union.¹⁹⁰ Spiritual direction given by priests who understand very well the vocation of Secular Institutes is also very important.¹⁹¹

The Institutes are called to make use of these different means in a complementary way according to the persons in formation and the actual possibilities. In this sense, it can be said that all means are necessary and complement each other in relation to the essential and permanent aim which is the growth of the person. On the other hand, there should always be a stimulus for making the person progress in self-formation. Occasions of formation between Institutes, on common elements and demands, can be very useful. Fraternal help from the part of a more capable Institute – for its great number of members or their qualification – towards other Institutes in need can also be considered.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Cf CRIS, «*Formation in Secular Institutes*», 124-125, nn. 64-66; Cf A. OBERTI, *Nel giovane, integrazione o dualismo fra la comunità dell'Istituto Secolare e le altre comunità ecclesiali?*, in "Vita consacrata" 13 (1977) 12, 643-645.

¹⁹⁰ Cf CRIS, «*Formation in Secular Institutes*», 125, nn. 67-69.

¹⁹¹ Cf OBERTI, «*La formazione negli Istituti Secolari*», 164-165; Cf D. LAFRANCONI, *Il sacerdote assistente negli Istituti Secolari*, Milano, Edizioni O.R., 1984, 37-43.

¹⁹² Cf CRIS, «*Formation in Secular Institutes*», 125, nn. 71-72.

Conclusion

It is true that Secular Institutes are still in process of evolution, and are wide open to further developments and adaptations; however, as it shown in this chapter, they have more or less acquired a clear-cut physiognomy in regard to their identity, apostolate and formation program, with a secure point of reference in the Code of Canon Law. It is obvious that this form of life is not easy in the sense that it involves a continuous effort to unite consecration to secular life and in the greater part requires a personal search and discernment for the will of God in assuming one's duties in the secular life and many times one has to deal with the practical problems of daily life independently. However, with a very solid and adequate formation the members can realize their vocation and can fulfil their apostolate effectively, and provided that they remain faithful to their identity, their secular mission can be far more reaching. Bearing in mind this analysis on Secular Institutes in general, we will, in the second part, proceed with a particular analysis on the historical development and nature of the "Catechists' Union of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate".

Part Two

**HISTORICAL EVOLUTION AND NATURE OF THE
“CATECHISTS’ UNION”**

Chapter Three

HISTORICAL ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE “CATECHISTS’ UNION”

The Catechists’ Union was founded by Venerable Br. Teodoreto Garberoglio in 1914 in Turin, Italy. Br. Teodoreto was a member of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools which was founded by St. John Baptist de La Salle.¹ The Union takes the name of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate; in fact, it is called as the “Catechists’ Union of Jesus

¹ St. John Baptist de La Salle was born in the French town of Rheims in 1651. He was the eldest child in a family of eleven brothers and sisters. When he was still young, he wanted to become a priest and, as was allowed in those days, he became a canon of Rheims Cathedral when he was only sixteen. He was ordained priest at the age of twenty-seven. Soon afterwards, almost accidentally, he found himself helping a group of teachers who were looking after poor children in the city. Seeing their needs, he gradually became more involved with them, assisting them in teaching and in improving their preparation as educators. When people saw that these teachers were doing good under his direction, requested him to open schools in other towns. Many young men asked to spend their lives as educators like those living with John Baptist. Feeling that God was leading him to a role which he had never foreseen, he gave up everything, particularly his canonry and his inheritance. Trusting in God, he became as poor as the children and teachers who were attending his schools. In fact, his schools depended on Divine Providence for survival. With the men who were under his direction, gradually a completely new kind of consecrated life was beginning, i.e., the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian schools was evolving. This congregation was unique by the fact that its members though they belonged to a religious order, they were laymen who spent all their life and energy in educating children, especially those who were very poor. John Baptist had to face immense problems and adversities. He was let down even by some of his friends. Yet he decisively went on in his goal which he believed was the Will of God. He died on the 7th of April 1719, at the age of 68. In history of education, he is one of the greatest practical pioneers of education for ordinary people. His imaginative ideas, the schools he founded and the reforms he made in teaching had completely changed the educational system. Among many others, a great contribution of his was the teacher-training manuals and the spiritual writings which he produced for the Brothers and other Christian teachers. John Baptist de La Salle was canonized in 1900, and in 1950, Pius XII, announced that he is to be known as the “Special Patron of all Christian Educators”. For a wider reading: Cf C. LAPIERRE, *Giovanni Battista de La Salle. “Cammina alla mia presenza”*, Roma, Città Nuova, 2006.

Crucified and of Mary Immaculate.”² The Union, as one of the first Secular Institutes that flourished in the beginning of the twentieth century, has a very interesting history. As in the case of all the other Institutes that brought forth in the Church the experience of a secular consecration, it had to face all the challenges as well as difficulties.

Br. Teodoreto founded the Union in a close collaboration with the Servant of God Fr. Leopold Maria Musso, from the Minor Franciscan Order. In this chapter we will present brief biographical notes of these two great persons and then we will proceed with the historical analysis of the remote origins of the Union, its early beginnings, first advancements and further developments till the period when it was officially approved by the Church as a Secular Institute. In addition, some biographical notes that include the specific roles played by the first General Presidents of the Union for its definitive consolidation as well as a brief history of the expansion of the Union in the world will be articulated.

1. Biographical Notes

It can be said that the Union was born by the prayerful collaboration between two persons characterized not only by the great understanding and love they had towards one another but also by their extraordinary example of humility, abandonment and faith in God. As it will be shown below, Br. Teodoreto was a well-known educator and Fr. Leopold was a humble cook but was a great mystic who lived in a constant and very much alive union with God. Br. Teodoreto was a faithful disciple of Fr. Leopold.

² As it will be shown in this chapter, in the beginning it was called as “Union of Jesus Crucified,” then the title “Mary Immaculate” was added; and later, in 1917, to indicate the main apostolate of the members, the title “Catechists” was added. It is also known as the “Catechists’ Union of the Most Holy Crucifix and of Mary Immaculate”. And according to the deliberation of the last General Assembly of the Union that took place in Turin, from 28th of December 2009 – 6th of January, 2010, the name is to be modified to “Catechists’ Union of Jesus Crucified and Risen and of Mary Immaculate.” In any case, usually the short form, i.e., “Catechists’ Union” is used to refer to this Institute.

1.1. *Life of the Founder, Br. Teodoreto (1871-1954)*

Giovanni Garberoglio (known by his religious name Br. Teodoreto) was born, in Vinchio d’Asti, Monferrato, Italy, on the 9th of February 1871. He was baptized the day after his birth with the name Giovanni Andrea. His father was a farmer and was called Bartolomeo and his mother was called Eleonora. He was the last of six children. He was tall with a well-built body and had a very sensible character and a strong will power. He received the first Christian education in his deeply religious family, which was much devoted to the parish functions and which practiced common prayers every evening lead by the mother. On 24th October 1883, at the age of twelve, he received the sacrament of Confirmation, and according to the use of the time, it is considered that he also received First Communion in this time. These were the first sacramental acts of his intimacy with Christ, the fundamental elements which characterized all his life.³

As a boy he served in the Mass and in other liturgical services; he was part of a confraternity called “*dei Sacramentini*” and at the age of only thirteen was admitted in a Confraternity of the Most Holy Trinity for reciting the little Sunday office of Our Lady. He had a strong will to learn, and had the permission of his parents to do the 4th and 5th elementary which in that time was done by payment. To create a joyful atmosphere with his friends and to animate religious songs he learned to play the guitar. Already in the years of his adolescence, he demonstrates his vocation as a catechist and educator preparing his nephew, four years younger than him, for First Communion, helping him to study the Catechism.⁴

After knowing the Institute of the Brothers of Christian Schools he quickly manifested a desire for joining, which took place on 12th October 1887. He was received in the College of St. Joseph in Turin, and the next day entered the Novitiate in La Villette, in Savoia, where he, on 1st November, received the religious habit and the religious name as Brother Teodoreto. During the Novitiate he was distinguished for his devotedness, obedience and seriousness in

³ Cf DI MARIA, *Fratel Teodoreto*, 9-18.

⁴ Cf *Ibid.*, 19-28; Cf A. RICCARDI, *Maestro di vita oltre la scuola*, Parma, Città Armoniosa, 1983, 17-20; Cf M. PATARINO, *Fratel Teodoreto. Maestro di vita*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2005, 6-7; Cf E. D’AURORA, *La santità è un’utopia?* Parma, Città Armoniosa, 1983, 19-23.

fulfilling his duty. On 3rd November 1888, he returned back to Italy to attend studies in Grugliasco, near Turin. On 1st November 1889 he emitted annual vows. In 1889, he started attending training courses for acquiring an academic title for teaching in primary school (obtained his first teaching license in 1891, and a higher license in 1893, both in Pinerolo).⁵

His first educational mission had practically started in 1889 – though in the form of training – in gratuitous elementary schools entrusted to the Brothers of Christian Schools of the community of S. Pelagia. In 1890, he returned back to Vinchio for army medical visit and he did military service in Turin for eleven months.⁶ In 1891 he was discharged from military service and in 1892 started again his activity in the schools of S. Pelagia (where he worked till 1897 as a teacher of elementary, and from 1897 till 1910 he worked as professor and vice director). On 20th September 1894 he emitted triennial vows, and on 12th September 1899 perpetual vows. In 1903, in Genoa, after following private lessons, he obtained a qualification as art teacher for teaching designs in secondary schools. From August to November 1906, he attended the Second Novitiate in Lembecq-lez-Hal, in Belgium. From 1910 to 1915 he was the director of the schools of S. Pelagia. Desiring to form students beyond elementary school, he was making efforts to open a Technical School in the places near S. Pelagia which was realized, developed and transferred later to Borgo Po taking the name Institute of La Salle.⁷

As it will be shown ahead, on 25th October 1912, Br. Teodoreto had his first encounter with Fr. Leopold Maria Musso, in the Church of St. Thomas in Turin. On 23rd of April 1913, he expressed to him an idea which he had from the time of his Second Novitiate, i.e., of forming an association of young men zealous in the catechetical apostolate. Following a confirmation given by Fr. Leopold, on 27th April 1913, Br. Teodoreto gathered the first group of young men who formed the association with the title “Union of Jesus Crucified”. On the 9th of May 1914, the Union was officially erected by the Archbishop of Turin, Cardinal Agostino Richelmy, who also approved the first Regulations.⁸

⁵ Cf DI MARIA, *Fratel Teodoreto*, 29-36 and 50-51; Cf PATARINO, *Fratel Teodoreto*, 7-10.

⁶ Cf RICCARDI, *Maestro di vita oltre la scuola*, 23-25.

⁷ Cf DI MARIA, *Fratel Teodoreto*, 50-54; Cf PATARINO, *Fratel Teodoreto*, 11-15.

⁸ Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 119-124.

Br. Teodoreto had an excellent spiritual director called Fr. Arturo Maria Piombino,⁹ a Barnabite father, who was a very loving person. Br. Teodoreto attentively conserved, throughout his life, the exhortation of Fr. Piombino “to rest in Jesus and Mary” which was like the compendium of the whole spiritual direction. Throughout the entire spiritual direction this “resting in Jesus and Mary” comes out insistently like the motive and the finality of the spiritual direction. Br. Teodoreto was very docile in being directed, and in this direction, had found light, comfort and rest. In his turn, he too, had given direction to many persons.¹⁰ In Turin he was taking care of the formation of Brothers so well that, though he was not a preacher, the superiors gave him the responsibility of giving retreats to novices and students. From 1913 (upto1936), he presided the great Spiritual Retreats of 20 days, reserved for young Brothers for the preparation of first annual vows, and those of 30 days for the preparation to perpetual vows.¹¹

From 1915 (upto1937), he worked as professor, as vice-director of the community of S. Pelagia, and as supervisor and director of the schools of “ROMI.”¹² In 1918 he had the first grave nephritic attack (which was repeated in the course of his life for 12 times). He was recovered in the clinic of Grugliasco, but as soon as he received the message of Fr. Leopoldo telling him that Jesus wants him to go back to S. Pelagia, his sickness disappeared instantly

⁹ Fr. Arturo Maria Piombino (1906-1990) was a professor, vice-rector, and then rector for more than twenty years in the College ‘*Carlo Alberto di Moncalieri*’ in Turin. He was also Superior General of the Barnabite Fathers. He was a holy and wise person under whose spiritual direction were entrusted many souls including several mystics like Sr. Caterina Martini and Sr. Consolata Betrone. Later, after the death of Br. Teodoreto, he came to be closely tied to the Catechists’ Union essentially for the role of spiritual direction which he had exercised towards him (Cf C. TESSITORE (Ed.), *Padre Arturo Maria Piombino (2.6.1906 – 23.2.1990)*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 73 (1990) 1, 26-27; Cf L. PIERBATTISTI, *Padre Arturo Maria Piombino (2.6.1906 – 23.2.1990)*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 89 (2006) 1, 26-28).

¹⁰ Cf DI MARIA, *Fratel Teodoreto*, 303-320.

¹¹ Cf *Ibid.*, 187-199; Cf G. FURFARO, «*Fratel Teodoreto: oratore e scrittore - 1984*», in UC (Ed.), *Documenti*, n. 9, Torino, 2001, 5-7.

¹² ROMI was an abbreviation for “*Regia Opera della Mendicizia Istruita*.” It was founded by the emperor Vittorio Amedeo III, at the end of 18th century, and that was why it was called as “*Regia*”. It represents the popular gratuitous schools for the poor. They were present only in Turin and were entrusted to the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Br. Teodoreto started his first ministry as educator in these schools among the poor. He did not dislike so much that the school of San Pelagia be entitled as ROMI. But later the administration of the zone decided to close such schools and ROMI was to be given another interpretation as “*Regia Opera Munifica Istruzione*.” This fact made Br. Teodoreto suffer a lot and he was struggling courageously to save and repair things as much as possible (Cf DI MARIA, *Fratel Teodoreto*, 153-155; Cf RICCARDI, *Maestro di vita oltre la scuola*, 25).

and immediately turned back to his work. In the same year, in 1918, he had an extraordinary vision of Our Lady while he was sleeping. From 1938-1940 he worked as an assistant in the classes in the College of S. Joseph in Turin. From 1940-1943, he was again director of the reconstructed community of S. Pelagia. From 1943-1946 he stayed in the house of S. Pelagia without any responsibility in the schools. In 1946, at the age of seventy five, after a first cerebral haemorrhage, he re-entered definitively in the College of S. Joseph where he worked again as assistant in the classes and lived the rest of his life hidden there, except for some temporary transfers to Grugliasco and Rivalta, around Turin, to substitute directors of Novitiate and of school for a brief period of time, and some other journeys. Before the Second World War he went to Bengasi (Libya) and after the War he visited the communities of Brothers in Milano, Piacenza, Parma, and other cities.¹³

In August 1949 he had another cerebral haemorrhage, and was cured though it left him some damages in speaking and in moving. This haemorrhage was repeated again in January 1954 as a result of which he was obliged to remain in bed in the clinic of the College of S. Joseph in Turin. After one month of cure he returned back to his community, but only till the beginning of May when his sickness started again. On the 9th of May he was paralyzed in all the right side of his body, with loss of speech. He entered into a long and painful suffering, but always remaining peaceful. He received the Sacrament of Anointing. On 12th May he was visited by Card. Maurilio Fossati, archbishop of Turin, and received a particular blessing of the Pope. He died on the 13th of May, at three o'clock in the morning. His body was placed in the Church for public veneration from 13th to 15th of May. The Cardinal Archbishop and the Mayor of Turin came to give him homage. The Mayor wanted that all the costs of the funeral be covered from the local administration. He was buried on 15th May, feast of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. Despite the fact that it was a day of heavy rain, the burial ceremony was participated by an impressive mass of people.¹⁴

¹³ Cf DI MARIA, *Fratel Teodoreto*, 54-55 and 333-334; Cf PATARINO, *Fratel Teodoreto*, 15-18.

¹⁴ Cf DI MARIA, *Fratel Teodoreto*, 334-344; Cf C. TESSITORE, *Il Fratel Teodoreto F.S.C.*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 38 (1954) 3/6, 5-23; Cf M. BILEWSKI, *Profilo Biografico di Fr. Teodoreto*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 87 (2004) 1, 7-8.

On 27th February 1959, his body was transferred from the tomb of the Brothers in the general cemetery, to the chapel in the General Centre of the Catechists Union. On the 2nd of September 1965, the local municipality, recognizing the great contributions offered by Br. Teodoreto to the city, in his honour, decided to entitle one street in Turin by his name.¹⁵ On 11th January 1961, started the process for canonization, at the diocesan level, and was concluded on 31st January 1977. On 2nd of February 1977, in the feast of the Presentation of Our Lord, it passed to the Congregation for the Cause of Saints in Rome.¹⁶ With the decree of 3rd March 1990, the Pope recognized the heroic virtues of Br. Teodoreto and proclaimed him Venerable. As was witnessed by so many people, Br. Teodoreto was a person in whom the love of God and love of neighbour was manifested in all its strength in prayer, in his relationship with others, particularly in all the works and activities of apostolate fulfilled by him. He lived immersed in God, with such trust, faith and love in Jesus Crucified and in the Mother of God. He had a very profound interior life which penetrated all his activities. He was known, in a particular way, by his great act of charity, especially in the service for the poor, by his very profound humility, and perfect act of obedience. He was very zealous and prudent educator with an immense love for the young; a model for educators of our time. His fame for sanctity was widely consolidated while he was still alive. Now it is prayed and hoped that, with one miracle obtained by his intercession, he will be beatified soon.¹⁷

1.2. *Life of Friar Leopold Maria Musso, O.F.M. (1850-1922)*

Luigi Musso (known by his religious name Fr. Leopold) was born in Terruggia Monferrato, Italy, on 30th of January 1850. His parents, Giuseppe Musso and Maria Cavallone, seeing the new born baby in danger of death, had him baptized quickly by the midwife Lucia

¹⁵ Cf RICCARDI, *Maestro di vita oltre la scuola*, 99.

¹⁶ Cf *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁷ Cf DI MARIA, *Fratel Teodoreto*, 77-147 and 345-364; Cf G. CESONE, «La paternità spirituale di Fratel Teodoreto», in UC (Ed.), *Documenti*, n. 2, Torino, 2001, 12-13 and 18-22; Cf C. TESSITORE, «Appunti sulla figura morale di Fr. Teodoreto», in UC (Ed.), *Documenti*, n. 5, Torino, 2001, 5-18; Cf UC (Ed.), *Causa di beatificazione del Ven. Fratel Teodoreto delle Scuole Cristiane*. Sintesi delle testimonianze, relazione, commenti dei teologi censori e del promotore generale della fede, Torino, 2004, 13-47.

Gavione. He was the third-born of five children. His father, a severe but good man, was always characterized by the Christian virtues and exactness in fulfilling his duties. He worked as a gardener with one family for forty years and always enjoyed his master’s trust. His mother was a fervent Christian and energetic in bringing up her children. Motherly care characterized Luigi from the very first years of his life. He was very much loved by his mother who always spoke of him as a very good boy.¹⁸

From the early years of his childhood he had a strong compassion for Jesus Crucified.¹⁹ His first knowledge of the Eucharist, which he received from his parents and in the parish church, left a deep mark in his soul. One day, at the age of nine or ten, making use of the lime and cement left over by builders in the courtyard, he made a monstrance which his parents judged worthy of being placed above a cupboard in the house. He also made a small altar for the Blessed Virgin and always adorned it with fresh-cut flowers. He used to avoid noisy playmates, and wished to stay with sacred images and pray. After attending lessons of catechism, he received First Holy Communion and the Sacrament of Confirmation on 24th of May 1857. After his First Communion the wonderful fruits of the Sacrament were noticed in him; he was talking of very edifying things that people had the impression of listening to a little saint. He had acquired a special strength for the exercise of virtues especially that of chastity. Though he was not the eldest son, he was able to gather his brothers for prayer with sweetness.²⁰

Luigi attended primary school in his village with love and diligence. However, like many other boys grown in rural districts, Luigi’s school-time was short. The hard necessity of life calls them to do agricultural work or other jobs. So Luigi, after having attended the second form of the primary school was employed with one medical officer in the village, and in his service he spent the best years of adolescence and youth, first as domestic assistant, then as a

¹⁸ Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 1-2.

¹⁹ One day mother of little Luigi was very busy in the household and to be free from being occupied by him gave him a book containing pictures of the Way of the Cross explaining the meaning to him. Little Luigi was very impressed and thinking of a way to relieve Jesus from his pain took a needle and started to prick the rascals with it, so that they might stop torturing Jesus. His mother surprised by what he was doing, asked him and he replied telling her that he does not want the rascals treat Jesus that way (Cf *Ibid.*, 2-3).

²⁰ Cf *Ibid.*, 3-4; Cf P. RISSO, *Una storia a due: Gesù Crocifisso e Fra Leopoldo*, Torino, UC, 2007, 12-14.

gardener, and at last he worked as a private coachman. He was always attentive, industrious, open and unselfconscious. He was very graceful, adorned by an extraordinary modesty that gave a particular charm to his sincere and delicate manners. Spiritually speaking, he never lost his innocence, not even in the vulnerable age of adolescence and youth. He was the pride of his family in the village. He had also proper joys of life. He was very clever at playing the guitar, as the other members of his family, and had cheerful leisure hours.²¹

In 1869, the necessities of family made Luigi move from his father’s house at the age of nineteen. He went to another town, Vercelli, and there he worked in the service of a rich landowner. The separation was painful to him because he had so much love and tenderness towards his family, especially his mother who was the greatest treasure of his life and who would always accompany him by prayers. It was also very difficult to leave his much loved parish and village. The landowner with whom he started working proved to be a bad fellow and he had to quit. Later he was employed with Monsignor Giuseppe Miglione whom he liked very much and served for many years as a cook and as a domestic assistant, taking care of all household affairs. His father died in 1870 and Luigi was the one who continued to help his mother. After the death of Monsignor Miglione in 1884, he worked for one family as a cook in Vercelli.²²

Luigi was experiencing supernatural moments of grace in his soul as a result of which little by little he left his friends.²³ In his loneliness he was filled by a divine presence that gave him sweetness and peace. When he finished his work he would engage himself in spiritual readings and silent meditation. The Lord was preparing him for a great mission. In the month of November 1887, he had in a dream a vision of the Holy Virgin. He saw her in a very sad attitude, with her head nobly bent, sweetly telling him to remember what her son has suffered. In 1893, in Viale d’Asti, he had another vision, in a dream, of Jesus Crucified up above, and a

²¹ Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 4-5.

²² Cf *Ibid.*, 6-8; Cf G. FERRERO, *Sotto il campanile di San Tommaso apostolo in Torino*, Torino, F.lli Scaravaglio & C., 2000, 29-30.

²³ Just from these times Luigi, the future Fr. Leopold, was experiencing heavenly visions and was also receiving messages both from Jesus and the Virgin Mary in an interior voice. The majority of the messages which will be quoted or presented in this work are those which he heard in an interior voice and which he, under the request of Jesus and Mary, noted in his diary with respective dates.

very beautiful soul with a noble face was embracing his feet. The soul had modestly lowered eyes and a little bit bent head and had a very luminous dress. Again, around the year 1894, he had the experience of the first inward voice that happened in the church of S. Dalmazzo, Turin. After he received the Holy Communion he heard Jesus telling him that in the future there would be a great intimacy between them two. These three extraordinary events were very characteristic and determinant for him and had left a great impression in his soul. At that time, as he wrote in his diary, he was not able to understand the whole meaning of these supernatural events, but always prayed God for his mercy accusing himself as a great sinner and unworthy of God’s goodness.²⁴

In 1889, his mother got sick and was unable to work and she was in need of receiving more financial aids. In such time of financial difficulty, he continued to work as a cook with diverse families and institutes. In 1893, he moved to live with one family in an area near the church of S. Dalmazzo where he met his first spiritual father, the Rev. Fr. Giulio Giuseppe Cozzi, a Barnabite – who later became a Provincial – who helped him towards a full consecration to God. In this church, he was attracted to a big Crucifix and was praying inflamed by love. He resolved to consecrate himself fully to Jesus Crucified. However, he never forgot his old mother for whom he was making great sacrifices. He also brought her to Turin, in 1895, so that she could get medical care for her illness that came from a sore in her leg. In May 1897, Luigi turned back to his village Terruggia. In 1899, during his stay with his mother who was gravely ill, he too, got pneumonia that brought him near to death. On 6th May his mother received the Sacrament of Anointment. That same day he was not able to receive communion because he was unconscious. On 8th May he had arrived on the verge of death, when in the evening he saw the Virgin Mary near him, with baby Jesus in her arms, telling him to get up and at that moment he was cured miraculously. This event infused into his soul so much love for God and for the Virgin Mary. His mother died one year later in the morning

²⁴ Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 8-9, 14, 128.

of 11th May 1900, in his arms, telling him that she saw Jesus Crucified with a great number of Angeles beckoning her to follow them!²⁵

After fulfilling his duty of taking care of his mother, Luigi came back to Turin in November 1900. As is written in his diary, as soon as he arrived he went to the Franciscans and implored the Provincial Superior, Rev. Fr. Luigi Borgialli, to accept him among them. He was accepted on 17th December 1900, and on 18th January 1901, he put on the coarse woollen frock of St. Francis, as a Tertiary lay friar, in St. Anthony’s sanctuary. He was given the name Leopold Maria. On 21st January 1901, he was sent to the convent of St. Thomas’ parish where he had to work very hard.²⁶ For about four years he was only a “postulant”. He had been given the habit and the title as Tertiary; however, did not officially enter in the Order. He remained in this long period of “test”, taking the last place. Finally, on 1st of April 1905, he began his novitiate in that same convent of St. Thomas. According to the rule, he should have done the novitiate in another place, but since they needed a cook in the convent of St. Thomas, he remained there. Fr. Leopold, had already progressed much in the way to sanctity, and was long prepared; however, he took this period of novitiate seriously as a period of an intense prayer and meditation – as he called it, as a year of retreat. He emitted his first vows on 6th April 1906.²⁷

From 1906, he had more frequent visions and conversations with Jesus and the Virgin Mary. During the time of novitiate Fr. Leopold had repaired an old Crucifix which had been put among the things which were out of use. This Cross was exposed on 13th April 1906, Good Friday, to be adored by the believers in the parish of St. Thomas and later it was put in the convent corridor near the room of Fr. Leopold. Before entering his room Fr. Leopold was always stopping there for a moment for a short prayer. One day he had the courage to ask if he could take that Crucifix, which was so dear to him, to his room. He was allowed and he would wake up every morning at four o’clock and remain under the Cross in profound adoration till

²⁵ Cf *Ibid.*, 10-39; Cf FERRERO, *Sotto il campanile di San Tommaso*, 30-32.

²⁶ Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 40-42. Probably, the date when he was accepted in the Franciscan Order and the other two dates that follow have to be postponed by one year, as Fr. Luigi Borgialli was elected Provincial Superior in July 1901 (Cf *Ibid.*, 41).

²⁷ Cf RISSO, *Una storia a due*, 53-54; Cf FERRERO, *Sotto il campanile di San Tommaso*, 32.

the time for Mass which was usually at six o’clock. At about ten o’clock in the evening, he would place himself again before the Crucifix and stay there until midnight absorbed in fervent prayer adoring the five wounds of Jesus. Fr. Leopold did his solemn vows on 26th April, 1909, on the day devoted to Our Lady of Good Advice. On this day Jesus confirmed him as the Spouse of his soul and manifested his most sweet love for him and he received a special blessing from the Virgin Mary telling him that she will make his soul as white as the lily and that he will receive the gift of prayer.²⁸

In the years 1909-1910, there was a great event in the life of Fr. Leopold. Every night the great Mother of God was coming to open the door leading from the convent to the sacristy. The door was kept closed in the night with a key. The Virgin seeing the great desire of Fr. Leopold to go to worship Jesus in the altar was opening and closing the door herself telling him that she does so in order that he may open a way for souls to draw them near her Divine Son by means of the Devotion to Jesus Crucified. She told him that it means the passage from earth to paradise, as Fr. Leopold leaves material work and kitchen and comes to her sanctuary where she and her Son were waiting for him and also told him that she does so in order that people may honour her and love her Son in the Most Holy Sacrament of the altar.²⁹

As it is mentioned before, it was in the year 1912 that he first met Br. Teodoreto who after having heard about the extraordinary spiritual gifts of Fr. Leopold came to see him in his convent. From this time of first encounter, he was guiding Br. Teodoreto by giving messages which he was hearing in an internal voice from Jesus and Mary and was accompanying him in prayer in everything that regarded the Catechists’ Union till the time of his death.³⁰ The last years of his life were characterized by suffering: physical as well as moral. His life had totally become a “cross”. He was also prohibited to receive any person from outside including Br. Teodoreto. However, he reacted in a heroic manner to all the temptations that came to him.³¹ Fr. Leopold died on 27th January 1922 with a smile in his face. He predicted the day of

²⁸ Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 43-45, 88-89, 92-93.

²⁹ Cf *Ibid.*, 93-97.

³⁰ Cf *Ibid.*, 119-124.

³¹ Cf R. VASCONI, *I servi di Cana. L’itinerario spirituale di Fra Leopoldo M. Musso*, Torino, Editore Piero Gribaudi, 1984, 51-52; Cf RISSO, *Una storia a due*, 136-137.

his death and announced it to some friends. After his death, the church of St. Thomas was crowded by people. Though he lived a completely hidden life, the fame of his sanctity was widely known. He was buried the day that followed with the participation of a great mass of people. On 26th April 1948, his body was transferred from the general cemetery to the chapel of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart next to the convent of St. Thomas.³²

Today, many members of the Union, considering the privileged role which Fr. Leopold had played in giving a solid root for the Union, strongly desire that he would be nominated ‘co-founder’ of the Union. And it is true that Br. Teodoreto himself was underlining so much the importance of Fr. Leopold in the foundation and development of the Union mainly through the confirmations he was giving and the fervent prayers which he was offering for the success of the work.³³ In reality it would be an enrichment for the Union but it should be justified in a general Assembly and declared as such by the proper authority of the Union.³⁴

2. Remote Origins of the Union

The Union found its origin in a historical moment characterized by an increasing secularization of society in Europe where the Christian schools were combated as anti-liberal, especially in France. On the other hand, it was a period when the major part of humanity had to pass through an extreme suffering in almost every sense. As it will be shown below, Br. Teodoreto received the inspiration of starting a certain project, for the spiritual accompaniment of young people outside the school program, long before its actual concretization in the Catechists’ Union. The same was true on the part of Fr. Leopold to whom God was revealing of a certain ‘Order’ that had to come years before his encounter with Br. Teodoreto.

³² Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 225-231.

³³ Cf *Ibid.*, 124; Cf L. CATTANEO, *Due cuochi al servizio di Dio: Fra Leopoldo e Suor Faustina*, Torino, UC, 2007, 19.

³⁴ Cf L. ROLLINO, *10^a Assemblea Generale Ordinaria (sessennio 1998-2003)*. Relazione, Torino, UC, 2003, 25.

2.1. *The Historical Moment When the Union was Conceived*

In the first beginning of the 20th century, in accordance to the advice of Pope Leon XIII, in the Institutes of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, much was said and efforts were done for the “works of perseverance”,³⁵ for their students and ex-students. As it has been mentioned before, in 1906, when Br. Teodoreto, at the age of 35, went to Lembecq-lez-Hal to make the “second novitiate”,³⁶ the vice-director of the Institute addressing the second-novices reminded them of the need of invigorating the fruits of education obtained in class with works of perseverance. And it was exactly in this moment that Br. Teodoreto received the inspiration to put in action these works of perseverance, which was to be realized later in the initiation of the ‘Catechists’ Union’ that started as an association of young men zealous in the catechetical apostolate.³⁷

Another factor which motivated the beginning of the Union was the need for Catholics to integrate themselves in the cultural, social and political life of society, which at that time was difficult to do. “It was necessary to affirm the identity of the Christian in social life just as it was done on the individual level; to have a transcendent vision of the world, of history and of humankind and to discover the spiritual greatness of all humanity which is called to union with God.”³⁸ In Br. Teodoreto’s mind, the Christian school had to enhance the vocation of each person to sanctity and for this reason Br. Teodoreto intended to create in each school an

³⁵ The “works of perseverance” indicated different initiatives to be undertaken by the Brothers to help their students or ex-students to persevere in the Christian life (Cf D. CONTI, «*La perseveranza nella vita Cristiana e la Divozione a Gesù Crocifisso (commento all’Art. 1 delle Costituzioni)*», in UC (Ed.), *Sussidi*, n. 8, Torino, 2002, 3-10).

³⁶ The Superiors of the Institute of the Brothers of Christian Schools, seeing the gravity of the political situation of that time, established this period of second novitiate to underline the necessity of regaining more fervour and dedication for the mission of the Brothers. It was a very important moment of spiritual and apostolic renewal, participated by Brothers who were already mature and who had already made years of experience. The event of the second novitiate of Br. Teodoreto is always remembered in the history of the Catechists’ Union because it was in this context that the first seed of the Union came to be conceived in his mind (Cf RICCARDI, *Maestro di vita oltre la scuola*, 51-52; Cf R. MEOLI, *Fratel Teodoreto “fondatore” (1871-1954)*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 88 (2005) 2, 9-11).

³⁷ Cf RICCARDI, *Maestro di vita oltre la scuola*, 51-52; Cf D. CONTI, *Union of Catechists of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate*, in “Bulletin of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools” (1995) 241, 3; Cf UC (Ed.), *Chi siamo? Breve storia dell’Unione Catechisti (1906-2006)*, Torino, 2006, 10, n. 4.

³⁸ CONTI, *Union of Catechists of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate*, 3-4.

association of young people to help them *live the Christian life intensely in the world*. The concept of living the Christian life intensely in the world forms the basis of the mission of what would be later known as Secular Institute. Br. Teodoreto was not thinking of a movement or a group with a specific activity but of an association of young people who want to help each other in living always with and for Christ within a secular reality.³⁹

If we analyze the diary of Fr. Leopold, there is a reality – a historical fact – which coincides with the humanity of the 20th century. It was a time when scientific knowledge was exalted too much.⁴⁰ Docility in believing was getting lost and religious enthusiasm was becoming very cold. In the history of mankind, Fr. Leopold happened to be a simple cook. His kitchen happened to be the place of unthinkable dialogue with Christ Who became for him source of true life. Fr. Leopold has become a witness that the great question of life, the ‘why’, is revealed, not merely in science which might also be misleading, but in the Cross, in that all-wounded Body, which becomes the surest and truthful response which is Love. In his kitchen – his ‘cathedra’ – Fr. Leopold was enabled to penetrate far into that tremendous moment when Christ found himself alone in the Cross.⁴¹

At the level of the Church it was a historical moment characterized by a great suffering. Due to the great Wars and the other social upheavals, a great part of humanity was finding itself in Calvary under the Cross. The Church as a Body of Christ was passing a moment of Crucifixion. The ‘Wounded Christ’ could be seen everywhere. Fr. Leopold, who was a man of so much equilibrium, is seen to be so much obsessed by the Cross and by the wounds of Christ as to reveal that a strong force can be drawn from it. He reveals that every man is called to

³⁹ Cf *Ibid.*, 4; Cf C. TESSITORE, «*Conferenza al II Noviziato dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane*», in UC (Ed.), *Documenti*, n. 3, Torino, 2001, 5-6.

⁴⁰ In the beginning of the 20th century, particularly the years from 1900-1914, an overall vision of Europe shows a period of scientific, technological and industrial revolution. It was a period of violence at the social, economic and political levels and much energy was used for armies. In general, there came a period of darkness and catastrophe that was never known before. Man who wanted to become super-man, thirst for power, ideologies of socialism and communism, the ideology that man does not need God and that he is the only protagonist in history, and beyond all was coming a radical atheism. And then the First World War, disintegration of Europe, the communist revolution in Russia, then Nazism, Second World War.... This was the historical moment when Fr. Leopoldo received messages from Jesus Crucified and the Catechist’s Union came into existence (Cf RISSO, *Una storia a due*, 116-129).

⁴¹ Cf VASCONI, *I servi di Cana*, 15-21.

participate in that ‘Great Suffering’ by which Christ accomplished Redemption and that human suffering, together with the passion of Christ, is elevated high to the level of Redemption.⁴²

In many aspects, generally speaking, the world was seen distancing itself from God, somehow preferring ‘an empty man’ deprived of the capacity to understand the proper motive of his existence on earth; refuting God as the Ultimate Good and Reason of human existence; as a close Companion and as the concrete Protagonist in History.⁴³ For which reason, Jesus from the Cross, in the name of all humanity, insistently asks Fr. Leopold: Are you happy of me? – a question which Fr. Leopold wanted to deviate but which Jesus repeated again because he wanted a response.⁴⁴ In Fr. Leopold was born an overflowing tenderness and sympathy, desire for closeness, for understanding and participation in the ‘problem’ of Jesus which history condemns to death putting him ‘out of its borders’. He feels urgency for making ‘reparation’⁴⁵ to this inattention and indifference. He discovers in Jesus ‘the greatest misunderstood person’ by great quantity of humanity. He discovers in God, a search for comfort, an extreme need to be close to men. In the life of Fr. Leopold, we see God opening out his arms towards the arms of man.⁴⁶ He is revealed in a total dedication of love towards the destiny of every man. In fact, the relationship between Jesus Crucified and Fr. Leopold was born on the basis of a promise which derived from the very Heart of Jesus: “Between me and you, in the future, there will be great intimacy”⁴⁷ For Fr. Leopold the ‘extraordinary’ did not exist, what mattered was the completion of life which results because God is revealed as a Friend. He did not want to lose this ‘great intimacy’ which was the only reason of his existence. He opened himself fully to it making himself available for an exchange of love.⁴⁸

⁴² Cf *Ibid.*, 22-25.

⁴³ Cf *Ibid.*, 19 and 25.

⁴⁴ Cf D. CONTI, *Il messaggio spirituale di fra Leopoldo*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 76 (1993) 4, 16.

⁴⁵ Fr. Leopoldo was making reparation by trying to maintain very much alive the friendship with Jesus with all his force (Cf VASCONI, *I servi di Cana*, 33).

⁴⁶ Cf *Ibid.*, 26-38.

⁴⁷ GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 14: “Tra me e te, in avvenire, ci sarà una grande intimità.”

⁴⁸ Cf VASCONI, *I servi di Cana*, 28-30.

An affirmation of Jesus Crucified which Fr. Leopold repeated many times in his life was: “You love me, I love you.”⁴⁹

Fr. Leopold, underlines and illuminates the richness of the mercy of God.⁵⁰ The love of Christ was stronger than death, stronger than sin, and becomes the certainty of experiencing mercy in every moment. It was like the recuperation of a message which was being forgotten. It can be said that the whole diary gradually moves towards this sweet discovery of the mercy of God. Christ is revealed as the incarnation of mercy and as the point of reference for the reconstruction of human dignity. In fact, the highest fact of the mystical life of Fr. Leopold is to be inserted at this point: the mandate to communicate to the world the instrument of reconciliation between God and man. This instrument was the prayer of Adoration or the ‘Devotion’ to Jesus Crucified which was born as a result of the supernatural relationship of love between him and Jesus.⁵¹ On 28th November 1908, Fr. Leopold heard the Virgin Mary telling him that “a very great, incalculable number of souls will be saved because of this Devotion, and you, Leopold, will have merit.”⁵²

In 1903, after the death of Pope Leon XIII, Pope Pius X was elected, who with the program of “recapitulating all things in Christ” called the Church to the defense of the truth of faith and to the teaching of Catechism to children, youth and adults. It was this Pope who in an extraordinary way placed the Eucharistic Jesus at the centre of Christian life, particularly the priestly life, so that all will be sanctified and be his apostles; for loving and adoring him and for making him known, loved and adored. Fr. Leopold, so much present to his historical context, was offering contributions in the maximum way he could, particularly by his union with Christ. He, whose centre of life was the Eucharistic Jesus, whom he adored with such a great flame of love, was praying and offering sacrifices for the intentions of this Pope.⁵³ On 5th November 1908, he heard the following message from Jesus: “the Most Holy Crucifix and the

⁴⁹ GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 99 and 104: “Tu ami me, io amo te.”

⁵⁰ Cf *Ibid.*, 65; Cf CATTANEO, *Due cuochi al servizio di Dio*, 86-87; Cf C. TESSITORE (Ed.), *Il tema della misericordia negli scritti di Fra Leopoldo*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 64 (1981) 1, 4.

⁵¹ Cf VASCONI, *I servi di Cana*, 33-44 and 54-62.

⁵² GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 80: “Un numero immenso, incalcolabile di anime andranno salve per questa Divozione, e tu, Leopoldo, n’avrai il merito.”

⁵³ Cf RISSO, *Una storia a due*, 51.

Eucharist are the two principal secure ways for lifting up the world from dust.”⁵⁴ Fr. Leopold found in the Eucharist a continuous proof of the love of Jesus Crucified. For him, the whole day was fully Eucharistic; in the altar he could see Christ who suffers from a great thirst of souls and he would put himself in front of the tabernacle, as in front of a Crucifix, in a loving adoration as reparation.⁵⁵

On 13th of November, 1909, Fr. Leopold received a precise message from Jesus which he wrote in his diary: “The Order which is to come will be the vineyard of Saints”, and continuing Fr. Leopold noted that “the Order willed by God will have the holy grace of the omnipotent Lord, to defend the Most Holy Name of Jesus Crucified as well as the name of his Most Holy Mother, the Virgin Mary.”⁵⁶ One year before, on 29th of December 1908, the Virgin Mary had also given him the following message: “I am the powerful Patroness of the great Order; your spirit and mine will be continuously working to show the whole world the great Mercy of my Lord and the glory of the Most High God.”⁵⁷ The “Order” referred to here, four years before the first encounter of Br. Teodoreto and Fr. Leopold, will be the “Catechists’ Union” which will make the Adoration of Jesus Crucified the centre of its spirituality, and will be occupied for its spread in the world.⁵⁸

2.2. *The ‘Devotion’ to Jesus Crucified*

Out of the great love he had towards Jesus Crucified, under his guidance, without noticing it, Fr. Leopold was lead to compose, around the year 1906, a new formula of prayer. Such a prayer consists in the adoration of the five Wounds of Jesus and was known as the ‘Devotion’

⁵⁴ GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 66: “Il SS. Crocifisso e la SS. Eucaristia sono le due vie principali, sicure, per innalzare il mondo dalla polvere.”

⁵⁵ Cf VASCONI, *I servi di Cana*, 78-83; Cf CONTI, *Il messaggio spirituale di fra Leopoldo*, 14-16.

⁵⁶ GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 85: “L’Ordine che verrà, sarà la vigna dei Santi.” “All’Ordine voluto dal Signore Iddio toccherà la bella e santa grazia dell’Onnipotente Signore, di difendere il Nome SS. Di Gesù Crocifisso e quello della sua SS. Madre Maria Vergine.”

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 81: “Io sono la potente Patrona del grande Ordine; il tuo spirito e il mio saranno in continuo lavoro per dimostrare al tutto il mondo la grande Misericordia del mio Signore e la gloria di Dio Altissimo.”

⁵⁸ Cf UC (Ed.), «Riferimenti storici: origini e sviluppi dell’Unione, vivente il fondatore», in UC, *Documenti*, n. 15, Torino, 2003, 3-5; Cf L. ROLLINO, *Centenario delle origini dell’Unione Catechisti*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 89 (2006) 2, 3-5.

to Jesus Crucified. Jesus and the Virgin Mary were continuously entrusting him with the mission of spreading this ‘Devotion’ and Fr. Leopold did his best to spread it among persons he knew and met. However, his humble condition as lay friar did not allow him to spread the ‘Devotion’ as much as he wished. There were three or four Franciscan Tertiary women who were helping him in writing it down and it was spread in a hand-written form.⁵⁹ He was praying so much to get a further help and on the 10th of September 1906, in an internal voice, he heard Jesus saying to him: “It is you who must urge persons to propagate this Devotion; there will certainly be souls who love me and who will come to your help; you must know, dear son, that I have lay brothers who love me so much; if only you could know how much I love them.”⁶⁰ For sometime, the meaning of these words remained a mystery for Fr. Leopold. He had no hint as to who these lay brothers were who would have to propagate the ‘Devotion’.⁶¹

On 24th September 1906, Fr. Leopold spoke, about the ‘Devotion’, with the secretary of the Archbishop of Turin who told him to write it down and that he would accept it with pleasure. He also advised him to go to the Archbishop, Cardinal Agostino Richelmy, in order to obtain the permission to have it printed and indulgenced for which Fr. Leopold responded that he would not dare to do so. But with the encouragement of the secretary and the assurance given to him by Jesus, he went to the Archbishop. But as soon as Fr. Leopold told him the reason of his coming, the Archbishop would not listen saying there are already a considerable number of devotions. Fr. Leopold had to leave; however, he did not lose courage and in his return continued to pray to God. On 7th/8th of July 1907, Rev. Fr. Fedele Provera⁶² went to the Archbishop to ask again for an approval for the ‘Devotion’, and this time, through the General Vicar of the Archbishop, it was obtained.⁶³

⁵⁹ Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 48 and 117.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 117: “Sei tu che devi spingere questo e quello per propagare questa Divozione; non mancheranno anime buone che mi amano e che verranno in tuo aiuto; sappi, caro figlio, che ho dei fratelli laici che mi vogliono molto bene, se tu sapessi quanto io li amo.”

⁶¹ Cf *Ibid.*; Cf UC, «Riferimenti storici: origini e sviluppi dell’Unione, vivente il fondatore», 5.

⁶² The Rev. Fr. Fedele Provera da Mirabello Monferrato, was the spiritual director of Fr. Leopold from 1902-1907 (Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 45).

⁶³ Cf *Ibid.*, 49-50; Cf DI MARIA, *Fratel Teodoreto*, 219-222.

For Fr. Leopold the ‘*Devotion*’ was a loving penetration into the most Holy Wounds of Jesus and into the Immaculate Heart of Mary pierced by the sword of sorrow. During his prayer he was receiving cheering promises in regard to the conversion of sinners and to their elevation to sanctity.⁶⁴ On 1st May 1909, Fr. Leopold: “As I’ve already told you, after your death I will make you see all the souls that were saved by this Devotion, and no soul practising this holy Adoration will be lost.”⁶⁵ On 13th January 1909, Fr. Leopold: “The penance that I give you to do is to make me loved throughout the world by means of the Devotion, and like I always tell you, this Devotion must be revealed to my Vicar the Pope, and if I, your Jesus, have been the Saviour by means of the Cross, with the redemption, I will be so in all times, in order that the human race can mend their ways and recognize me as the true Son of God, Jesus Crucified.”⁶⁶

3. Early Beginnings of the Union

The beginning of the Union is marked by the providential encounter between Br. Teodoreto and Fr. Leopold. The Union was inaugurated after the confirmation obtained through Fr. Leopold, and quickly, started to show internal developments bringing forth first fruits of apostolate. Here we will show the event of the encounter between Br. Teodoreto and Fr. Leopold, the event of the foundation of the Union till the time when it had started to take solid roots, and also the first developments including the first apostolate of the members in the diffusion of the ‘*Devotion*’ to Jesus Crucified and in teaching catechism, and the publication of the bulletin of the Union as a means of catechizing and of making known the ‘*Devotion*’ and the messages of Jesus and Mary received through Fr. Leopold.

⁶⁴ Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 50-51 and 102-103.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 82: “Dopo la tua morte ti farò vedere tutte quelle anime che andarono salve per questa Divozione, come già te l’ho fatto segnare, e non andrà perduta quell’anima che fa tale santa Adorazione.”

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*: “La penitenza che ti dò da fare è quella di farmi amare con la Divozione in tutto il mondo; da palesarsi, come sempre ti dissi, al mio Vicario il Papa, e se io, il tuo Gesù sono stato il Salvatore colla croce, colla redenzione, lo sarò sempre in tutti i tempi, affinché il genere umano si ravveda e mi riconosca per vero Figlio di Dio, Gesù Crocifisso.”

3.1. *The Encounter between Br. Teodoreto and Fr. Leopold*

In the academic year 1911-1912, Br. Teodoreto was finding himself in a great danger of losing the right of giving examinations in house, with legal value, for one thousand and fifty students of the elementary school of ROMI of S. Pelagia, where he was the director. In that year, i.e., in 1911, in the first days of November, came to him one of the above mentioned Franciscan Tertiary women who were spreading the ‘*Devotion*’ to Jesus Crucified. While giving him some leaflets of the prayer, she told him that it is a very efficacious prayer written by a certain friar under the guide of Jesus Crucified, who spoke to him familiarly during prayers. Br. Teodoreto started practicing that ‘*Devotion*’ and asked permission to his Superiors so that it can be done in the whole community and in the schools. His proposal was accepted and the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools began practicing such devotion, and spreading it among their brethren, in the school classes and families. And they obtained not only the grace asked in favour of the students but several other important ones, among which was the beginning of the Union of Jesus Crucified and a remarkable gift from some benefactors.⁶⁷

In those years several other persons, were telling Br. Teodoreto about the friar favoured by God. However, such persons were talking about this friar with much discretion, i.e., as Fr. Leopold was to remain hidden, neither his name nor his residence was mentioned. On 25th October, 1912, in a funeral procession in which the main persons who were spreading the ‘*Devotion*’ participated, Br. Teodoreto heard a gentle man saying to others that he had been to St. Thomas, but Fr. Leopold could not come to meet him. Such words made Br. Teodoreto think that Fr. Leopold might be the friar and he desired to see him. But he would not let himself do it, as he knew that this friar had to remain hidden. To remove any doubt about his intention, he went to a church of St. Francis and there prayed the ‘*Devotion*’ before a Crucifix

⁶⁷ Cf *Ibid.*, 118; Cf DI MARIA, *Fratel Teodoreto*, 225-230; Cf T. GARBEROGLIO, «Come nacque l’Unione», in UC (Ed.), *Documenti*, n. 1, Torino, 2001, 7 [originally published with the title: *Unione del SS. Crocifisso*, in “Rivista Lasalliana dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane della Provincia di Torino” 1 (1934) 1]; Cf D’AURORA, *La santità è un’utopia*, 50-51.

adored in that church. After such a moment of prayer, all his perplexity disappeared and he went to St. Thomas to meet Fr. Leopold.⁶⁸

He was cordially welcomed by Fr. Leopold and after an exchange of few words Fr. Leopold had to leave because his occupations did not allow him to stay longer.⁶⁹ But they made an appointment to meet again on 30th of October, and after this they were meeting continuously and grew in “a very profound and extraordinary friendship”.⁷⁰ As Br. Teodoreto wrote in his diary, the sincerity of Fr. Leopold and the various providential circumstances that were happening, made him think that it was God’s will that he should rely in all that Fr. Leopold would tell him. In fact, as was seen later, Br. Teodoreto would not proceed with anything without the advice and approval of Fr. Leopold. On 23rd April 1913, Br. Teodoreto expressed to Fr. Leopold the desire which he had from the time of his second novitiate in 1906, i.e., the idea of forming an association of young men zealous in the catechetical apostolate and told him to pray for it.⁷¹ That very evening, at nine p.m., while adoring Jesus in the Most Holy sacrament, Fr. Leopold heard in his heart the following words: “You shall tell Brother Teodoreto to do what he has in mind”.⁷²

Soon after, three or four students were selected from each of the higher classes, and on the following Sunday, 27th April 1913, the first meeting was held. At that meeting, after the church ceremonies, the young men were told about the ‘*Devotion*’ to Jesus Crucified which later on was to become, both in practice and in spreading, one of the principal activities of the Association. During the whole year 1913, the weekly meetings continued and Fr. Leopold was praying for them. In the academic year 1913-1914 the best students of Evening Technical-

⁶⁸ Cf DI MARIA, *Fratel Teodoreto*, 213-216; Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 119.

⁶⁹ In fact, when Br. Teodoreto rang the bell of the convent it was Fr. Leopold himself who opened the door and as soon as he saw Br. Teodoreto he told him that he had been waiting for him from a long time. Br. Teodoreto was very much amazed by the extraordinary things which Fr. Leopold communicated to him with so much humility and confidence. He wrote that the conversation which he had with Fr. Leopold in that moment was as efficacious as a course of a very well done spiritual exercise (Cf UC, «*Riferimenti storici: origini e sviluppi dell’Unione, vivente il fondatore*», 5; Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 119).

⁷⁰ It was a relationship where ‘an educator’ became a disciple of a very simple ‘uneducated’ man but who was living in God (Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, X).

⁷¹ Cf *Ibid.*, 119-120; Cf R. GUIDI, *Un incontro stimolante tra un lasalliano e un francescano*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 88 (2005) 1, 23.

⁷² GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 120: “*Dirai al Fratello Teodoreto che faccia ciò che ha nella mente*”; Cf VASCONI, *I servi di Cana*, 53-54.

Commercial Schools for grown ups were selected. On 14th March 1914, in another meeting of all the selected young men, the title “Union of Jesus Crucified” was proclaimed, some essential regulations for the members were discussed and approved and Br. Teodoreto was entrusted with the drawing up of the Rules of life. After drawing the Rules, with the help of some Brethren, Br. Teodoreto gave the manuscript to Fr. Leopold in order that he may obtain Jesus’ and Mary’s blessing for it. On 29th April 1914, Fr. Leopold was praying in the chapel of Our Lady in St. Thomas, recommending the Union to the Virgin, and at that moment he heard the Virgin Mary telling him that she approves the Rules. More over, when Br. Teodoreto went to the Archbishop’s Curia for approval, for some reasons, it was suggested to him to add the title of Mary Immaculate to the principal title of the Union. For this reason, on 8th May 1914, to the great joy of the young men, the title of Mary Immaculate was added to that of Jesus Crucified. On the next day, 9th May 1914, the Archbishop of Turin, Cardinal Agostino Richelmy, officially erected the Union approving its Regulations, and on 12th May he obtained its aggregation to the head sector of “Our Lady of Annunciation” (*Primaria della SS. Annunziata*) in Rome. After three days of spiritual exercises, the solemn inauguration of the Union took place on 17th May 1914, together with the consecration of the young men to Jesus Crucified and Mary Immaculate. Fr. Leopold accompanied them by his prayers recommending all these young men to the protection of the Virgin Mary.⁷³

3.2. *Development of the ‘Devotion’ to Jesus Crucified*

From 1907 to 1912, limited copies of the ‘Devotion’ were printed by the women who were helping Fr. Leopold. These first printed copies of the ‘Devotion’ contained a brief note in regard to the permission obtained from the church authorities of Turin. They were printed on two-paged leaflets which were cut and pasted respectively on the right and on the left side of a coloured image of Jesus Crucified. In 1912 such leaflets were out of print, and Br. Teodoreto, entrusted with the preparation of a new edition gave it a new form not requiring additional

⁷³ Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 120-124; Cf ID., «Come nacque l’Unione», 10-20; Cf ID., *Andamento interno dell’Unione del SS Crocifisso e di Maria SS. Immacolata*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 1 (1917) 1, 5-6.

work. From edition to edition, the leaflets of the ‘*Devotion*’ came to be composed in six pages. With the permission of Fr. Leopold, Br. Teodoreto added, on the first page where there was the title, the aim of the ‘*Devotion*’ as well as the manner of practising it; on the second and fourth page he put the formulas of the ‘*Devotion*’; on the third page he put a printed image of Jesus Crucified. The “Nihil obstat” and the “Imprimatur” were still to be obtained and were to be printed on the sixth page.⁷⁴

Till 1914, images of Crucifix of diverse authors were printed on the leaflets of the ‘*Devotion*’. One day Fr. Leopold told Br. Teodoreto of the vision he had in 1893, in the Castle of Viale d’Asti, where he, in his dream, saw Jesus Crucified up above, and a very beautiful soul, raised above the earth, was embracing his feet. After this, Br. Teodoreto with greatest faithfulness described such a vision to various painters in Turin and out of Turin, to have it reproduced in an artistic image, but the results were not satisfactory. Later, a nice water-colour picture was made in Milan and Fr. Leopold approved it as the right representation of the vision. This image of Jesus Crucified with the pure soul at his feet, detached from the earth and united with God was printed in the ‘*Devotion*’ and the ‘Imprimatur’ was obtained from the Archbishop’s Curia on 31st July 1915. From that time all editions of the ‘*Devotion*’ contained this image.⁷⁵

From 1912 onwards, with the collaboration of the Brothers of the Christian Schools,⁷⁶ the spread of the ‘*Devotion*’ had a new development to such an extent that 174,000 copies were printed in that year. In 1913, it was translated into seven languages and 663,000 copies were printed. Early in 1915, Fr. Leopold thought that the time has come to have the ‘*Devotion*’

⁷⁴ Cf ID., *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 127.

⁷⁵ Cf *Ibid.*, 128. The image made in Milan was good, but when printed it became unpleasant. Therefore, after some more attempts, the painter Prof. Luigi Guglielmino from the school of Reffo, succeeded in modifying it satisfactorily, leaving for the Catechists’ Union a typical image (Cf *Ibid.*, 133); Cf DI MARIA, *Fratel Teodoreto*, 224-225.

⁷⁶ In regard to the relationship of the Union with the Brothers, Fr. Leopold had received several messages in different moments. On the 17th of Jan 1915, he heard Jesus telling him to tell the Brothers that he gives and entrusts all the sons of the pious Union to them. Another time, on 23rd Jan 1918, he noted in his diary another message from Jesus that he had put the pious Union in the hands of the Brothers and that they do things well. Before this, on 12th Jan 1918, he had received, in the usual internal voice, another message from the Virgin Mary telling him that blessed will be those Brothers who will take care of the Union and who will cooperate in favor of it according to God’s heart (Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 140-142).

indulged by the Pope. In agreement with him, Br. Teodoreto wrote a petition by way of Monsignor Angelo Bartolomasi,⁷⁷ where he, as the Director of the Union, asked the Holy Father, Benedict XV, to grant indulgence to all the faithful who practice the ‘Devotion’. The Holy Father not only granted the indulgence but also added a special blessing signed by his name on 18th January 1915. It was a great event for the Union and was the beginning of a series of supernatural graces. Following this, Br. Teodoreto prepared a new leaflet, mentioning the indulgence and the blessing granted by the Pope. A new ‘Imprimatur’ was obtained for it in July 1915, and 454,000 copies were printed. Fr. Leopold wanted to spread these leaflets above all among soldiers called to war. Soon after, it was translated in 14 languages and 8 million copies were printed and were sent to different countries free of charge. The cost of printing was covered with the support of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and with the alms collected by the members of the Union.⁷⁸

In April and May 1915, as Fr. Leopold wrote, a pressure was put on him by an important person, to say only ‘Glory’ leaving the ‘Our Father’ and ‘Hail Mary’ which are said in between the adoration of each Wound of Jesus. Fr. Leopold was about to give in, but later with the support of his spiritual director, he decided not to change anything.⁷⁹ On 2nd May 1915, he heard this: “I wish my most Holy Mother Mary be nominated in my Devotion, as she is its Patroness. However, I always leave the decision to the discretion of your Superiors.”⁸⁰ And on the next day, he heard the Virgin Mary telling him that she was glad that he united her with her Divine Son in the ‘Devotion’.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Monsignor Angelo Bartolomasi was the auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Turin. He was very friendly to the Brothers of the Christian Schools and was always ready for their help. He was going to visit the Pope, Benedict XV, and Br. Teodoreto sent his petition with him (Cf DI MARIA, *Fratel Teodoreto*, 225).

⁷⁸ Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 48 and 129-135. Later on, the ‘Devotion’ was inserted, with a slight modification, in the book “*Preces et pia Opera*” published by the Holy Apostolic Penitentiary of the year 1938, in n. 170 (Cf *Ibid.*, 48); Cf DI MARIA, *Fratel Teodoreto*, 225-233; Cf GARBEROGLIO, «*Come nacque l’Unione*», 32-33.

⁷⁹ Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 132.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*: “Io desidero che la mia Madre Maria Santissima sia nominata nella mia Divozione, essendo essa la Patrona. Lascio però sempre la decisione alla discrezione dei Superiori.”

⁸¹ Cf *Ibid.*, 110.

3.3. *First Developments of the Union*

Guided and strengthened by the fervent prayers of Fr. Leopold, the Union was taking solid roots. In 1914, there were thirty young men, and Br. Teodoreto, in order to strengthen them more decided to organize monthly spiritual retreats, the first of which took place on 31st of May. After, the joyful results of the first retreat, on the next month, June 14th, thirty-two aspirants were initiated into the Union. In the initial moments, the Union had a unique aim – namely the sanctification of the members; however, little by little the members were lead towards a particular apostolate. Br. Teodoreto in preparing the first Regulations of the Union, was reminded of the association of voluntary catechists founded by other Brothers of his Institute in France and Spain and had tried to introduce the same form of apostolate to the Union but leaving it free for the more zealous young men. However, very soon, he was assured that God wants the members of the Union for such a catechetical apostolate. In the same year, i.e., in 1914, eight of the principal members were examined by the Diocesan Commission to be able to teach Religion and they passed with excellent results obtaining the relative certificate from the church authority. In 1915, twelve other members obtained the same certificate, and in 1916, fourteen others followed them. The teaching of catechism began in 1914 in one parish called S. Massimo and in the Oratory of the Union with a total of 92 pupils. In 1915 there were 260 pupils in four parishes, in 1916 a total of 630 pupils and in 1917 a total of 1000 in eleven parishes of Turin with 34 Catechists.⁸²

On 18th June 1915, Fr. Leopold heard Jesus telling him that the Brothers of the Christian Schools have to lead the young men to him with faith and love. One year before, on 29th June 1914, he had noted another similar message from Jesus that the Brothers should do as he does, like a Good Pastor; and if some one of the pious Union goes out of track, he is to be admonished softly as a way to return him back to him. Towards the end of 1916, Br. Teodoreto received two writings from Fr. Leopold. One said that the members of the Union need to be Masters of Catechism in the midst of the world, and the other said that those

⁸² Cf *Ibid.*, 124-126, 137-138 and 142-143; Cf L. ROLLINO (Ed.), «*Fratel Teodoreto: conferenza ai suoi confratelli - 1940*», in UC, *Documenti*, n. 10, Torino, 2002, 13.

members of the Union who found it hard to study to be catechists with certificate need to be encouraged because what is important is working in God’s vineyard for the salvation of souls, saying that they can limit themselves to the teaching of children.⁸³ On 9th of March 1917, while praying in front of the Crucifix, Fr. Leopold, in an interior voice – like always, heard this: “I will make the young men of the pious Union experience ineffable joys because of my protection; I will love them in a particular way; I will sanctify them.”⁸⁴ And on the 28th March of the same year, he heard this message from the Virgin Mary: “You shall tell Brother Teodoreto to be cautious so that no pestiferous air may come to trouble the young men of the pious Union who are my sons.”⁸⁵ All these show the great predilection the young men had in the eyes of Jesus and Mary.

In addition to the teaching of Catechism in Sunday in parishes, a School of Religion was opened in the Union for students of middle and technical schools to be attended gratuitously after school. It included play time in the courtyard, teaching of catechism, and giving assistance in doing school home-works. At the end of every school year prize certificates were given to the most diligent ones. It was attended by an average of 150 students a year and was giving excellent results. The above mentioned events show that the members of the Union initially gathered to help one another, with good words and good example, to live a good Christian life, were enabled, by the grace and protection of Jesus Crucified and Mary Immaculate and by the fervour of their dedication to the study and practice of religion, to yield many consoling spiritual fruits by way of a particular apostolate – namely the catechetical apostolate.⁸⁶

In the beginning of 1917, all copies of the first edition of the Regulations were out of print and therefore, by permission of Monsignor Angelo Bartolomasi, a new edition was to be prepared. The special dedication of the members of the Union to the catechetical apostolate and the obligation, voluntarily assumed by them, to obtain a certificate for the teaching of

⁸³ Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 140-141 and 143.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 150: “Farò provare ai giovani della pia Unione gioie ineffabili per la mia protezione; li amerò in modo particolare; li santificherò.”

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 149: “Dirai al Fratello Teodoreto di stare guardingo perché non venga aria pestifera a turbare i giovani della pia Unione che sono i miei figli.”

⁸⁶ Cf *Ibid.*, 143-144.

catechism, required special additional rules and a slight modification in the title of the Institute which was to be called as Catechists’ Union of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate.⁸⁷ In addition, as the Union, on 18th April 1916, came to be aggregated to the Society of Italian Catholic Youth (*Società della Gioventù Cattolica Italiana*),⁸⁸ it required several additions to the Regulations. Another reason was the spiritual maturity of the members of the Union as was manifested during the first years. Evaluating the progress made by them, Br. Teodoreto felt the need for a further modification of the Regulations. Therefore, taking into consideration the above facts and the directions of Fr. Leopold, Br. Teodoreto prepared the new edition and on 24th January 1917, he presented them, handwritten, to Fr. Leopold in order that he may obtain blessing from Jesus and Mary. On 25th January, Jesus confirmed to Fr. Leopold that the Regulations are very good, in a voice which was repeated three times.⁸⁹

3.4. *Bulletin of the Union*

After the settlement of the Regulations, Br. Teodoreto, as usual after having obtained the consent of Jesus by way of Fr. Leopold, started working for the publication of a bulletin of the

⁸⁷ In this study, when a reference is made to a member of the Union it is written “Catechist” (with capital letter), while in making a general reference to any “catechist” small letter is used.

⁸⁸ This aggregation to this form of association of the Catholic Action was an honor for the Union (Cf T. GARBEROGLIO, *Andamento interno dell'Unione*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 1 (1917) 2, 11-13). However, later in the history of the Union, in the beginnings of its rapid diffusion, the branches of youth established in the Houses of the Brothers, had completely been transformed into associations of Catholic Action, and they were called as Lasallian Youth of Catholic Action (*Gioventù Lasalliana di Azione Cattolica*). The fact was that, by the divine message communicated through Fr. Leopold, all the Brothers of the Christian Schools had received a mandate to make Jesus Crucified loved; to spread the *Devotion* among their pupils, in their communities and everywhere; and to collaborate in the activities of the Union particularly in view of vocations. On the other hand, Pope Pius XI, for contrasting the invasion of fascism which was monopolizing the education of young people with its ideals, entrusted all religious Congregations with educational institutions to establish associations of Catholic Action in their institutions. So, for the Brothers, the question was which one to take care of: Catechists’ Union or Catholic Action? It was an event that had provoked great sadness to Br. Teodoreto. When the polemical discussions and meetings had started, Br. Teodoreto had accepted to transform the associations of youth of the Union into associations of Catholic Action, but without diminishing the diffusion of the *Devotion* and the catechetical apostolate, in a way that both exigencies – that of the Union and that of the Catholic Action – would be satisfied. However, his proposal was refused and the consequences were great for the Union: its initial very rapid growth was hindered and progressively its attachment with the Brothers of the Christian Schools diminished (L. ROLLINO, interview, Turin, Centro La Salle, 5th December 2009; Cf C. UGHETTO, «*Appunti di una conferenza ai Fratelli - 1953*», in UC (Ed.), *Documenti*, n. 16, Torino, 2007, 7-13).

⁸⁹ Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 144-146; Cf ROLLINO, «*Fratel Teodoreto: conferenza ai suoi confratelli*», 13.

Union, as a means of catechizing and of making known the messages of Jesus, the ‘*Devotion*’ and the Union.⁹⁰ Br. Teodoreto was in doubt on whether to begin with Fr. Leopold’s writings or with the pious Union and he asked Fr. Leopold about it. That day, in the evening, Fr. Leopold heard this: “From neither; but must start talking about faith which develops little by little; about the good things done by the Catechists; speak about good things; about virtues to be practiced; about vices to be abandoned and the punishments which will come (if not abandoned); about the extreme need of well guiding and protecting the poor youth and about the necessity that the rich people and Priests co-operate with one another to help these youth.”⁹¹

On 15th May 1917, Fr. Leopold heard the Virgin Mary telling him that the bulletin must be entitled ‘*Love to Jesus Crucified*’ and that it should be gratuitous, though spontaneous offerings are not to be refused.⁹² Jesus had also assured him of a divine providence, telling him also not to make the bulletin pompous but modest, sufficient to make people know and love Jesus Crucified. At that time several persons who obtained special graces by the practice of the ‘*Devotion*’ were coming and were offering money as an expression of gratitude. In regard to this Br. Teodoreto had doubts as to whether to write it or not. Jesus let him know, as always by way of Fr. Leopold, that the graces received are to be recorded carefully; however, without publishing the offers, which will be recorded in heaven. Another time, one of the Brothers, considering it too simple, wanted to substitute the characteristic image of the vision of Fr. Leopold which was put on the cover of the bulletin with another more beautiful ornamented image of a Crucifix. In regard to this, Fr. Leopold notes in his diary that Jesus told

⁹⁰ Cf FURFARO, «*Fratel Teodoreto: oratore e scrittore*», 14-17.

⁹¹ GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 147: “Né dall’una, né dall’altra; ma si deve incominciare a parlare della Fede che cade a poco a poco; del bene che fanno i Catechisti; parlare del bene; delle virtù da praticare; del vizio da lasciare e dei castighi che ne verranno (se non si lascia); del bisogno estremo di ben indirizzare e custodire la povera gioventù e della necessità che i ricchi e i Sacerdoti si diano la mano per lavorare intorno a queste giovani pianticelle.”

⁹² In fact, the first bulletin of the Union was published in this year, i.e., in 1917 with the title ‘*Love to Jesus Crucified*’ (*L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso*) and has always been gratuitous. It is also to be noted that in the beginning, fees of association had been established in the Union, and the young men had periodically to pay a certain amount of money for the common expenses. On the 24th of June 1914, Fr. Leopold heard a message from Jesus that this should be eliminated. From that time on, common expenses were covered from spontaneous offerings given by the members of the Union and from the donations of benefactors (Cf *Ibid.*, 139-140).

him to maintain the same image with the soul at the feet of Jesus Crucified in the Cross in memory of the apparition and for reminding mankind that they must return to the Cross and to Jesus Crucified.⁹³

4. Further Developments of the Union

Under the untiring dedication of Br. Teodoreto and the prayerful indications of Fr. Leopold, the Union started to make considerable developments including its diffusion to other places around Turin; though, at the same time, it had also to challenge moments of great darkness. With time, as a great achievement, a first group from its young members professed their first consecration and in the mature time it was erected as a Secular Institute and continued its efforts towards the establishment of a female group as well as priest members.

4.1. Spread of the Union

In the spring of 1917, Br. Teodoreto, had the idea of selecting from the different parishes where the Catechists were working, some boys to be associated to the Union, to be instructed, educated and then sent back as Catechists to the respective parishes. He consulted Fr. Leopold, who, on 9th April 1917, after praying for this intention, got the response from Jesus that they should consult the parish priests so that, guided by Him, they would select good and virtuous young men. At that time they were very few but Jesus confirmed them saying that they will grow abundantly. The idea consisted also in finding young Aspirants to be initiated in religious practices and in the spreading of the ‘*Devotion*’, and afterwards to be admitted to the Catechists’ Union, in accordance to the time requirements established by the Regulations. In 1918, Br. Teodoreto had the idea of reporting the works of the Catechists before the Auxiliary bishop, Monsignor Pinardi, and before the zealots of the Union. And he was assured by Jesus, who told Fr. Leopold that the works of God must be made known to everybody. Br. Teodoreto had also the intention of establishing the same pious Union of young men in other towns

⁹³ Cf *Ibid.*, 146-148; Cf UC, *Chi siamo*, 22.

outside Turin. He was again confirmed and was told that the same Regulations, as those of the pious Union of Turin, were to be observed. In 1919, he presented to Fr. Leopold the idea of sending groups of two or three Catechists to teach catechism on parishes outside of Turin. This idea was confirmed by Jesus as the first fruit of the divine tree. Br. Teodoreto also presented the idea of sending the best catechists to address the members of the different Groups out of Turin to which Jesus responded that their ability must be tested by the Superiors, and that their action as well as speech be done, always, in His love.⁹⁴

In October 1919, an idea has come to someone from the members, to leave, for some time, the works of the apostolate so that the Catechists would be enabled to undertake further studies and acquire academic degrees to be able later to teach catechism in a better way. To this Jesus responded saying that for itself it is not something bad, but one must not leave what is spiritual for what is material on the pretext of teaching catechism better, and said that, in this, something threatening is hidden. Another time, towards the end of 1919, a Catechist presented to Br. Teodoreto a well-studied project in 32 articles to form in the Union a perfect organization for the propaganda of the good press. Br. Teodoreto presented it to Fr. Leopold who as usual prayed for the intention, and Jesus responded to it saying that any proposal, even in the form of good, must never be accepted, when it becomes for the Catechists an occasion for abandoning their mission even for a very short period of time.⁹⁵

In 1919, a new director, Br. Isidoro di Maria, was appointed for the Technical and Commercial School in Turin, a school which was run for more than one hundred years by the Brothers of the Christian Schools. This Brother wishing to establish a gratuitous school for helping young people acquire a certain profession began reorganizing ex-students from the schools of ROMI. The ex-students accepted the invitation with enthusiasm and in a great number. However, the realization of such great a project was restrained by the Superiors because they had very few teachers and a very limited financial resource. In this time, divine providence intervened through Fr. Leopold in the sense that, on the 24th November 1919, he

⁹⁴ Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 153-154 and 156-157; Cf ID., *Tra le varie sezioni dell'Unione*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 3 (1919) 3, 22-24; 4 (1920) 1, 5-7.

⁹⁵ Cf ID., *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 157-158.

received a message from Jesus that this is his will and that he wants such a school. As Fr. Leopold noted in his diary, Jesus wants the establishment of such ‘Houses of Charity’ for saving souls and for forming new generations by way of helping young people learn arts and crafts. He also noted that Jesus demands the collaboration of priests and rich people. Br. Teodoreto told his Superior about this message of Jesus without telling the director so as not to put impulse on him. Soon, the Superior sent for the director and asked him about his intentions in respect to the project and told him he will ask for the opinion of other Brothers, directors of other schools. Meanwhile, Rodolfo Sella, an engineer, one of the most ardent zealots of the ‘*Devotion*’, was forming a committee of Catholic men for such purpose. The first meeting of the committee was held on 12th of Jan 1920. In this meeting R. Sella spoke about the necessity of such a great institution willed by God which has the aim of regenerating society through the education of youth in commerce and industry. Br. Isidoro also spoke about the education of workers and technical directors and about the necessity of having institutions that would make the fruits of education stable. In fact, the ultimate aim of such a school, offered for workers and employed young men, was to raise the workers’ minds to the ideals of religion, in accordance to the principles of the Gospel and the social teachings of the Popes, so as to bring a solid solution to the social problems of that time creating a possibility for deceived workers to find the right track, as the Church in general was endeavouring to do.⁹⁶

4.2. *Difficulties Encountered*

The committee members, working very hard without rest, studied the requirements needed and prepared a project. However, a big mistake was done in the preparation of the project. The project was made in such a way as to include a wide range of industrial professions: electro-mechanical, textile, alimentary, paper-making, etc.; and courses that were divided into six years of study with the addition of one or two years of specialization depending on the profession. To this project of an industrial school, another project was added for a middle school of commerce. The committee also went further in the search of a place for the

⁹⁶ Cf *Ibid.*, 159-163.

realization of the project and found a vast building that was considered suitable. The project was too great requiring a maximum budget that when it was presented it resulted to be impossible to realize and all remained cold and silent. After this, three members of the committee left, with a sense of mistrust, and the others remained in cold spirit almost wishing to abandon everything. A great error was done in the very fact that they wanted to start from the maximum. As it came out to be later, they should have started from a minimum, leaving the ideal for the future; they went ahead too much with the project without moderation.⁹⁷

Then it was decided to start the school in a very simple way with two classes, 6th and 7th, which were already existing, but giving the 7th class a feature of a professional school and the 6th as a preparation for the 7th class. The relative programmes for the beginning of the academic year 1920 were prepared. On 3rd June 1920, a meeting was held by four of the committee members to talk about the matter and Fr. Leopold participated. The first general meeting of the committee took place on 28th June 1920, when they decided to ask an authorization to use the church of St. Pelagia and to rent the place adjoining it. Br. Teodoreto made last agreements with his Superiors and, on 18th October 1920, the school was opened with day and evening programmes. The students of the day programme, divided into two classes were sixty, and those of the evening, also divided into two classes, were about seventy. In this school, teaching was partially entrusted to the Catechists of the Union. The school started with great success; there was a great discipline and seriousness that promised an excellent future. The members of the committee and of the council were working very hard to get the necessary materials and for a possibility of enlarging the institution.⁹⁸

Two months after the beginning of the school, on 17th December 1920, the meeting of the council or board of administrators decided to give the school the name “Institute for Arts and Crafts.” According to the message of Jesus communicated through Fr. Leopold it had to be called by the name “House of Charity for Arts and Crafts.” The word “charity” implied the fact that such institution had to be based first of all on supernatural Charity, which invites to a full trust in God’s providence, and then on Christian charity inviting the rich people, for love

⁹⁷ Cf *Ibid.*, 164-166.

⁹⁸ Cf *Ibid.*, 166-171.

of God and the neighbour, to give hand for the education of the poor to be educated in the practice of the same Christian charity. Therefore, the problem was not merely the exclusion of the term but of the significance as was demonstrated by the way of thinking and the purely human methods followed by the majority of the members of the council above all in regard to the supernatural Charity. It also implied that the young men had to pay in order to be admitted. However, at the end, assisted by the prayers of Fr. Leopold, it was decided that the name be “House of Charity for Arts and Crafts” and on 4th March 1921, on the meeting of the executive committee of the council, the president proposed this name confirming the school as a providential institution that aims at forming a better generation by cultivating the hearts of young men through religious practices and their minds through useful and practical knowledge. This decision was met with oppositions, and six days later, on 10th March, Fr. Leopold received a message from Jesus to tell them that he does not want a human institution but a divine one, and that he wants the House of Charity to develop according to his heart.⁹⁹

Due to the disagreements, further meetings were delayed to give time to the persons to calm down. On the contrary, such delay produced opposite effects. In the first ten days of July 1921, the majority of the committee, one member of the council and the president resigned; the others also distanced themselves from the institution. On 11th July, a meeting was held where there were: Br. Teodoreto, the director Br. Isidoro, the secretary and seven members of the council. But on the absence of the president they could not do anything but decided to ask him to give up his resignation and to meet after two days to nominate members for the executive committee. The president accepted and came for the meeting of 13th July, but since there were, besides the secretary, only two members of the council, there was lack of a legal number for a meeting to be opened. After this, all those who resigned were asked to stay in work at least till the opening of the next academic year 1921-1922. After the end of the previous academic year, a new director was nominated who worked hard to restore peace and unity among the members of the committee. In agreement with the president, he called several

⁹⁹ Cf *Ibid.*, 171-173; Cf D. CONTI, «Causa di beatificazione di Fr. Teodoreto - 1985», in UC (Ed.), *Documenti*, n. 6, Torino, 2001, 17-20.

meetings, and after the last meeting which was held on 13th January 1922, another general meeting was held where the new director reported that he fully understands the spiritual significance which the name of the institution contains and that it is good to keep this significance, but in order to eliminate disagreements and to favour the development of the institution he declared that no insistence should be made in regard to the name to be given to the institution and that the matter should be left entirely in the hands of the committee and the council either to return to the first name or to choose another name accepted by all. And as such, in spite of all the efforts done, it was no longer possible to have again that fervour which was necessary to accomplish such a great work. Two more meetings of the executive committee were called, on the 7th and 14th July 1922, but only the president and the secretary were present at both; one member of the council was present in the first and no one from the council was present at the second.¹⁰⁰

The above mentioned event was the cause of the deepest sorrows which Fr. Leopold had ever suffered. However, this suffering had become an occasion for spiritual purification and source of great merits. Fr. Leopold, on 4th July 1920, had written in his diary that institutions founded even by honest persons but supported only by human means are not destined to spread every where, even if they do much good; while the institutions based on Jesus’ Charity go beyond oceans and spread all over the world. Continuing, Fr. Leopold wrote that this institution “House of Charity for Arts and Crafts”, willed by God in his great mercy for the salvation of the world, based only on the goodness and Charity of Jesus Christ, will spread in the course of years in the whole universe. And on 27th February 1921, in a letter to Br. Isidoro, the director who insisted with vigour on the name “House of Charity”, he wrote that not giving the name willed by God means not recognizing the work of God; and not conforming to God’s will means turning his blessings away from the House of Charity. After this, one of the members of the council who had resigned contacted the provincial Superior of Fr. Leopold in order to ask him to take measures against him; and following this, Fr. Leopold was forbidden

¹⁰⁰ Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 173-175. At the end, in obedience to his Superiors and for the sake of fraternal charity, Br. Teodoreto had to stop insisting on the title and on the gratuitousness of the Work (Cf CONTI, «Causa di beatificazione di Fr. Teodoreto, 1985», 20).

to occupy himself with the school and to receive persons from outside. He had to suffer his portion of martyrdom with patience for the love of God.¹⁰¹ He remained closed in himself in the agony of the feeling of abandonment. Though, throughout his life, he had experienced suffering in all its colours, it was particularly in this moment that he came to be inserted in a higher degree into the mystery of the Cross which continued till his death on 27th January 1922. He was enabled to understand something of the loneliness of Christ on the Cross.¹⁰² The following is written in his diary (with a date 14th December 1921): “O my Jesus, because I am poor, not noble, a simple fellow, all have forsaken me!” And, as he noted, he got the following response: “Courage! Are we not friends?” – then he wrote: “Oh thank you Jesus! For you they have done much worse!”¹⁰³

Later on, several members, animated by God’s Spirit, worked with great sacrifice and God rewarded their efforts and kept his blessing over the Institute. In reality the committee had not been dissolved by a formal act. Since its members were almost always absent from the meetings, there was no legal number for taking any deliberations. Already in 1920, when the Evening Industrial School was opened, together with the “Institute for Arts and Crafts” in via delle Rosine 14, the Catechists were entrusted by the Brothers with the teaching of Religion. Later, in 1925, the Catechists themselves, animated by Br. Teodoreto, opened another Industrial School that was organized for non-working days, in a parish called “Our Lady of Peace” (*Nostra Signora della Pace*), in the Barrier of Milan, and was completely gratuitous. In few years this school made a rapid development and the Catechists had to search for a wider place in order to receive all those who were insisting to be enrolled. Then came again the idea of assuming the name “House of Charity” and it was chosen as the name for the new initiative. As soon as the title “House of Charity” was given, help of every kind started to flow. In May

¹⁰¹ Cf GARBEOGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 175-176. Fr. Leopold had the impression that even Br. Teodoreto tied to him by an intense holy friendship did not understand him anymore. Everything remained within the knowledge of the Superiors and he was not able to understand it all (Cf RISSO, *Una storia a due*, 136-137; Cf D. CONTI, «80° anniversario del primo “detto” di Fra Leopoldo sulla Casa di Carità Arti e Mestieri, 1919-1999», in UC (Ed.), *Contributi*, n. 3, Torino, 2001, 19).

¹⁰² Cf VASCONI, *I servi di Cana*, 51-52.

¹⁰³ GARBEOGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 176-177: “O mio Gesù, perché povero, perché non nobile, perché semplice tutti mi hanno abbandonato!”. – Disse Gesù: “Fa’ coraggio! Non siamo due amici?”. – “Oh grazie Gesù! a te hanno fatto ben di peggio!”

1929, the Catechists without having any fund signed a contract for the purchase of a certain building, in via Feletto 8, and after few months, assisted by divine providence, they were able to give all the payments and to initiate the program which was organized for evenings and non-working days. In October 1931, the former Evening Industrial School, that of via delle Rosine, was transferred and united with the latter Industrial School established by the Catechists in via Feletto. Soon the number of attendants of the new school rose from 370 registered in 1932 to 800 registered in 1939. Again the space proved to be small for all the students and refusing the applicants seemed for the Catechists going against the continuous encouragements that came from divine providence. So they decided to acquire a more appropriate place and decided to adopt the full title “House of Charity for Arts and Crafts” which was so often recommended by Fr. Leopold. As usual, assisted by divine providence and the sacrifices of the members, another land was bought and the construction initiated. In the mean time, in 1948, had started day-time courses which had produced students of high professional quality in Turin; and in 1950, the school was transferred to the newly constructed spacious building which is the present time General Centre of the Union in Corso Benedetto Brin, 26.¹⁰⁴

4.3. *The Union as a Lay Congregation*

Soon after the death of Fr. Leopold the Union had started to give its most beautiful flowers. The efficacious intercession of Fr. Leopold was pouring out blessings and favours over the works of the Union. In the beginning the Union did not have consecrated members; it actually did not begin with such an intention. However, Fr. Leopold had the inspiration that the pious Union will turn out to be something greater as Jesus and Mary were always telling him of ‘the coming Order’ or ‘the great Institution’; and had written in his diary – a message which he heard from Jesus on 17th March 1915 – that holy fathers of family and many vocations [to consecrated life] would come out from the Union. In 1925, there were thirty-five

¹⁰⁴ Cf *Ibid.*, 248-254; Cf RICCARDI, *Maestro di vita oltre la scuola*, 77-80; Cf DI MARIA, *Fratel Teodoreto*, 280-285. Later, in 1971, the school became an association with the name “Association House of Charity for Arts and Crafts” with full autonomy, legally recognized by the Civil Authority (Cf UC, *Chi siamo*, 44).

members who wanted to follow Christ more closely by way of the evangelical counsels. Sixteen Catechists were already married but remaining members as always, united to the Union, in its spirituality and activities.¹⁰⁵

On 28th December 1924, a general assembly of the Union was held where the Archbishop of Turin, Monsignor Giuseppe Gamba, presided. Another general assembly was also held at the end of 1925. In these assemblies, wide reports of the major events and activities of the Union were presented. In the first ten years, the activities of the Union were undertaken mainly on the basis of the simple but secure guidelines received from Fr. Leopold. The previous Rules of life were only like an experiment whose validity was to be tasted in the practical happenings. Therefore, in 1925, an intense work for the renewal of the Rules started and this work took the whole year of 1925. Each single chapter, after having been drawn, was presented and discussed by the members, and it was all based on the indications of Fr. Leopold and the past experiences of the Union. These Rules were approved by the Archbishop at the end of 1925, and were given to the members as indications for the way they had to follow.¹⁰⁶

Following this, the Archbishop of Turin, through his secretary, asked Br. Teodoreto, to select a certain number of the most fervent Catechists, and to bring them to him. Twelve Catechists were selected and on 25th June 1926 they went to meet the Archbishop who welcomed them very warmly. He precisely traced out to them the whole program of religious perfection, and then told them about the possibility of living the evangelical counsels in the middle of the world and about the good they can do by word and by example in their families, in work, etc., above all, through the catechetical apostolate. The young men responded to this ideal with great joy and enthusiasm, and seeing this, the Archbishop asked Br. Teodoreto to prepare particular Rules for them that included the practice of the evangelical counsels. This event which was not provoked but which arose as a spontaneous invitation from the part of the Archbishop who did not even know anything about Fr. Leopold created a great impression on

¹⁰⁵ Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 232-233 and 236-237; Cf ID. (Ed.), *Relazione annuale dell'Unione del SS. Crocifisso e di Maria SS. Immacolata*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 10 (1926) 1, 4-8; Cf G. CESONE, *Relazione dell'Unione Catechisti del SS. Crocifisso e di Maria SS. Immacolata*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 12 (1928) 2, 3-6.

¹⁰⁶ Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 237-238 and 240.

all those who knew the prediction of Fr. Leopold. Thus, from that time, the young men who aspired to consecrate themselves to God by means of the evangelical counsels were enabled to realize their vocation without leaving the Union and their own families. They were given the name congregational-Catechists. The married Catechists and the other young Catechists were given the name associated-Catechists. The particular Rules of the congregational-Catechists included and went beyond those of the associated-Catechists. However, no distinction was imposed, i.e., both groups were not separated and the Union was only one as always. While participating in the same means of sanctification and in the works of apostolate, it was open for the young associated-Catechists to choose the form of life they needed to follow. The married Catechists, in as much as their familiar duties allowed, were participating in the meetings, prayers and in the works of apostolate, offering to the Union a great contribution in every possible way.¹⁰⁷

The Archbishop of Turin – who in 1926 had become Cardinal – offered himself, by divine providence, in handling matters relating to the future of the Union. When informed about the different groups of the Union established by the Brothers of the Christian Schools in various towns such as Vercelli, Biella, Parma, Roma, etc., he at once understood that they could not survive for long as they were not united with their principal Centre in Turin as to form one institution; in fact, they disappeared. He also proposed that the Union, to have a firm and lasting existence, needed to be guided by the congregational-Catechists, i.e., the consecrated Catechists; however, without separating from the Brothers of the Christian Schools who were called to prepare among their pupils ‘the first stages of the vocation to the Union’.¹⁰⁸ Thus,

¹⁰⁷ Cf *Ibid.*, 240-241.

¹⁰⁸ There were various stages in the development of the vocation of the persons in the Union. At the first level, there were children known as the Registered (*Ascritti*) who committed themselves to the individual daily practice of the ‘Devotion’ to Jesus Crucified and once they had acquired the habit of practicing it regularly their name was registered in a notebook by the Brother who guided them. Then the best ones from the Registered children were selected and promoted, with their choice, to become Zealots (*Zelatori*) and, after a certain preparation, they were given the duty of spreading the ‘Devotion’ among their friends, family and other persons they knew. Again the best of the Zealots were selected and promoted – if they wanted and if they were between twelve and fifteen years of age – to the category of Learner Catechists (*Allievi Catechisti*) who dedicated themselves to a weekly meeting (or a meeting in two weeks) for a formation program that intended to help them live a fervent Christian life and to prepare them for an examination after which they were given a little ‘diploma’ of Catechists – at the completion of sixteen years. Then there were the Volunteer Catechists (*Catechisti Volontari*) – between sixteen

later on, the Brothers entrusted the responsibility of the Union to the consecrated Catechists who established a Council and a General President. In different occasions the Cardinal had repeatedly expressed that he did not want to entrust the Catechists of the Union to others so that they might not be made to follow another direction.¹⁰⁹

The Rules of the congregational-Catechists containing such directions were presented by the Cardinal to the Holy See. This Cardinal fought for the causes of the Union so much as to produce in the members a profound hope and faith that they will succeed in obtaining the official approval. However, in December 1929, he died causing a deep sorrow for all of them. But it happened to be that the Cardinal who succeeded him, Maurilio Fossati, also showed a paternal love towards the Union like his predecessor and took the necessary steps for the canonical approval of the Union and its Statutes. It was a very difficult process like what was happening with other institutions presenting such a new form of consecrated life in that time. However, after so much insistence on the part of the Cardinal, Pope Pius XI pronounced his disposition for an approval by these words “If times go by, we must not stop; if necessary, we will even modify the Canons.”¹¹⁰ Thus, after examining the Rules of the associated-Catechists and the Statutes of the congregational-Catechists, the Sacred Congregation of the Council, with the letter of 18th of January 1933, communicated its dispositions for the approval which the Archbishop confirmed by the decree of 23rd June 1933.¹¹¹

and twenty years of age – who made a ‘consecration’ and had a special Regulation to follow, and participated in weekly meetings and in activities of apostolate among workers. Then at the age of twenty-one they became Effective Catechists (*Catechisti Effetivi*), or when they got engaged or married, they became Senior Catechists (*Catechisti Anziani*) who had regulatory prescriptions on engagement or conjugal life. The Effective or Senior Catechists were incorporated into the Union as members. Those who desired to make part of the Congregated Catechists (*Catechisti Congregati*) were welcomed into a process of formation that intended to prepare them for a consecration by means of the profession of the evangelical counsels, according to the proper Statutes and Regulations of the Union (Cf RICCARDI, *Maestro di vita oltre la scuola*, 65-66); Cf C. TESSITORE, «Intervento al convegno delle Associazioni Unione Catechisti - Azione Cattolica nelle Case dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane - 1936», in UC (Ed.), *Documenti*, n. 12, Torino, 2002, 22-26 [first published in “Rivista Lasalliana” 4 (1936) 2].

¹⁰⁹ Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 242; Cf CESONE, «La paternità spirituale di Fratel Teodoro», 15.

¹¹⁰ GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 243: “Se i tempi camminano, noi non dobbiamo fermarci; se sarà necessario, modificheremo anche i Canoni.”

¹¹¹ Cf *Ibid.*, 242-244; Cf T. GARBEROGLIO (Ed.), *Decreto erezione dell’Unione*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 17 (1933) 5, 2; Cf ID., *Esulti il nostro cuore*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 17 (1933) 5, 3-5.

4.4. *The Union as a Secular Institute*

This approval was really a great accomplishment and marked a new phase in the history of the Union. However, the juridical systematization of the Union was not yet definitive. It could not be collocated with the lay religious Congregations, like the Brothers of the Christian Schools, so as to be governed by the Sacred Congregation for the Religious, because the members had no common life, no common dress and were living in the overall secular condition of life.¹¹² On the other hand, it was not like the other lay Associations which were governed by the Sacred Congregation of the Council as the members were professing the evangelical counsels. It was just the problem of all Secular Institutes before the promulgation of the apostolic constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia*.¹¹³

Following the promulgation of “*Provida Mater*” by Pope Pius XII, on the 2nd of February 1947, the Archbishop of Turin, Maurilio Fossati, sent a letter to the Sacred Congregation for the Religious in regard to the question of the Catechists’ Union to be erected as a Secular Institute. The same Congregation, on 1st February 1948, responded that there was no impediment on its part and that the Archbishop could proceed.¹¹⁴ Thus, the Archbishop, by the decree of June the 24th 1948, officially erected the Catechists’ Union as a Secular Institute of a diocesan right declaring its particular end to be the spiritual perfection of its members which is to be realized, above all, in the meditation of the Cross of Christ and in the catechetical apostolate to be undertaken with the best of methods. The same Archbishop approved the

¹¹² The history of the Union shows that in 1938 some tentatives for a life in common were made – Giovanni Cesone together with Giovanni Cordiale made this tentative in the ‘House of Charity’ – but it was only because the form of consecration lived in the world was not yet recognized by the Church (Cf S. PIZZIO (Ed.), *Giovanni Cesone. 26 luglio 1898 – 28 novembre 1964*, Torino, Unione Catechisti, 2001, 7; Cf CESONE, «*La paternità spirituale di Fratel Teodoreto*», 16).

¹¹³ Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 244.

¹¹⁴ It is to be noted that the Catechists’ Union was – thanks to the immense collaboration of the above mentioned Archbishop of Turin – one of the first few SII who got a quick approval from the Church at a diocesan level (Cf D. CONTI, «*IV Congresso Mondiale ex allievi dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane. Barcellona 9-13 settembre 1964*», in UC (Ed.), *Documenti*, n. 12, Torino, 2003, 26).

Rules and Constitutions of the Union by the decree of 8th March 1949.¹¹⁵ As such ‘the Order’ predicted by Fr. Leopold since 1908 became a reality after forty years.¹¹⁶

The erection of the Union as a Secular Institute caused some internal difficulties as well as some difficulties in regard to its relationship with the Brothers of the Christian Schools. As it is mentioned before, the Union included two categories of members: the members who are consecrated by profession of evangelical counsels and the associated members who aim to live an intense Christian life dedicating themselves particularly to the upbringing of a holy family participating in the spirit of the Institute. Br. Teodoreto always maintained their unity at an equal level without any distinction. However, the Church considered the married Catechists to be members in the broad sense; while members in the strict sense were to be only the consecrated Catechists. It was also necessary to clarify the term ‘Catechist’, applied to each member of the Union, in order to go beyond the common understanding of the catechetical apostolate. The common practice of reducing the concept of catechesis to a mere sacramental

¹¹⁵ Some documents of the Union hold the date of approval of the Rules and Constitutions to be on the 22nd of Feb. 1949. This is because in the Italian translation of the decree we find it like this (Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 247). While the decree in Latin contains the date 8th Mar. 1949 (Cf ID. (Ed.), *L’approvazione delle Regole e Costituzioni*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 33 (1949) 1/2, 2). The approved Rules and Constitutions were handed over to each Catechist on Holy Saturday 16th Apr. 1949, though it had first been presented to them on 19th Mar. 1949, on the feast of St. Joseph. Br. Teodoreto and all the Catechists were very much moved. In fact, as Br. Teodoreto, before starting to handover the texts illustrated to the Catechists, it was such an important act and important moment for the Union (Cf FURFARO, «Fratel Teodoreto: oratore e scrittore», 10-11). Later the Constitutions were revised in the light of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and the renewed norms of the Code of Canon Law. The renewed Constitutions were confirmed in the extraordinary Assembly of the Union that took place from 30 Nov. - 23 Dec. 1997 and were approved on 7th Oct. 1998 by the decree of the Archbishop of Turin, Cardinal Giovanni Saldarini, and entered into force ‘*ad experimentum*’ from 29th of Nov. 1998 for five years. In the 10^o General Assembly of the Union that took place in Dec. 2003 some more modifications were made, and on the 8th of Dec. 2004 were definitely approved by the decree of Cardinal Severino Poletto. However, in the same decree the Cardinal had proposed certain clarifications in regard to the category of the members in Art. 38 which was reformulated in an extraordinary Assembly in 2005, and was approved by the same Cardinal on 31st May 2006 (Cf UC, *Chi siamo*, 31; Cf ID. (Ed.), *Indicazioni su identità, origine e sviluppo dell’Unione Catechisti di Gesù Crocifisso e di Maria SS. Immacolata*, Torino, 2007, 44-47; Cf V. MOCCIA (Ed.), *Le nuove costituzioni dell’Unione Catechisti nel cinquantenario dell’Istituto secolare*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 81 (1998) 3/4, 10-12; Cf L. ROLLINO, *Assemblee dell’Unione*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 81 (1998) 1/2, 5-8).

¹¹⁶ Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 244-247; Cf ID., *Istituto Secolare*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 32 (1948) 5, 2-4.

preparation did not make comprehensible the relationship between consecration of one’s life and the catechetical apostolate.¹¹⁷ To explain this, Br. Teodoreto wrote:

A person is said to be a catechist not only when he explains the Catechism in a parish or in a school, but is still more a catechist when he/she invites a colleague of work to a Paschal Communion, when in front of the temptation of the evil knows how to disapprove it and to maintain a behavior that shows that virtue is not a myth but a reality demonstrated by action, and that it is source of greatness and joy in the world. He/she is a catechist in the street, in the church, in family, in a restaurant, in a classroom of university, in the barracks. The catechist has always and everywhere to maintain an attitude that he/she is an apostle.¹¹⁸

Other difficulties encountered include also the acceptance of the *Devotion to Jesus Crucified*. The Catechists were convinced that they should accept and spread this pious practice as a specific historical event in the birth of the Union. However, there were complaints that this *Devotion* might produce a ‘devotionalist’ mentality and that the Union might be reduced to merely an act of devotion, diminishing in its ecclesial and social apostolate. Little value was given to the Adoration of Jesus Crucified which in fact carried

¹¹⁷ In the beginning, the Union had to make basic clarifications because many people were commenting that there was no need of consecrating one’s entire life just for a catechetical apostolate. It has to be clear that the members of the Union are not Catechists just for some activities which they do in the catechetical sphere – these activities occupy only a part of their time. Rather they are Catechists because they have chosen a form of life that requires of them an internal attitude and a style of life which is essentially catechistical. Their life is entirely and always apostolic; it is entirely and always catechistical. They are called not only to communicate messages but, above all, to communicate life. They are called to announce and communicate the life of Christ principally by their life: continuously, everywhere and in every situation of life. That’s why it is indispensable for them to possess the Lord in sanctity (Cf CONTI, «IV Congresso Mondiale ex allievi dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane», 38, 65; Cf C. TESSITORE, *La figura del catechista nell’opera di Fr. Teodoreto*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 62 (1979) 1, 9-10; Cf CONTI, *Union of Catechists of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate*, 8; Cf E. SAVINO, «Fr. Teodoreto, o della vita comune», in UC (Ed.), *Documenti*, n. 14, Torino, 2003, 31-32 [first published in “Rivista Lasalliana” 28 (1954) 4].

¹¹⁸ T. GARBEROGLIO, *Catechisti Congregati*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 18 (1934) 5, 11: “Il Catechista non è soltanto tale quando in una Parrocchia o in una Scuola spiega il Catechismo, ma è ancora Catechista quando invita alla Comunione Pasquale un collega d’ufficio, quando di fronte alla sfacciata affermazione del male sa disapprovarlo e tenere un contegno atto a dimostrare che la virtù non è un mito, ma realtà fattiva, fonte di grandezza e di letizia nel mondo. Egli è Catechista per la strada, in chiesa, in famiglia, al ristorante, nell’aula della Università, nella caserma. Sempre e dovunque egli deve tenere un tale contegno che sia un apostolato.”

with it the whole idea of meditating the Paschal mystery which is indispensable for becoming better apostles of Christ participating in his death and resurrection.¹¹⁹

It is to be remembered that on the 21st of November 1935, the consecrated Catechists were affiliated to the Institute of the Brothers by the *Letter of Affiliation* of the Superior General, Br. Junien Victor.¹²⁰ And so, after the erection of the Union into a Secular Institute, was raised another difficult question in regard to the autonomy of the Union, which was at the same time a question on how to maintain its relationship with the Institute of the Brothers and its connection with the spirit of St. John Baptist de La Salle, just as Br. Teodoreto wanted it to be. The question of the autonomy of the Union caused great difficulty because in those times the formation of groups around the circle of the same root was not considered as something positive and there was no much reflection on ‘shared-mission’.¹²¹ Therefore, in order to clear-up the question of continuity in diversity it was necessary to clarify what was essential and unchangeable and what was secondary; what was common with the Brothers and what was not.¹²² Above all, it was necessary to see the Union in the light of God’s plan. In fact, as Dr. Conti stated: “Seen in this way, the Union’s autonomy does not present any difficulty. In fact, it favours a reciprocal understanding not as a relationship of dependence and hegemony but seen as a commitment to discover and validate the respective identities with a common Lasallian spirit and to better accomplish the common mission with profound cooperation both from within and outside of the school.”¹²³

The Union has always tried to maintain relations with the Institute of the Brothers.¹²⁴ For a long time Brothers have collaborated in directing the Union and in the formation of Catechists.

¹¹⁹ Cf CONTI, *Union of Catechists of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate*, 8.

¹²⁰ Cf RICCARDI, *Maestro di vita oltre la scuola*, 64; Cf UC, *Chi siamo*, 23, n. 27.

¹²¹ Cf D. CONTI, «40° anniversario della morte del Venerabile Fratel Teodoreto: antesignano della “Famiglia Lasalliana” e della “missione condivisa”», in UC (Ed.), *Documenti*, n. 13, Torino, 2003, 9-11.

¹²² Cf ID., *Union of Catechists of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate*, 8-9.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹²⁴ On 19th March 1949, the Superior General of the Brothers Frère Athanase Émile, with the Circular n° 328, entirely dedicated to the Union, underlined the Lasallian character of the Union, made it known in the entire Institute and recommended its diffusion in all the communities of the Brothers all over the world, always respecting its autonomy (Cf UC, *Chi siamo*, 27). For more details of this very important Circular considered as the ‘Magna Charta’ that regulates the relationships between the Institute of the Brothers and the Catechists’

In addition, Brothers have always been provided as Advisors in the Union’s General and also local Councils. Certainly the Institute of Brothers has given much to the Union. In 1991, under the proposal of the Superior General of the Institute, Br. John Johnston, a commission composed of Brothers and Catechists was set up with the purpose of examining common problems and for mutual support. In 1993, the 42nd General Chapter of the Brothers, in which the President of the Union at that time, Dr. Domenico Conti, participated, adopted a concrete position in regard to the relationship between the two Institutes.¹²⁵ Today there is a lot of collaboration between the Brothers and the Catechists, and wherever they work together the identity of each is respected and their communion is manifested.¹²⁶

4.5. *Female and Priest Branches*

In regard to the foundation of a female branch that shares the same finality, spirituality, charism and mission of the Union, one day when a certain Brother asked Br. Teodoreto whether he foresees a possibility for such a project, he replied saying that he not only foresees but is already working for its concretization. It seems that already in 1949 Br. Teodoreto had very clear intentions. It is indicated in a letter written to him by his spiritual director, Rev. Fr. Arturo Maria Piombino, on 10th July 1949 – a letter that seems to give a response to a precise question asked by Br. Teodoreto. This letter states that since the Brothers normally do not occupy themselves with female institutional activities, for assuming such an initiative it was necessary to have the permission of Superiors, unless the work would come out and develop independently as a new institution, completely separated from the Brothers of the Christian

Union: Cf G. VERRI, *L'Istituto dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane e l'Unione Catechisti del SS. Crocifisso e di Maria SS. Immacolata*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 56 (1973) 1, 9-14.

¹²⁵ Cf CONTI, *Union of Catechists of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate*, 20-21.

¹²⁶ In the 43rd General Chapter of the Brothers, there was a continuation and development of what had been deliberated in the previous General Chapter. In this Chapter, that took place in May-June 2000, the Union and the House of Charity – together with the other Institutes and groups who share the mission and spirituality of the Brothers – were recognized as associated to the Institute of the Brothers. In his turn, the President of the Union at that time, Leonardo Rollino, in expressing a response stated that the members of the Union as well as the House of Charity as an association, from the origins, have always felt associated to the Institute of the Brothers, through Br. Teodoreto, sharing in the same mission and spirituality and cultivating the spirit of collaboration (Cf L. ROLLINO, *43° Capitolo Generale dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 84 (2001) 1, 33-35).

Schools. There is no doubt that Br. Teodoreto had asked his Superiors and that he had obtained the desired authorization, since just from that period he started to have a regular contact with three female catechists: one in Turin, one in Trieste and the other in Rome – all of them with a great desire to realize the project.¹²⁷ Most probably it might be them – especially the ones of Turin and Trieste – who had originally proposed the idea for the initiation of the female branch. In fact, in one of his letters to the catechist in Rome dated 31st of August 1951, Br. Teodoreto, referring to the catechist in Turin wrote that she wanted to initiate a nucleus of female Catechists with the same Rules and Constitutions that were already approved for the male Catechists of the Union. The Church authority took into consideration her proposal and sent her to a competent person who examined her and allowed her to do the novitiate in accordance to the Rules and prepared her for a future apostolate.¹²⁸

Therefore, already in 1951, there was such a desire and a tentative to concretize the project. Br. Teodoreto was encouraging this woman and was doing all his best though in the greater part he left her to the guidance of her spiritual director. In a letter which he wrote to the same catechist in Rome, on 12th of November 1951, he stated: “If in a period of one year, Jesus enables her to meet two or three persons determined to follow her in the love of Jesus Crucified, her spiritual director will allow her to initiate the female branch of Catechists of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate which will be entirely independent from the male branch.”¹²⁹ In another letter of 1st June 1952 he clearly stated his intentions for the future in this way: “Following the Rules of the Secular Institute of Catechists of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate, to form a Pious Union approved by the Church authority which is then to

¹²⁷ Br. Teodoreto, when referring to these women in his letters, used the name of the city where they were living and for two of them he was also using the initials of their names as follows: ‘the woman of Trieste’ or Miss C. M.; ‘the woman of Turin’ or Miss A. M. B.; and ‘the woman of Rome’ (Cf DI MARIA, *Fratel Teodoreto*, 286-289).

¹²⁸ Cf *Ibid.*, 285-286.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 287: “*Se nel corso di un anno, Gesù Le fa incontrare due o tre anime decise di seguire Lei nell’amore di Gesù Crocifisso, il Padre Spirituale Le permetterà di iniziare la Sezione Catechiste del SS. Crocifisso e di Maria Immacolata che sarà interamente indipendente dai Catechisti.*”

be erected as a Secular Institute of female Catechists which would have only a spiritual relationship with the male Catechists.”¹³⁰

In other letters written in the year 1952, Br. Teodoreto informs the catechist in Rome about the encounter of the two catechists of Turin and of Trieste and how they decided to initiate the formation of female Catechists in Trieste, according to the Regulations of the Union, under the leadership of the one of Trieste. It seemed a good start; however, soon they had to face great difficulties. One of the major difficulties was an opposition from the Church authority, the Bishop, who approved the formation of catechists as such but disapproved the Union. Br. Teodoreto was telling them to be docile to the bishop and to continue to pray. In fact, after some time, as it can be noted in a letter written on 14th of May 1953, the adaptation of the Rules and Constitutions was permitted to them.¹³¹ In addition, Br. Teodoreto was giving them important practical directions, and particularly, he was encouraging them to encounter in monthly Retreats as a necessary condition and he always continued to pray for them. In his last letter to Trieste written on Good Friday, 16th April 1954, less than one month before his death states: “I hope in Jesus Crucified and in Mary Immaculate to continue to pray, for all the life that remains to me, for the ideals of the two Institutes.”¹³² Here, when Br. Teodoreto wrote ‘two Institutes’ meant the male and female Institutes.

The dream of Br. Teodoreto was realized in 1988 with the consecration of the first three female catechists – two from Italy and one from Eritrea – on the 8th of December, feast of Immaculate Conception, in Turin.¹³³ While the female Association as such was founded, with its own proper Statutes, on 8th December 2006 in the General Centre of the Union in Turin with the hope that one day it would be recognized as a female Secular Institute.¹³⁴ Today this

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*: “Seguendo il Regolamento dell’Istituto secolare dei Catechisti del SS. Crocifisso e di Maria SS.ma Immacolata formare una Pia Unione approvata dalla Autorità Ecclesiastica e poi eretta ad Istituto secolare delle Catechiste le quali abbiano solamente relazioni spirituali con i Catechisti.”

¹³¹ Cf *Ibid.*, 288-289.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 290: “Spero in Gesù Crocifisso e Maria SS. Immacolata di continuare per tutta la vita che mi resta, a pregare per gl’ideali dei due Istituti.”

¹³³ These three Catechists are Ms. Emanuela Cagnetta and Ms. Carolina Cagnetta, two sisters from Italy, and Ms. Izghilewa Ghebrehawariat from Eritrea.

¹³⁴ The female Association was constituted on the bases of Art. 725 of the Code of Canon Law that permits SII to include such associations (Cf UC, *Indicazioni su identità, origine e sviluppo dell’Unione*, 20, n. 21).

Association has some members with perpetual vows, some others with temporary vows and several candidates in the process of formation. Till their definitive recognition as an autonomous Secular Institute, the female Catechists enter into the Union – the male Secular Institute – to make part of it as consecrated-associated Catechists.¹³⁵

As it is demonstrated in one of his letters written on 2nd September 1952, there was also another project that was developing in the mind of Br. Teodoreto namely that of priest Catechists of the Union. In this letter, after stating that the female Catechists need to collaborate with the parish priest in their proper parish, he wrote: “We should wait, instead, to collaborate with the Diocesan Catechetical Office as long as Rev. Fr. L.D.R. has not compiled the «Rule of life for the secular priest Catechists», which is to be inserted in the Rules of the Catechists’ Union of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate.”¹³⁶ This project for priest members or for a separate priestly branch is not yet realized today, but there is hope that it will come out in the near future.¹³⁷

5. First General Presidents of the Union

The Catechists’ Union, in its development and diffusion, owes a lot to the successive General Presidents, together with their Councilors, and the first Catechists,¹³⁸ who following the example of Br. Teodoreto have brought it forth faithfully and vigorously giving everything for the full realization of the intentions of the founder. They were/are men of great spiritual, human and professional qualities and have carried out their responsibility with a total constructive dedication. The Psalmist says: “He went off, went off weeping, carrying the seed.

¹³⁵ Cf ID., *Associazione Unione Catechiste di Gesù Crocifisso e di Maria Immacolata*. Statuto, Torino, 2006, 5-9.

¹³⁶ DI MARIA, *Fratel Teodoreto*, 290: “Si aspetti invece a collaborare con l’Ufficio Catechistico Diocesano fino a che il Rev. Padre L.D.R. non avrà compilato il «Regolamento di vita per i Sacerdoti secolari Catechisti», da inserirsi nelle Regole dell’Unione Catechisti del SS. Crocifisso e di Maria SS.ma Immacolata.”

¹³⁷ Several concrete tentatives had already been made starting from 1972 where there had been the first ordination to priesthood of a certain Catechist, but it did not workout (Cf C. TESSITORE, *Il Ramo Sacerdotale dell’Unione*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 55 (1972) 2, 9).

¹³⁸ Some of the first Catechists (now deceased) include: Giovanni Baiano (1911-1941), Carlo Demaria (1901-1961), Peter Chan (1951-1973), Giovanni Cordiale (1897-1981), Claudio Brusa (1927-1982), Pietro Bagna (1922-1987), Giovanni Fonti (1911-1993), Francesco Fonti (1909-1999). For their biography: Cf P. ROGGERO (Ed.), *Unione Catechisti del Crocifisso e di Maria Immacolata: Materiale per la formazione* [CD-ROM, Versione 2.1], Torino, 2007.

He comes back singing, bringing in his sheaves.”¹³⁹ These men, presented below, have transmitted what they have received from the founder with great integrity and, paying so much sacrifice, have given the Union a solid ground.

5.1. *Giovanni Cesone (1926-1933)*

The first General President of the Union, Giovanni Cesone, was born on 26th July 1898, in Turin. He had lost his father at an early age and had to face the economic difficulties in his family just from this young age. He frequented the popular schools of ROMI where he came to know Br. Teodoreto. The historical encounter took place in April 1913, at the initial establishment of the first nucleus of the future Catechists’ Union. Br. Teodoreto was going to various classes of the school to select good boys – in study, character and prayer – and he liked Giovanni just at a first sight. Later he became his spiritual guide and essential point of reference for his constant growth. Giovanni had found in him a secure paternal affection and with time, a holy friendship had developed between them two.¹⁴⁰

His catechetical apostolate initiated in the time of his adolescence when he started teaching children in a parish; and later on, he was also teaching Religion in a school. After his professional preparation, Giovanni dedicated himself, full time, to the Union taking various commitments. Under the guide of Br. Teodoreto he became the first General President of the Union for seven years from 1926 to 1933, and then he undertook the task of economic administrator. From 1931 till 1964 he was also teaching several courses in the “House of Charity for Arts and Crafts”. He had followed all the crucial periods of first developments of the Union including those of the “House of Charity”. He is also one of the few Catechists who had the opportunity of knowing Fr. Leopold personally.¹⁴¹ He encountered him for the first time on 16th August 1917. He was collaborating with him in the diffusion of the *Devotion*, and during the last moments, when he was sick in bed, he was visiting him.¹⁴² Out of great love,

¹³⁹ Ps 126: 6.

¹⁴⁰ Cf PIZZIO, *Giovanni Cesone*, 3-7; Cf ROGGERO, *Unione Catechisti: Materiale per la formazione* [CD].

¹⁴¹ Cf G. CESONE, *I miei colloqui con Fra Leopoldo*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 45 (1961) 5/6, 110-114.

¹⁴² Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 225.

even after the death of Fr. Leopold, he continued frequenting the convent in memory of him and used to pass hours in the chapel where the Servant of God received the revelations. He had profoundly interiorized the *Diary* which penetrated all his life and catechetical works.¹⁴³

Giovanni died on 28th November 1964, at the age of sixty-six. As a faithful soldier, he dedicated himself to the cause of the Union for fifty-one years. For the Union, his presence had become a guarantee of continuity as it was a constant presence from the period of foundation to the first phases of development. The life of Giovanni was a proof of the possibility of concretizing the evangelical call in a daily reality of a great industrial metropolis. Surely it is difficult to find united in one person various responsibilities of a higher level and all accomplished with great readiness and docility to the Holy Spirit. For the founder, Giovanni was the ‘pupil of his eyes’, very much loved by him. For the Catechists’ Union, more than being a determined administrator, he was the standard-bearer and the untiring animator. He was very humble, always smiling and gentle of character, extremely zealous for the development and diffusion of the Union and possessed very effective skills in teaching the young. He was man of deep interior life of prayer which was greatly noted in his virtuous life and in his catechetical teachings.¹⁴⁴

5.2. Carlo Tessitore (1933-1966)

The second General President of the Union, Dr. Carlo Tessitore, was born on the 4th of October 1902, in Orio, Italy. He was the first born of his parents with four younger sisters. Following his father, who died in 1921, he took the responsibility of sustaining his family. He spent his young age between Turin and Orio, working and studying. Later on, he finished his studies in Economic and Commercial Sciences. Carlo came to know the Union for the first time by way of a Catechist called Massaia who was offering services in the parish of S. Thomas in Turin – where Fr. Leopold was living. This Catechist invited him to come to the

¹⁴³ Cf ROGGERO, *Unione Catechisti: Materiale per la formazione* [CD]; Cf V. MOCCIA, *Rag. Giovanni Cesone e Dr. Carlo Tessitore*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 92 (2009) 1, 17.

¹⁴⁴ Cf PIZZIO, *Giovanni Cesone*, 8-13.

classes of catechesis and Carlo started attending with great joy. He first encountered Br. Teodoreto in 1917, when he was about fifteen years old and was so much impressed by him.¹⁴⁵

In 1921, at the age of nineteen, he was aspiring to become a priest. But at this time, his father had already died and his mother begged him not to let her alone with her daughters who were only adolescents. Therefore, taking into consideration the situation of his family he renounced to religious life. Later, he was very much impressed by the knowledge that a lay profession can be reconciled with consecration. It was an ideal solution for him who desired so much to consecrate himself to God but who had also to carry out familial obligations. In 1922, he was already an aspirant Catechist, and in 1925, at the proposal of the Archbishop of Turin, Giuseppe Gamba, he became one of those twelve young men selected by Br. Teodoreto, to start the first nucleus of congregated (consecrated) Catechists. In reality, the first consecration of Carlo was postponed to 1927, but only in obedience to his spiritual father who suggested to him that, in that young age, it would be difficult to live evangelical counsels outside a religious community.¹⁴⁶

Just from a young age, he had undertaken great responsibilities in the Union. In 1928, he undertook the task of formation of ‘novices’, during which his educational competence and ability, particularly his pedagogical sensibility, were revealed to all. In addition, in those years he was dedicating himself for the fruitfulness of the spiritual retreats given to the Catechists of the Union. He was elected President in 1933 and maintained this responsibility till 1966. Together with Br. Teodoreto and the other Catechists he worked hard for the recognition of the Union as a Secular Institute. Again, at the side of Br. Teodoreto, he dedicated himself to an

¹⁴⁵ Cf S. PIZZIO (Ed.), *Carlo Tessitore. Catechista consacrato*, Torino, Unione Catechisti, 2001, 11-12; Cf ROGGERO, *Unione Catechisti: Materiale per la formazione* [CD]. In regard to the first encounter with Br. Teodoreto, Dr. Carlo Tessitore witnessed that he had never made an experience like that before. He was impressed by the radiant, smiling and calm figure of Br. Teodoreto. Despite the fact that he was so much reserved in all his actions, Br. Teodoreto greeted all the young men in the class individually with so much sweetness and attention that inspired confidence and respect. Dr. Tessitore stated that in the presence of Br. Teodoreto every less-noble thought would disappear instantly and a climate of seriousness and spiritual recollection would come out. Br. Teodoreto talked about simple but very true and just things, creating a very fervent and efficacious enthusiasm (Cf C. TESSITORE, *Il venticinquennio del Fr. Teodoreto*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 62 (1979) 1, 3-7; Cf ID., «*Appunti sulla figura morale di Fr. Teodoreto*», 13-15).

¹⁴⁶ Cf PIZZIO, *Carlo Tessitore*, 12-16; Cf D. CONTI, *La morte del dr. Carlo Tessitore*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 78 (1995) 4, 4.

intense study for the revision of the previous Constitutions formulated in 1914. Under his collaboration, the Rules for consecrated Catechists approved in 1933 by Cardinal Maurilio Fossati – which indicated only annual vows and which were deprived of the vow of poverty – were also revised in 1938, in the General Assembly of Catechists where the perpetual vows and the vow of poverty were added. From the beginning he had sustained the project for the “House of Charity” and fought for its development with great energy and sacrifice. He has a great merit for the fact that it has now become a great school. He had also taught there for about thirty years though, in respect to the other responsibilities he had, this activity was only marginal. In 1954, after the death of Br. Teodoreto who was directing the Bulletin of the Union from 1926, he also received the responsibility as director and editor which he maintained for many years.¹⁴⁷

Historically, the period of his presidency has left a great impression. Under his presidency the Union had made great developments including its diffusion in the world which came about with the collaboration of several Lasallian Brothers. In this period, the Union in Arequipa and in Lima had obtained official recognition from the local bishops, on 26th June 1958 and 28th March 1960, respectively; and a new Centre was inaugurated in Barcelona on 8th December 1960.¹⁴⁸ Dr. Carlo, accompanied by Br. Gustavo Furfaro,¹⁴⁹ had made visits to Spain (7-16 April 1963) and to Peru (18 July-13 August 1963). Later, from 1989 he had to undergo a period of continuous suffering that lasted for seven years, after which he died on 2nd October 1995. He was so much admired for the special qualities he had particularly his great sense of

¹⁴⁷ Cf PIZZIO, *Carlo Tessitore*, 16-50; Cf MOCCIA, *Rag. Giovanni Cesone e Dr. Carlo Tessitore*, 17.

¹⁴⁸ As it will be shown, at this time the Union already existed in Eritrea, with numerous members, but it succeeded to make a first contact with the principal Centre in Turin only in 1969.

¹⁴⁹ Br. Gustavo Luigi Furfaro (1919-1996), an exemplar person of great quality, was the second General Assessor in the history of the Catechists’ Union. He offered this service for thirty-three years. He was a passionate advocator of the Union, always intervening in its activities. He sustained the Union during the General Chapters of his Institute, the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He was a true apostle of the ‘Adoration of Jesus Crucified’, continuously committing himself to its practice and diffusion. He also worked hard for the House of Charity, particularly in finding benefactors. He sustained the Mass of the Poor for almost fifty years, animating volunteers. In general, he entirely shared the mission of Br. Teodoreto for the Union (Cf D. CONTI, *Il Fratello Assessore Generale dell’Unione Catechisti*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 73 (1990) 1, 10-13; Cf V. MOCCIA, *Nel ricordo di Fr. Gustavo, assessore generale dell’Unione*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 89 (2006) 2, 28; Cf B. BORDONE, *Fr. Gustavo, discepolo di Fr. Teodoreto*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 89 (2006) 2, 29).

humanity, profound equilibrium, interior integrity and self control – qualities that merited him great respect. He was serious in character; very eloquent in speech, capable of expressing great ideas with great simplicity; and was very rigid with himself.¹⁵⁰

5.3. *Domenico Conti (1966-1997)*

The third General President of the Union, Dr. Domenico Conti, was born on the 12th of April 1921, in Turin. He had one brother, now deceased. He frequented elementary school in the Institute for Arts and Crafts in Turin, directed by the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and then he studied in a Technical Institute (*Istituto Tecnico Statale ‘Amedeo Avogadro’*) where he obtained a Diploma as an expert in Chemistry (*Diploma Perito Chimico*). He participated in the Second World War during which he became a Lieutenant. He rendered military services in Yugoslavia, Slovenia, Dalmatia and Croatia, during which – and after – he had to undergo a period of immense suffering, a situation of great grief and confusion.¹⁵¹

Though, he already knew Br. Teodoreto as a young boy in the school of the Brothers, he had a first personal encounter with him in 1945, after the War, and was so much impressed by him. For Dr. Conti, it was a period of so much tension and darkness. As he said, God permitted it in order to bring him closer to Him. After the first meeting, he continued frequenting Br. Teodoreto for a period of time, he started to reflect on Jesus Crucified and under the guidance of Br. Teodoreto he matured his vocation deciding to become a consecrated Catechist of the Union. In reality, as he narrates, the idea of consecration had at first caused him so much tribulation, but later when he decided to accept it for love of God it caused him great joy and he received great force and courage. In 1947, he started his first formation, which at that time was called ‘novitiate’, uniting himself to the group which was already established one year before under the guidance of Br. Teodoreto. In 1945, he had participated in the required exam of maturity (*maturità letteraria*) for initiating studies in the University of Turin and by this time, i.e., in 1947, he was already completing his first

¹⁵⁰ Cf PIZZIO, *Carlo Tessitore*, 51-60; Cf ROGGERO, *Unione Catechisti: Materiale per la formazione* [CD].

¹⁵¹ D. CONTI, interview, Turin, Centro La Salle, 7th December 2009.

University studies. His formation took place together with the others in the College of St. Joseph of Turin, every Sunday morning after Mass and the formator was Br. Teodoreto himself. On 15th August 1948, in coincidence with the recognition of the Union as a Secular Institute, he professed his first consecration, following spiritual exercises in Castelvechio, Turin. In 1959, he professed his perpetual consecration for a total donation to Jesus Crucified.¹⁵²

Undertaking further studies in the University he also obtained a doctorate degree in Philosophy. After this, he dedicated himself – full time – to the “House of Charity for Arts and Crafts”, first as a professor and then as a General Director. In 1966, he was elected as the General President of the Union, and having been re-elected several times he undertook this responsibility till 1997. Dr. Conti narrates that he had had strong desire to continue his philosophical researches in the University, but leaving this he accepted to be President of the Union. In his life, he had also undertaken the task of a politician and had had many contacts with the Political Authorities in Turin as well as in Rome. For several years, he carried out a task as a Councillor in the local administration of Turin (*Comune di Torino*) and also as a Councillor in charge of Labour (*Assessore al Lavoro*) for the Region of Piedmont.¹⁵³

Dr. Conti, as he said, was so much touched by the intentions of the founder and strongly moved by the message of Jesus to Fr. Leopold (of 24th November 1919) that says: “To save souls, to form new generations, Houses of Charity must be opened in order to make young men learn Arts and Trades.”¹⁵⁴ In fact, he dedicated himself fully and made maximum efforts for this ideal. The fourth General President of the Union, Sig. Leonardo Rollino, narrates that in the long period of his presidency, Dr. Conti, had done so much for the Union that a separate study is needed to mention it all; however, not always was he appreciated for what he was doing. In reality, it was him who had laid the foundation even for the actual developments of the Union and of the “House of Charity”, and it was him who had opened wider horizons in regard to the apostolate of the Union giving stress to the social aspect and clearly defining the

¹⁵² ID., interview, 7th December 2009.

¹⁵³ ID., interview, 7th December 2009.

¹⁵⁴ GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 160: “Per salvare le anime, per formare nuove generazioni, si devono aprire Case di Carità per far imparare ai giovani Arti e Mestieri.”

apostolate of the Union as catechetical, educative and social. Before this, the apostolate of the Union was focused mainly on the catechetical and educative aspects though from the beginning the founder had wanted a wider social apostolate.¹⁵⁵ In the last few years, Dr. Conti is living in the Lasallian Centre in Turin, always as Counsellor of the Union.

5.4. *Leonardo Rollino (1998-2003)*

The fourth General President of the Union, Sig. Leonardo Rollino, was born on the 11th of June 1922, in Turin. He is the only child which his parents had. From 1934 to 1938, for five years, he frequented the Institute for Arts and Crafts in Turin which was directed by the Brothers of the Christian Schools – one year in the old historical site, via delle Rosine 14, and four years in another site, Corso Trapani 25, where he obtained a Certificate in Technical Studies and where he came to know Br. Teodoreto. He had also frequented an Association, within a Lasallian Institute, which according to the intentions of Br. Teodoreto was a branch of the Union for youth. This Association, reborn today as Association of Mary Immaculate (AMI), was attached to the Catholic Action and was open to all forms of vocations, helping the young people to mature their vocation. In this Association, Br. Teodoreto was reuniting them every week, giving everyone a duty according to their age. The youngest ones (zealots) were invited to dedicate themselves to the diffusion and practice of the *Devotion* in their familial environment. While, those who were more than sixteen years were invited, after an acquisition of a Diocesan Diploma, to dedicate themselves to the catechesis of children in a nearby parish that was to be carried out every Sunday morning after Mass for half an hour. As an adolescent and a young man, Leonardo had participated in these activities both as a zealot and as a catechist in the parish of St. Bernardino of the Franciscan Fathers, where he had received the Sacraments of Holy Communion and Confirmation and where he made part of the association “Little Friends of St. Francis” (*Piccoli amici di S. Francesco*). Leonardo carried out his second more consistent experience of catechesis after the Second World War (1944-1945), i.e., after his return from the military service, in the parish of Nativity of Mary (*Natività*

¹⁵⁵ ROLLINO, interview, 5th December 2009.

di Maria) where his parents were married and where he had received the Sacrament of Baptism. It was in this period and in this atmosphere that he matured his vocation and decided to be a consecrated Catechist of the Union.¹⁵⁶

Leonardo had started his formation in 1946, one year before Dr. Domenico Conti. His formator was Br. Teodoreto. The formation took place in the College of St. Joseph of Turin, together with other two young men, every Sunday in two meetings in the morning after Mass. In the same afternoon, the meetings were continuing under the guide of the Catechist Pietro Fonti, who also accompanied the young men in short trips and walks with the intention of creating fraternity among them, helping them to know each other more and more. These regular meetings were accompanied by other moments of prayer, monthly retreats and annual spiritual exercises. In addition, beyond the specific formation in regard to the Union, they had to frequent a quadrennial course of theology which was given for the doctrinal formation of lay people, and there were other recommended readings of classical spiritual books. The first formation was concluded on 15th August 1947, feast of Assumption of Mary, when he professed his first consecration, following spiritual exercises in Villa S. Croce (S. Mauro Torinese) directed by the Jesuits.¹⁵⁷

From 1946, after a day-time work, he was also frequenting a Technical Institute (*Istituto ‘Amedeo Avogadro’*) for regaining his scholastic formation that was interrupted by the War. After four years of study, in 1950, he obtained a Diploma as an expert in Industrial Mechanics (*Diploma di Perito Industriale Meccanico*) and continued his professional and apostolic activity in the “House of Charity for Arts and Crafts” – in via Feletto – where daily courses were beginning in addition to the evening and summer courses that were going on from 1929. As a professor, he was teaching Mechanical Technology, Technical Designs and Religion. In the same year, i.e., 1950, the “House of Charity” was transferred to the actual site, in Corso Benedetto Brin, and under the presidency of Dr. Carlo Tessitore and the impulse of Dr. Domenico Conti, there was a considerable improvement in the quality of the courses that

¹⁵⁶ ID., interview, 5th December 2009.

¹⁵⁷ ID., interview, 5th December 2009.

were given. The young people who studied there were finding job immediately, especially in the sector of electro-mechanics.¹⁵⁸

On 15th August 1958, he professed his perpetual consecration in Villa S. Ignazio in Genova. His main career in life was as entrepreneur. From 1946 till his retirement in 1985, he dedicated himself in the “House of Charity” in different occupations, on the basis of his profession and on the basis of necessity, both in the day-time as well as evening program, the last twenty-five years of which, i.e., from 1960, he undertook the task of a Director with an opportunity to be close to thousands of young people and their families. Starting from 1987, he was visiting the local Centres of the Union: successively, he made four journeys to Eritrea,¹⁵⁹ about ten journeys to Peru, Bolivia and to other surrounding countries, and two to Brazil. He was also following the different projects of these Centres especially that of the Catechetical Centre of Asmara and the House of Charity of Arequipa. In the years that followed, he undertook different responsibilities in the Union: as economic administrator, Secretary, Counsellor and President for six years from 1998 to 2003. After this, up to 2006, he was once again economic administrator and archivist of the Union. In the last few years, he had undertaken another very important responsibility as formator of female Catechists and at the same time was following their development as a female branch of the Union.¹⁶⁰ As a formator, Sig. Rollino is noted for his extreme gentleness, openness and loving attitude; in a word he has an exceptional quality of a true father. From March 2009 he is living in the Lasallian Centre in Turin together with Dr. Conti, and recently, he was one of the major counsellors in the 11th General Assembly of the Union that took place in this Lasallian Centre, from the 28th of December till the 6th of January.

¹⁵⁸ ID., interview, 5th December 2009.

¹⁵⁹ The first visit of the General President of the Union to the Centre in Eritrea took place in 1987. The President at that time, Dr. Domenico Conti, was accompanied by Sig. Leonardo Rollino, Sig. Leandro Pierbattisti and another Catechist from Turin.

¹⁶⁰ ROLLINO, interview, 5th December 2009.

5.5. *Leandro Pierbattisti (2004-2009)*

The fifth General President of the Union, Sig. Leandro Pierbattisti, was born on 28th of August 1931, in Gabicce Mare, Italy. He is the third of eight brothers and sisters. He dedicated himself to work at a very young age. From 1948-1949, he was working in the industry of bicycle *Frijus*. In 1950, due to certain necessity but with his own consent, he was transferred to the industry *Fiat Mirafiori*, where after few days he met a friend from oratory who narrated to him of a certain person working in that industry saying that this person talked of so many interesting things in regard to religious and moral problems and telling Leandro that he had to meet this person. Leandro went to meet him and made a long interesting conversation with him. This person, joyful and light-hearted, was called Sig. Marietta Attilio. He was much elder than Leandro and was working for *Fiat* as carpenter. In a short time, a deep and sincere friendship started between them and in one of their conversations Sig. Marietta told Leandro about the Catechists’ Union and of Br. Teodoreto and of the formative meetings that were carried out on Saturday afternoons. Leandro was very interested and started to frequent some of these meetings; the first one of which, that moved him very much, was about the grace of God given to men. Occasionally, but for years, he continued participating in these meetings and came to know Br. Teodoreto and to talk to him personally. However, in that time Br. Teodoreto, as a result of a paresis he had, was not able to express himself very well and so he entrusted Leandro to Sig. Marietta for clarifying eventual questions.¹⁶¹

After the death of Br. Teodoreto in 1954, in one spiritual retreat, he encountered Fr. Arturo Maria Piombino, the spiritual director of Br. Teodoreto, who also became his spiritual director. This priest was a very saintly person to whom the Virgin Mary had been revealed several times. Leandro was meeting him every week and sustained by him, in 1956, he started his formation for becoming a consecrated Catechist of the Union. On 17th August 1958, following his spiritual exercises in Genova, he professed his first consecration,. His first apostolate was accompanying some work companions to Fr. Piombino for confession; and at the same time, together with other members of the Union, was organizing some groups of the

¹⁶¹ L. PIERBATTISTI, interview, Turin, Centro La Salle, 6th December 2009.

youth branch of the Union (AMI) in his parish where there were many young people. Every Sunday, he was also helping some seminarians (*Orionini*) who were studying in a nearby city and were entrusted to him as helpers in catechesis. Later, the group of parish catechists, where he and the other members of the Union belonged, was consolidated and Leandro was given the responsibility of directing the catechetical courses. He undertook this responsibility for several years. In the same period, he was also organizing spiritual exercises for the young people of the “House of Charity” and was also organizing school camps for adolescents in the place of spirituality of the Union (*La Sorgente*). For several years, he prepared groups of adults for the Sacrament of Confirmation.¹⁶²

In the Union, in addition to so many other commitments, he had undertaken the task of General Director and formator. He was elected President in the 10th General Assembly that took place in the period between the end of December 2003 and beginning of January 2004. He had worked hard, with so much effort, for the general development of the Union, particularly for the progress and consolidation of the group of married Catechists as couples. For many years, he had been visiting and following the development of the local Centres of the Union. During his presidency he had organized many conferences and had made many presentations on very significant themes. In the last few years, by way of circular letters, he had communicated very profound messages, fruit of his long time reflections, particularly on the theme of vocational pastoral (*pastorale vocazionale*). Sig. Leandro is distinguished for his deep spirituality as his mother who was much noted for her profound faith and spirituality; in fact, from his family have come out many vocations to priesthood and consecrated life. In the last General Assembly of the Union, he was substituted by Dr. Piero Bernardo Roggero who is elected President for the coming six years (2010-2015).¹⁶³

¹⁶² ID., interview, 6th December 2009.

¹⁶³ Today in Italy, in Turin, there are seven male and five female consecrated members; in addition, there are four associated Catechists and other six associated Catechists as spouses.

6. Expansion of the Union

In more or less the same period, the Union, with the collaboration of devoted Lasallian Brothers had spread to other countries of Europe, particularly Spain,¹⁶⁴ to several countries in Africa and Latin America. Generally, the development of the local Centers in these countries was accomplished in progressive phases: the practice and diffusion of the *Devotion*; the approval from the respective local bishops; the official inauguration of the Centers; preliminary contact with the principal Centre in Turin; visits of the local Presidents to Turin; the eventual visit of the General President to the local Centers.

6.1. *The Union in Africa*

In Africa, the Catechists’ Union is present mainly in Eritrea though it is to be noted that there had been and still are present groups who practice the *Devotion* to Jesus Crucified in several provinces of Ethiopia and in Congo. As it will be shown below, in its establishment in Eritrea, the Union had undergone various progressive changes.

6.1.1. *The Union in Eritrea as a Traditional Pious Association*

The Catechists’ Union started in Eritrea in 1958 as a traditional pious association called ‘*Mahber*’. The thought of beginning this Union came with the special initiative of a very devoted Italian Brother from the Lasallian Institute named Br. Adriano Celentano.¹⁶⁵ As it can

¹⁶⁴ As it has already been mentioned, a Centre of the Union was inaugurated in Barcelona, in 8th Dec. 1960, and already in 1966, there were eleven Centres in Spain; however, today there is no much activity of the Union there, though groups of prayer who practice the *Devotion* still exist.

¹⁶⁵ Br. Adriano Celentano (called Enrico) was born, in Naples, Italy, on 15th of Jun. 1875. His father was called Giovanni Celentano and his mother Ermelinda Errichiello. As adolescent, Enrico was full of life, enthusiasm, affection, very impetuous and decisive in his intentions. On the 9th of Sep. 1889, he joined the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Albano Laziale. After one year as aspirant, he was welcomed into the novitiate, in Albano, on the 1st of Oct. 1890; and on 8th Dec. of the same year, he put on the habit and was given the name Adriano di Maria. He professed his first vows on 3rd of Sep. 1893, always in Albano; and on 23rd of Sep. 1903, at the age of 28, he made his solemn profession of perpetual vows in Rome. He started his career as a teacher of first elementary in Rome at the end of 1893. Later he also obtained a diploma for teaching in secondary school. However, his activity as a teacher did not last for a long time; in the major part of his life he had to assume other responsibilities. Starting from 1904, he undertook the task of a Director. In Oct. 1910, at the age of 35, he became

be read in his biography, after his arrival to Eritrea, Br. Adriano was thinking of two great projects: one was about establishing a house where aspirants for the Lasallian Institute can be welcomed and another was a school for the formation of native teacher-catechists. In fact he was working hard and hopefully praying for the realization of his holy dreams.¹⁶⁶ Habtesllassie Abrha,¹⁶⁷ came to know Br. Adriano by the fact that he was occasionally going to Keren – a city about 90 Km from the capital city Asmara – to the house of the Lasallian Brothers to visit his cousin and friend Br. Daniel Mesghina.¹⁶⁸ And it was in 1956 that Br.

Provincial Visitor, supervising different Lasallian Institutes in the administrative as well as scholastic aspects providing the necessary personnel and resources. From 1919 he also carried out the task of directing a Novitiate house. Starting from 1938, for 22 years, he undertook the apostolate of a missionary with an extraordinary dynamism, fascinating initiatives and great charity. Br. Adriano departed for Africa at the age of 63 on Sep. 12th 1938 and arrived at the port of Massawa after one week on Sep. 19th 1938. On Feb. 5th 1939 he arrived to Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia, and started his missionary activity there. In 1942 all missionaries where obliged to leave the city of Addis Ababa and so Br. Adriano left with a great pain in leaving behind the work which he had started there. However, he had the possibility to stay in Asmara and start his activity there. Soon after his arrival to Asmara he started to think about an apostolate which the Brothers could carry out in Eritrea. The major area of his apostolate in Eritrea became Keren and it started in 1948. In Jul. 1960, after a serious illness, he was obliged to return back to Italy definitively and died on 24th of Jul. 1964. The present Lasallian community and school of San Joseph in Keren owe a great deal to his zeal. For a wider reading: Cf M. SBORCHIA, *Fratel Adriano di Maria delle Scuole Cristiane: educatore e missionario*, Roma, Casa Editrice A. & C., 1968.

¹⁶⁶ Cf *Ibid.*, 64-132.

¹⁶⁷ Habtesllassie Abrha (known as Habte) was born on the 4th of Feb. 1933 (27-05-1926 Ge'ez Calendar). His father was called Abrha Seghid and was a professor and writer; his mother, Ameteldet Nedele, who was known as Wubsefer (referring to her beauty), was a very courageous woman and devoted housewife. Habte started working at a very young age in different places. In 1961 he started his career as a teacher of English language, and in 1963 he was employed in a factory where he worked for 25 years in the administrative faculty. He was married and became father of a big family. In 1988 at the age of only 55 he decided to retire from his job in order to dedicate himself entirely to the Catechists' Union in Eritrea. Till the last moment of his life he had given everything without reserve – time, mind, and heart – to the Union. His entire life was remarkably characterized by the cross. His suffering started just from the time of his early adolescence when his mother died and he had to substitute her place in the family. There were other series of painful happenings that continuously came into his life, the most remarkable being the very cruel tortures he received in one of the worst prisons of the country, where he was providentially rescued from the sentence to death. The pain of this experience had accompanied him till the time of his death. However, as he himself was continuously saying, it had become a time of so much grace since it was in this prison that he profoundly opened himself to the most glorious wounds of Jesus Crucified. He died in Asmara, on 14th Sep. 2003, the day of the exaltation of the Cross, at the age of seventy, forty-five of which taking responsibility of the Union in Eritrea. He is to be distinguished by his unshakable trust in God, his heroic capacity to endure suffering, his courage in taking risks for the good of others and his extreme love and respect for the poor. Cf V. MOCCIA (Ed.), *Habtesllassië Abrha*, in “L'Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 86 (2003) 2, 33-34.

¹⁶⁸ Br. Habtemariam Mesghina (known by his religious name as Br. Daniel) was born on 24th Apr. 1927 (~16-08-1920 Ge'ez Calendar). His father was called Abba Mesghina Solomon and was an Orthodox priest; his mother was called Sellas Abrehe. In his young age desiring to be a diocesan priest joined the seminary in Keren, Eritrea.

Adriano first shared his intentions with Habteslassie simply telling him that he had made Br. Daniel a member of the Lasallian Institute and that he wanted to make him a member of the Union. In fact, it was Br. Adriano who had first accepted Br. Daniel to teach in the present day school of St. Joseph and later assisted him to become a member of the Lasallian Institute.¹⁶⁹

Habteslassie did not promptly accept what Br. Adriano was telling him nor did he understand very much. But, later on, seeing the great love and respect which the great Brother had towards him and seeing his insistence that went on for about two years he agreed to start. However, Br. Adriano himself did not give enough instructions and directives in regard to the Union. He simply told Habteslassie to organize – according to the traditional custom of the country – a group of twelve persons and to start an association, *Mahber*, with the name “Union of Jesus Crucified.”¹⁷⁰ Br. Adriano was a man who planned great projects without having anything at hand, entirely trusting in God’s providence, and so he wanted the Union to start in such a way. Therefore, in that year, 1958, with a group of twelve men the first nucleus of the Union started in Asmara. The members were gathering once a month praying together with a special devotion to Jesus Crucified and sharing their daily experiences. Soon another female group started with the same practice and the Union was developing quickly in quantity and in

In regard to the years which he passed in seminary, his teachers and companions witness that he was very mature and very exemplar in his spiritual life. However, very soon he realized that he was not called to that life and left. He started teaching in the actual school of St. Joseph of the Lasallian Institute, and attracted to the spirit of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, particularly to their educational mission, he decided to join them. Since there was no house of formation of the Institute at that time, in 1951 (~1944 Ge’ez Calendar) he was sent to Italy for formation and after two years of preparation on Dec. 25th 1953 (~16-04-1946 Ge’ez Calendar) he received the habit and the name Daniel. He returned back to Keren on 2nd Oct. 1955 (~22-01-1948 Ge’ez Calendar). Again he became a teacher in the school of St. Joseph. But his mission was not limited to this; he was committed to many other services. With a great zeal he also devoted himself to the direction and development of the Catechists’ Union in Keren bringing forth many fruits. He died at the age of about fifty-four on the 4th of Feb. 1981 (~27-05-1974 Ge’ez Calendar). Br. Daniel was very active, warm and sympathetic of character; an excellent preacher and possessed great teaching skills. He worked very hard without reserve for the good of his Institute, of the Union and of all his people (Liturgical commemoration of the 1st year anniversary of his death, Keren, 4th Feb. 1982, ~ 27-05-1975 Ge’ez Calendar).

¹⁶⁹ A. HABTESLLASSIE, personal conversations, Asmara, September 2001.

¹⁷⁰ For many years it was known as “Union of Jesus Crucified” but later on, progressively, it assumed the full title as “Catechists’ Union of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate.”

organization. Similar groups also developed in Keren and its surroundings under the guidance and direction of Br. Daniel as well as other Brothers who were collaborating with him.¹⁷¹

6.1.2. *The Union in Eritrea as a Catholic Movement*

In Asmara, the group was constantly encouraged by the most humble and holy bishop of that time, his Excellency Abune Abrha François (1961-1981), great promoter of the Union, who gave it an official recognition and offered himself as its spiritual guide and allowed the group that had become numerous to have an adequate space in the main Cathedral of *Kidane Mihret*. The members with an amazing collaboration contributed for the resources needed, cleaned and reconstructed the place given to them and started to gather and to perform different activities there. There were male and female groups of adults, as well as male and female groups of young people and a group of children. They were devoted to the Adoration of Jesus Crucified and to the diffusion of this *Devotion*. They had also a special devotion to the Immaculate Mother of God. The Union was offering a continuous formation in faith for its members especially the young ones. It was preparing spiritual dramas, songs and competitive sport groups. The members were giving a catechetical preparation for children for the Sacraments of Initiation. There were also many priests and religious who were participating and collaborating in its activities. The Union had become a wide Catholic movement in the local church and was bearing many fruits both in Asmara and in Keren. Habteslassie and Br. Daniel, were two harmonious persons, both in character and in way of directing, and by their union have given the local church such a contribution. However, the Union had also to face many difficulties as well. In 1961, it was already well organized with numerous members – more than three hundred in Asmara and almost the same number in Keren. In that year the Eritrean armed struggle had began and since many of the young members of the Union went to

¹⁷¹ HABTESLLASSIE, personal conversations, September 2001.

join this struggle for independence, the Ethiopian government started to put a suspicious eye on the Union in Asmara which had to take a grave responsibility for those young men.¹⁷²

After some years, one Italian Brother called Rogero, seeing this Union remarked to the members that he would collaborate with them in having contact with the Catechists’ Union in Italy as their origin. Therefore, in 1969, Habteslassie went to Italy and for the first time encountered the members of the Union in Turin and was enabled to communicate to the members in Eritrea something of the real identity of the Union. The contact with the Union in Turin was a very great event and helped the Union in taking proper form. But the Union had to face again another great difficulty in that, after Abune Abrha François, the members were obliged to leave the place in the Cathedral where they were gathering, and this actually led to a gradual disintegration of the groups and the suspension of most of the activities of the Union.¹⁷³

6.1.3. *The Union in Eritrea as a Secular Institute*

The above mentioned problems had their own advantage and were in some way providential because after these difficult happenings the Union started to reflect about its proper identity and started to work for the realization of this identity in the proper way. As Habteslassie said, one day in Italy, he desperately shared the situation of the Union in Eritrea with Br. Gustavo Furfaro,¹⁷⁴ who was the General Assessor as well as spiritual director of the Union. This Brother responded saying that till that time they had made the Union and the *Devotion* to Jesus Crucified to be known in the local area, which was really great, but that, in that particular time, God was calling them to study, discern and purify the overall situation and to make true members with a solid root. In fact, after that, there was a complete change of orientation. All the effort given was not so much in view of spreading the Union or in making numerous members – in fact, the members remained very few – but was in giving the Union

¹⁷² ID., personal conversations, September 2001; G. IZGHILEWA, *Historical Report of the Catechists’ Union in Eritrea* [presentation at the 11th General Assembly of the Union, Turin, Centro La Salle, 29th December 2009].

¹⁷³ HABTESLLASSIE, personal conversations, September 2001.

¹⁷⁴ See footnote n. 148 of this study.

its real identity. Externally, it seemed little was done in this period; however, it was in this period that much was done for the internal renewal of the Union. It was after such a time that the Union in Eritrea started to assume its identity as a Secular Institute starting, for the first time, formation program for consecrated members.¹⁷⁵

The Union also started to search for its own Centre in Asmara where it could carryout its projects and activities, and after so much trouble, a terrain was given by the government. With the collaboration of his Excellency Abune Zekarias Yohannes (1981-2001), the process of construction started and went on with the economic and moral support of the Union in Italy. However, from 1991, it had to be suspended continuously due to the situations in Eritrea – the government having to make sensor of all land properties – and also as a result of the scarcity of resources, but always with a great hope that one day this project would be completed and will start to provide fruitful services for the local church as well as the society of Eritrea especially the young.¹⁷⁶ Lately, there was a proposal shared with the current bishop of the Diocese of Asmara, his Excellency Abune Menghsteab Tesfamariam, great friend and collaborator of the Union, for a possibility to make this Centre an Eparchial or National Catechetical Centre.¹⁷⁷

Today there are three consecrated women of the Union in Eritrea, the first consecrated Catechist being Izghilewa Ghebrehawariat, who is, at the same time, one of the first three consecrated women in the entire history of the Union. In addition, in Asmara, there is a group of women who regularly meet in the first Friday of the month, and there are many dedicated young people who want to join the Union in different forms of life according to their vocation and, with the special initiative and accompaniment of devoted Franciscans and the Catechist Izghilewa, they are constantly gathering in the parish of the Most Holy Saviour (St. Francis). In Keren the groups of young people and of adults are gathering in the Institute of the Brothers with the accompaniment of ceratain Brothers for the Adoration of Jesus Crucified and for

¹⁷⁵ HABTESLLASSIE, personal conversations, September 2001.

¹⁷⁶ ID., personal conversations, September 2001.

¹⁷⁷ Cf L. ROLLINO, *Relazione viaggio Eritrea. L’Unione in Eritrea*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 88 (2005) 2, 29-31.

sharing their faith experience. There are also other groups who practice the *Devotion* in several other areas in Eritrea.

6.1.4. *The Union in Other Parts of Africa*

It is known that from many years there existed fervent groups of adults and young people who practiced and spread the *Devotion* in Ethiopia – in the capital city Addis-Ababa as well as in other parts – and in Congo, particularly in Kalemie and Kongolo. However, still today, there is no real and proper Centre of the Union neither in Ethiopia nor in Congo. In Congo, the diffusion of the pious Adoration started by a Lasallian Brother from Belgium who in Kalemie, where the Brothers had a school, had constituted a group among his students who had conserved the *Devotion* to Jesus Crucified which has now become a popular devotion. In the past thirteen years, individual persons from Congo – catechists, seminarians, religious persons – had been writing to the General Centre in Turin, declaring to be leaders of such groups, communicating a list of members and asking for illustrative materials. Some of them stated that they perform their activities in strict connection with their parish, where they offer catechetical as well as other services. The Union had tried to contact the Brothers in Congo, but they could not offer great assistance because they find themselves in Kinshasa and around, far from these zones. It is hoped that in the near future the Centre in Turin makes an exploratory trip to Congo to see the situation directly and to provide the necessary assistance.¹⁷⁸

6.2. *The Union in Latin America*

The Union initiated in Peru, Arequipa, in 1958, with the initiative and dedication of Lasallian Brothers, Br. Felipe Maestro¹⁷⁹ and his collaborator Br. Josè Canut.¹⁸⁰ The Centre in

¹⁷⁸ Cf ID., *10^a Assemblea Generale Ordinaria*, 33; Cf UC, *Progetti e opere con il sostegno dei nostri amici*, in “Unione informa” (2005/2006) 7, 3.

¹⁷⁹ Br. Felipe Maestro Garcia (religious name Br. Genasio María) was born on 16th Jan. 1903 in Revenga, in the province of Palencia, in Spain. He started his novitiate on 1st Feb. 1919 at the age of 16. He received the religious habit on 7th Apr. 1919. He made his first profession on 5th Aug. 1921 and perpetual vows on 23rd Aug. 1928. He went to Peru on 25th Jan. 1931. He returned back to Europe for his second-novitiate in Rome, on 1st Oct. 1939,

Arequipa obtained official recognition from the local bishop on 26th June of the same year. Later it spread to different cities namely Ñaña, Requena and Lima.¹⁸¹ It is also found in Bolivia (El Alto-La Paz) and there is a group in Brazil (Sao Paolo). Currently, in Arequipa there are five male and two female consecrated Catechists. In addition, there are twenty associated Catechists and ten other associated/married Catechists as couples. The Fraternity of the Union in Ñaña, which initiated in 1995 and which was officially established in 2000, has two consecrated – one male and the other female – and four associated Catechists. Currently, the Catechist Delegate for Latin America is Sevillano Pacheco David, from Arequipa, officially delegated in 2000, and his collaborator, Silva Portocarrera Walter, from Ñaña. It is also to be remembered that in 1997, as the first person living outside Italy, David had been elected as a member of the General Council of the Union. For many years, as in Eritrea, the General President or Vice President of the Union along with some other members from the General Centre in Turin, have been making constant visits to Latin America.¹⁸²

In Peru, among the principal projects and activities of the Catechists include: catechesis in more than twenty parishes in Arequipa and Ñaña, formative activities for various groups of the Union, basic courses of formation for parish catechists, temporary group mission in abandoned villages, in prison, in hospital, as well as external activities outside the Centre of the Union. In 2001, the “House of Charity for Arts and Crafts” initiated in Arequipa and in April of the same year, the first professional courses started. The Catechists guided and assisted by the General Centre of the Union and by their local authority who greatly appreciated the project and its importance have made a considerable progress even if they had to pay a lot of sacrifices

and then returned back again to Peru on 1st Apr. 1941. He died at the age of 89 on 29th Jun. 1992 in Lima, Peru (Cf L. OJEDA, *Hno. Felipe Maestro Garcia (Hno. Genasio María)*, [n.p.], 1992).

¹⁸⁰ Br. José Canut Saurat (religious name Br. Ambrosio León) was born on 12th Dec. 1924 in Espuy (Vall Fosca), in the province of Lleida, in Spain. He started his formation as aspirant in Mollerusa on Sep. 1935. He received the religious habit on 11th Oct. 1941 in Cambrils. He made his first profession on Oct. 12th 1942 and renewed till 1946. He made his perpetual profession in Cambrils on 15th Aug. 1949. He did his second-novitiate in Bordighera, Italy, in 1951. He went to Peru, on 18th Jun. 1957 and stayed till 1965 when he returned to Spain for some years. On 1st of Sep. 1977 he went to La Paz, Bolivia, till 1992. He died in Cambrils, on 18th Mar. 1997, at the age of 72 (Cf G. JOSEP, *Hermano Josep Canut i Saurat*, Madrid, Ediciones San Pío X, 1997).

¹⁸¹ In Lima the Union obtained official recognition from the local bishop on 28th Mar. 1960.

¹⁸² Cf L. PIERBATTISTI, *11^a Assemblea Generale Ordinaria (sessennio 2004-2009)*. Relazione, Torino, UC, 2009, 12; Cf ROLLINO, *10^a Assemblea Generale Ordinaria*, 26-30.

particularly in the early periods. The activity of the Union in “Colonia Climatica Pio XII” in Camanà is also very significant. The Catechists offer precious catechetical, educative and social services for the poorest children of this city. Every year, during summer vacations, the Catechists, with the collaboration of Brothers and other parish catechists, welcome about two thousand children, even if there had been some difficulty after the violent earthquake of 2001 which caused great destruction in that place.¹⁸³

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the historical evolution of the Union from the origins to the period of its definitive consolidation, and as it has been shown, we can affirm that the Union had developed in three phases. First it was constituted as a *pious association* where the young members were devoted to the Adoration of Jesus Crucified and to its diffusion and, after some time, to the catechetical apostolate in parishes and in the schools of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Later the first nucleus of consecrated Catechists was constituted and the Union became a *Lay Congregation* composed of two categories of Catechists, congregated and associated, and was spiritually affiliated to the Institute of the Brothers. Finally, following the promulgation of *Provida Mater*, it was erected as an autonomous *Secular Institute*, always maintaining its relationship with the Brothers. It is true that today the Union does not have numerous members,¹⁸⁴ but it is beginning to flourish again particularly in Latin America and Africa. Hopefully the female association will soon develop and be erected as an autonomous Secular Institute so that it can give its fruits in a more adequate way. Having said all this in regard to the historical origin and development of the Union, we will now proceed with the analysis of the identity, apostolate and formation program of the Union in the actual time.

¹⁸³ Cf ROLLINO, *10^a Assemblea Generale Ordinaria*, 26-30 and 35-42; Cf UC, *Chi siamo*, 45; Cf UC, *La Casa di Carità di Las Canteras*, in “Unione informa” (2005) 6, 1; Cf UC, *Progetti e opere con il sostegno dei nostri amici*, 3; Cf L. ROLLINO, *Notizie dall’Unione: viaggio in America Latina*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 84 (2001) 1, 25-32.

¹⁸⁴ Today, all over the world, there are 13 male and 11 female consecrated Catechists. In addition, there are 42 associated Catechists and 16 other associated Catechists as couples who are fully incorporated in the Union (Cf PIERBATTISTI, *11^a Assemblea Generale Ordinaria*, 12).

Chapter Four

IDENTITY, APOSTOLATE AND FORMATION PROGRAM OF THE “CATECHISTS’ UNION”

As a Secular Institute, the Catechists’ Union shares in the essential nature of Secular Institutes in general. However, on the basis of the specific charism received from the Founder it has acquired its own specific form and, on the basis of the Rules of life or Constitutions, the members assume their own specific identity and apostolate and are provided with a formation itinerary suitable for their specific mission in the world. Today, the Union embraces different categories of members who specialize in the catechetical-educational-social apostolate. The members live and undertake this apostolate with a particular centralization on the love and mercy of Jesus Crucified and in the imitation of the Immaculate Mother of God. The Catechists’ Union is one of the few Secular Institutes that have their own apostolic works and these apostolic works are established mostly for young people; and, in accordance to the diverse forms of vocation of the candidates who want to join the Union, distinguished itineraries of formation are programmed though there are also essential unifying elements in view of the specific mission common to all members. In this chapter we will articulate all these specific elements of the identity, apostolate and formation program of the Union.

1. Identity of the Union

The Catechists’ Union, in relation to the diverse vocational orientations of each individual, embraces different categories of members who commit themselves to give witness to the

world of the love of Jesus Crucified, the unique salvation of humanity, together with Mary Immaculate ‘the first one to adore Jesus Crucified’.¹ Here, we will analyse the fundamental aspects of the identity of the Union that include: the charism, finality, and the spirit of the Union, the different forms of vocation in the Union, the spirituality and the internal organization of the Union.

1.1. *Charism and Finality of the Union*

As it is shown in the first section of this chapter, Br. Teodoreto, with the collaboration of Fr. Leopold, concretized the Union as an answer to the requests of his Superiors to take initiatives that favor the perseverance of Christian life, particularly meant for the students and ex-students of the Institute of the Brothers. Later on, progressively, the Union evolved into a Secular Institute with a specific finality and charism, with members who commit themselves fully to the practice of evangelical counsels and to a specific apostolate in the world, and associated members who according to their vocation commit themselves to a particular apostolate living the charism and spirituality of the Union.²

The members take the name of Jesus Crucified, for love and gratitude of him who “loves us and has washed away our sins with his blood,”³ and they take the name of Mary Immaculate, for in her they see the epitome of redemption and the model for their secular consecration or commitment. Intimacy with Christ contemplated in his crucifixion, fully glorified by his resurrection, constitutes the charism of the Union which is manifested in the spiritual and apostolic life of the members. This intimacy consists in a constant relationship, an uninterrupted dialogue and a reciprocal exchange of love through the cross as a source of joy and secure way towards God. The members of the Union are called to live their intimacy with the Crucified Christ with tenderness, penetrated by the prayer of life which Jesus taught Fr. Leopold and which he strongly desired to be practiced throughout the day in all things:

¹ Cf D. CONTI, «L'Adorazione a Gesù Crocifisso nella contemplazione della Sindone», in V. MOCCIA (Ed.), *Contributi*, n. 7, Torino, 2008, 18.

² Cf L. ROLLINO, «Carisma», in UC(Ed.), *Sussidi*, n. 5, Torino, 2001, 1-11.

³ Rv 1:5.

“You love me, I love you!”⁴ And they live this intimacy together with the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of humanity, entrusting themselves to her protection, in everything, as she is the Patroness of the Union.⁵

The Union has as primary objective the holiness of its members, who as lay persons are called to dedicate themselves fully and to consecrate themselves to God through a radical acceptance of their baptism, considering themselves as grafted on to Christ Crucified and as belonging to him. Therefore, as the specific end of their consecration in the Union, the members, living in the world, commit themselves towards Christian perfection, for sanctifying the world from inside of it. The Constitution of the Union states:

The members of the Union, answering an inner call from the Holy Spirit, attracted by the love of the Crucified Resurrected Lord, demonstrated in full by His bleeding and glorious wounds, with the protection of the Blessed Virgin, find in their Institute a great help for their own sanctification and a way to proclaim, by word and example, Jesus Christ and His eternal love for us by dying on the Cross for the salvation of all mankind.⁶

The event of the Cross has a Trinitarian dimension. The sacrifice of Jesus was offered for love of the Father in the Holy Spirit for the expiation of the sins of the world. Therefore, in worshipping the wounds of Jesus, the members also live an intimate union with the Father, praising and thanking him for the gift of his Son who was incarnated, died and rose as the greatest manifestation of God’s wisdom and power. They recognize in the Holy Spirit, the One who intercedes in our hearts, the inner voice who teaches us Christ’s truth, and by their

⁴ On the 29th of January 1918, Fr. Leopold heard Jesus telling him: “During the day you must have this thought which you will repeat many times: ‘You love me, I love you’ ” (GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 104: “*Tu devi avere nel corso della giornata questo pensiero che ripeterai più volte: ‘Tu ami me, io amo te’*”). Before this, on 12th October 1913, he had heard this: “Leopold, how many times have you said today: You love me! I love you!” (*Ibid.*, 99: “*Leopoldo, quante volte oggi hai detto: tu ami me! Io amo te!?*”).

⁵ Cf UC, *Union of Catechists of the Holy Crucifix and of Mary Immaculate. Constitutions and Statutes*, Turin, 2006, n. 9; Cf ID., *Chi siamo*, 26, n. 30; Cf D. CONTI, «*La Vergine Immacolata nelle nuove Costituzioni dell’Unione - 1999*», in UC (Ed.), *Sussidi*, n. 7, Torino, 2001, 3-7; Cf L. PIERBATTISTI, *Maria Immacolata esemplare del Catechista*. Riflessioni del Presidente nella solennità dell’Immacolata Concezione di Maria, Torino, 2007, 2-7.

⁶ UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, n. 2.

docility to the action of the Spirit of Jesus, they remain in him, to be the mind, heart and hand of Christ in the world.⁷

Br. Teodoreto had proposed to the members of the Union some biblical passages fundamental to the charism:

- “When I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all people to myself” (*Jn* 12:32);
- “When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am He” (*Jn* 8:28);
- “I was resolved that the only knowledge I would have while I was with you was knowledge of Jesus, and of him as the crucified Christ” (*1 Co* 2:2);
- “I am not asking you to remove them from the world, but to protect them from the Evil One” (*Jn* 17:15);
- “He showed them his hands and his side” (*Jn* 20:20);
- “Through his bruises you have been healed” (*1 P* 2:24, Cf *Is* 53:5);
- “This is your son ... This is your mother” (*Jn* 19:26-27).⁸

1.2. *Spirit of the Union*

The expression “spirit” is used here to indicate the principal virtues or spiritual practices that should animate the life of the members so deeply and fully as to become permanent attitudes of life. In this sense, the members of the Union, in order to realize the above mentioned finality, animate their lives with the spirit of *faith, zeal, fraternity, humility* and *reparation* as will be shown below.

1.2.1. *Spirit of Faith*

The expression “spirit of faith”⁹ signifies being able to look upon everything with the eyes of God, to do everything in view of God, and to live fully according to the Will God. The

⁷ Cf *Ibid.*, nn. 10-11; Cf V. MOCCIA (Ed.), *L'Adorazione a Gesù Crocifisso di fra Leopoldo Maria Musso O.F.M.: attualità e teologia di una devozione centenaria*. Estratto dalla Rivista Lasalliana 03/2007, Torino, Unione Catechisti, 2007, 17-18.

⁸ Cf PIERBATTISTI, *11^a Assemblea Generale Ordinaria*, 6.

spirit of faith directs everything towards God and is understood in an active and total way. It becomes the supreme rule that governs a person’s understandings, actions, and life bearings. At the level of understanding, it is not referring to something merely notional but implies a constant and serious asceticism. It enables a person to know and to value created realities in the way God does. At the level of action, it enables a person not to do anything except in view of God or for God. It invites a person to be conscious of God’s presence; to have God as the principal or prime author of one’s life and to allow oneself to be directed by his Spirit; to have God as the objective of one’s life seeking only his glory and pleasing him in everything. The spirit of faith is the light and guide that leads and directs a person on the road to salvation. It is related to two poles: “to follow” and “to renounce”: “If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me.”¹⁰ In the first case, i.e., in following, faith strongly attaches a person to knowledge, love and imitation of Christ as well as to a union with him. In the second case, it invites a person to renounce everything for the glory of God, in imitation of Jesus Christ. In regard to life bearings, the spirit of faith enables a person to receive anything, joy as well as suffering, from God and to be absolutely convinced that there is nothing in which the will of God is not accomplished. It is a faith full of hope and confident abandonment in God’s providence. In this way the whole life, with all its limitations, becomes open to redemption since what happens in life is God’s will for the person, and is the person’s realization in history.¹¹

The spirit of faith enables the Catechists to consider all things in the Crucified Christ, in order to live according to his heart enlightened by his Gospel. It calls the Catechists to live in an intimate union with Christ, the Saviour of the world.¹² It invites them to cultivate in themselves the same feelings experienced by the Crucified Christ, remembering his words:

⁹ It is true that the spirit of faith is the spirit of Christianity in general. But particularly speaking St. John Baptist de La Salle has made it the spirit of the Lasallian Institute – together with the spirit of zeal – as the principal virtue that should profoundly penetrate and animate all the life of the Brothers, directing and governing all their thoughts and actions; and Br. Teodoro has transmitted it to the Catechists of the Union.

¹⁰ Mt 16: 24.

¹¹ Cf H. MAYMÍ, «Faith – the Spirit of Faith», in BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS (Ed.), *Lasallian Themes*, vol. II, Roma, Tipografia S.G.S., 1995, 35-50; Cf CONTI, «IV Congresso Mondiale ex allievi dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane », 52-56.

¹² Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, n. 16.

“When I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all people to myself.”¹³ United to him, they carry out their daily task as a reality in which they feel the saving attraction of our Crucified Lord, as a meeting place with God, as an instrument of personal sanctification and as an expression of one’s love to God, in the service of mankind.¹⁴ For the Catechists, the objective of this spirit of faith is to become within the world signs of Christ, with particular stress on his paschal mystery, on his wounds, from which resurrection and life sprang. It calls the members of the Union to nourish and crown their life with prayer, with the simple regard directed towards God in all the circumstances and undertakings of the day.¹⁵

1.2.2. *Spirit of Zeal*

Together with the spirit of faith, zeal is a primary characteristic of the life of the Catechists: “The love of Christ overwhelms us.”¹⁶ Moved by the love of Christ and animated by the spirit of faith the Catechists practice the spirit of zeal which is manifested in the participation of the zeal of Jesus Crucified for the salvation of men: “No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends.”¹⁷ In imitation of Christ, the Catechists share in the joys and sufferings, the hopes and delusions, the contradictions and ambiguities of human situations, as an expression of fraternal charity, with the aim of directing all things to God, and to cooperate in the reconciliation and recapitulation of all things in Christ.¹⁸

The Catechists find, in the contemplation of Jesus’ holy wounds and in the sound of his cry ‘*I thirst*’, the source of a love which is transformed into a burning zeal for the salvation of children and the youth. Desiring to satisfy the Crucified Christ’s thirst for souls, the Catechists feel called and are sent to preach, announcing God’s love manifested in Christ. Like Christ, the first divine

¹³ Jn 12:32.

¹⁴ Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, nn. 12-13.

¹⁵ Cf D. CONTI, «*Aspetti del messaggio di Fr. Teodoreto*», in UC (Ed.), *Documenti*, n. 11/1, Torino, 2002, 29-31 [first published in “*Rivista Lasalliana*” 29 (1955) 1].

¹⁶ 2 Co 5:14.

¹⁷ Jn 15:13.

¹⁸ Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, nn. 13 and 17.

Catechist, they are prepared to give their lives for the salvation of the people entrusted into their care, especially the poorest, the smallest and the most humble.¹⁹

By the spirit of zeal, the Catechists cooperate with Jesus Crucified so that men and women, especially young persons, the poor and marginalized will be saved, and as active members of the church and society, produce with his help abundant fruit. They are called to cultivate in themselves the same thirst of souls experienced by the Crucified Christ.²⁰ This zeal, enlivened by the Holy Spirit, is the internal force which infuses energy in all their apostolic activities, and since it is rooted in faith and in God’s own love, it is ardent, active, lively, tireless and efficacious, and it is to be nourished by a personal relationship with God in silence and prayer.²¹

1.2.3. *Spirit of Fraternity*

The members of the Union, since they do not have life in common, in order to avoid the risk of isolation, are strongly recommended to reinforce fraternal life among themselves as communion. The Constitution states that by the spirit of fraternity, the Catechists, in secular dispersion, create among themselves that fraternal union and that communion of life for which Christ prayed in the imminence of His sacrifice: “May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me.”²² By the very reason of their belongingness to the same Institute and their participation in a unique charism, they have a fundamental communion among themselves, and they are called to cultivate fraternal life not only by the regular prayer meetings, assemblies, retreats, conferences, etc. but also by other fraternal visits in different occasions where different experiences are shared. Again, the Constitution states:

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, n. 4; Cf *Jn* 19: 28.

²⁰ Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, nn. 4 and 17.

²¹ Cf J. BRUNET GUTIÉRREZ – F. BLAIS – A. HOURY, «Zeal», in BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS (Ed.), *Lasallian Themes*, vol. III, Roma, Tipografia S.G.S., 1997, 315-324.

²² *Jn* 17:21; Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, n. 18.

With the aim of increasing their spiritual life within the confines of fraternity, the members of the Union meet regularly to share the Word and the experience of God, which help them to live in a dynamic fidelity to the charism of the Union, putting in common the gifts of the Spirit so that they become of all and serve for the edification of all. Communion is born just from this sharing of the gifts of the Spirit, a sharing of faith and in faith, where the link of fraternity is strong as much as central and vital is that which is shared. The fraternal life of the Union finds its model and unifying dynamism in the life of communion of the Persons of the Holy Trinity.²³

On 29th August 1908, Fr. Leopold heard the following message from Jesus: “The Order that will arise must be first of all cultivated in piety, mutual assistance and humility, in activity and modesty, and great fraternal charity, and in carrying the Cross with joy in union with Jesus Crucified.”²⁴ Another time, on 28th March 1917, he heard the following: “The sons of the pious Union must be one group united with me Jesus Crucified. Even if they be in all cities of the world, they must form one spirit in God.”²⁵ Therefore, fraternity is a fundamental necessity; without it there can never be a union. This was the reason why Br. Teodoreto, even after the erection of the Union into a Secular Institute preferred that it continues to be called as Union; and, according to the will of Jesus, recommended the Catechists to recite everyday, and at the beginning of every assembly, a prayer for obtaining from Jesus Crucified a grace for fraternal charity.²⁶

In addition, fraternity is a precept of the Gospel on the love of God and the neighbour, and for the members of the Union it becomes an invitation for a total and more generous gift of oneself to others. “Each day, with one heart, they regularly went to the Temple but met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared their food gladly and generously.”²⁷ Fraternal communion is also a sign of belongingness to the Church. The Catechists, preserving their

²³ UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, nn. 33-34.

²⁴ GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 232: “L’Ordine che sorgerà, sia coltivato prima di tutto colla pietà, colla reciproca assistenza e umiltà, coll’attività e modestia e grande carità fraterna: in unione con Gesù Crocifisso portare la Croce con gaudio.”

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 153: “I figli della pia Unione devono essere un gruppo solo unito con me Gesù Crocifisso. Fossero pure in tutte le città del mondo, debbono formare uno spirito solo in Dio.”

²⁶ Cf *Ibid.*, 156; Cf CONTI, «IV Congresso Mondiale ex allievi dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane», 70-72; Cf ROLLINO, *10^a Assemblea Generale Ordinaria*, 4-5.

²⁷ Ac 2:46.

specific identity, by being faithful to the charism of the Union, live to the full the spirit of evangelical fraternity in everyday life with all the people around them, as members of the People of God and as members of the same Body of Christ. They are called for an active and selfless presence among those they serve and to witness the possibility of creating true union among peoples and nations.

1.2.4. *Spirit of Humility*

The spirit of humility is lived in the first place as an awareness of oneself in the light of Jesus Crucified who “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are; and being in every way like a human being, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross.”²⁸ The spirit of humility is primarily expressed by searching only the glory of God in one’s life, by not seeking recognitions for the things that we do, by a spirit of self-denial and obedience. It is manifested by a humble service following Jesus’ example at the washing of the feet: “I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you. In all truth I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, no messenger is greater than the one who sent him.”²⁹ In fact, St Paul says: “preaching the Gospel gives me nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion and I should be in trouble if I failed to do it.”³⁰ The spirit of humility is against the disordered search for self-esteem. It enables a person to accept one’s weaknesses and to remain simple.³¹

In the Diary of Fr. Leopold we read that one day (25th April 1915) when Fr. Leopold asked Jesus in prayer to take away from the Union everything which he does not like, he heard the following response: “My son, I love humility above all.”³² Another day (30th April 1919), he heard the following from Jesus: “I recommend great humility and charity among the young

²⁸ Ph 2:7-8.

²⁹ Jn 13:15-16; Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, n. 19.

³⁰ I Co 9:16.

³¹ Cf UC (Ed.), *Pensieri sulle Regole e Costituzioni del 1949*. Dagli scritti del Venerabile Fr. Teodoreto Garberoglio, Torino, 1999, 23-25.

³² GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 151: “Figlio, amo soprattutto l’umiltà.”

men of the pious Union.”³³ Again we read (19th August 1919): “I give a commandment to the sons of the pious Union which is that they must keep good and holy harmony among them, they must not grieve me by disagreements and bad tempers; they must bear one another and be humble before me. The one, who does this, is true son of God. Let them be humble and I will fill them up with my divine graces.”³⁴

1.2.5. *Spirit of Reparation*

“It makes me happy to be suffering for you now, and in my own body to make up all the hardships that still have to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church.”³⁵ As the Constitution states, the spirit of reparation calls the members of the Union to a loving participation in the suffering of Christ and to make amends for sin, the obstacle which impedes the spreading of his love in the world; it illuminates the penitent life and completes Christ’s passion for the Church, and in this sense becomes the consolation of the Crucified Christ and the Sorrowful Virgin.³⁶ The members of the Union are called to present in a spirit of reparation, to persons of their time, the triumphal power of the merciful love of the Crucified Lord, his universal saving action for the world, in the history of secular and daily life.³⁷

Fr. Leopold had noted this message from Jesus (8th July 1918): “It is my will that the pious Union spreads all over the world, to make reparation for so many insults against me, and so that from it will come a renewal of the world through youth educated in the name of God.”³⁸ The members of the Union are called to imitate Fr. Leopold in the practice of reparation. The main act of reparation which Fr. Leopold was making consisted in trying to keep alive his

³³ *Ibid.*, 152: “Raccomando una grande umiltà e carità fra i giovani della pia Unione.”

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 156: “Io porgo un Comandamento ai figli della pia Unione, quello cioè di mantenersi in buona e santa armonia fra di loro; di non addolorarmi con discordie e malumori; di compatirsi fra loro e tenersi umili dinanzi a me. Chi fa questo, è vero figlio di Dio. Siano umili e io li ricolmo delle mie divine grazie.”

³⁵ Col 1:24.

³⁶ Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, n. 20; Cf T. GARBEROGLIO, «Senso della sofferenza, vivere con Gesù», in UC (Ed.), *Documenti*, n. 8, Torino, 2001, 7-19.

³⁷ Cf D. CONTI, «Primo commento all’Art. 2 delle Costituzioni», in UC (Ed.), *Sussidi*, n. 4, Torino, 1999, 3-14.

³⁸ GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 233: “È mia volontà che la pia Unione si estenda in tutto il mondo, per far riparazione a tanti insulti che mi si fanno, e perché da questa ne verrà la riforma del mondo portata nella gioventù educata nel nome di Dio.”

friendship with Jesus, trying to be there with him in his suffering, especially in his abandonment. On 7th October 1908, he heard Jesus telling him: “Stay always near my heart, dear Leopold, do love me a great deal in exchange of millions of baptized souls who do not even think to turn to me an act of gratitude.”³⁹ Fr. Leopold tried to maintain the intimacy with Jesus with all his force, making it the only reason of his existence. He opened himself fully to Jesus Crucified for an exchange of love, to love him in the name of a great quantity of humanity, to participate in his suffering and to comfort him.⁴⁰ He was also making reparations for so many insults and indifferences towards the Mother of God who wants to be very close to humanity.⁴¹

1.3. *Vocational Forms in the Union*

The charism, spirituality and mission of the Union are internally participated in different forms of adhesions that correspond to the specific vocation of each one of its members.⁴² The

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 68: “*Sta’ sempre vicino al mio Cuore, caro Leopoldo; amami tanto in cambio di milioni d’anime battezzate che non si danno pensiero di volgermi un atto di riconoscenza!*”

⁴⁰ Cf VASCONI, *I servi di Cana*, 26-38; Cf C. TESSITORE, *La riparazione religiosa*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 58 (1975) 1, 4-7.

⁴¹ Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 110-111.

⁴² In the past few years there had been certain incomprehension in regard to the different forms of adhesions in the Union; therefore, the Union had to make certain clarifications. It is to be remembered that, Br. Teodoreto, in regard to the married and consecrated Catechists, always maintained their unity at an equal level with out any distinction. However, the Church considers the married Catechists to be members in a broad sense; while members in the strict sense are to be only the consecrated ones. In fact, the instruction of the Sacred Congregation, *Cum Sanctissimus*, when presenting the elements to be considered for giving a secure judgment in regard to the true nature of a SI, states that it has to be seen if “those who are enrolled as members in the stricter sense of the word ‘over and above the general habitual piety and self-denial’ without which a life of perfection would be empty and illusory, are making firm and real profession of the three general evangelical counsels in one of the various forms admitted in *Provida Mater* (Art. III, § 2). But in a broader sense there may be members, attached and incorporated in various degrees, who aspire to the perfect life of the gospel, and try to live it in their own situation but do not, or cannot, rise to a commitment to all three counsels at the higher level” (Cf *CSan*, n. 10a ~ Italian edition, n. 11a). In a similar way, in 1976, a study work was made by the Sacred Congregation in regard to the place of married persons in a SI and its results were communicated as follows: “It reconfirms that the evangelical counsel of chastity in celibacy is an essential element of consecrated life in Secular Institutes. It deals with the possibility of married persons belonging in a wider sense and encourages the founding of appropriate associations” (CRIS, «*Secular Institutes: Their Identity and Their Mission*», 141). Another document of the Sacred Congregation confirms that “the possibility of married people belonging to a Secular Institute cannot be called into doubt”; however, as the document states: “married people cannot be admitted to full membership of Secular Institutes, since these are characterized by the fact that their members are essentially

Constitution states that the members, according to their vocation, are called to realize, in secular manner, their baptismal consecration through the practice of the evangelical counsels expressed with vows or “in the spirit of the evangelical counsels”.⁴³ Thus, according to their vocational orientation the members of the Union are articulated in the following way:

Consecrated Catechists. These members are characterized by the commitment to pursue the finalities, the spirit and the mission of the Union through the practice of the evangelical counsels of celibate chastity, poverty and obedience.⁴⁴ Taking the Immaculate Virgin as the model of their secular consecration, these Catechists offer all their being to become the expression of the love that Christ has for mankind; they offer themselves fully so that Christ may become all in all and that he may reign in the world in the hearts of all men and women. Consecration does not separate them from the secular condition and way of life, rather calls them to valorise it as a means and as a way for a direct and total offering to God and to others in service. By this consecration they are called to live radically and transparently, in the secular condition, the sacrificial and regenerative dimension of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and through their professional, familial and social commitments, to infuse the divine and eternal values into the human and temporal realities.⁴⁵

vowed to chastity in celibacy” (CRIS, «*Married People and the Secular Institutes*», 10 May 1976, in CMIS, *Secular Institutes. Documents*, 111 and 106, nn. 49 and 24 respectively).

⁴³ Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, n. 5. The married Catechists realize their baptismal consecration *in the spirit of the evangelical counsels* by a promise of commitment to show their desire to live in accordance with the image of love shown by Jesus Crucified. For this reason they draw inspiration for their lives from the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience. By the *spirit of chastity* they commit themselves to live in reciprocal fidelity, and to observe God’s laws and the teachings of the Church in matters of conjugal love. With this conjugal chastity they offer their nuptial love to God, to purify it and animate it in the love shown by Christ’s sacrifice, freeing it from all selfishness and opening it to life. By the *spirit of poverty* they commit themselves in making the love of the Crucified Lord the centre of their life and of all their choices, in moderating themselves in the use of material things – making use of only that which is necessary, avoiding any disorderly desire or greed in possessing temporal goods, and being attentive in not falling into the temptation of being attached to them – and in orientating everything towards the purpose of realizing the plan of God in their family, which is a fundamental cell of the Church and society, in their children and in everything around them. By the *spirit of obedience* they commit themselves to conform to God’s will in everything and to practice mutual submission as a couple in their relationship and in their role as parents, particularly in respecting the vocation of their children and in their efforts to help them grow in body, wisdom and grace (Cf *Ibid.*, nn. A10-A26).

⁴⁴ Cf UC, *Indicazioni su identità, origine e sviluppo dell’Unione*, 18, n. 17.

⁴⁵ Cf ID., *Constitutions and Statutes*, nn. 38, 40-48.

Consecrated associated Catechists. These are female members of the Union who intend to consecrate themselves to the Lord through the practice of the evangelical counsels. Since it is not possible to constitute a mixed Institute composed of men and women, in as much as it is not allowed by the actual Code of Canon Law, these female Catechists have established an association with the same denomination: Catechists’ Union of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate. This female sodality is associated to the male Secular Institute and shares the same charism, spirituality and mission. As a norm of life it has its own Rules and Constitutions that are mostly adapted from that of male consecrated Catechists.⁴⁶

Associated Catechists. These members – male or female, married with a Christian matrimony⁴⁷ or single – are those who participate, in the spirit of the evangelical counsels and in the spiritual and apostolic ideals of the Union for their own sanctification and for love of others.⁴⁸ These Catechists finding an effective means for living their baptismal consecration in the Union offer all their secular reality to the liberating and uplifting attraction of Jesus Crucified. They live in union with him who recapitulates in himself all things, renewing them, and for him, with him and in him, they administer, according to the spirit of the evangelical message and in relation to their mission, all their time, wealth, talents, plans and decisions; all their professional, familial and social activities; all their relationships and affections.⁴⁹

Associated Catechist-spouses. These are married Catechists who as a response to a personal call, in the spirit of the evangelical counsels, together as couples, intend to live in fullness the sacrament of matrimony in accordance to the charism and mission of the Union.

⁴⁶ Cf ID., *Indicazioni su identità, origine e sviluppo dell’Unione*, 19-20, n. 21; Cf ID. (Ed.), *Vocazioni e pastorale vocazionale*. Riflessioni di Leandro Pierbattisti (2008-2009), Torino, 2009, 128-129.

⁴⁷ If they are married persons but separated, they can be members provided that they are not re-married civilly and as long as they do not live with another (Cf ID., *Indicazioni su identità, origine e sviluppo dell’Unione*, 19, n. 19).

⁴⁸ As it has been mentioned before, the associated married Catechists, though, in accordance to the teachings of the Church, are not members in a strict sense, their adhesion to the Union does not happen automatically but is confirmed every year, according to the criteria established by the General Council of the Union and in accordance to their fidelity to the Statutes of the associated married Catechists on the basis of which they participate in the charism and mission of the Union. The others instead, i.e., the aggregated Catechists, are normally collaborators in the works of the Union which they do in harmony with its charism and mission (Cf PIERBATTISTI, *11^a Assemblea Generale Ordinaria*, 9).

⁴⁹ Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, nn. 38 and 152-158.

They animate their love as a participation in the mystical union of Jesus with his Church; and they commit themselves in living the matrimonial chastity and conjugal fecundity, creatural and ecclesial obedience, and spirit of poverty. With Mary, the Spouse and Mother of God as their model, they are called to work untiringly to render their gift of love more complete, constantly fighting to live in pureness of heart, mind and spirit, trusting in the redeeming power of Jesus. Their specific mission is familial catechesis, which is the practice of catechism in family particularly towards their children, placing Christ at the heart of their family, as the principle of any growth, especially of their children, and of every approach towards them. They have also the mission of evangelical proclamation through the family, by word and example.⁵⁰

Aggregated Catechists. The aggregated Catechists are those who adhere to the ‘Movement of the Adoration of Jesus Crucified’.⁵¹ It includes several groups like the ‘Crusade of Suffering’,⁵² family groups and those who belong to other associations of the Union like the Association of Mary Immaculate (AMI), the Association of the Personnel of the House of Charity,⁵³ the group of volunteers who assist the ‘Mass of the Poor’ (*Messa del Povero*), etc.

⁵⁰ Cf ID., *Indicazioni su identità, origine e sviluppo dell’Unione*, 18-19, n. 18; Cf ID., *Constitutions and Statutes*, n. 161.

⁵¹ In 1972, a General Assembly of the Union made a deliberation to call the group of persons who adhere to the Adoration of Jesus Crucified as ‘Movement of Worshippers’ (*Movimento Adoratori e Adoratrici di Gesù Crocifisso*). This movement is characterized by a silent prayer of adoration at the foot of the Cross, without noise or talking. It consists of people sensible to the call of Jesus Crucified and are attracted to adore him in the Cross, in the Eucharist. They have as their symbol the characteristic ‘vision’ of Fr. Leopold – the image of a transparent soul which, attracted by Jesus Crucified, is lifted up from the earth and gently embraces Jesus in the Cross. It is one of the original movements in the Church. It is prophetic, as Jesus wanted Fr. Leopold and all the members of the Union to be, without much statistical numerations, structures or organizations. The members dedicate themselves gratuitously and generously without asking anything in return. It is one of the most important fruits of the Union (Cf ROLLINO, *10^a Assemblea Generale Ordinaria*, 12-13).

⁵² The ‘Crusade of Suffering’ (*Crociata della Sofferenza*) which makes part of the ‘Movement of Worshippers’ initiated in 1963. It consists of an invisible crusade whose members offer their daily physical and moral suffering for reparation and for holy vocations and devote themselves to the practice of the ‘Devotion’ every day (Cf G. FURFARO, *La Crociata della Sofferenza*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 58 (1975) 1, 9; Cf L. PIERBATTISTI, *Crociata della Sofferenza*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 84 (2001) 1, 37-38; 84 (2001) 2, 37; 85 (2002) 1, 40).

⁵³ During the annual assembly of the personnel of the House of Charity, on 3rd April 2004, the former President of the Union, Leandro Pierbattisti, gave a letter of recognition to associate to the Catechists’ Union the group of persons who, for years, were performing their activities in the House of Charity sharing in the spirit, charism and

They practice the ‘*Devotion*’ to Jesus Crucified, in a spirit of love and reparation, and commit themselves in its diffusion so that Jesus, in his bleeding and glorious wounds, would be at the centre of every situation of life. Therefore, they participate in the spirit and mission of the Union in an effective way; while they may, at the same time, belong to other forms of life.⁵⁴

Priest members. The consecrated Catechists who feel called to the ministerial priesthood can be ordained with the necessary formation, with the concession of the competent authority of the Union and the concession of the bishop of the diocese where they wish to be incardinated. These Catechists who, sustained by the spirituality of the Union, want to dedicate themselves to the priestly ministry collaborate with the bishop in promoting and sustaining the catechetical apostolate at all levels. On the other hand, with the permission of the bishop, other priests who feel attracted to live the charism and mission of the Union can adhere to it.⁵⁵

1.4. *Spirituality of the Union*

The Union was born and had grown at the foot of Jesus Crucified, in the adoration of his wounds. From the beginning the young members of the Union had committed themselves to the loving contemplation of the wounds of Jesus through the practice of the ‘*Devotion*’, and together with this, had cultivated a very profound and ardent Marian spirituality.⁵⁶ Since the Adoration of Jesus Crucified is the soul and the heart of the spirituality of the Union, it is

mission of the Union (Cf UC, *Associazione del Personale della Casa di Carità*, in “Unione informa” (2004) 1/2).

⁵⁴ Cf ID., *Indicazioni su identità, origine e sviluppo dell’Unione*, 19, n. 20; Cf ID., *Vocazioni e pastorale vocazionale*, 36-51; Cf L. PIERBATTISTI, *Pastorale vocazionale: riflessioni della presidenza*. Lettera circolare, n. 8, Torino, 2009, 2-15.

⁵⁵ Cf UC, *Indicazioni su identità, origine e sviluppo dell’Unione*, 20, n. 22.

⁵⁶ Cf CONTI, «Aspetti del messaggio di Fr. Teodoreto», n. 11/2, 86-89; Cf ID., «40° anniversario della morte del Venerabile Fratello Teodoreto», 14-18; Cf ID., «La Vergine Immacolata nelle nuove Costituzioni dell’Unione», 7-14; Cf MOCCIA, *L’Adorazione a Gesù Crocifisso di fra Leopoldo Maria Musso: attualità e teologia*, 16-17; Cf L. PIERBATTISTI, *Maria adoratrice del Crocifisso*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 90 (2007) 1, 5-7.

important to understand it deeply and practice it every day with an always increasing love.⁵⁷

The Constitution states:

The Catechists contemplate, through the bleeding and glorious Wounds of the Lord, the divine action of salvation which is accomplished in themselves and the world, and in particular among those who are entrusted to them, to be for them “ambassadors of Jesus Christ and dispensers of His mysteries.” It is in the worship of the bleeding and glorious Wounds of Jesus Christ, the only mediator with the Father, that they present to God the intentions and the needs of the brothers, of the people entrusted to them or whom they approach, and of the whole world.⁵⁸

Putting Jesus Crucified at the centre signifies accepting his divinity and salvific sovereignty and looking at all events of life, in every instance, in the light of him who was crucified and risen. It signifies entering into a deep intimacy of love with him, the Crucified Lord; having the same feelings like him in his desire to pardon, love and save all humanity; and sharing in his passion in the spirit of reparation. A fountain of grace, a profound renewal, and a relationship of life comes out spontaneously from the contemplation of Jesus Crucified and this is the final end of the practice of the ‘*Devotion*’.⁵⁹

In the diary of Fr. Leopold we find the following message from Jesus (2nd August 1906): “Let the Adoration be done devotedly as on Good Friday, and I will grant many graces and

⁵⁷ The event of the Passion of Christ is considered as the climax of the auto-revelation of God that questions every thought, culture and life. The Cross is the hermeneutical criteria of Christian theology around which Christian conception of God is constructed. The mystery of the Cross is the light through which God is known in faith and in which God is manifested to mankind. That which man could have never known nor thought, i.e., the infinite love and mercy of God is revealed in the Cross. In the Cross, by the power of divine love, Jesus filled up all the gaps of love and enabled humanity to find refuge in the hands of the merciful Father asking forgiveness for all. In addition, Jesus, dying on the Cross, wanted the maternal love of Mary to embrace the entire humanity redeemed by him. Then when the work of redemption was fulfilled, Jesus arrived to the glory of resurrection and from this time on, Christ cannot be separated from his glorious Cross. Passion, death and resurrection of Christ became, for always, the point of reference for the salvation of men through God’s work and also the distinctive signs of his love. In this way the significance of the Cross was transformed, it became the way to glory (Cf D. PETTI, *Fondamenti teologici della spiritualità di Fratel Teodoreto*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 88 (2005) 1, 13-22; Cf MOCCIA, *L’Adorazione a Gesù Crocifisso di fra Leopoldo Maria Musso: attualità e teologia*, 18-21; Cf L. ROLLINO, *Gesù il Crocifisso Risorto*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 86 (2003) 2, 2-6).

⁵⁸ UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, n. 101.

⁵⁹ Cf ID., *Vocazioni e pastorale vocazionale*, 24-29; Cf CONTI, «L’Adorazione a Gesù Crocifisso nella contemplazione della Sindone», 7-9; Cf TESSITORE, «Conferenza al II Noviziato dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane», 19-22; Cf G. FURFARO, «Fratel Teodoreto e l’adorazione al Crocifisso», in UC (Ed.), *Documenti*, n. 4, Torino, 2001, 20-21 [first published in “Rivista Lasalliana” 46 (1979) 2].

favours to all those who in the grace of God will prostrate themselves to worship me.”⁶⁰ For Fr. Leopold the Adoration of Jesus Crucified is a privileged way towards sanctity.⁶¹ He writes in his Diary:

O my beautiful Jesus, who through the holy Adoration has liberated me from so many miseries, let all the children of the pious Union, all the benefactors and, more over, all the dear Brothers of the Christian Schools who, with much love for you, Jesus Crucified, spend their lives to lead to Paradise the souls of youth, your beloved flowers, my Jesus, as well as all the aggregated members of the pious Union, be defended from the infernal enemy and that, by your merit, all be saved, in your most sweet Name, now and always till the end of the world.⁶²

Certainly adoration of Jesus Crucified implies adoration of Jesus in the Eucharist. For the Catechists the Eucharist is the centre of all their thoughts and of all their emotions and are called to participate in the Eucharistic celebration everyday. Their whole life is animated by the Eucharist and in communion with Jesus they achieve integrity of heart.⁶³ The Catechists need to live in a continual prayer, like Jesus and with Jesus, in the Holy Spirit, before the Father. Prayer needs to be their breath that beats out the rhythm of their entire existence, and it calls them to perform all their daily tasks and responsibilities in the presence of God, to do everything in union with him. In the constant reference to the crucified and resurrected Lord,

⁶⁰ GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 44-45: “Si faccia divotamente l’Adorazione come nel Venerdì Santo, e molte grazie e favori concederò a tutti quelli che in grazia di Dio si prostreranno ad adorarmi”; Cf CONTI, «L’Adorazione a Gesù Crocifisso nella contemplazione della Sindone», 16-18.

⁶¹ Jesus wanted that the Adoration be practiced not only as a pious devotion but as an inspiration for life, as a way to persevere in the Christian life. The Adoration constitutes an important means for orientating spiritual life, catechetical mission and Christian education in all aspects. It is to be assumed as the foundation of all that concerns educational process and formation in general because it puts at the base of everything the salvific centrality of Christ, Crucified and Risen, maximum manifestation of God’s mercy and glory (Cf CONTI, «La perseveranza nella vita Cristiana e la Divozione a Gesù Crocifisso», 12-18); Cf ID., «L’Adorazione a Gesù Crocifisso nella contemplazione della Sindone», 10.

⁶² GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 134: “O mio bel Gesù, che per la santa Adorazione mi hai liberato da tante miserie, concedi ancora che tutti i figli della pia Unione, tutti i benefattori e più che mai tutti i cari Confratelli delle Scuole Cristiane che con tanto amore per te, Gesù Crocifisso, spendono la loro vita per condurre al Paradiso le anime della cara gioventù, fiori prediletti di te, mio Gesù, come pure tutti gli Ascritti alla pia Unione, siano difesi dall’infernal nemico e in virtù tua vadano tutti salvi nel Nome tuo dolcissimo ora e sempre fino alla fine del mondo.”

⁶³ Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, n. 106; Cf T. GARBEROGLIO, *Gesù Crocifisso e l’Eucaristia*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 2 (1918) 1, 18-19.

they are called to read and meditate everyday the Word of God and other spiritual readings including the life of saints and the teachings of the Church. The Catechists are responsible for personal prayer as the first and principal act of love towards God and the persons entrusted to them. They have also fundamental moments of group prayer. As the Constitution indicates they gather every week to pray together and to share experiences, usually on Fridays with special focus on first Fridays; every month they meet for a spiritual retreat; and every year for spiritual exercises of several days. As much as it is possible, they are also invited to do Eucharistic adoration in group in the first Thursdays of the month. They can also organize, in agreement with the local President, other forms of prayer in which fraternal life is expressed. In this way they nourish their life of faith and consolidate their secular and apostolic commitments.⁶⁴

The Catechists’ life of prayer is true only when it is rooted in a permanent effort for conversion and internal growth, both in relation to God and in relation to others, and when it is expressed with a spirit of self control, sacrifice and denial, offering all difficult relationships, the strains of professional work, family and social commitments, the infirmities of life to Christ, at the foot of the Cross, with a spirit of reparation. In the daily examination of conscience, in the Sacrament of reconciliation – frequently received, and in the period of retreats and spiritual exercises, the Catechists find the opportunity to strengthen their Christian love and to go on safely along the path of faith. To understand better God’s plan for them, they are invited, in all moments, but particularly in the decisive moments of their life, to turn to a spiritual director for accompaniment.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, nn. 100-109. The first Catechists, in addition to the monthly and annual spiritual retreats, were meeting regularly on Saturdays for confession, spiritual reading and prayer. These Saturday meetings were meant to prepare them for the Sunday celebration of Mass; they were also meeting regularly on Sundays. On first Fridays, after one hour of Eucharistic adoration, they were celebrating Mass in group as an act of reparation. On the last Sundays of the month they were meeting for a special devotion for Mary, to implore her protection; and every month they were going to some sanctuary of the Virgin to do pilgrimage in her honor. Every year on the last day of Carnival they were gathering for Mass and night adoration with a spirit of reparation; and on the last day of the year they were gathering at the foot of the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar to finish the year and begin a new one (Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 137-139, 141, 233-237).

⁶⁵ Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, nn. 110-113; Cf GARBEROGLIO, «*Senso della sofferenza: vivere con Gesù*», 7-19.

The Catechists cultivate a profound devotion for Mary Immaculate for in her, “in the total ‘Yes’ that she proclaimed to God, generously renewed at the foot of the Cross, they have a better understanding of the meaning of their consecration. From her they learn a docile spirit which draws them closer to Christ, with faith, hope and love and turns them towards the Father, the source of all that is good and the end of every apostolate.”⁶⁶ They honour Mary by reciting the holy Rosary everyday and by practicing other forms of devotion to her in accordance to Church directives. The Catechists find a model in St. Joseph, who with trust and faith participated in the work of salvation, gave help to Mary and was faithful in his humble fatherhood to Jesus. They invoke his name remembering that Br. Teodoreto had placed the Union under his protection. The Catechists pay special tribute to St. John Baptist de La Salle. They are inspired by his writings and example of life and imitate him in his total submission to the will of God, in his great love for the Church and his generous dedication to young people. The Catechists specifically venerate St. Francis of Assisi and share in the charism and spirituality of the Franciscans.⁶⁷

1.5. *Internal Organization of the Union*

The Union has a General President and General Councilors who closely collaborate with him. They represent a symbol of unity and are guarantors of the charism of the founder and the mission of the Union. The President and the Council dedicate themselves to ensure the fidelity of the entire body of the Union to the faith and directives of the Church and to the living charism of the founder in a spiritual and missionary collaboration with the needs of the Church and of the world. Imitating the governing methods of the founder, docile to the Spirit, they make constant discernment for the spiritual renewal of the Catechists, taking into consideration the various situations and new demands of the mission. They are bearers of hope for all the Catechists within the Union, and the Catechists, considering the authority of the President and the Council as a fraternal service for maintaining communion, for strengthening

⁶⁶ UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, n. 115.

⁶⁷ Cf *Ibid.*, nn. 115-118.

the vitality of the Union and for facilitating the effectiveness of its mission, must collaborate with them respectfully.⁶⁸

The President, as the first representative of the Union, is responsible for maintaining relations with the Authorities of the Church and other Institutions on behalf of all the members. He assigns mandates in accordance to the directives of the Canon Law and that of the Union and, within the established limits of the law, he can delegate part of his authority to Catechists which he thinks competent. For a duly justified request, after consulting the members of the Council, he can authorize some temporary exceptions that regard disciplinary regulations of the Union. He convokes the ordinary General Assembly of the Union, which is held every six years, and when necessary also an extraordinary General Assembly.⁶⁹

In charge of the entire body of the Union, the ordinary General Assembly is authorized to act in its name for evaluating the life of the Union, for settling serious or urgent matters, for establishing general guidelines for renewal in the future and for electing a new President and new Council. It can also take any other decision of a legislative or administrative nature concerning the institutions and members of the Union. Constituted in the image of the entire Union, this Assembly represents the highest expression of fraternity that exists between all Catechists and perpetuates amongst them the charism of the Union. In order to be valid, it requires the presence of two third of those who have the right to participate. In the case of the death, resignation or removal of the President the Assembly will be convoked by the Vice President. If serious circumstances demand it, the President, or if necessary even the Vice President or in their absence the Councilors, can call an extraordinary General Assembly, as long as it is approved by the majority of the Councilors voting by secret ballot.⁷⁰

All the Catechists consecrated in the Union are invited to attend the preparations for the ordinary Assembly, and each one has the right to present to the President or to the Secretary any duly signed notes or studies which can be useful. Each Catechist, fully incorporated in the Union, can vote on the day of election. The associated Catechists do a consultative vote; they

⁶⁸ Cf *Ibid.*, nn. 232, 267-268; Cf UC, *Direttorio*, Torino, 2003, 24-31.

⁶⁹ Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, n. 272.

⁷⁰ Cf *Ibid.*, nn. 233-236; Cf UC, *Direttorio*, 10-21.

do not participate in the decisive vote. The Assembly is participated by Provincial Directors and one delegate from each of the different local Centres of the Union in the world. The General Assessor of the Union, who is a Brother member of the General Council of the Institute of Brothers, participates as consultant. In addition, in the phase prior to voting, at least two representatives of associated Catechists as single and one as couple participate to present the activities, developments, needs and other proposals that regard the associated Catechists. Other experts or consultants can cooperate in the work of the Assembly.⁷¹

During the voting process for the election of a new President and Council, the Assembly is presided by the bishop of the diocese where the General Centre of the Union is found or by his delegate. To be elected President, the candidate must have at least three years of perpetual consecration in the Union, and only candidates consecrated with perpetual profession can be elected as Councilors. After the election, the new President, in a personal decision, will appoint the Vice President from the newly elected Councilors who will have the duty of substituting him in illness or other cases. The term of the President lasts till the next ordinary Assembly, i.e., six years, and he can always be re-elected. Postulation is required for a third-term mandate. During the Assembly, proposals to be submitted to the competent Church Authority, in regard to modifications, additions or suppressions of Articles of the Constitutions are accepted only if there are two thirds of valid votes. The Assembly can take decisions without introducing them into the Statutes. These decisions are to be considered regulations or directives till the next ordinary Assembly when their application would be assessed.⁷²

The President and the Council are assisted by others in the services of administrative nature, in those which regard communication and in other general services. They receive assistance in the organization of the work in the central offices, in the management of assets, in legal matters and in services that regard relations with the civil and religious authorities. They are also assisted in the missionary, educational, pastoral and formative objectives of the Union. The General Secretary, General Treasurer, Formation Director and others responsible for general services are appointed by the President, in conformity with the Council, for a

⁷¹ Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, nn. 237-243, 284.

⁷² Cf *Ibid.*, nn. 246-248, 253, 270.

specific responsibility and for a determined period of time that can be renewed. They work in a regular contact with the Council and are called on when some matters in question fall within their area of competence.⁷³

The Province, as the ordinary expression of the communion between different Fraternities of the Union and the Catechists making them up, is rather a simple government structure, which aims at manifesting and keeping the fraternal union that allows all, the Fraternities and the Catechists, to help one another in assuming together the responsibilities of their life and of their apostolic commitment. Therefore, the first responsibility of the Provincial Directors is promoting unity and active participation of Catechists and Fraternities for ensuring the value and effectiveness of their mission in the local Church. The Provincial Assembly has a pastoral and administrative purpose and is convoked by the Provincial Director. Bearing in mind the local situations, it assesses all aspects of the life of the Province and deliberates plans for renewal and adaptation. All decisions taken by the Provincial Assembly must always be in conformity with the directives of the General Assembly of the Union and with the directives of the Church and they are to be approved by the General President and the Council before their concretization. Once approved, they become effective in the Province and what is established for the Province also refers to the Delegation.⁷⁴

The Delegation is a collection of Fraternities or Groups which, for reasons of a practical or contingent nature, cannot form a Province. It is directly administered and sustained by the General President who can appoint a consecrated Catechist as director of the Delegation with the name Delegate. The Delegate is to be assisted by at least two Catechists elected from the members of the Delegation. The Region is conceived not as a governing body, but as an organization for the coordination and collaboration between the sectors of the union that choose to unite. The unity between the Catechists of the Region is established and develops through effective communication and relations. Each Province and Delegation is part of a

⁷³ Cf *Ibid.*, nn. 285-286; Cf UC, *Direttorio*, 34-40.

⁷⁴ Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, nn. 287-288, 296.

Region. The president and the Council ensure that no sector of the Union remains isolated without the benefit of collaboration.⁷⁵

The Centers of the Union are constituted as Fraternities,⁷⁶ as communities of faith, of prayer and solidarity which are nourished from and which share the experiences of spiritual life in the Lord, crucified and resurrected, and cooperate in the realization of his Reign. The Fraternity of Catechists fits into the Diocesan Pastoral of the specific local Church and collaborates, according to its possibilities, in social and cultural works of the territory actualizing, at the same time, its commitment in the works in which it had direct responsibility. Each Centre or Fraternity is acknowledged as such by the General President and the Council. The Catechist in charge of the Fraternity is nominated by the Provincial Director and takes the responsibility of accompanying the others in accordance to the Regulations.⁷⁷

The Union develops through the creation of Basic Groups, organized by the Catechists themselves, by Brothers, by priests or by other people interested in catechetical mission. They are divided into groups in formation and effective groups. The first group consists of people preparing to be part of one of the categories of members of the Union. The second group consists of consecrated male and female Catechists and/or associated Catechists and/or Catechist spouses. The groups of associated Catechists constituted in a parish, diocese or in Christian educational institutes, can be directed by priests or religious, with the help of a groups leader, or they can be directed by one member of the group, chosen by them, and nominated by the Provincial Director. The groups of Catechists set up in parishes, dioceses, or educational institutes, who wish to be inserted in the Union or participate in its internal activity, have to make a request to the Provincial Director.⁷⁸

The Catechists maintain their relationship with the Brothers of the Christian Schools, mainly through the work of the General Assessor Brother, who is a member of the General

⁷⁵ Cf *Ibid.*, nn. 289-295.

⁷⁶ The Centers of the Union are constituted as Fraternities if the members, already incardinated in the Union, give a guarantee of stability and continuity to it (Cf UC, *Indicazioni su identità, origine e sviluppo dell’Unione*, 29, n. 35).

⁷⁷ Cf ID., *Constitutions and Statutes*, nn. 312-325.

⁷⁸ Cf *Ibid.*, nn. 326-330; Cf UC, *Indicazioni su identità, origine e sviluppo dell’Unione*, 29, n. 34.

Council of the Institute of the Brothers; a Provincial Assessor Brother, who makes part of a Provincial Council of the Institute; or a local Assessor Brother, who is a Director of the community where he belongs. These Brothers assist in promoting dialogue between the Union and the Institute of the Brothers and contribute to the development of the Lasallian heritage of the Union. They promote possible collaboration between the Union and the Brothers, help in the development and diffusion of the ‘*Devotion*’ to Jesus Crucified, and favor vocations to the Union. They participate in the respective General, Provincial or local Assemblies of the Union as consultants. On the other hand, the members of the Union nourish themselves from the spirit of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, from the educational methods and thoughts of St. John Baptist de La Salle, and they constantly work for an increasing relationship and collaboration. They affirm their desire to remain part of the family of the Lasallian Institute and acknowledge that the Institute of the Brothers represents a reason for the stability of the whole Union.⁷⁹

2. Apostolate of the Union

Having shown the major elements of the identity of the Catechists’ Union, we will now articulate its specific apostolate which consists in the diffusion of the ‘*Devotion*’ to Jesus Crucified and in the catechetical-educational-social service which is carried out in diverse modalities with a particular attention to the young and the needy. In addition to the apostolate that is carried out in collaboration with the Church in the society, the Catechists’ Union has also its own apostolic works or institutions.

2.1. *Spreading the ‘Devotion’ to Jesus Crucified*

The primary apostolate of the Catechists is the diffusion of the ‘*Devotion*’ to Jesus Crucified: to heal the wounds of mankind through the bleeding and glorious wounds of Jesus

⁷⁹ Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, nn. 6-7 and 333-346; Cf ID., *Indicazioni su identità, origine e sviluppo dell’Unione*, 30-31, nn. 36-40.

by uniting oneself to the testimony of the merciful love manifested by Jesus Crucified.⁸⁰ In fact, this was the unique apostolic mission of the initial nucleus of young men who constituted the Union. They were committing themselves to the diffusion of the ‘*Devotion*’ so that all people will be attracted to his love, and so that his suffering will be renewed each day in men’s heart like an echo of Good Friday and that it will always be remembered with gratitude.⁸¹ The Constitution states:

The Catechists practice and spread the adoration of Jesus, the Crucified Resurrected Lord, with the aim of bringing back to the centre of Christian life, the mystery of the death and resurrection of the Son of God, and to announce to everyone the universal value of Christ’s sacrifice, of yesterday, today and forever.... The members of the Union work so that Christ’s Cross is manifested as a throne of glory, source of forgiveness and life, of reconciliation and universal renewal, the supreme manifestation of the kingship of the Lord.⁸²

In regard to the diffusion of the ‘*Devotion*’ and the greatest benefits obtained through it, the following messages were received by Fr. Leopold from Jesus:

- 13th January 1909: “The penance that I give you to do is to make me loved through the Devotion all over the world.”⁸³
- 11th July 1909: “My son, take care of the mission which I have entrusted you. Let this holy Adoration spread all over the world, and marvels of God will come from the Cross.”⁸⁴
- 2nd November 1909: “The most luminous sign of the love you have towards me is the Devotion which you are spreading with the intention of seeing me, your Jesus, loved

⁸⁰ Cf ID., *Chi siamo*, 41; Cf L. PIERBATTISTI, *L’amore a Gesù Crocifisso nelle famiglie e nell’Unione Catechisti*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 89 (2006) 2, 20.

⁸¹ Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, n. 22.

⁸² *Ibid.*, nn. 2-3; Cf D. CONTI, «I membri dell’Unione operano affinché la Croce di Cristo si manifesti come trono di gloria (commento all’Art. 3 delle Costituzioni», in UC (Ed.), *Sussidi*, n. 6, Torino, 2001, 1-10; Cf D. CONTI, «Cristo Crocifisso è la manifestazione della misericordia del Padre», in UC (Ed.), *Pubblicazioni e contributi*, n. 2, Torino, 2001, 10-11.

⁸³ GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 82: “La penitenza che ti dò da fare è quella di farmi amare con la Divozione in tutto il mondo.”

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 82-83: “Figlio mio, tieni cara la missione che ti ho dato. Si estenda per tutto il mondo la santa Adorazione e ne verranno, dalla Croce, le meraviglie di Dio.”

again by the human race redeemed by my Divine Blood; and so, through you, there will be a continuous predication that will last till the end of the world.”⁸⁵

On different days, Fr. Leopold had also received the following promises from the Virgin Mary as fruits of the holy ‘Devotion’:

- 31st December 1911: “The Devotion to my Divine Crucified Son will cover the whole world with Mercy.”⁸⁶
- 10th April 1913: “The holy Adoration will bring great fruits to the world.”⁸⁷
- 18th October 1913: “Spread the Devotion-Adoration to my Divine Son Jesus Crucified and at the hour of your death I will come to take your soul.”⁸⁸

2.2. *Catechetical-Educational-Social Apostolate*

The Catechists of the Union do all they can to participate in the evangelical mission of the Church. They are called to be the ‘light and salt’ and the ‘leaven’ of society, and therefore, in an attempt to bring the Christian spirit in all spheres of life, they commit themselves to the catechetical, educational and social apostolate.⁸⁹

Catechetical apostolate. The members of the Union are entirely dedicated to the catechetical apostolate by means of a special consecration to Jesus Crucified from whom they draw new impetus, new light and an ever firm determination to commit themselves and to be available to others by means of this particular service. Normally, the parish, in the frame of the individual Church, represents the ecclesiastical area in which the members of the Union

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 83: “Il segno più luminoso dell’amore che tu mi porti è la Divozione che vai spargendo col fine di vedermi, io tuo Gesù, riamato dal genere umano riscattato col mio Sangue Divino; così per ragion tua sarà una continua predicazione che durerà fino alla fine del mondo.”

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 109: “La Divozione al mio Divin Figlio Crocifisso coprirà di Misericordia tutto il mondo.”

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*: “Grandi frutti porterà al mondo la santa Adorazione.”

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*: “Tu estendi la Divozione-Adorazione al mio Divin Figlio Gesù Crocifisso e nell’ora della tua morte verrò io a prendere l’anima tua.”

⁸⁹ The apostolate of the Union is distinguished as catechetical, educational and social just to give a particular emphasis; otherwise, these three aspects are fundamentally linked and cannot be distinguished. If it is catechetical it is educational, and it is social, because catechesis communicates the Truth which is the foundation of liberty, justice, peace, love – the Reign of God on earth (Cf CONTI, «IV Congresso Mondiale ex allievi dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane», 77).

operate, without excluding inter-parish or diocesan areas, depending on the requirements of the apostolate to be carried out and on the relationship of collaboration with the bishop of the diocese.⁹⁰

The Catechists of the Union act individually or in group, with their own initiative or with the initiative of others, in an organized or occasional form. For group activities, they need to have a legal recognition and need to adopt forms of organization that are most suitable for the effectiveness of the service to be performed, giving also responsibilities to the participants as a shared mission. Preferably, they assume initiatives which permit experiences of integral catechesis, including the various fundamental aspects of life, and experiences in proportion to the age, mentality and the conditions of life of those to whom they refer. At the same time, in accordance to the importance of their catechetical mission, they endeavour to acquire the maximum preparation and to improve constantly their competences, initiatives and experiences.⁹¹ In harmony with the directives of the parish and the diocese, the Catechists also provide basic formative courses to other parish or diocesan catechists; and collaborate in the preparation of the fundamental texts or catechisms for different age groups and different situations.⁹²

In a particular way, the members of the Union, are called and are sent to preach and announce God’s merciful love manifested in Christ. As Catechists they contribute to the development of an adult faith through the fullness of charity, and with this, they contribute to the edification of the Body of Christ, which is the Church, endeavouring to procure the maximum benefit for it, always faithful to its teaching. Corresponding, to the new evangelical

⁹⁰ Since the Union is a SI of a diocesan right, in the dioceses where it has constituted a Centre, its catechetical apostolate is subordinated to the pastoral orientations of the diocese, and the local Director of the Union has to work always in collaboration with the local bishop (Cf UC, *Indicazioni su identità, origine e sviluppo dell’Unione*, 29, n. 33).

⁹¹ Cf ID., *Constitutions and Statutes*, nn. 21, 27, 30, 31, 32; Cf ID., *Chi siamo*, 44; Cf TESSITORE, «*Intervento al convegno delle Associazioni Unione Catechisti*», 17-21.

⁹² The objective of these formative courses is to prepare parish or diocesan catechists for the Christian initiation of children, and later it continues to help these catechists deal with adults. The complete program lasts for three years and consists of spiritual, doctrinal and methodological formation. It includes catechetical workshops, direct experience at the side of an expert Catechist and four spiritual retreats (Cf V. MOCCIA (Ed.), *Iniziative 2001-2002 dell’Unione Catechisti: corso per la formazione di base dei catechisti parrocchiali*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 84 (2001) 2, 39).

mission of the Church, they work for the evangelization of culture and the inculturation of faith so that men may have a life in accordance to Christ and that they may have it in abundance. More over, within the Spirit of Jesus, they commit themselves for the ecumenical and inter-religious dialogues.⁹³

Educational apostolate. The members of the Union are missionaries in educating all people to become responsible citizens for the good of the Church and the Society. They endeavour to educate their fellow men with particular reference to human promotion. Christian education is fundamental in overcoming the widespread dissociation between religious practices and activities of daily life, between the professed creed and the collective ways of thinking and acting. Therefore, the Catechists are called to provide a Christian education that is based on the anthropological and spiritual aspects and dynamics of Christ’s love, an education that works as ferment in all aspects of life and work within the events of history and man’s achievements, in all cultural, political, economical, social, professional, family matters. Only an education that has its operating basis in the new evangelization, in capillary witnessing and in the animation of all things, can show the fact that victory over sin and death and renewal of all things is possible only in the crucified and risen Lord, through his wounds.⁹⁴

Social apostolate. The Catechists inspired by the Gospel contribute to the building of a society based on dignity of man, justice, solidarity and peace.⁹⁵ They become fully involved in the problems, difficulties and resources of the secular society, and they work for its improvement.⁹⁶ They are to be distinguished by the intensity and humility of their

⁹³ Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, nn. 4, 23, 25; Cf CONTI, «IV Congresso Mondiale ex allievi dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane», 65-70.

⁹⁴ Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes* nn. 5, 23, 353, 354; Cf CONTI, «IV Congresso Mondiale ex allievi dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane», 78-81.

⁹⁵ There are two prominent features of the Catechists of the Union that distinguish them from other lay catechists. The first, as it has already been shown, is the fact that their catechetical apostolate is based on consecration, i.e., it derives from their consecration. The second is the social aspect of their apostolate which is expressed in a wider dimension (Cf CONTI, «IV Congresso Mondiale ex allievi dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane», 68).

⁹⁶ The social apostolate of the Union does not aim directly at the modification and transformation of political structures and instruments, but aims at the education of individuals, both as single and as community in as much

commitment, the openness of their attitude, their willingness to help other persons along the path of God. They act like evangelical light and leaven in all areas of life by means of testimony and fraternal help, encouraging every good intention and offering, in the crucified and risen Lord, real reasons for hope, trust and joy even in suffering. The Catechists give special care for the poor and the marginalized people of the society as images of the concrete and historic man.⁹⁷

In union with Christ, they carry out their familial, professional, social duties as a reality in which they feel the saving attraction of the Cross as a meeting place with God, as an instrument for their own sanctification and as an opportunity for a specific testimony of love towards God, in the service of mankind. The members of the Union choose, plan and achieve everything in accordance to God’s design, particularly considering the human being in the dynamic relationship with various communitarian and social realities of belonging, such as family, political and civil life, economic and cultural partnership, the ecclesiastical community. They endeavour to acquire maximum competence in their professional activities, and to perfectly and faithfully fulfil their duties in a civic and Christian manner.⁹⁸

2.3. *Particular Mission for the Young*

Young people occupy a privileged place in the apostolate and in all the activities of the Catechists’ Union. The Union is concerned with the needs of young people particularly as they strive to live and to be recognised as dignified human beings and as children of God.⁹⁹

as they are social beings open to communication. The Catechists endeavor to construct a just civil and religious society in the interiority of those who are in it. On their part, they endeavor to be active and responsible members of the society, capable of producing good for themselves and for others (Cf *Ibid.*, 74-75 and 90).

⁹⁷ Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, nn. 24, 26, 27; Cf R. MOTTIGLIENGO, *La nostra missione quotidiana*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 91 (2008) 1, 13-14.

⁹⁸ Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, nn. 12, 29, 32.

⁹⁹ As Br. Teodoro himself expressed, the principal aspects and particular concerns that characterized his life were: 1) Guiding and sustaining young people in living an intense Christian life in the light of the universal call to sanctity; 2) Helping young people know that God loves them individually up to dying on the Cross for each one; 3) Accompanying young people from school period to the professional formation and then to a life commitment with works of Christian perseverance; 4) Helping young people discover and respond generously to the project of God on them; 5) Orientating young people to an apostolate in the Church specifically in the

Therefore, as its principal objective, it provides for the formation of young people at the Christian and professional levels:

Christian formation. The Union is characterized by its strong determination to make the means of salvation available to young people. The members of the Union help young people to discover, appreciate and assimilate the Gospel values and help them to persist in their Christian life. They try to make themselves available for the young for a personal companionship leading them along the way as they learn to pray, receive the sacraments and grow in the exercise of virtues, and prevent them from occasions of sin by creating occasions in which they can be involved in constructing activity. They dedicate themselves for the continuous formation of young people helping them in the discernment of their vocation and in its realization. By their example they help the young people to be able to integrate faith with ordinary life happenings and to become available for the service of the society and the Church.¹⁰⁰

Human and professional formation. The Union is also designed to help young people to grow as persons and to prepare them to take their place in society and in its leadership. Young people are trained to be creative, to be open to life and to have a sense of responsibility in the society. For Br. Teodoreto, professional formation, i.e., the training for the achievement of a certain competence for work was one of the principal means of evangelization.¹⁰¹ In the

catechetical field (Cf L. PIERBATTISTI, *Commemorazione del 50° anniversario della morte del Ven. Fr. Teodoreto. Saluto del Presidente dell'Unione Catechisti*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 88 (2005) 1, 9).

¹⁰⁰ Cf UC, *Vocazioni e pastorale vocazionale*, 65-66.

¹⁰¹ Br. Teodoreto had the awareness that he had been called for a particular mission. He was not satisfied with the teaching of particular materials in school. He wanted to form the conscience of his students and his pedagogy always referred to the entire person in its totality and not to a part of it. The educational work of Br. Teodoreto, though it considered all the necessities of the young men, was also distinguished for a major and constant centrality of the spiritual dimension, particularly the call to sanctity. In all his correspondences, except in two which were written in a hurry, this call to sanctity is mentioned insistently. Br. Teodoreto gave a personalized attention to his students – who were actually ‘disciples’ more than students. He loved them and ardently desired to talk to them individually. He respected each one of them as well as their roles. He was very decisive and authoritative in teaching; however he always possessed an attitude of humble listening. His educational action was of much intensity and aimed towards elevated horizons. His major worry was the life of the students beyond the school period – their future. He wanted to prepare them for life by way of professional formation, teaching them to valorize work as an instrument to sanctity (Cf M. PRESCIUTTINI, *Fratel Teodoreto educatore*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 88 (2005) 2, 14-21); Cf V. MOCCIA, *Il Ven. Fr. Teodoreto, modello di educatore*

radical and rigorous respect for the didactic and technological aspects of professional formation, young people are prepared for a special insertion in the society by means of a certain occupation, in a full spiritual harmony and in the exercise of love towards God and the neighbour, without which formation at the human and professional level runs the risk of being a compromise. Young people are also helped to adopt a critical judgment towards the contemporary society in general and, in particular, to the mass media and many other technological resources.¹⁰²

2.4. *Apostolic Works of the Union*

The Catechists’ Union concretizes its catechetical, educational and social apostolate also by means of institutions of its own that are mostly meant for the young and the poor people. Among these works of apostolate we can mention: the House of Charity for Arts and Crafts, the Association of Mary Immaculate (AMI), the Mass of the Poor, and the Centre of Spirituality.

2.4.1. *House of Charity for Arts and Crafts*

As it has been indicated in the first section of this chapter, the Union, for realizing its objectives for the Christian formation of young people through professional training, has established the ‘House of Charity for Arts and Crafts’¹⁰³ where young people learn different crafts and techniques necessary for life. It is also noted that it was desired by Jesus himself, who through Fr. Leopold, on the 24th of November 1919, expressed: “to save souls, to form new generations, Houses of Charity must be opened in order to make young men learn Arts

per il nostro tempo, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 87 (2004) 1, 17-23; Cf V. MOCCIA, *Un modello di educatore per il terzo millennio: Il Ven. Teodoreto F. S. C.*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 87 (2004) 2, 9-17.

¹⁰² Cf RICCARDI, *Maestro di vita oltre la scuola*, 80-83; Cf CONTI, «IV Congresso Mondiale ex allievi dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane», 77-78.

¹⁰³ The history of the Union shows that, the Catechists with the encouragement and support of Br. Teodoreto initiated this professional school in 1925.

and Crafts.”¹⁰⁴ Therefore, the fundamental and characteristic objective of this association consists precisely in bringing eternal salvation to young people through the sanctification of work, liberating them from the slavery of material things.¹⁰⁵

Professional training, given in coherence to the developments and demands of time, on a profound Christian atmosphere, on the basis of charity, aims in making the new technical progresses and work instruments of sanctification. If a certain profession becomes a mere means of production, it makes man an instrument and a slave; but if it becomes a means for transforming and elevating the world in fraternal service, it becomes an instrument for participating in the Divine fecundity. Without God any profession cannot achieve its final purpose both at the natural and supernatural level; without God it can not elevate man to a dignified life. This is why in the House of Charity of the Union the education given does not limit itself to a mere acquisition of a skill or a certain specialization, but penetrates to all the faculties of the individual, irradiates into the spirit, elevating the person to God so that all the efforts of work are rendered easy and holy.¹⁰⁶

The Commission for Examination, which issues the professional qualification of the students, constantly refers to the House of Charity as a model in regard to the organization, programs of study, appropriate methodologies, and in regard to the formation and updating of teachers, both in the theoretical as well as practical aspects. The program includes technical training, religious, cultural, human and social studies. It is really fruit of a continuous research, constant elaboration and experimentation which, in the light of the principal message or inspiration of the Work,¹⁰⁷ always tries to interpret and to correspond to the human and social needs and demands that emerge in the world of work, of young people and of workers. It assumes, as a point of reference and dominant factor, the aspect of profession as an expression

¹⁰⁴ GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 160: “Per salvare le anime, per formare nuove generazioni, si devono aprire Case di Carità per far imparare ai giovani Arti e Mestieri.”

¹⁰⁵ Cf CONTI, *Union of Catechists of Jesus Crucified and of Mary Immaculate*, 14-15; Cf ID., «80° anniversario del primo “detto” di Fra Leopoldo sulla Casa di Carità Arti e Mestieri, 1919-1999», 3-18.

¹⁰⁶ Cf RICCARDI, *Maestro di vita oltre la scuola*, 80-82; Cf CONTI, «Aspetti del messaggio di Fr. Teodoreto», n. 11/3, 114-124; Cf V. MOCCIA, *La Chiesa dialoga con la città. Le nuove dimensioni della disoccupazione e dell'occupazione: opportunità e rischi*, in “L'Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 83 (2000) 3, 19-23.

¹⁰⁷ As it is indicated, the message or principal inspiration of the Work is educating young people in the Christian way through the acquisition of professional skills.

of evangelization, human promotion, integral development and liberty. On the basis of this, the House of Charity works in reference to the political, economic, social, spiritual and cultural, pedagogical and didactic dimensions of formation and education through the assumption of profession as nucleus of a global formative proposal. This indicates also that it is a very demanding work, always open to wider developments.¹⁰⁸

It is entitled as ‘House’ to highlight the educational dimension undertaken in paternal relationship and which is expressed in a communitarian and familial atmosphere of fraternal sharing and solidarity; and as it had been noted before, the word ‘Charity’, which had been tormented so much, signifies the gratuitousness of the service and its dependence on Divine Providence expressed in human collaboration. According to the directions and foresights contained in the writings of Fr. Leopold, the House of Charity is to be a model for many other Institutes and is to be erected in all dioceses for the reformation of the world by Christian charity.¹⁰⁹

Today there are 18 Centers of the association House of Charity, two of them in Perù. In the General Centre in Turin there are about five thousand students of diverse age, nationality and religion.¹¹⁰ In addition, professional formation is given to prisoners and ex-prisoners for their reintegration in the society. These are activities given by some branches of the House of Charity directly inserted in the works of de La Salle and constitute one of the most significant actions concretized with great charity and comprehension, recognizing the capacity of these persons for a true and total conversion, trusting them without any prejudice no matter what their previous history might be and opening for them the way to hope for a brighter future.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Cf RICCARDI, *Maestro di vita oltre la scuola*, 82-83; Cf CONTI, «Causa di beatificazione di Fr. Teodoreto, 1985», 24-26; Cf D. CONTI, «Idee per la formazione degli educatori della Casa di Carità Arti e Mestieri. Centro La Salle - 14 luglio 1998», in UC (Ed.), *Formazione*, n. 3, Torino, 2001, 3-19; Cf G. PONZIO – G. MONTEVERDE – C. ROSSO, *La formazione professionale d'ispirazione Cattolica e i problemi del lavoro e della disoccupazione*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 79 (1996) 2, 22-27.

¹⁰⁹ Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 248; Cf CONTI, «Aspetti del messaggio di Fr. Teodoreto», n. 11/3, 118-121; Cf D. CONTI, «La perseveranza nella fedeltà a Cristo e all'uomo in Cristo», in UC (Ed.), *Pubblicazioni e contributi*, n. 1, Torino, 2001, 18.

¹¹⁰ Cf PIERBATTISTI, *11^a Assemblea Generale Ordinaria*, 8; Cf UC, *Chi siamo*, 44.

¹¹¹ Cf CCAM (Ed.), *La formazione professionale, speranza per il lavoro*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 89 (2006) 2, 27; Cf V. MOCCIA, *Le opere del Ven. Fr. Teodoreto*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 88 (2005) 1, 29.

2.4.2. *Association of Mary Immaculate (AMI)*

The Union gives special attention to the vocational orientation of young people, and in every place where it has constituted a Centre offers a special service for the vocational pastoral care of young people, helping them to discover and to concretize the particular vocation towards which God calls them. To achieve this objective, the Union proposes the Association of Mary Immaculate, usually known as AMI. This association is governed by a Regulation which inspires the spirituality of the Catechists’ Union and can be proposed to all Groups and Fraternities of the Union, as well as to all schools and communities of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.¹¹²

AMI is made up of groups of children, adolescents, young people and also adults who preferably belong to the Union or to the Lasallian institutions. It is directed by the Catechists or by Brothers who guide the members according to their age and psychological make-up. The principal purpose is to consolidate them in Christian life: to help them know the Christian doctrine and to live the commandments in a personalized relationship with Jesus; help them to discover Jesus as a friend, to continuously cultivate this friendship and to understand that it is for love of each one that he suffered death on the Cross; help them to generously exchange the love of Jesus, thinking of him prayerfully, offering him everything, above all one’s self, even if it might cost sacrifice, doing good to others, specially to one’s family and friends; help them to know and love the immaculate Virgin as a Mother and as a Model.¹¹³

AMI carries out this purpose through an intense spiritual life, a solid religious instruction, the formation of the human person in Christ and through the catechetical, educational and social apostolate. In a particular way, this association tries to orientate its members in the choice of the state of life to which God calls them, helping them in making discernment, in

¹¹² Cf UC, *Indicazioni su identità, origine e sviluppo dell’Unione*, 32-33. The association AMI originated in the following way: in 1926 when the first nucleus of consecrated members began in the Union, the Catechists were divided into two: those who felt called to the sacrament of matrimony and those who desired consecration by the profession of the evangelical counsels. This situation moved Br. Teodoreto to create this association AMI, in around 1930, in order to help the younger members in their vocational orientation in the exercise of the catechetical apostolate (Cf ID., *Vocazioni e pastorale vocazionale*, 55-58).

¹¹³ Cf ID., *Indicazioni su identità, origine e sviluppo dell’Unione*, 33; Cf ID., *Vocazioni e pastorale vocazionale*, 58-59.

distinguishing the voice of God from the other innumerable voices that come from the proper egoistic self and from the secularized society which, in many ways, affirms a materialistic conception of man and of the world. AMI can be characterized as a group of vocational orientation, with an equal attention to all forms of vocations: matrimony, priesthood, religious life, secular consecration in the Union or in other Institutes approved by the Church.¹¹⁴

Among the various activities of this association, the formation to become catechists has a privileged place, so that the members, always and every where, can irradiate the love of Jesus Crucified to others. The young people who adhere to this association are to be distinguished for their fraternal love and desire to help one another. The young people of AMI profess a particular love and devotion to Jesus Crucified, adoring him in the Eucharist. They have also a particular love and devotion towards Mary Immaculate. They animate their lives with generosity, solidarity, joyfulness and temperance, always trying to acquire an authentic humility in the spirit of faith. They are divided into three groups: the friends of Jesus Crucified (up to 11 years of age), the group of adolescents (from 12 to 16 years) and the group of young people (from 17 to 25 years or above).¹¹⁵

The director of the association is the Catechist who is responsible for that particular Fraternity and has the responsibility of organizing the groups with major attention to the spiritual and catechetical formation. He has also to provide spiritual directors for the groups and inform them of the finality of the association so that they can support the groups according to the desired objectives.¹¹⁶

2.4.3. *Mass of the Poor and Centre of Spirituality*

The Catechists of the Union collaborate in a certain initiative, called ‘Mass of the Poor’.¹¹⁷ This initiative consists in welcoming the poor people with understanding and fraternal service;

¹¹⁴ Cf ID., *Indicazioni su identità, origine e sviluppo dell’Unione*, 33-34; Cf L. PIERBATTISTI, *Riflessioni della presidenza sulla pastorale vocazionale*. Lettera circolare, n. 1, Torino, 2008, 5-7.

¹¹⁵ Cf UC, *Indicazioni su identità, origine e sviluppo dell’Unione*, 34.

¹¹⁶ Cf *Ibid.*, 34-35.

¹¹⁷ The *Mass of the Poor* was founded in 1928, in Turin, by the initiative of Sr. Luisa Beltrame, from the Daughters of Charity. From 1933, Br. Teodoreto was collaborating in the activity by sending the best Catechists

in comforting them – who usually suffer more in the spirit than in the body – by helping them encounter Jesus Crucified and helping them discover the goodness of God the Father. Every Sunday morning these people participate in the celebration of Mass where a catechesis adapted to them is given. The Mass is followed by lunch, medical assistance and distribution of necessary materials. Every Saturday afternoon, there are also other services of catechesis and alphabetization. In addition, these poor people are helped in finding work and housing, and are helped in the scholastic and religious instruction of their children, directing them to schools and parishes. In the last few years, a special assistance is also offered to immigrants from different countries, Christians and non-Christians. All these services are performed with the collaboration of volunteers.¹¹⁸

The Union has also a Centre of Spirituality (*La Sorgente*)¹¹⁹ which is a place of silence where spiritual retreats and prayer meetings take place – for the Catechists as well as other groups: priests, religious, families, couples, young people, educators, etc. It aims at representing the Paschal Mystery, in particular the crucified and risen Christ, the fountain of living water,¹²⁰ with his message of love and eternal life, to all persons who desire to have access to him, for the intensification or restoration of their spiritual life in the world. Starting from 2000, the year of Jubilee, the Way of the Cross is done in this place every year on the 14th of September, feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, in collaboration with the parish and the local associations. In addition, in the last few years, in the fourth Sunday of the month, a prayer meeting, centered on the adoration of Jesus Crucified, takes place regularly and is open to all.¹²¹

of the Union who had given a great impulse to the work that it was established in three sites of the city. Later on, it became a very important activity of the Union, and throughout the years it was accompanied by a constant presence and assistance of the Brothers. In the actual time, under the direction of Br. Egidio, are welcomed about two-hundred persons every Sunday (Cf UC, *Chi siamo*, 46; Cf ROLLINO, *10^a Assemblea Generale Ordinaria*, 38; Cf I. MOCCIA, *Messa del Povero*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 84 (2001) 2, 35-36).

¹¹⁸ Cf GARBEROGLIO, *Nella intimità del Crocifisso*, 238-240; Cf DI MARIA, *Fratel Teodoreto*, 277-280; Cf G. FURFARO, *Messa del Povero*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 59 (1976) 4, 22-26.

¹¹⁹ The Centre of Spirituality (*La Sorgente*) initiated in 1970 and is situated in a hill in the surroundings of Turin (Cf UC, *Chi siamo*, 45).

¹²⁰ Cf *Jn* 7: 37-38; Cf *Jn* 4: 14.

¹²¹ Cf UC, *Centro di vita spirituale. La Sorgente*, Torino, [n.p.], [n.y.], 3-10; Cf ROLLINO, *10^a Assemblea Generale Ordinaria*, 38; Cf RICCARDI, *Maestro di vita oltre la scuola*, 76-77.

3. Formation in the Union

As it has been shown above, the Catechists’ Union has a very important and, at the same time, very vast field of apostolate. Therefore, in order to realize this apostolate in an effective way it provides its members with a formation that intends to help them grow in the apostolic as well as spiritual life of the Union and in the general human sphere. As it will be shown here, there is a period of first formation which is more intense and then a continuous or permanent formation. In the period of first formation, the candidates are introduced to the fundamental contents of the mission and spirituality of the Union, together with an initial description of its origin, finality and the different forms of life within it. In this process of first formation, normally, the candidates are helped by other Catechists who, as intermediaries of the Lord, willingly offer themselves in welcoming and accompanying them. The first formation is concluded with the profession of vows or promise, but the formation process continues always though with a different modality.

3.1. *First Formation of Consecrated Catechists*

The first formation progressively introduces the candidates into the spirit and mission of the Union. It consists of a period of orientation, initial formation, period of temporary consecration that ends with the profession of perpetual vows.¹²²

Period of orientation. This is the first stage of the first formation and prepares the candidates for the initial formative process and has an itinerary of its own distinct from the initial formative itinerary. In general, it helps the candidates towards personal maturation, in the human and spiritual sense and, in particular, it helps them to discern the authenticity of their vocation to become consecrated Catechists and to mature their decision for starting the initial formative process, allowing them to make a first experience of consecrated, fraternal and apostolic life in the Union. At the end of this period, the candidates are expected to have

¹²² Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, nn. 126-128.

acquired a basic orientation of life. Normally, this period of orientation lasts for one year; however, if the Provincial Director sees the necessity it can be extended for another year.¹²³

Initial formation. This is the privileged experience of initiation into the life of consecration in the Union. To be officially admitted to the initial formation, a candidate must have at least seventeen years and must be free from all canonical impediments, and must satisfy other conditions required by common law. The candidates are closely accompanied for two years in their preparation for the catechetical, educational and social apostolate of the Union. In addition, the Union endeavors to provide them with the necessary educational help and within the limits of what is possible, helps them in the professional formation in the area of their vocation.¹²⁴

During this period, regularly, there are two meetings a week and the formators, with a maximum respect to the individual rhythm, help the candidates to enter progressively into the fundamental spiritual and apostolic life of the Union which is intimacy with Jesus Crucified manifested in the catechetical and educational service in the Church and in all areas of life and work. The time of initial formation must be dedicated for the formation of the personality of the candidates through the experience of God and self denial in order to follow Christ radically and to work for the fullness of his Kingdom. It consists in the study of the Statutes and Constitutions, in meditation and constant prayer, in education concerning secular consecration, in ascetic exercises for combating sin and disorderly tendencies and the acquisition of the virtues necessary to remain in the love of Christ. The formation is based on the Holy Scriptures, the teachings of the Church, the writings of Br. Teodoreto, Fr. Leopold and St. John Baptist de La Salle, and the Liturgy. It also includes physical, psychological and social education as well as musical training for sacred songs. During this period the candidates are practically trained in the catechetical, educational, and social activities according to the charism of the Union.¹²⁵

¹²³ Cf *Ibid.*, n. 129; Cf L. PIERBATTISTI, *Sintesi sulla pastorale vocazionale e suggerimenti per la formazione*. Lettera circolare, n. 10, Torino, 2009, 8-12.

¹²⁴ Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, nn. 128, 130-131, 139-140.

¹²⁵ Cf *Ibid.*, nn. 129, 136-139.

Period of temporary consecration. When the period of initial formation is over, the candidates who fulfill all the necessary conditions are admitted to the profession of temporary vows. For the admission, it is very important to consider the spiritual and psychological maturity of the individuals, the consistency of their participation in the initial formative process, and their understanding of what had been presented to them. As criteria for evaluation, it is important to consider the attitude of the candidates in the sincere search for the will of God and in the firm dedication for its realization; in the humble submission to God and to the persons in responsibility; in the dedication for unlimited fraternal charity; in the availability for a humble, joyful, consistent and gratuitous service; in the readiness to continue formation in the spiritual, ascetic, catechetical, methodological, social and other spheres; in the practice and diffusion of the ‘*Devotion*’ to Jesus Crucified.¹²⁶

If there are some doubts in regard to their readiness, the Provincial Director, or in his absence, the General President, may extend the period of initial formation for six months. The period of temporary consecration helps the candidates to continue growing in their vocation and formation and also to prepare them for the perpetual consecration. In this period, the formators need to stimulate them for self-education and preparation.¹²⁷

Perpetual profession. Perpetual commitment requires spiritual maturity and personalization of the life journey of the Catechists. The Catechists who have professed temporary vows can be admitted to perpetual consecration if they have at least twenty-five years, five of which lived with temporary consecration and apostolic experience in the Union. Before the perpetual profession the Catechists make spiritual exercises of at least two weeks.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Cf UC, *Indicazioni su identità, origine e sviluppo dell’Unione*, 27, n. 28.

¹²⁷ Cf ID., *Constitutions and Statutes*, nn. 141-142.

¹²⁸ Cf *Ibid.*, nn. 143-145.

3.2. *First Formation of Associated Catechists*

First formation of the associated Catechists also begins with a period of orientation that lasts for one year and is followed by two years of initial formation given in preparation for the first promise for commitment. First formation aims in helping the candidates to follow Christ on the basis of the Gospel, in accordance with the objectives of the Union and the teachings of the Church. The consistency in the commitment to the first formation helps the candidates to acquire a correct balance between spiritual initiation, study and practical experience of the mission of the Union. Formally, the formation takes place by way of weekly meetings and spiritual retreats given once a month.¹²⁹

During the period of orientation the candidates are provided with the necessary means for their personal maturation, in the human and spiritual sense, and are helped to discern their vocation in the light of faith, and to mature their decision in joining the Union. Initial formation initiates the candidates into the spiritual and apostolic life of the Union. In this period, the formators help the candidates to progressively enter into an intimacy with the crucified and risen Lord, to recognize him as their universal Saviour and as the centre of everything in their life, and to fight all oppositions. To be validly accepted into the initial formative process, the candidates must be over seventeen years of age and must be free from any canonical impediment in the civil and moral aspects. Once the initial formation is completed, the candidates are admitted to make the promise which establishes them as associated Catechists of the Union. By this promise they make an annual commitment in the Union.¹³⁰

3.3. *Formators in the Union*

Usually the formation of both those who want to become consecrated Catechists and those who want to become associated-married Catechists is entrusted to consecrated Catechists who have professed perpetual vows and who are free from offices or duties that might impede their

¹²⁹ Cf *Ibid.*, nn. 206-208.

¹³⁰ Cf *Ibid.*, nn. 209-145.

function as formators. These Catechists responsible for formation need to consider prayer as the foundation of the formative process and need to give testimony by their lives; in a particular way, they need to be transparent examples in living the Constitution and Statutes of the Union. They have to know not only the fundamental contents to be communicated, but also the fundamental pedagogical elements necessary for the effective transmission of the contents. Moreover, they have to be very creative in inventing new ways of participation and in adapting particular messages to new situations. Usually they are helped by one or more collaborators.¹³¹

In case of necessity, the Provincial Director, with the consent of his Council, can authorize other persons who are not members of the Union, to take responsibility for the formation of the candidates; however, they have always to remain in a close contact with the Director or the General President. This can be done from distance by means of correspondence, with the provision of the necessary materials. In addition to the writings of Br. Teodoreto, Fr. Leopold, St. John de La Salle, and many other documents of the Union, another typical means of information and formation in the Union is the bulletin.¹³²

3.4. *Permanent Formation*

The consecrated Catechists constitute the nucleus of reference of the Union as a Secular Institute. For this reason, they are called to live their secular consecration, mission and fraternal life in the Union with maximum availability and loyalty, always opening themselves to a continuous growth in a constant dialogue with God. The Directors of the Union have to do all they can in providing them with the necessary conditions and instruments in order to reinforce them in the spiritual and apostolic life, in a dynamic relationship with the other forms of life present within the Union.¹³³

¹³¹ Cf *Ibid.*, nn. 132, 212, 215; Cf ROGGERO, *Unione Catechisti: Materiale per la formazione* [CD].

¹³² Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, n. 213; Cf P. ROGGERO, *Bollettino su internet*, in “L’Amore a Gesù Crocifisso” 91 (2008) 3, 14.

¹³³ Cf UC, *Constitutions and Statutes*, nn. 147-151.

The associated-married Catechists, in the active relationship with the consecrated Catechists, represent a precious manifestation of the potentiality inherent in the identity and charism of the Union for the fullness of Christian life. The consecrated and associated Catechists have activities performed in common as well as activities performed separately. The animation of the various activities is entrusted to the consecrated Catechists, while the role of coordination is assured by the associated Catechists. For all of them, particularly recommended formative moments are: weekly meetings,¹³⁴ programmed moments of conversation with the persons in responsibility,¹³⁵ monthly spiritual retreats and annual spiritual exercises. In addition, all the Catechists are entrusted to make a personal effort to nourish the life and the prospects of the Union as a whole and at the individual level.¹³⁶

Permanent formation is indispensable for the Catechists for many reasons: it helps to understand and deepen certain fundamental things which have not been treated or well understood during the first formation; it helps to be updated continuously and to render oneself attentive to the new demands of time; it helps to overcome moments of crisis and gives an impulse for a continuous spiritual renewal, both at the level of the individual and at the level of the entire Union; it helps to return to the original spirit and to make it live in the present

¹³⁴ The weekly meetings have a long tradition in the history of the Union and they have been given maximum importance by the founder. They are moments of continuous formation as well as moments for reinforcing the link between the Catechists. These meetings consist of a friendly and fraternal encounter between the Catechists, and represent a moment of union, of catechesis and of sharing to which all have to contribute in diverse ways. They are always preceded by a moment of prayer (Rosary, Liturgy of Hours, or any other prayer of choice) which is followed by Eucharistic adoration – if possible – and meditation on the basis of Sunday liturgical readings. Then, after a brief presentation of the person who presides, continues the sharing of personal reflections and experiences in relation to the readings. This is done also in preparation to the Sunday Mass. These meetings are of general character and therefore are also open to others who want to participate and who are also welcome in sharing experiences and testimonies. At the end, it is concluded with the prayer of Adoration of Jesus Crucified and the kissing of the Cross (Cf ID., *Direttorio*, 43-45).

¹³⁵ In a personal conversation with the persons in responsibility of the Union, that has to take place at least once a month, the Catechists are invited to open their soul in a familial spirit and to manifest their growth especially in the observance of the Constitutions as well as their problems and difficulties concerning their life in the Union, in order to receive some advice and encouragement. These conversations are very important for the life of the Union in general since they, in the exchange of ideas and initiatives, become a source of growth. The conversation has to be well prepared and requires sincerity, reciprocal trust and confidentiality. In addition, it has to be done in a spirit of faith, fraternity and humility (Cf ID. (Ed.), «*Colloquio-rendiconto*», in UC, *Sussidi*, n. 3, Torino, 1999, 1-8; Cf ID., *Direttorio*, 42-43).

¹³⁶ Cf ID., *Constitutions and Statutes*, nn. 217-219; Cf ID., *Indicazioni su identità, origine e sviluppo dell'Unione*, n. 29, 27; Cf ID., *Direttorio*, 42-50; Cf T. GARBEROGLIO, «*Importanza degli esercizi spirituali*», in UC (Ed.), *Documenti*, n. 7, Torino, 2001, 7-19.

time. The program of permanent formation needs to be elastic, adapted to the duties of the Catechists in life and to the circumstances of time and place, and it is very necessary to encourage each Catechist to contribute one’s own reflections and experiences.¹³⁷

Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, today, the Catechists’ Union with its catechetical-educational-social apostolate, mostly directed towards young people, has a very important role to play in the contemporary Church and society. With its profound spirituality, centred on Jesus Crucified and Risen, the sense and hope of human existence, it has so much to say to the world of today. However, there are still many aspects, which we will treat in the last chapter, in which the Union needs to make progress and change, particularly in what regards the field of apostolate and the way of approaching the young. It is true that the charism of the Union is to be conserved and to be lived faithfully in the way in which it was received and transmitted by the founder; however, it also needs to be understood in a dynamic sense, i.e., it grows and is open to interpretation in accordance to the historical context. Therefore, the Catechists’ Union, for achieving its objectives in an optimum way and for bearing all the desired fruits, needs to make a profound renewal. In the following part of the study, following a brief historical overview of the catechetical action in the Church, we will examine the nature of catechesis and catechists in the Church in the light of contemporary trends of thought and ecclesial teachings on the subject, and this will help us clarify better the identity, apostolate and formation of the members of the Union as catechists in the general sense, and it will help us indicate the major aspects which are in need of renewal.

¹³⁷ Cf ROGGERO, *Unione Catechisti: Materiale per la formazione* [CD].

Part Three

**HISTORICAL EVOLUTION AND NATURE OF
CATECHETICAL ACTION IN THE CHURCH**

Chapter Five

OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF CATECHETICAL ACTION IN THE CHURCH

Before proceeding with the content of this chapter, it is opportune to clarify why this chapter has been necessitated in this part of the study which deals with the nature of catechetical action in the Church. The historical overview of the catechetical action in the Church is done in function of a deeper clarification of the nature of catechetical action in the Church and follows the same logic with what has been done in the first and second part of the study in our analysis of the historical evolution of Secular Institutes and of the Catechists' Union, respectively. Therefore, the objective of this chapter is not simply to present historical data in regard to the catechetical praxis of the Church, but is to examine the understanding of catechesis in different periods in history and to show how the present understanding has evolved. Thus, as it has been mentioned in the general introduction, it is a genetico-historical development of the catechetical action in the Church.

The praxis of catechesis has a very long and rich tradition in the history of the Church. Catechesis understood as the clarification or deepening of the initial proclamation (*kerygma*) is a reality that existed from the origins of the Church, though the terms (*catechesis*, *catechein*) assumed their technical significance only when the catechumenal institution started to be organized, i.e., around the end of the second century. It is true that the documented pastoral practice of catechumenate started in the last decades of the second century, but it did not start all of a sudden. Already in the first century and much more in the first half of the second

century can be found traces of the seriousness with which the Christian community assessed the effective conversion of those who were asking for baptism and demanded of them a period of preparation and guarantee. In this chapter, we will show these earliest catechetical experiences in the apostolic period and then analyse the developments made in the centuries that followed: in the patristic period when the process of Christian initiation through the catechumenal activity remained very intense and vital till its progressive decline and disappearance in the sixth century; the middle-ages when the history of catechesis is to be generally identified with preaching or predication – since it was the principal way of instructing Christians; the modern period which is usually known as the period of catechisms – diffused both from the part of the Reformers as well as the Catholics; and the contemporary period which is generally marked by great catechetical movements for the renewal of catechesis that include the restoration of the catechumenate.

1. Catechesis in the Apostolic Period

In the apostolic period some kind of instruction was given for those who wished to be baptized and incorporated into the Church. Such an instruction or teaching (usually called as ‘*didaché*’) which was basically moral in nature and which was given orally in the form of a sermon is to be referred as *catechesis*. The New Testament describes how the apostles and the deacons *proclaimed* the resurrected Christ and *instructed* the early Christian community.¹ It is true that the term ‘catechesis’ is not found in the NT, we find instead the verb *katekein* that derives from the simple verb *eken* (literally meaning ‘to make echo’ or ‘to resound’) which signifies to instruct or to teach orally or to narrate. In this sense, the term ‘catechesis’ appears in the NT in a form not yet differentiated, together with other expressions that indicate the various manifestations of the ministry of the Word such as evangelization, instruction, prophecy, witnessing, exhortation, etc. However, among these diverse expressions, it is possible to perceive a basic distinction between the first moment of proclamation of the Christian message (with verbs like exclaiming, preaching, evangelizing, announcing,

¹ Cf *Lk* 1:4; Cf *Ac* 18:25; 21:21; Cf *Rm* 2:18; Cf *1Co* 14:19; Cf *Ga* 6:6.

witnessing) and the second moment of clarification and deepening around which is to be collocated the term 'catechesis' (with verbs like teaching, conversing, handing over).²

1.1. *First Moment of Apostolic Preaching (kerygma)*

The Greek term *kerygma* which signifies 'announcing' or 'proclaiming' refers to the proclamation of the Kingdom of God that was carried out in the form of preaching. The nucleus or the essential content of the apostolic preaching was Christ. The apostles were communicating the message of the salvific intervention of God in history realized through the paschal mystery of Christ. As such, it was a message of great joy brought about by Christ who was born, died and raised for the salvation of all humanity; at the same time, it was also a call for a radical conversion and an invitation to receive baptism in faith and become part of the Christian community participating in its life and mission.³

The apostolic proclamation was missionary in nature and generally initiated with the preaching of Peter⁴ in Pentecost (ca. 30) and was ideally concluded with the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of Israelites (ca. 70), in the sense that this event constitutes, in some way, a moment of definitive detachment of Christianity from Judaism and, in addition, it was from this moment on that the Judaic-Christian community of Palestine (known as 'the Church of circumcision') started a progressive and rapid process of involution, while the Hellenistic-Christian communities which were already diffused throughout the empire, were developing and growing in a consistent manner giving rise to other new forms of Christian preaching.

² Cf E. ALBERICH, «Catechesi», in J. GEVAERT (Ed.), *Dizionario di Catechetica*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 1987, 104; Cf S. ALATHARA, *Introduction to Catechetics*, Bangalore, Asian Trading Corporation, 2005, 2-3 and 12; Cf P. GIGLIONE, «La catechesi degli Apostoli e dei primi cristiani», in P. C. BONIVENTO (Ed.), *Andate e Insegnate. Commento all'Esortazione Apostolica "Catechesi Tradendae" di Giovanni Paolo II*, Bologna, EMI, 1980, 113-119.

³ Cf G. GROPPA, «Predicazione apostolica», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 507; Cf C. H. DODD, *La predicazione apostolica e il suo sviluppo*, Brescia, Paideia, 1973, 9-39.

⁴ Cf Ac 2:14-36.

However, the major part of writers considers the end of the apostolic or the first Christian preaching to be at the end of the first century.⁵

1.2. *Second Moment of Apostolic Preaching*

The apostolic preaching had a second moment where those who had believed and were converted received additional instructions and exhortations in function of the new life which they had to lead as Christians, i.e., in function of Christian initiation, which was the moment of 'catechesis'. In the apostolic period, 'catechesis' developed in two forms: that which was addressed to the converts from Judaism and that which was addressed to the Hellenistic proselytes and converts from paganism. The first form of 'catechesis' was based on the Law of Holiness, in Leviticus (chapters 17-19), and was in line with the Jerusalem apostolic decree that had prescribed baptism and abstention from unclean objects and idolatry. The main objective of this 'catechesis' was to manifest that Christ is the promised Messiah, and once the sermon was accepted in faith it was followed by baptism. The second form of 'catechesis' started with the expansion of the Church to Syria, Asia Minor and Greece. In this form of 'catechesis', while the basic abstentions were inculcated, further moral instructions based on Jewish teachings in the Psalms and Proverbs were introduced along with catalogues of virtues that were common to both the Hellenistic and Jewish ethical laws. Since polytheism was dominant among the gentiles, the major objective of the sermon was to manifest the unity of God and that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The *Didaché* and the *Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas*⁶ supply examples of the primitive catechesis.⁷

The *Didaché*, which signifies teaching, was fully entitled as '*The Lord's Instruction to the Gentiles through the Twelve Apostles*'. It is the earliest non-canonical handbook for Christian

⁵ Cf GROPPPO, «*Predicazione apostolica*», 507; Cf A. E. CRUZ, *Storia della catechesi*, Roma, Paoline, ²1983, 40-55; Cf DODD, *La predicazione apostolica e il suo sviluppo*, 9-39.

⁶ The *Epistle of Barnabas* is a theological tract and a letter only in appearance. Early Christian writers looked upon the epistle as the only proper genre for instruction in piety and resorted to it even when they were not addressing a limited circle of readers. It is divided into two parts: one theoretical and the other practical (Cf QUASTEN, *Patrology*, vol. I, 85-92).

⁷ Cf ALATHARA, *Introduction to Catechetics*, 12-13; Cf GROPPPO, «*Predicazione apostolica*», 507-508; Cf G. BARDY, *La conversione al cristianesimo nei primi secoli*, Milano, Jaca Book, 1975, 121-210.

instruction and it is like a catechism. The content of the *Didaché* is not dogmatic in nature. From the title, one might expect the *Didaché* to reveal the evangelical preaching of Christ, but we find it to be more on the order of a compendium of precepts of morality, of instructions on the organization of communities, and of regulations pertaining to liturgical functions. The entire treatise is divided into sixteen chapters in which two main divisions are clearly noted. The first part presents liturgical instructions and the second part comprises disciplinary regulations. The chapter on the *Parousia* of the Lord and the Christian duties arising from it constitutes the conclusion. The *Didaché* as a whole is not a coherent product, but rather an artless compilation of existing texts. Modern studies attest that it must have originated between 100 and 150 A.D.⁸ It served subsequent liturgical works and ecclesiastico-juridical writings as model, e.g., the *Syriac Didascalia*.⁹

2. Patristic Period/Period of Catechumenate

In the post-apostolic and patristic period catechesis assumed a more precise significance of a fundamental teaching of the Christian faith within the context of the institution of catechumenate, i.e., it referred to a fundamental training to Christian life in view of baptism. The term 'catechumenate' derives, with the addition of the suffix *-atus*, from the ecclesiastical Latin *catechumenus*, a word which in its turn had been taken from the ecclesiastical Greek *catechumenos* (from the verb *catechein* or *katekein*). This word can be put in a semantic contrast with the term *kerygma*: while *kerygma* indicates the proclamation of the Christian

⁸ Cf. QUASTEN, *Patrology*, vol. I, 29-39; Cf. M. SIMONETTI, «*Didaché*», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 205.

⁹ Another primitive catechism similar to *Didaché* is the *Didascalia* or the *Catholic Teaching of the Twelve Apostles and Holy Disciples of Our Saviour*. It is a moral and disciplinary document directed towards a community of Christian converts from paganism in the northern part of Syria. It belongs to the first decades of the third century and the author seems to have been a convert from Judaism. It is the same in nature as the *Didaché* containing more moral instruction and canonical legislation than dogma (Cf. QUASTEN, *Patrology*, vol. II, 147-152; Cf. ALATHARA, *Introduction to Catechetics*, 228). The term *didascalia* also indicated the doctrinal teaching given for the baptized. It is to be noted that catechesis differed from *didascalia* as it differed from *kerygma* (Cf. ALATHARA, *Introduction to Catechetics*, 12).

message for the first time, the use of the word catechumenate indicates the moment when the message that had already been proclaimed is re-echoed or deepened.¹⁰

The primitive Catechumenate can be described as an ecclesial institution of pastoral-liturgical kind that was born and consolidated from experience, approved by the ecclesiastical authority, and that developed inside the Christian community starting from the end of the second century defusing rapidly in all the Churches during the third and the first half of the fourth century. In the second half of the fourth century it started to be transformed; nevertheless, remained vital during the fifth century though slowly declining till its disappearance in the sixth century. This institution of catechumenate had as a purpose the preparation, in group,¹¹ of adult persons who had manifested the intention to be converted to Christianity, either for the perfection of their conversion at the level of orthodoxy and orthopraxis or for the reception of the sacraments of Christian initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist). For achieving this objective, structured series of instructions (called 'catechesis') together with cult and liturgical practices (imposition of hands, exorcisms, etc) were constituted and were accompanied by a very strict training of Christian life.¹² However, it is to be noted that the primitive catechumenate was a phenomenon that was elaborated in diverse ways in the early Churches;¹³ and, as it will be shown below, the

¹⁰ Cf G. GROPPPO, «*Catecumenato antico*», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 133-134. Kerygma was a ministry carried out, by the apostles and evangelizers, normally outside the Christian community in an itinerant way; while 'catechesis' took place inside the Christian community and was addressed to the newly converted individuals by way of a minister officially recognized by the 'didaskaloi' signifying teachers or doctors (Cf A. SEUMOIS, «*Catechesi missionaria: storia*», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 436).

¹¹ Before this period the persons were usually prepared individually, but with the institution of the catechumenate individual 'catechesis' was replaced by group instruction that was followed by group baptism (Cf ALATHARA, *Introduction to Catechetics*, 13).

¹² Cf GROPPPO, «*Catecumenato antico*», 134; Cf G. CAVALLOTTO, «*Il catecumenato nei primi secoli: origine, evoluzione, struttura e identità*», in ID. (Ed.), *Iniziazione cristiana e catecumenato. Divenire cristiani per essere battezzati*, Bologna, Dehoniane, 1996, 19-62.

¹³ Though the catechumenate was elaborated in diverse ways, there were the following fundamental common elements: 1) it was an intermediate form of Christian predication to be collocated between the missionary proclamation (*kerygma*) and the ordinary predication given to the baptized in the liturgical assembly; 2) it was given in strict relation to the sacraments of Christian initiation; 3) it had a function of initiating the neo-converts to the fundamental contents of faith, of moral and sacramental life, and of Christian practice (Cf G. GROPPPO, «*Catechesi patristica*», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 483).

catechumenal organization prior to the Peace of Constantine was diverse from that which came after at least from the pastoral point of view.

2.1. *Catechumenate before Peace of Constantine*

Starting from the end of the second century and during the entire third century, an abundant documentation certifies the presence, in the principal Churches of the Mediterranean world, of a highly elaborated catechumenal organization though with different modalities. The *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus (ca. 215) contains the earliest and more complete regulations of the catechumenate for the Church of Rome, and most probably, it had directly or indirectly influenced all the other Churches. For the Church of Carthage we have the writings of Tertullian († after 220), of Cyprian († 258), and of Commodianus (ca. 250-260). The works of Clement of Alexandria manifest the existence of a catechumenal organization for the Church of Alexandria already around 200. Origen is a precious testimony for the reconstruction of the contents of catechesis for the catechumens in the Church of Caesarea of Palestine (ca. 240). For the Church of Syria and Palestine there are also apocryphal writings which directly or indirectly constitute a documentation of catechumenate, like the *Didascalia of the Apostles*, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* and the *Clementine Romances* – all of the third century.¹⁴

According to the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, the adults who desired to become Christians were subjugated to the persons in charge of the community for a first verification (first examination) in regard to the sincerity and consistency of their aspiration by means of questioning that included three types of questions. The first regarded the motives of conversion and demanded not only the answer of the candidates but also the confirmation of the evangelizers who had followed them in the critical period of the radical decision for conversion. These were the ‘godparents’ or the guarantors of the faith of the future Christian. The second series of questions regarded the state of life of the candidates, whether they were

¹⁴ Cf GROPPPO, «*Catecumenato antico*», 134; Cf G. CAVALLOTTO, *Catecumenato antico. Diventare cristiani secondo i padri*, Bologna, Dehoniane, 1996, 33-76; Cf QUASTEN, *Patrology*, vols. I and II.

married or not; and their social situation, whether they were slaves or free. The third question regarded the profession and occupation of the persons in order to see if it was compatible with Christianity. Once the first verification was judged positive, the candidates were initiated to the catechumenate, a period of formation which was long enough, generally lasting for three years – though it could be shortened according to the maturity of the candidate. During this period, the newly converted individuals were initiated to the Christian doctrine and life by way of a person – who could also be lay – prepared and delegated for this office. This person was an official catechist of the community and was called '*doctor audientium*'. During these years, the catechumens received from the catechist a regular instruction (confutation of idolatry, homiletic comments on books of OT, interpreted in the light of the NT, from which emerges the history of salvation and the regulations for Christian life) and committed themselves to the practice of a moral life coherent with the faith which they intended to embrace.¹⁵

At the end of this period of a true Christian initiation, the catechumens were put under a second moment of verification (second examination) which essentially pointed to their moral life. Even here, the confirmation of the 'godparents' or guarantors was decisive and this implies that the catechumens during the period of three years were followed by the persons who had converted them. Those who passed this second examination – called '*electi*' or '*competentes*' – were chosen for an immediate preparation to the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, and to the participation in the Eucharist with the faithful. They were separated from the rest of the catechumens and were introduced to a second form of catechesis (the Gospel). They received daily imposition of hands and were exorcised by the bishop. In the third century, the duration of this period, whether it lasted for the entire Lent season or for only one week, is not clear. The candidates were fasting on Friday and were staying awake the whole Saturday night listening to Bible readings and instructions and finally in the dawn of

¹⁵ Cf GROPPPO, «*Catecumenato antico*», 134-135; Cf M. DUJARIER, *A History of the Catechumenate. The First Six Centuries*, New York, Sadlier Inc., 1979, 56-63.

Sunday were baptized and confirmed, and then participated in the Eucharistic celebration with all the faithful, and their Christian initiation was concluded in this way.¹⁶

2.2. *Catechumenate after Peace of Constantine*

After the Peace of Constantine, i.e., during the first half of the fourth century or even before, the necessity of the slow catechumenal undertaking of the newly converted individuals though continued to be affirmed was less applied in practice. In this period, the Church acquired an official – even privileged – place; in the pastoral level evangelization was facilitated, there were no more risks and there were mass conversions. In regard to the catechumenate great changes were made. Among the numerous number of individuals converted to Christianity, many of them had other interests rather than the evangelical motives. Another grave consequence was that since the catechumens were officially considered Christians, they were diffused as such even when they had not yet become faithful. No matter the warnings of the bishops, there was this practice of staying as catechumen indefinitely postponing baptism to the end of life, which was usually done in order to be free from the rigorous obligations of the Christian life. In this context, the catechumenate lost a great part of its significance and its pastoral value. In many cases, it assumed, almost exclusively, the significance of registry and as such, gradually, the catechumenate as a pastoral structure for the maturation of faith disappeared. Those in responsibility of the communities made tentatives for its restoration and not being able to restore the full value of the first period that lasted for three years, tried to restructure and elaborate the second period, i.e., the immediate preparation for baptism, for a period of the Lent. Since, in entering the first period, a true conversion was no more demanded like it was done in the third century, this came to be asked in the beginning of the second period. Therefore, the effective catechumenate was reduced to the period of Lent. All the doctrinal initiation and the moral training were concentrated to this brief period of Lent. The catechumenate as a gradual process of

¹⁶ Cf GROPPPO, «*Catecumenato antico*», 135; Cf G. LAITY, «*La catechesi nel catecumenato antico*», in CAVALLOTTO, *Iniziazione cristiana e catecumenato*, 63-90; Cf DUJARIER, *A History of the Catechumenate*, 66-68 .

maturation of the initial choice of faith was substituted by a liturgico-pastoral institution, inferior in quality both in regard to the value and the pastoral and pedagogical effectiveness.¹⁷

The fundamental themes of Lent season catechesis were: the Creed, the prayer 'Our Father', and the sacraments of Christian initiation. In the fourth century, we find a wide presentation of the pre-baptismal and mystagogical catechesis.¹⁸ The principal and well known ones are: of Cyril of Jerusalem († 386),¹⁹ of Theodore of Mopsuestia († 428), of Ambrose of Milan († 397), of John Chrysostom († 407), etc. The *De Catechizandis Rudibus* of Augustine written at the beginning of the fifth century can be considered as the first handbook of catechetical pedagogy.²⁰

From the second half of the fifth century there was a progressive but rapid decline of the catechumenate as a pastoral institution for adults because the Christian families started to

¹⁷ Cf GROPPPO, «*Catecumenato antico*», 135-136; Cf CAVALLOTTO, *Catecumenato antico*, 79-207.

¹⁸ The mystagogical catechesis is a catechesis on the sacraments which was given during the week of Easter to the neophytes – the newly baptized ones – who were going everyday to the Church during this week dressed in white. It was meant to introduce them deeply to the mystery of the Christian initiation and help them to be more aware of the sacraments which they had just received. In some Churches they were also given instructions on certain moral aspects. If pre-baptismal catechesis had the purpose of showing the candidates how to become Christians, mystagogy was meant to show them how to continue becoming Christians through the fructification of the gifts received (Cf LAITY, «*La catechesi nel catecumenato antico*», 79-82).

¹⁹ Cyril of Jerusalem is known in history as the Catechist and the Mystagogue for excellence. He was bishop of Jerusalem in a difficult period of time where there were lots of theological controversies and rival factions which tormented the oriental Church. But the first years of his episcopate were serene and fruitful where he, with great zeal, undertook great pastoral activities principally directed towards the formation of catechumens through catechesis. The fundamental work that had made him known is constituted of his famous catechesis which is a body of 24 homilies structured in the following way: the first one is introductive called *Procatechesis*; the next 18 are *Baptismal Catechesis* addressed to the *photizómenoi* who were candidates that had passed to the second phase of the catechumenate where they received immediate preparation for baptism; the last five are *Mystagogical Catechesis* which introduced the *neophytes* to the mystery of the Christian initiation (Cf F. BERGAMELLI, «*Cirillo di Gerusalemme*», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 155; Cf QUASTEN, *Patrology*, vol. III, 363-364; Cf G. M. MEDICA, *Grandi Catechisti. Dai catechisti del passato orientamenti per la spiritualità e stimoli per l'azione*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 1989, 23-26).

²⁰ Cf GROPPPO, «*Catecumenato antico*», 136. In regard to the general catechetical contributions in the patristic period, we can mention Irenaeus of Lyons (second century) who devoted his life to catechetical instructions and contributed important ideas both in regard to the catechetical content and method. His major catechetical contribution is 'The Demonstration of the Apostolic Teaching' (*Demonstratio Apostolicae Predicationis*). We can also mention Hilary of Poitiers († 367); the work of Gregory of Nyssa († 394), the 'Great Catechetical Discourse' (*Oratio Catechetica Magna*) composed ca. 385, which is an important catechetical treatise; the work of Rufinus of Aquileia († 410), the 'Commentary on the Apostle's Creed' (*Commentarius in Symbolum Apostolorum*) written ca. 400; etc (Cf ALATHARA, *Introduction to Catechetics*, 16-17; Cf SEUMOIS, «*Catechesi missionaria: storia*», 436; Cf O. PASQUATO, «*Ireneo*», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 360-361; Cf A. TRAPÉ, «*La catechesi dei Padri*», in BONIVENTO, *Andate e Insegnate*, 122-131; Cf QUASTEN, *Patrology*, vols. I-IV; Cf MEDICA, *Grandi Catechisti*, 9-66).

baptize their children soon after birth. There was no catechesis for the baptized children because it was considered normal that the parents take care of the religious education of their children. During the infant baptism sponsors were chosen from the members of the family and they were equally responsible with the parents for the Christian education of the children. The children coming into the Christian community with their family were instructed principally through the liturgy.²¹ In this way, at the end of the fifth century and the sixth century the institution of catechumenate disappeared.²²

3. Catechesis in the Middle Ages

The history of middle-age catechesis generally extends from the beginning of the sixth century to the end of the fifteenth century. With the fall of the catechumenate, even the term 'catechesis' disappeared for all the middle-ages. In stead, we find the term 'catechismus' and the verb 'to catechize' referring to the initial instruction given before baptism, which usually with the universal practice of infant baptism was reduced to questions and answers done before the beginning of the baptismal rite. While for the other forms of instructions or teachings other terms like '*instructio*' were used, and Christians were principally instructed through different forms of preaching. In fact, in the middle-ages catechesis was generally identified with preaching, and the history of catechesis as preaching can be divided into four principal periods.²³

²¹ Cf ALATHARA, *Introduction to Catechetics*, 15.

²² Later we have the 'modern catechumenate' and also the contemporary one, known as the 'catechumenal choice' (*scelta catechumenale*). The modern catechumenate consists of the diverse forms of catechumenal institutions restored starting from the modern period particularly in mission countries. It goes up to the time of the Second Vatican Council (Cf E. ALBERICH, «*Catecumenato moderno*», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 136-139; Cf SEUMOIS, «*Catechesi missionaria: storia*», 437).

²³ Cf ALBERICH, «*Catechesi*», 104; Cf CRUZ, *Storia della catechesi*, 157-183; Cf J. H. WESTERHOFF III – O. C. EDWARDS (Eds.), *A Faithful Church. Issues in the History of Catechesis*, Wilton, Morehouse-Barlow Co. Inc, 1981, 79-103.

3.1. *First and Second Periods of Christian Preaching*

The first period consists of the preaching that was carried out in the Churches of the western barbaric population from the sixth to the eighth centuries. In this period, particularly towards the end of the seventh century, the Latin Church was carrying out its missionary activity mainly with a sense of conquering great quantity of people to Christianity and baptism was administered in a hurry without any proper preparation of the catechumenal type and sometimes it was even forced.²⁴

The generalized practice of infant baptism necessitated the catechetical preparation of the parents. The institution of the guarantors of faith (godparents) who gave guarantee of the sincerity of the conversion of the adults during the first centuries was also transformed. They became helpers or substitutes of parents in the Christian formation of children. However, what was required of the parents and the guarantors was very limited: knowing the Creed, the prayer 'Our Father' and the Christian virtues, in view of teaching later the children – which usually they were not doing. Apart from this, there was no organized catechetical ministry for children in this period. The schools that existed in the monasteries and in the cathedral or parish Churches were almost exclusively for the clergy. For the laity the unique form of Christian instruction was the liturgical preaching. In rural areas the clergy were not much educated, therefore, the fruits of preaching in these areas was limited.²⁵ Pope Gregory the Great († 604) had the most important influence in the history of catechesis of this period. He saw an inner relationship between missiology, liturgy and catechesis and proposed a form of catechesis very much adapted for his times.²⁶

The documentation of the preaching among the barbaric populations in this period is very limited. We have the *De Correctione Rusticorum* of Martin of Braga (569-570) and the *Adnotationes de Cognitione Baptismi* of Ildefonso of Toledo († 667) which was a description of baptismal ceremonies, of the Creed and of 'Our Father' made for the faithful after the

²⁴ Cf G. GROPPPO, «*Catechesi del medioevo*», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 411-412; Cf GROPPPO, «*Catechesi patristica*», 482-485; Cf L. LA ROSA, *La formazione cristiana nel medioevo*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 1998, 47-56.

²⁵ Cf GROPPPO, «*Catechesi del medioevo*», 412.

²⁶ Cf ALATHARA, *Introduction to Catechetics*, 17; Cf LA ROSA, *La formazione cristiana nel medioevo*, 76-85.

reception of the sacrament. Another important pastoral handbook attributed to St. Pirmino is the *Scarapsus*, composed between half of the seventh and the end of the eighth century to serve as a model for preachers. There is also a collection of fifteen sermons attributed to St. Boniface († 754) which instead was composed by unknown author of the ninth century. In this period also started the homiliaries, i.e., the collection of homilies of the Church Fathers generally arranged according to the liturgical cycle. They were used either for private readings or public readings in the monasteries and as instruments or models of preaching for the pastors.²⁷

The second period extends from the ninth to the twelfth century and consists of the Patristic and Carolingian homiliaries, the Carolingian legislation, missionary and popular preaching. Even if the collection of homilies started in the preceding centuries; nonetheless, it was mainly from the eighth to the eleventh century that they were diffused. On the basis of the criteria of their utilization, they are divided into two categories: the Patristic homiliaries which were compiled in view of their use in the liturgical office and the Carolingian homiliaries which had personal or pastoral use. From the Patristic homiliaries we have that of *Saint Peter of Rome* (second half of the seventh century) which was in use till the end of the tenth century; of *Alano of Farfa* († 770) which had a rapid diffusion; of *Deacon Paul* (at the end of eighth century) which was compiled in Monte Casino under the invitation of Charles the Great and certainly was the most diffused; etc. Among the Carolingian homiliaries, compiled as supplement for preachers, we have the two collections of homilies of Rabano Mauro (ca. 784-856); there is also a series of exegetics of Smaragdo (ca. 820); and so on.²⁸

The collection of homilies was seen as the duty of the ecclesiastical and civil authorities for the reinforcement of the Christian population by way of preaching which was the catechetical instruction. A great importance is given to the Carolingian legislation.²⁹ We have

²⁷ Cf GROPPPO, «*Catechesi del medioevo*», 412.

²⁸ Cf *Ibid.*, 412-413; Cf L. CSONKA, «*Storia della catechesi*», in P. BRAIDO (Ed.), *Educare*, vol. III, Zürich, PAS-Verlag, ³1964, 92-98.

²⁹ Cf CSONKA, «*Storia della catechesi*», 92-94. The Carolingian legislation introduced new school system for faith formation. Schools were opened in the cities and teachers were trained to give religious formation. It was supervised by local pastors. This legislation also insisted that the priests should instruct the faithful every Sunday, during homilies, about faith and moral law in the vernacular language. In this period, the instruction on the

the *General Admonition (Admonitio Generalis)* of 23rd march 789 which contains several regulations regarding preaching. The purpose of this was the promotion of faith in Trinity, in the mystery of Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection and Ascension of Christ. The Apostolic Symbol and moral themes (sins to be avoided, commandments and norms of Christian morality to be observed) are indicated as contents of preaching. There are also regulations that regarded the obligation of teaching to the faithful the 'Our Father' and the Creed from the part of priests taking care of souls. In addition, there are indications for bishops that they had to visit the parishes administering the sacrament of confirmation and preaching, and that they had to form in every diocese educated priests for preaching. In the ninth century we have two important works that are inspired by the *De Catechizandis Rudibus* of St. Augustine. These are the *Ordo de Catechizandis Rudibus* that came in the circle of Arno, bishop of Salzburg, and the *De Ecclesiastica Disciplina* of Rabano Mauro.³⁰

3.2. *Third and Fourth Periods of Christian Preaching*

The third period extends from the twelfth to the thirteenth century and consists of the predication that was carried out in monasteries, in universities and that which was addressed to the population. It was a period of intense predication or preaching and there are lots of documentations. Predication was mostly practiced in monasteries and many of the sermons were adaptable to the secular clergy and laity since the ideal of Christian life proposed to the monks was not so much different from that of the other faithful. However, the form of elaboration which was usually allegoric demanded an educated and spiritually refined

sacrament of penance had acquired a primary place. Later at the end of the middle-ages, different types of 'Confessional Booklets' were prepared for the preparation of the sacrament of confession. Some were for the use of the clergy and others for the lay faithful. These 'Confessional Booklets' were the forerunners of catechism. After the invention of the printing press other books, more extensive in content than the 'Confessional Booklets' were published. In this period, pictures in posters, in stained glass windows and other artistic works were used for the religious instruction of the illiterate (Cf ALATHARA, *Introduction to Catechetics*, 18).

³⁰ Cf GROPPPO, «*Catechesi del medioevo*», 413. Among other important works and persons in this period we can mention the catechism of Alcuin of York († 804), the teacher of Charlemagne; the catechism of Dodena, wife of Bernard Septimania; the eleventh century treaties of Fullbert of Chartres and Bonizon of Plaisance (Cf ALATHARA, *Introduction to Catechetics*, 19).

population which was rarely found among the laity and the simple clergy of the rural areas.³¹ Among the most important preachers of monks in this period we can mention St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153). In the universities, predication was concerned with the spiritual formation of the students, which were clerics or religious, and with their preparation for future pastoral activity. Predication, together with lecturing and disputation, was one of the fundamental duties of the teachers or '*Magisters*'; in fact, it was the principal one in respect to the other two.³²

The preaching addressed to the population was prepared in a diverse way to suit the understanding of the common people. The ecclesiastical authority in this period was concerned, at all levels, to promote and control the religious instruction of the people. We have Popes like Innocent III who, himself, was an excellent preacher and who took important pastoral initiatives regarding preaching; we have councils like the IV Lateran Council (1215); bishops like Maurizio of Sully whose great collection of sermons contains important 'Prologue' that concerns catechesis of population; we have synods like that of Paris of 1204 and that which was known as the 'Synod of West' (*Sinodale dell'Ovest*) ca. 1220. There were also individual initiatives of clerics, monks and hermits who preached the population independently with the permission of a parish minister. Among the initiatives that greatly contributed to the religious instruction of population with a widespread activity of preaching throughout Europe, we have the two great Mendicant Orders that were founded in the beginning of the thirteenth century: the Franciscans and the Dominicans (Preachers). These Orders, united to the pastoral activity of the ancient monastic Orders and the regular canons, were filling up the great gaps in the activities of the secular clergy in the field of preaching.³³

³¹ In fact, during the middle-ages, since there was no formal religious formation in regard to knowledge and understanding, the people remained mentally immature and this, later, paved the way for the Reformation (Cf *Ibid.*).

³² Cf GROPPPO, «*Catechesi del medioevo*», 413-414.

³³ Cf *Ibid.* Some other notable works and persons to be mentioned in the catechetical history of this period are: the twelfth century catechism of Elucidarium of Honorius; the *De Quinque Septenis Seu Septenariis* of Hugh of St. Victor († 1119); the catechetical instructions of St. Thomas Aquinas (1221-1274); etc (Cf C. DELCORNIO, *La predicazione nell'età comunale*, Firenze, G. C. Sansoni, 1974, 7-115; Cf ALATHARA, *Introduction to Catechetics*, 19).

The fourth period includes the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. We have a wide documentation of this period; however, since the major part is in the form of manuscript, not much can be said in regard to the preaching activities in this period. We have the documentation of the V Lateran Council (1516) where we find an echo of the difficulty encountered in the Church in the centuries preceding the Council and the compendium of regulations and recommendations made in anterior councils or synods. It was about reformation; however, like the other conciliar decisions it is brief in dealing with the renewal of the activity of preaching and with the pastoral activity of the Church in general. It was the Protestant reformation which later moved the Church towards a radical renewal of its pastoral activities that took place during the Council of Trent and the reformation movement that followed it.³⁴

4. Catechesis in the Modern Period

In the modern period which extends from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century (the period of First Vatican Council - 1870), the practice of catechetical activity received new impulses and great variety of denominations. The Council of Trent is remarkable in the history of catechesis; it is a council that had made a notable effort in the promotion of catechesis.³⁵ Starting from 1530's a series of catechisms started to be diffused both from the part of the Reformers and the Catholics. Before this time, generally speaking, Catholics did not have catechisms, only the popular devotional booklets. The modern period is, above all, a period of 'catechism' understood in a double sense: as a form of elementary and systematic religious

³⁴ Cf GROPPPO, «*Catechesi del medioevo*», 414-415.

³⁵ The Council of Trent was convoked by Pope Paul III, on 19th Nov. 1544, with the bull *Laetare Jerusalem*. It started on 13th of Nov. 1545 and was concluded on 4th Dec. 1563. The deliberations of the Council were approved by Pius IV, with the bull *Benedictus Deus* of 26th Jan. 1564, but which was published on 30th May 1564. The Council obliged the bishops to organize catechesis for children and also adults in all parishes at least on Sundays and Holidays of obligation. After the Council, a special catechetical program was designed and introduced into parish pastoral ministry; the catechesis of children was renewed; the division of the children according to age groups became an accepted practice in the cities and proper catechisms were written for them (Cf P. BRAIDO, *Lineamenti di storia della catechesi e dei catechismi: dal «tempo delle riforme» all'età degli imperialismi*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 1991, 66; Cf ALATHARA, *Introduction to Catechetics*, 19-20; Cf CRUZ, *Storia della catechesi*, 202-215). For the deliberations of the Council of Trent: Cf H. JEDIN, *Storia del Concilio di Trento*, vol. IV, Brescia, Morcelliana, 1981.

instruction and as a book or compendium of the Christian doctrine.³⁶ In this period, there were also other fundamental and more significant elements for catechesis that include: the 'Confraternity of Christian Doctrine' as a basic ecclesial movement for catechesis, the phenomenon of Enlightenment with its great influence on catechesis, and the beginning of catechesis in popular schools.³⁷

4.1. *Reformation and Catholic Catechisms*

The Reformers were very zealous to propagate their teaching and were publishing catechisms. Already from 1516, Martin Luther (1483-1546), was preaching on the traditional catechetical formulas of the late middle-ages: the Creed, 'Our Father', and the Ten Commandments. His major concern was to put as the basis of the preparation for a dignified reception of the sacraments that which the authentic tradition of the primitive Church had established. Therefore, he put the Decalogue as the principal material for the preparation to confession and eliminated the catalogues of sins and virtues of that period. He also tried to widely diffuse the knowledge and understanding of the formulas of faith. On the basis of his catechetical preaching, in 1529, he published the 'Little' and the 'Great Catechism'.³⁸

The 'Little Catechism' of Luther was destined to simple parish priests of the rural areas and to the fathers of families (usually farmers). It was meant to serve as an example for the way of teaching the Christian truths in this situation of life. The 'Great Catechism' is deeper and was meant for more educated parish priests. The main interest of Luther was catechetical pedagogy, i.e., that which is solidly verified and firmly established must be presented and

³⁶ Cf ALBERICH, «*Catechesi*», 104.

³⁷ Another important event in the history of catechesis in this period is that here we find the seed of the beginnings of the restoration of the catechumenate. Following the great geographical discoveries and the beginning of the missionary activity in the sixteenth century, the need of preparing the neo-converts with a catechetical formation that could guarantee their perseverance in the pagan environment was greatly felt and a catechumenate of forty days with progressive ritual of baptism was proposed. Again in this period, starting from the sixteenth century we have the birth of many religious orders who have as a primary objective the education, particularly the religious education of young people (Cf BRAIDO, *Lineamenti di storia della catechesi e dei catechismi*, 99-133; Cf SEUMOIS, «*Catechesi missionaria: storia*», 437; Cf D. S. AMALORPAVADASS, «*Il catecumenato in Asia e in Africa*», in E. BARTOLUCCI (Ed.), *Iniziazione Cristiana. Un catecumenato rinnovato secondo il concilio e l'Ordo dell'iniziazione cristiana degli adulti*, Bologna, Nigrizia, 1972, 49-51).

³⁸ Cf E. PAUL, «*Lutero Martin*», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 393.

explained taking into consideration the situation of life; therefore, in existential sense. Surely the aspects of Reform were accentuated in the catechisms of Luther, but without the theological controversies and without a tentative of transporting scientific theology in the catechism. The catechisms of Luther included the three formulas used in the late middle-ages, Creed, 'Our Father' and the Decalogue, with the addition of sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, and later a preparation for Confession and an appendix with prayers and rules of life taken from the Scriptures. The parents, particularly the fathers, were entrusted with the duty of teaching their children. The catechism was book of the house and book of life. In addition, Luther was strongly asking for the establishment of Christian schools. Later on, with the new scholastic institutions of the Reformation, the 'Little Catechism' became a scholastic book and became a doctrinal instrument of orthodoxy which was mainly learned by memorization.³⁹ Other noted catechisms of the Reformers include those of Martin Butzer (1491-1551), mediator between Luther and Zwingli; the catechisms of John Calvin (1509-1564): the *Institutio*, *Formulaire*, and the *Cristianae religionis institutio*; the catechism of Johannes Brenz (1499-1570); of Heidelberg (1563); etc.⁴⁰

While the Reformers, particularly Luther and Calvin, were diffusing their catechisms, other catechisms of Catholic orthodoxy were also coming out but none of them seemed to respond adequately to the pastoral demands of that period. Peter Canisius (1521-1597) felt the need of a book that would present with precision the Catholic doctrine and tried to provide catechisms destined to different groups of persons on the basis of their level of understanding. In fact, this constitutes the originality of his work. In 1555, he wrote his large catechism in Latin (*Summa Doctrinae Christianae*) for intellectuals with about 220 questions and answers. Then, in 1556, he wrote a catechism for children and the illiterate (*Catechismus Minimus*) with 50 questions and answers. In 1558/1559, he published another catechism (*Parvus Catechismus Catholicorum*) for students of high school with 120 questions and answers. Again, in 1589, he published a catechism (*Institutiones Christianae*) uniquely constituted of images, generally

³⁹ Cf *Ibid.*, 393-394; Cf BRAIDO, *Lineamenti di storia della catechesi e dei catechismi*, 39-56; Cf WESTERHOFF III –EDWARDS, *A Faithful Church. Issues in the History of Catechesis*, 120-143.

⁴⁰ Cf BRAIDO, *Lineamenti di storia della catechesi e dei catechismi*, 48-56.

accompanied by only brief subtitles. His catechisms were quickly translated into numerous languages and were widely diffused. In as much as the catechetical content is concerned, Canisius followed the works of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas and the wisdom and justice of *Sir* 1:26, articulating his work in the following way: the Creed is put under *faith*; the ‘Our Father’ and other prayers under *hope*; the Decalogue and commandments of the Church under *charity*; the sacraments are put under *wisdom*; and under *justice*, according to the formulas of middle-ages, were put the catalogues of the sins to be avoided and the virtues to be practiced.⁴¹

In 1566, the so called ‘Roman Catechism’ (*Catechismus Romanus* or *Catechismus ad parochos*)⁴² was born under the impulse of the Council of Trent and occupies a very important place in the history of catechesis for its content, structure, methodological orientation, diffusion and influence. It is the unique catechism which came out as a fruit of an ecumenical Council, with papal authority and with an official character for the entire Church. In addition, it was recommended by very numerous Synods and local councils – it is really an exception among catechisms. This catechism provided pastors with the fundamental elements of catechesis and is, at the same time, doctrinal, biblical and spiritual; however, not limiting itself to a mere intellectual knowledge of Christian doctrine, but aiming towards faith education and maturity. It was also meant for counterbalancing the influence of protestant catechisms but does not have a polemic character.⁴³

In its structure, the ‘Roman Catechism’ follows the classical scheme with four parts: faith, sacraments, commandments and prayer. The dogmatic parts that deal with faith and sacraments are highlighted with a privileged attention to the sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist and Penance. The entire catechism is orientated towards Christian life, many times entrusting the parish-priests with the duty of clarifying the doctrine in view of daily practices. Therefore,

⁴¹ Cf E. PAUL, «Canisio Pietro», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 100-101; Cf BRAIDO, *Lineamenti di storia della catechesi e dei catechismi*, 57-65; Cf A. LÄPPLE, *Breve storia della catechesi*, Brescia, Queriniana, ²1985, 103-122.

⁴² See: L. ANDRIANOPOLI (Ed.), *Il Catechismo Romano del Concilio di Trento*, Città del Vaticano, Civitas Gentium, 1946.

⁴³ Cf BRAIDO, *Lineamenti di storia della catechesi e dei catechismi*, 66; Cf L. RESINES, «Catechismo Romano», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 125.

the entire doctrinal framework is in function of pastoral action and in function of a fervent and illuminated Christian dedication. That's why, in as much as the content is regarded, it offers only the things that were strictly necessary to the pastoral ministry and that were accessible to the capacity of the faithful. But this does not mean that it was a catechism for the people, rather it was an instrument to help the parish priests for instructing the people. Therefore, its function and influence for the people was indirect; while other more popular and polemical catechisms had direct influence on the people. One of the limits of the Roman Catechism is that it does not have the pedagogical characteristic that would have facilitated its use by the parish priests in preaching or in catechesis.⁴⁴

Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621)⁴⁵ composed three catechisms. In 1597, he wrote the 'Brief Christian Doctrine to be Learned by Heart' (*Dottrina cristiana breve da impararsi a mente*). This work is concentrated on two aspects: on the necessity of transmitting the Catholic doctrine and on the capacity of the individuals to whom it was destined. It was destined to children and simple persons and is of a great simplicity. It is divided into four parts: Creed, prayer, commandments and sacraments. The order of the 'Roman Catechism' is changed and some complementary aspects are added. It invites not only for knowing the doctrine but also for putting it in practice. It is polemic and defensive in nature and consists of 96 questions and answers. In 1598, Bellarmine wrote his second major work (*Dichiarazione più copiosa della dottrina cristiana*), which has also a form of a dialogue, with 273 questions and answers. It was meant as an instrument for those who teach children and other simple persons; therefore, it is destined for catechists. It is justified in the following way: Creed (*faith*), prayer (*hope*), commandments (*charity*), sacraments (*means for acquiring grace*). The polemical character is more accentuated. This catechism was very popular in Italy and the First Vatican Council considered it to be a model catechism. The third work (*Dichiarazione del Simbolo*), written in 1604, was composed for providing priests with the necessary materials for preaching. It

⁴⁴ Cf BRAIDO, *Lineamenti di storia della catechesi e dei catechismi*, 66-74; Cf L. RESINES, «Catechismo Romano», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 125-126.

⁴⁵ For a wider reading on the life and works of R. Bellarmine: Cf J. BRODRICK, *S. Roberto Bellarmino*, Milano, Editrice Ancora, 1965; Cf ASSOCIAZIONE GIOVANILE DIOCESANA MILANESE (Ed.), *S. Roberto Bellarmino. I catechismi: Breve dottrina cristiana e Dichiarazione della dottrina cristiana*, Milano, La Favilla, 1941.

strongly recommends the priests to diligently fulfil their duties in teaching others and maintains that implicit faith is not sufficient. It explains in detail all the articles of the Symbol.⁴⁶ Other very noted catechisms in this period include: the anti-Calvinist catechism of Edomd Auger (1530-1591); the 'Doctrines' of Jerónimo de Ripalda (1536-1618) and of Gasper Astete (1537-1601); etc.⁴⁷

4.2. *Confraternity of Christian Doctrine*

The sixteenth century is particularly important for the history of catechesis also because in this century were born and diffused the Schools and the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. The Confraternity was an important instrument of Christian formation and also of elementary alphabetization of the common people by means of catechism. It initiated in 1536, in Milan, by a young priest called Castellino of Castello, and, received a particular impulse, by St. Charles Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan, who prescribed the foundation of the Confraternity in every parish from 1569-1570, and gave it a juridical form. By the impulse of St. Charles the Confraternity was vigorously promoted and inserted in the heart of the parish-pastoral. It was approved by Pope Pius V, in 1571, and later in 1607, was officially recognized, by Pope Paul V, as Archconfraternity of the Basilica of St. Peter in Vatican.⁴⁸

The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine remained for centuries as the basic structure for the catechetical instruction of children and young people. The organization of the Schools and of the Confraternity was centralized at the diocesan level. All the Schools of Christian Doctrine in a diocese formed one Confraternity and depended on one head under the authority of the bishop who erects the Confraternity, approves the books of catechism and controls the uniformity of the method though taking into consideration the particular situations. Much emphasis and insistence was given to the aspect of conversion and to the personal piety of the catechist and of all the members of the Confraternity as well as to the communitarian

⁴⁶ Cf L. RESINES, «Bellarmino Roberto», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 81-82; Cf BRAIDO, *Lineamenti di storia della catechesi e dei catechismi*, 82-86.

⁴⁷ Cf BRAIDO, *Lineamenti di storia della catechesi e dei catechismi*, 82-86.

⁴⁸ Cf U. GIANETTO, «Confraternita della Dottrina Cristiana», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 170-172.

dimension. The classes were composed of little groups – four to six children, and it usually took place on Sunday afternoon. This Confraternity which constitutes one of the roots of the future oratories had contributed to some methodological suggestions valorised in the Catholic educational camps (parishes, schools, oratories, etc.) till the period of the Second Vatican Council.⁴⁹

4.3. *Catechesis and the Phenomenon of Enlightenment*

At the end of the seventeenth and the eighteenth century was widely diffused the phenomenon of Enlightenment⁵⁰ which presents a radical turn in the history of the Church and the history of catechesis. Enlightenment as such was not against religion but against revealed religion, affirming a natural religion founded on human reason and human morality. It affirmed that at the basis of Christian instruction there is the instruction on natural religion (which had to demonstrate the existence and the attributes of God) and the doctrine of rational morality. And these themes were to be developed with the Socratic Method. The movement of ‘Socratics’, which flourished in this period, influenced catechesis both in a positive and negative sense. At the level of method, catechesis was not tied to a simple memorization, neither to a simple exposition which was rather repetitive; instead it consisted of a continuous

⁴⁹ Cf *Ibid.*, 170-171; Cf BRAIDO, *Lineamenti di storia della catechesi e dei catechismi*, 134-144.

⁵⁰ The phenomenon of Enlightenment, more than being a period of history, was a movement that characterized a certain period. It is a phenomenon that can not be generalized easily because it regards intellectuals of diverse formation and it had diverse geographical and sociological influences. For example, in Spain, it was almost entirely Catholic. Enlightenment was accompanied by other relevant phenomena like the Jansenism. It consisted of the exaltation of the reason; more specifically it wanted liberty of thought, valorisation of science, tolerance, interior and exterior autonomy, and emancipation from any ties in various fields: economic, social, political, ecclesiastical, theological, dogmatic, etc. From the social point of view it was an ideology of the bourgeois which aimed towards the acquisition of wealth and power in a world where economy, science and technology were more important. From the cultural point of view it popularized knowledge and affirmed new intellectual role. Popular instruction began, with a progressive scholastic obligation, in order to form honest citizens, useful for the society and for the individual self – and according to the Catholic Enlightenment to form good Christians. At the pedagogical level the movement of ‘Socratics’ was diffused both as method and as content. In some aspects the Enlightenment was atheistic and materialistic, very often against theological morality. It wanted to establish an ethics and religion only on the basis of the natural principles. Therefore, it brought forth a rationalistic vision of God (*deism*). It rejected the Christian dogmatic vision that regards original sin, grace, free salvific action of God, the mission of the Church, ecclesiastical authority, mysteries, etc (Cf BRAIDO, *Lineamenti di storia della catechesi e dei catechismi*, 294-300; Cf E. PAUL, «*Illuminismo*», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 336-337).

interrogation that helped the individuals to arrive at a certain truth or norm by themselves. It is a method that facilitates true process of learning, mental formation, and real conviction in regard to moral and religious issues; and leads to a responsible moral conduct. The other consequences for catechesis were the production of many catechetical texts inspired by Socratics; catechesis became an educational science more than being a part of pastoral theology; and in catechesis was applied the mentality that ‘only those things that can be understood by reason can form the heart’ and that ‘only those things that correspond to the natural needs are religious and natural’.⁵¹

Before the Enlightenment morality was taught as emanation of the dogmatic doctrine, as expression of the will of God and as a condition for obtaining eternal salvation, and was a secondary theme in respect to the other parts of the doctrine, i.e., in respect to the Creed, sacraments, and prayer. But with the Enlightenment it acquired a major importance with a tendency of making it autonomous from Dogma and Bible and putting it in human and civil function (even though not in separation from the doctrine of God). The priest became ‘teacher of humanity’ and ‘of moral’. In addition, different critics were made on the catechism of Bellarmine, on the traditional and other catechisms. It was affirmed that it is useless to teach the Christian doctrine to children because they are not able to understand it; the ideal proposed was that the ‘Little Catechism’ initiates with the doctrines of natural religion and that it points greatly to the rational morality; and once the natural religion was learned, it had to be demonstrated as the religion of Christ and then its specific doctrines were to be taught. Therefore, the catechism had to have three parts: the doctrine of religion, moral doctrine, and the doctrine of Jesus. The catechism became very restricted avoiding: questions of theological studies (considering only the essential); very abstract terms (e.g. instead of saying ‘grace’ is used ‘action of the Spirit’) and the treatments on saints. In regard to sacraments, only Baptism and Eucharist were treated. The catechisms insisted much on the duties towards the civil authority; in fact, the part of morality on ‘duties’ was enlarged and the sacraments were treated as the means for putting these duties in practice. Therefore, the sacraments were marginalized

⁵¹ Cf BRAIDO, *Lineamenti di storia della catechesi e dei catechismi*, 294-309; Cf F. ARNOLD, *Storia moderna della teologia pastorale*, Roma, Città Nuova, 1970, 117-251.

in favour of moral precepts with deistic and lay tendency. The catechism was reduced from four parts to three parts. In one scheme, the observance of commandments and ecclesial precepts comes as a consequence of faith and sacraments. In another scheme there is exchange of place between commandments and sacraments – which seems more logical than the first (believing and observing the commandments as the finalities, and sacraments as the means). In the sphere of catechetical theory, in this period catechetics became a discipline of the university.⁵²

4.4. *Catechesis in Popular Schools*

In the eighteenth century, different nations were directly and explicitly interested in the establishment of schools – not only high schools but also public basic schools, i.e., elementary schools. In 1729, Vittorio Amadeus II of Savoy, King of Sardinia, was working for the reorganization and centralization of the entire scholastic system within the framework of the Reform magistrate. And after some decades, new historical event for schools came with the official scholastic establishments made in Prussia, with Frederick II, in 1763 and 1765, and in the territories subject to the monarchy, with Maria Teresa (Austria), in 1774.⁵³

For catechesis and catechisms a new period started, above all in what regards the popular or elementary schools. It was not only question of more clearly structured new programs that included the presence of catechism (and also sacred history) as a school material together with the other materials like reading, writing, mathematics, history, geography, civil education, etc.. There was also the presence of a new spirit that penetrated the entire significance and spirit of the school, explicitly finalized, in as much as possible, towards the formation of instructed and useful citizens (for themselves and for the State) in addition to the formation of convinced and faithful Christians. In coincidence with catechism, there was a change in the finality of the school, in the figure of teachers and also in the method. In regard to the finality: alphabetization was not only meant for learning catechism in a better way but for creating

⁵² Cf BRAIDO, *Lineamenti di storia della catechesi e dei catechismi*, 294-309; Cf PAUL, «*Illuminismo*», 336-337; Cf LÄPPLE, *Breve storia della catechesi*, 131-167.

⁵³ Cf BRAIDO, *Lineamenti di storia della catechesi e dei catechismi*, 310.

more instructed, capable and free citizens. In regard to the teachers: they were formed in view of the respective materials; piety or being good Catholic was their primary quality; they do not act like priests but have a lay finality; they were taught the *normal* method to be utilized in teaching catechism and sacred history. In regard to the method: there was the *normal* method with simultaneous instruction for all the materials; there was division of the classes according to age and capacity; reading and memorization with a loud voice together in group; there was the use of tables, schemes, writing boards, etc; and there was a dialogical method with the word ‘catechizing’ signifying pulling out all talents with the detailed analysis of the passages.⁵⁴

At the end of this period, during the First Vatican Council (1870), a unique ‘Little Catechism’ for the entire Church was proposed and a scheme in Latin, on the model of Bellarmine (the Brief Christian Doctrine), was given to the Fathers. After a long discussion, where the major part of the Fathers gave their consent, the scheme was rewritten and approved with the following criteria: that it would not introduce in the scheme prescriptions in regard to the obligation and modality of catechizing; that the catechism would be made by the Pope without consultation of the episcopate; that it would be on the model of Bellarmine and that it would be translated in fidelity to the content but not in a literal way. However, it remained without being promulgated due to different reasons particularly the anticipated and unplanned closing of the Council.⁵⁵

5. Catechesis in the Contemporary Period

In the last period of the history of catechesis, starting from the last quarter of the nineteenth century, we have the birth of a vast movement for the renewal of catechetical activity.⁵⁶ However, this catechetical movement always remained characterized by traditional

⁵⁴ Cf *Ibid.*, 310-322.

⁵⁵ Cf BRAIDO, *Lineamenti di storia della catechesi e dei catechismi*, 384-402.

⁵⁶ When we say ‘movement’ it does not include the isolated personal actions, but refers to a more or less organized work that includes a large number of scholars and animators, working directly, with a link among them both in action and reflection, for creating and diffusing a certain opinion for the renewal of legislation and

terms such as catechism, religious instruction, religious teaching, religious education, teaching of Christian doctrine, etc. But later, in the twentieth century, always in the context of this renewal movement, the ancient term 'catechesis' which was forgotten in the previous centuries is seen to reappear with the purpose of returning to the richness of the origins, above all of the apostolic and patristic periods, and with a desire of overcoming the limits of an exceedingly intellectualistic and superficial conception of the catechetical activity. In this sense, with the prevailing impulse of the French catechetical movement of 1950's, progressively, was arrived at a terminological clarification. The terms 'catechism' and 'catechistical' were partly substituted with the terms 'catechesis' and 'catechetical'. Naturally, more than a terminological change, the objective was discovering and reformulating with meaningful and satisfying terms the significance and the task of catechesis in the Church.⁵⁷

In this last period, we have also the preparation and publication of very important catechetical documents that can be considered as landmarks in the history of contemporary catechesis: the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *General Directory for Catechesis*. The *Guide for Catechists* has also a particular catechetical significance. In addition, this period, particularly after the Second Vatican Council, is marked by real efforts for the restoration of the catechumenate.

organization. They work together for reviewing and rethinking the contents and the texts of catechesis, for perfecting the methods and for creating a link among themselves with periodicals or other writings or associations – and so creating a more or less organized movement – for diffusing ideas and experiences. Such catechetical movement, in the true and proper sense, began in the Catholic Church only at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century (Cf U. GIANETTO, «*Movimento catechistico*», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 448); Cf J. HOFINGER, *Looking Backward and Forward: Journey of Catechesis*, in "The Living Light" 20 (1983-84) 4, 348-357.

⁵⁷ Cf ALBERICH, «*Catechesi*», 104-105. Among the important catechisms that came out at the beginning of this contemporary period we can mention the catechism of Pius X. Usually by 'catechism of Pius X' is intended that which was published in 1912. But this one was preceded by another catechism edited in 1905 which in its time constituted the greatest work of unification of catechisms that started years before. This catechism of 1905 has three parts: primary notions, brief catechism and major catechism. The edition of that of 1912 was necessitated as a result of the excessive length of the preceding text (Cf U. GIANETTO, «*Catechismo di Pio X*», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 121-122). There was also the Baltimore catechism which was one of the English catechisms that was widely used throughout the world, particularly in the United States. It was published on 7th April 1885 with the title 'A Catechism of Christian Doctrine'. It was revised in 1941 and was important in the renewal of catechesis in the United States (Cf ALATHARA, *Introduction to Catechetics*, 231).

5.1. *International Catechetical Movements*

The Italian and French catechetical movement was born as a reaction to the abolishment of religious instruction in schools, starting from 1873 for Italy and from 1881-1882 for France. That of Germany and Austria was born in connection to the establishment of the Unions of Catechists, in Munich and Vienna. A constitutive characteristic of the catechetical movement is the diffusion of ideas by means of catechetical periodicals, congresses and conventions – local, national and international – and study weeks.⁵⁸ There is also an always increasing diffusion of catechetical handbooks and formation of catechists by way of catechetical training in seminaries, schools for catechists, and later, Institutes of catechetics and catechetical Centres. Normally, the movement starts from the base and has strong moments in occasion of ecclesial events relevant to catechesis. The contributions made are then assumed by the teaching authority of the Church and are diffused in a wider sense.⁵⁹

The catechetical movement can be divided into four periods. The first goes from the First Vatican Council, 1870 – where numerous sessions were dedicated to the problem of a unique catechism for the entire Church – to the encyclical letter *Acerbo nimis*, 1905, which appropriated the acquisitions of the Italian Catechetical Movement. The second period extends from this encyclical *Acerbo nimis* – that has given rise to a new catechetical fervour

⁵⁸ In the field of catechetics certain international meetings had made great influence for the further development of catechesis. Moreover, these international meetings have facilitated the encounter of catechists from different cultural contexts and have been occasions for the revival of the catechetical movement – though, generally, it can be affirmed that the catechetical progress has been favored more from national congresses and the less official study meetings. Among the principal international meetings we can mention: the *International Catechetical Congress* in Rome (10-14 Oct. 1950); the *International Study Week of Missionary Catechesis* in Eichstätt - Germany (21-28 Jul. 1960) which can be considered as the last great act of kerygmatic catechesis; the *International Study Week of Missionary Catechesis* in Bangkok - Thailand (31 Oct. - 3 Nov. 1962) which was relevant for the overcome of kerygmatic catechesis and the opening to all issues of first evangelization; the *International Study Week of Missionary Catechesis* in Katigondo - Uganda (28 Aug. - 1 Sep. 1964) in which strongly emerged the non-European cultural issues and the new attitude in regard to non-Christian religions; the *International Catechetical Study Week of Medellín* - Colombia (11-18 Aug. 1968) in which the issue of catechesis was strongly polarized from the socio-political field; the *International Catechetical Congress* in Rome (20-25 Sep. 1971) which was convoked for the presentation and study of the General Catechetical Directory of 1971 (Cf J. GEVAERT, «*Congressi catechistici internazionali*», in ID. (Ed.), *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 173; Cf ALATHARA, *Introduction to Catechetics*, 23-28).

⁵⁹ Cf GIANETTO, «*Movimento catechistico*», 448.

everywhere – to the decree *Provido sane*, 1935, where Diocesan Catechetical Offices⁶⁰ were instituted. The third period goes from *Provido sane* – that revived the movement giving it solid diocesan organization which then rapidly developed into National Catechetical Offices and Centres as springs of an intense work of organization, of formation and study – to the Second Vatican Council, 1962-1965. The fourth period extends from the Second Vatican Council to the Synod on Catechesis, 1977,⁶¹ and the apostolic exhortation of Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 1979. It is a period of great development at a world level where we have the *Second International Congress of Rome*, in 1971; the issuing of the *General Catechetical Directory*, in 1971; the Synod on Evangelization, in 1974;⁶² the apostolic exhortation of Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, in 1975; the issuing of many national directories and new catechisms; etc.⁶³

On the other hand, taking into consideration the themes of discussion in the history of the catechetical movement we can distinguish three phases. The first is the *phase of method* and it goes from the end of the nineteenth century to the 1930's. We have the Munich method,⁶⁴ the active methods,⁶⁵ etc. The second is the *phase of content* extending from the publication of the book of J. A. Jungmann, 1936 – on preaching as a proclamation of the Good News (*the*

⁶⁰ The major purpose of the Diocesan Catechetical Office is to promote and discipline the religious instruction of the faithful in every diocese, to respond to the new demands of religious instruction in public schools and to organize courses of preparation for catechists and religious teachers. However, its activity can always be extended to other sectors relevant to catechesis (Cf S. PINTOR, «Ufficio Catechistico Diocesano», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 649-651).

⁶¹ See: E. CAPORELLO, «Il Sinodo del 1977 sulla catechesi: linea di lettura», in BONIVENTO, *Andate e Insegnate*, 40-49. See also: G. CAPRILE, *Il Sinodo dei vescovi 1977*, Roma, La Civiltà Cattolica, 1978.

⁶² See: D. S. AMALORPAVADASS (Ed.), *The Synod of Bishops, Rome, 27th September – 26th October 1974. Evangelization of the Modern World*, in “Word and Worship – Special Number” 8 (1975) 1.

⁶³ Cf GIANETTO, «Movimento catechistico», 448; Cf G. CAVALLOTTO, «La catechesi contemporanea: da Pio X ai nostri giorni», in BONIVENTO, *Andate e Insegnate*, 187-197.

⁶⁴ In the cities of Munich (Germany) and Vienna (Austria) there were catechetical societies from which came out many methodological discussions giving rise to the Munich method. The purpose was to find a more effective method than the traditional question-answer approach. The Munich method tried to adapt educational psychology into catechetical instructions and consisted of three well defined steps: presentation, explanation and application. These steps corresponded to the three stages in the learning process of educational psychology namely: perception, understanding, and practice. The Munich method faced several adaptations and modifications but it never acquired a universal acceptance (Cf ALATHARA, *Introduction to Catechetics*, 21-22).

⁶⁵ The active method or ‘learning by doing’ involves the teaching methods based on the fact that children learn not only by hearing but also by doing; that they are formed not only by word, but also by life itself (Cf *Ibid.*, 22; Cf C. WACKENHEIM, *Breve storia della catechesi*, Bologna, Dehoniane, ²1985, 137-139).

kerygmatic phase)⁶⁶ – and the reflections of F. Arnold on faith as the end of Catechesis, to the Second Vatican Council.⁶⁷ The third is the *anthropological phase*, from the Second Vatican Council – particularly from the Second International Study Week on catechesis, that of Bangkok in 1962, up to that of Medellín in 1968, in which the attention is expanded to man in society and to the total liberty of the person – up to the time of the Synods on Evangelization (1974) and on Catechesis (1977) which focused on the situation. J. Hofinger postulated a forth phase, which he called the *pastoral or spiritual phase*, concentrated on the community and on the catechist and would constitute a synthesis of all the preceding phases.⁶⁸ Other scholars also distinguish three phases as follows: the *kerygmatic phase*, *anthropological phase* and *political phase*. All these phases have progressively resulted in a profound change of perspective in regard to the content and method in catechesis. They emphasize in the consideration of man in his concrete life situation and stress the unity between history of salvation and history of man.⁶⁹

5.2. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*

As it has already been mentioned, the question of a unique catechism for the entire Church treated in the First Vatican Council did not find any conclusion. This question was raised again in the Second Vatican Council and in the Synods of Bishops that followed the Council (in 1967 and 1977) but no definitive conclusion was reached. It was only following the

⁶⁶ It was also known as the kerygmatic movement and it was popularized mainly through the works of Josef Andreas Jungmann, S.J., (1889-1975) who was a professor of Catechetics and Pastoral Science in the University of Innsbruck in Austria. The emphasis of Jungmann was more on the need for a religious understanding of the Christian message than the orthodox interpretation of certain doctrines and proper teaching methods. This movement was further popularized by Johannes Hofinger who was then associated with the East Asian Pastoral Institute in Manila (Philippines). The kerygma – the proclamation of the Good News and the call for repentance and conversion – became the spirit, soul and substance of the movement. The kerygmatic movement defined catechesis as the ministry of the Word and closely connected it with evangelization (Cf ALATHARA, *Introduction to Catechetics*, 22-23).

⁶⁷ Cf WACKENHEIM, *Breve storia della catechesi*, 140-143.

⁶⁸ Cf GIANETTO, «*Movimento catechistico*», 448-449; Cf HOFINGER, *Looking Backward and Forward*, 350-357; Cf CAVALLOTTO, «*La catechesi contemporanea: da Pio X ai nostri giorni*», 197-104.

⁶⁹ Cf L. ERDOZAIN, *L'evoluzione della catechesi negli ultimi anni*, in "Presenza Pastorale" 40 (1970) 8/9, 645-653.

Extraordinary Synod of 1985⁷⁰ that a concrete step was made for the preparation of a universal catechism, and after six years of intense work, under the leadership of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was prepared and on the 8th of December 1992, Pope John Paul II, promulgated it with an apostolic constitution.⁷¹

The CCC is a fruit of a very extensive collaboration, in a spirit of complete openness and fervent zeal.⁷² It is a result of collegial work, but from a strictly juridical point of view it is a Papal work. It is a major catechism in the sense that it is intended to serve as a source or point of reference for the development of minor national or local catechisms throughout the world. It is a universal catechism made for the universal Church but it was never officially entitled as the 'universal catechism'. The CCC contains the essential and fundamental content of the Catholic faith.⁷³ It is very rich, attested and illuminated by the Sacred Scriptures, the tradition of the Apostles, the writings of the Church Fathers, the lives and writings of the Saints,

⁷⁰ In October 1985, an Extraordinary Synod was convoked to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council and in this Synod was proposed the preparation of a catechism for the Universal Church.

⁷¹ Cf ALATHARA, *Introduction to Catechetics*, 234-237; Cf T. KALATHUVEETTIL, «*Characteristics and Urgency for the Catechism of the Catholic Church*», in C. DE SOUZA – T. KALATHUVEETTIL (Eds.), *Introducing the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Reflections and Comments*, Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publications, 1994, 1-11.

⁷² In July 1986 the Pope appointed a Commission of Cardinals and bishops to prepare a compendium of the Catholic doctrine. In February 1989 the Commission sent a draft of what they had prepared to all the bishops of the world for consultation. In November 1989 a revised project was sent again to all bishops for the intended consultation which was to last till May 1990. From June to October 1990 there was a period of examination and evaluation of the responses submitted by the bishops. The bishops had contributed very much and a lot of amendments were done that the final draft was considerably different from the one that circulated in 1989. From November 1990 till September 1991, there was a preparation of a new project of the catechism, the 'amended text', and then of the 'pro-definitive text' – first and second revised versions. In October 1991 there was an examination and evaluation of the corrected 'pro-definitive text' version (a seventh text from the beginning of the work). From November 1991 till February 1992 there was a preparation of the 'definitive project' of the text. On 14th February 1992, on the feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius, the Commission unanimously approved the 'definitive project' of the Catechism of the Catholic Church which was then presented to the Pope, John Paul II, for judgment. On 30th April 1992 a definitive version was prepared, and on 25th June 1992 it was officially approved by the Pope (Cf T. KALATHUVEETTIL, «*Redaction and Structure of the CCC*», in DE SOUZA – KALATHUVEETTIL, *Introducing the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 12-18; Cf ALATHARA, *Introduction to Catechetics*, 235-237).

⁷³ The CCC is positive, objective and declarative in its exposition of the Catholic doctrine. It is both inviting and challenging. It presents the Catholic truths in a way which facilitates understanding and presents them within the context of the Church's history and tradition. It is intended, first of all for bishops, as the first teachers of faith and pastors of the Church, and then for all those who have the duty to catechize and all the faithful for personal reading. It is not intended for the direct youth by very young persons or children (Cf ALATHARA, *Introduction to Catechetics*, 234-238).

Conciliar and Papal documents and liturgical texts. Like the catechism of the Council of Trent it is divided into four major parts: the Creed (what the Church believes), Sacraments (what the Church celebrates), Commandments (what the Church lives) and Our Father (what the Church prays).⁷⁴

After the publication of the CCC, on 3rd December 1993, the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples published the *Guide for Catechists*, which addresses the issue of the nature, role, function and formation of catechists in mission lands – though it can also be used by all those engaged in catechetical ministry. In addition, after the publication of the CCC there was a need for revising the *General Catechetical Directory* of 1971; therefore, in 1997 was published the revised edition of the Directory with the title *General Directory for Catechesis*.

5.3. *The General Directory for Catechesis*

The *General Directory for Catechesis* was published on 11th August 1997 by the Congregation for the Clergy. Though the Second Vatican Council did not deal with catechesis in a direct way, the *General Catechetical Directory*, following a request of the Council,⁷⁵ had practically implemented in the field of catechesis the pastoral lines of renewal coming from the Council. Later, a revision of the GCD was necessitated for the implementation of further interventions of the Magisterium in the field of catechesis and also for the adaptation of the CCC to different situations, i.e., for providing a point of reference for the practical implementation of the CCC.⁷⁶ Like the GCD, the objective of the GDC is to provide fundamental theologico-pastoral principles for a better orientation and coordination of catechetical activity.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Cf *Ibid.*, 237-243; Cf KALATHUVEETIL, «Redaction and Structure of the CCC», 18-25.

⁷⁵ Cf VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Christus Dominus*. Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, 28 October 1965, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966) 673-696, n. 44.

⁷⁶ Cf U. GIANETTO, «The General Directory for Catechesis: Origin and Evolution», in G. CHOONDAL (Ed.), *Introducing the General Directory for Catechesis*, Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2004, 17-24.

⁷⁷ Cf CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *General Directory for Catechesis*, Vatican City, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997, n. 9; Cf SACRED CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *General Catechetical Directory*, 11 April 1971, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 64 (1972) 97-176, Introduction.

The *GDC* offers a rich and wide comprehension in regard to the nature of catechesis. It locates catechesis within the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on divine Revelation presenting it as a ministry of the Word and as a channel for transmitting Revelation and Tradition. It situates catechesis in the context of the Church's mission of evangelization affirming that it is an essential moment of this mission (nn. 63-64). It shows that catechesis realizes its objectives through interrelated tasks: promoting knowledge of the faith, liturgical education, moral formation, teaching to pray, initiation and education in community life and to mission (nn. 84-86). It affirms that catechesis is a responsibility of the entire Christian community and calls the entire community to participate in it (n. 220). It gives particular importance to adult catechesis since it deals with persons capable of a fully responsible adherence and affirms that it should be considered as the chief form of catechesis (n. 59). It presents the baptismal catechumenate as a model for all catechesis, i.e., according to the *Directory* the catechumenal formation should inspire the other forms of catechesis (nn. 59, 90-91). In addition, the *GDC* lays out a holistic understanding of the Christian faith which engages the whole person in his cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions (n. 35). It gives particular importance to the question of inculturation of the Gospel message (nn. 109-110). It promotes a pedagogy which makes individuals to be actively involved in the process of catechesis. It recommends a method which correlates life and faith (nn. 87, 147, 153, 205, 207); thus encourages Christians to incarnate their faith in daily experiences. Again, in what regards the methodological aspect it highlights the role of critical reasoning in faith reflections (n. 175).⁷⁸

The *GDC* maintains the basic structure of the *GCD*. It is divided into five parts: the *first part* shows the place of catechesis in the context of evangelization and clarifies its nature, objective and duties; the *second part* indicates norms and criteria for presenting the Gospel message in catechesis and also presents the *CCC* as a reference point for the transmission of the faith in catechesis and for the preparation of catechisms at the local level; the *third part* presents the main elements of the pedagogy of faith inspired by divine pedagogy and also by

⁷⁸ Cf T. GROOME, «A General Appraisal of the *GDC*», in CHOONDAL, *Introducing the General Directory for Catechesis*, 197-204; Cf ALATHARA, *Introduction to Catechetics*, 219-220.

human sciences; the *fourth part* deals with the diverse situations and contexts of those to whom catechesis is directed giving particular attention to the socio-religious situation and to the question of inculturation; the *fifth part* focuses on the centrality of the particular Church and on its duty to promote, organize and coordinate all catechetical activities describing the roles of the various agents involved in catechesis and the requirements necessary for their respective formation. Finally, the conclusion calls for an intensification of the catechetical activity in our time.⁷⁹

5.4. *Restoration of the Catechumenate*

The above mentioned catechetical documents have played a very important role in the renewal of the catechetical ministry of the Church in the contemporary period. Another very important event in this last period of the history of catechesis is the restoration and development of the catechumenate.⁸⁰ Even if the history of the missions shows that there had been initial seeds of the catechumenal restoration in the modern period, in the proper sense it owes to the initiative of Cardinal Lavigerie, founder of the White Fathers, who restored the catechumenate in Africa starting from 1878. After this major impulse, in the first half of the twentieth century, there was a certain establishment of the catechumenate in some young Churches of Africa and Asia as a fundamental institution for assuring the Christian initiation of the new candidates to faith. In Europe the catechumenate began in France, starting from 1953, and was organized for adults who wanted to be baptized. This catechumenal experience in France had given rise to a real movement for reflection on catechumenate, and

⁷⁹ Cf *GDC*, n. 8; Cf G. CHOONDAL, «*GDC and GCD: A Comparative Study*», in CHOONDAL, *Introducing the General Directory for Catechesis*, 29-35.

⁸⁰ Today the term “catechumenate” is put under critical analysis by some authors like M. Dujarier who was first in favour of that term but later preferred to use the term “discipleship” in its place (Cf M. DUJARIER, «*Devenir disciple du Christ. Catéchuménat et “Discipulat”*», in M. MARITANO (Ed.), *Historiam perscrutari*. Miscellanea di studi offerti al prof. Ottorino Pasquato, Roma, LAS, 2002, 521-537). As it will be indicated in the chapters which follow, today the objective of catechesis is not only viewed in terms of helping individuals towards maturity in faith or in terms of helping individuals towards a real initiation into the Paschal mystery of Christ and towards a true incorporation into the mystery of the Church through a true process of initiation, the catechumenate, but is viewed more in terms of making true disciples of Christ. In fact, this aspect of discipleship has now become the main criteria for evaluating the successfulness of a catechetical action. After all, maturity in faith as such cannot be evaluated.

progressively its practice began in different parts of Europe. This consisted in reassuming, in a general sense, the spirit of the ancient catechumenate, actualizing it in the given context, with a great attention to the needs of the single individuals in their journey of faith.⁸¹

The Second Vatican Council represents a decisive turn in the history of the catechumenate. It officially recommended the restoration of the catechumenate of adults and recalled the characteristics traits.⁸² Similar recommendations and insistences are also present in various documents that followed.⁸³ Another very significant moment in the history of the catechumenate was the publication of the *Ordo initiationis christianae adultorum* in 1972,⁸⁴ a document which in the general framework of the renewal of the liturgy, re-introduces, in view of baptism, an itinerary for the maturation of faith and for the incorporation in the Church and recalls the structure of the primitive catechumenate of the Church.⁸⁵ In addition, in 1977, the Synod of Bishops, which was dedicated to catechesis, reaffirmed the importance of catechumenate and gave it a place of primacy within the catechetical activity of the Church. In fact, in this Synod, the baptismal catechumenate is presented as a model of every catechesis and as the means through which adults converted to faith receive a specific formation till the baptismal confession of faith in the vigil of Easter.⁸⁶ After the Council many nations had taken concrete initiatives for its restoration not only for the adult candidates for baptism, but also for children and adolescents who ask for the sacraments of initiation in the school-age. In

⁸¹ Cf ALBERICH, «*Catecumenato moderno*», 136-137; Cf AMALORPAVADASS, «*Il catecumenato in Asia e in Africa*», 49-58.

⁸² Cf VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 4 December 1963, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 56 (1964) 97-138, nn. 64-65; Cf AG, n. 14.

⁸³ Cf GCD, n. 20; Cf EN, n. 44.

⁸⁴ The '*Ordo initiationis christianae adultorum*' (OICA) was prepared by the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship and was promulgated by Pope Paul VI on 6th January 1972. It is prepared for all Christian communities of the world and describes the catechetical and liturgical process for initiating adults or children into the Church (See: SCDW, *Decretum de «ordine initiationis Christianae adultorum»*, 6 January 1972, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 64 (1972) 252). In 1978 it was published again with the name '*Rito initiationis christianae adultorum*' – RICA (See: CEI, *Rito dell'iniziazione cristiana degli adulti*, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1978). For English version see: USCC, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. Study edition, Washington D. C., Office of Publishing and Promotion Services, 1988.

⁸⁵ Cf G. CAVALLOTTO, «*Il nuovo Rito di iniziazione Cristiana degli adulti: origine, struttura e scelte pastorali*», in ID., *Iniziazione cristiana e catecumenato*, 223-265.

⁸⁶ Cf *Messaggio del Sinodo sulla catechesi. La catechesi nel nostro tempo. Quarta Assemblea Generale del Sinodo dei Vescovi*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 1977, n. 8.

addition, today, other new forms of catechumenate are organized for persons who are already baptized but who had not received further catechesis and the rest of the sacraments of initiation. It is also organized for Christians who had already received all the sacraments of initiation but who feel the need for rediscovering the significance of faith and ecclesial belonging through an articulated and structured journey of faith that is inspired by the ancient catechumenate and by the indications of the *Ordo*. Therefore today, exist in the Church a series of different catechumenal initiatives.⁸⁷

Conclusion

In this chapter we have, in a very brief way, highlighted some of the fundamental and more significant moments in the historical evolution of catechetical action in the Church. Our analysis has shown how in the early centuries, through the catechumenal institution, Christian initiation was realized with great seriousness and commitment producing great fruits and how later in the middle ages, little by little, the preparation to Christian initiation was reduced to an initial instruction given before baptism and which, with the universal practice of infant baptism, was reduced to questions and answers referred to parents and godparents before the beginning of the baptismal rite. It has been shown that, in the modern age, particularly through the impulse of the Council of Trent, catechisms and elementary religious instruction were diffused and efforts were done in imprinting the revealed truth in the memory of learners through catechetical formulas mainly with the objective defending truth from error. We have also shown how in the contemporary period in one time the method in catechesis was the centre of attention while in another time the content; and how lately the emphasis shifted to man in his concrete contextual situation giving special attention to the dimension of the

⁸⁷ Cf ALBERICH, «*Catecumenato moderno*», 137; Cf ID., «*Catecumenato*», in V. BO et al. (Eds.), *Dizionario di Pastorale della comunità cristiana*, Assisi, Cittadella, 1980, 123-133; Cf D. SARTORE, «*Attualità della Catechesi patristica per la Chiesa di oggi*», in S. FELICI (Ed.), *Valori attuali della catechesi patristica*, Roma, LAS, 1979, 24-27; Cf C. FLORISTÁN, «*Restaurazione del catecumenato in Europa nel nostro secolo*», in CAVALLOTTO, *Iniziazione cristiana e catecumenato*, 197-221; Cf D. S. AMALORPAVADASS, «*Ripristino e rinnovamento del catechumenato in Europa*», in BARTOLUCCI, *Iniziazione Cristiana*, 59-69; Cf A. LAURENTIN – M. DUJARIER., *Il catecumenato: fonti neotestamentarie e patristiche. La riforma del Vaticano II*, Roma, Dehoniane, 1995, 257-392.

community and to the person of the catechist. Finally it has been shown, how after the Second Vatican Council, the Church has made a decisive turn in the option for the restoration of the Catechumenate and how today it is making its maximum efforts to return back to the seriousness and intensity by which the first Christians were being instructed in faith.

From our analysis it is evident that the Church, in all times, considering the great importance of catechesis had committed itself – with more or less intensity and in different modalities – to the improvement of this ministry, always looking forward towards a more adequate understanding and effective organization in regard to the personnel, means and instruments of catechesis. The contemporary catechetical movements have made and are making a remarkable contribution to the radical renewal of catechesis and, with the collaboration of many researchers and professors in catechetics in higher Institutes of education, are giving a great impulse towards its correct understanding and practice. Hopefully, this historical analysis will help us understand better the current understanding of the nature of catechesis which will be treated in the next chapter.

Chapter Six

NATURE OF CATECHESIS IN THE CHURCH

As it has been shown in the previous chapter, starting from the end of the nineteenth century, the catechetical movements have progressively contributed to a substantial renewal in the understanding and praxis of catechesis. Today catechesis can be understood in view of the overall evangelizing mission of the Church which is directed towards the Reign of God. Catechesis as an ecclesial action of the ministry of the Word directed towards the Christian initiation of individuals or their continuous maturation in faith is at the service of the Reign of God which is made present in the world by way of the four fundamental functions of the Church: *kerygma*, *diakonia*, *koinonia* and *leitourgia*. As such catechesis has an integral nature, i.e., it is concretized in all the sectors of ecclesial praxis.¹ At the level of the individual, catechesis has an authentic nature, i.e., it leads to an authentic personality by promoting a mature attitude of faith in the cognitive, affective and operative dimensions, thus transforming the whole person.² At the universal level, catechesis has also an ecumenical nature in the sense that it promotes dialogue with the other Christian Churches. In addition, catechesis has a contextual nature, i.e., it takes into consideration the religious, cultural, eco-economic, social and political contexts of a society.³

¹ Cf E. ALBERICH – J. VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms. A Handbook of Fundamental Catechetics*, Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2004, 38-42.

² Cf *Ibid.*, 132-136; Cf F. V. ANTHONY, *Evangelization: Growing Understanding of a Complex Process*, in “Salesianum” 61 (1999) 30-31.

³ Cf ANTHONY, *Evangelization: Growing Understanding of a Complex Process*, 25-29 and 32-33; Cf ID., *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation. Toward an Empirical-theological Theory of Inculturizing Praxis*, Roma, LAS, 1997, 161-162; Cf A. CAÑIZARES, «Evangelizzazione», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 265.

In this Chapter, after a brief terminological clarification and description of catechesis, we will first highlight its biblical and theological nature. After this we will show the integral, authentic, ecumenical and contextual nature of catechesis. We will develop our analysis on the basis of the actual teachings of the Church and the contributions of contemporary thinkers on the issue. This analysis on the current understanding of the nature of catechesis is done in function of renewal of the Union.

1. Terminological Clarification and Definition of Catechesis

As it has been shown, going back to the origins it is not precisely clear to what ‘catechesis’ really referred in the earliest centuries of Christianity. However, it can generally be viewed in line with *didaché* which was the elementary moral and doctrinal teaching or instruction that followed the first proclamation of the Good News (*kerygma*) and that came before the more profound moral and doctrinal teaching (*didascalía*) which was usually given for the baptized ones.⁴ In line with this, today in the process of Christian formation and maturation, catechesis is understood as the intermediary stage⁵ between the initial stage known as the *primary* or *missionary proclamation* and the mature stage of *theologizing* which consists in the effort of understanding faith starting from concrete life experience or understanding concrete life on the basis of faith for a more credible witness.⁶

⁴ Cf ALBERICH, «*Catechesi*», 105.

⁵ Here it is worth noting that such division into stages is only general and has a limited validity (Cf *Ibid.*). These stages cannot be strictly separated, and “may be repeated, if necessary, as they give evangelical nourishment in proportion to the spiritual growth of each person or of the entire community” (GDC, n. 49).

⁶ Cf ANTHONY, *Evangelization: Growing Understanding*, 33-35; Cf ID., *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation*, 163 and 168; Cf CAÑIZARES, «*Evangelizzazione*», 264-266. For more clarification we can briefly highlight each one of these stages in reference to the evangelizing action of the Church: 1) «*Missionary action*» which is directed towards peoples, groups, and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known and towards those who live in religious indifference. It is a call to conversion and is realized in different forms: presence, dialogue, witness, explicit announcing of the Gospel (Cf E. ALBERICH, «*Evangelizzazione e catechesi in un mondo che cambia*», in ISTITUTO DI CATECHETICA UPS, *Andate e insegnate*, 25; Cf GDC, n. 49; Cf JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*. Encyclical Letter on the Mission of the Redeemer, 7 December 1990, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 83 (1991) 249-340, nn. 33-34; Cf J. GEVAERT, *La proposta del vangelo a chi non conosce il Cristo. Finalità, destinatari, contenuti, modalità di presenza*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2001, 36-37). 2) «*Catechumenal action*» which is directed towards those who choose the Gospel and those who need to complete or modify their initiation. It includes non-baptized adults in the catechumenate, baptized adults who wish to return to the faith or who need to complete their initiation, and children and young people preparing for initiation.

Today we may find a distinction made between *catechesis in a wider sense* and *catechesis in a narrow sense*, though not always with the same criterion or significance.⁷ For example, sometimes catechesis in the narrow sense is meant to indicate the simple teaching of the formulas that express faith; and in the wider sense is meant to indicate the global initiation to the life of Christian faith. Other times, as in this study, catechesis in the narrow sense indicates catechesis in the proper sense, i.e., catechesis understood as the elementary and systematic education or formation in the faith or as the process of Christian initiation, and this understanding of catechesis in the narrow sense is meant to exclude the wider understanding of catechesis referring to the different forms of education of faith through the ministry of the Word.⁸

In some cultural contexts, in the place of the term 'catechesis', are also used other expressions with equal or analogous significance like: education of faith, religious teaching, religious education, etc. The expression education of faith (or education to the faith or in the faith) can generally be identified with the concept of catechesis. However, some scholars also

The Church achieves this function fundamentally by catechesis in close relation with the sacraments of initiation whether these sacraments have already been received or are about to be received. Initiatory catechesis is a basic catechesis and as such is centred on the most fundamental elements of faith and the most essential evangelical values. It does not enter into theological investigations or disputed questions (Cf ALBERICH, «*Evangelizzazione e catechesi in un mondo che cambia*», 25; Cf CAÑIZARES, «*Evangelizzazione*», 264-266; Cf GDC, nn. 49, 51 and 67-68). 3) «*Pastoral action*» which is "directed toward the Christian faithful of mature faith in the bosom of the Christian community" (GDC, n. 49). It refers to the "Christian communities with adequate and solid ecclesial structures [...] fervent in their faith and Christian living" (RM, n. 33). It includes the functions exercised inside the Christian community: cult, celebrations, sacraments, preaching, catechesis, community life, service of charity, etc. (Cf ALBERICH, «*Evangelizzazione e catechesi in un mondo che cambia*», 25; Cf GDC, n. 69). Continuing formation in the faith or permanent catechesis is directed not only to individual Christians but to the Christian community as a whole so that it may mature in its interior life of love towards God and the neighbour. There are many forms of continuing catechesis: a vital study of Sacred Scripture (a continuous discovery of divine truth); interpretation of events of daily life (experience read in the light of faith); a deeper understanding and experience of the liturgy (education to prayer and to an active participation); occasional catechesis regarding personal, family, ecclesial or social life; spiritual formation (to encourage perseverance in the Christian fellowship and to open new prospective); a systematic deepening of Christian message by means of theological instruction (Cf GDC, nn. 70-71). 4) «*Presence and action in the world*» which completes the dynamism of the evangelizing action. It regards the various forms of evangelical witnesses in the society: human promotion, social and political action, educative and cultural action, promotion of peace, ecological engagement. These are environments where Christians through their presence are called to give witness to their faith and offer their service for the Reign of God in the world (Cf ALBERICH, «*Evangelizzazione e catechesi in un mondo che cambia*», 25).

⁷ Cf JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesi Tradendae*. Apostolic Exhortation on Catechesis in Our Time, 16 October 1979, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 71 (1979) 1277-1340, n. 25.

⁸ Cf ALBERICH, «*Catechesi*», 105.

want to make a distinction taking into consideration the wider dimension of education of faith, but this can be justified only if the concept of catechesis, in its turn, is not to be unduly limited in its significance. In some other places the expressions religious teaching, religious education, etc. refer mainly or exclusively to the academic teaching of religion. There are also some cases where the use of the terms religious teaching or religious education has a much different sense or even a contrasting sense in relation to the concept of catechesis, in as much as it underlines the non-confessional or non-ecclesial character in its approach.⁹

Keeping in mind the above considerations, we can now put forward some definitions or descriptions of catechesis that are found in official ecclesial documents.¹⁰ The *Second Vatican Council* talks about “catechetical instruction” whose “function is to develop in men a living, explicit and active faith, enlightened by doctrine.”¹¹ The *General Catechetical Directory*, stressing on the communitarian aspect states: “In the realm of pastoral activity, catechesis is that ecclesial activity which leads the community and individual Christians to maturity of faith.”¹² And according to the *Synod of Bishops*, catechesis consists in the organized and progressive education of faith that is united to a continuous process of maturation of the same faith.¹³ A similar description presented in *Catechesi Tradendae* and used again in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that “catechesis is an education of children, young

⁹ Cf *Ibid.*, 106; Cf T. GROOME, *Catechesis and Religious Education*, in “The Living Light” 29 (1992-93) 1, 40-46. In this work the term ‘catechesis’ is identified with the term ‘education in the faith’ though taking in consideration the wider dimension of the latter. In addition, here, the term ‘catechesis’ as education in the faith strictly assumes an ecclesial tone. In relation to catechesis, we have also the term *catechetics* which developed in the 19th century through the catechetical movements. Catechetics is an organic, systematic and scientific study of catechesis. As a science it combines pedagogy and theology. As a theological discipline it is part of pastoral theology and as a pedagogical discipline it is part of religious pedagogy. It is concerned with the nature of the catechetical task, how it relates to the Church’s mission, and its place in pastoral ministry. It lays out the tasks and conditions which characterize the field of work of catechets and catechumens, documents and analyzes the processes which determine the catechetical action, plans the catechetical action, and finally develops an overall theory of catechetics in relation to its history (Cf ALATHARA, *Introduction to Catechetics*, 9; Cf G. STACHEL, «*Catechetica*», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 110).

¹⁰ Cf ALBERICH, «*Catechesi*», 106; Cf ID., «*Identità e dimensioni fondamentali della catechesi*», in ISTITUTO DI CATECHETICA UPS, *Andate e insegnate. Manuale di Catechetica*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2002, 83-84.

¹¹ VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Christus Dominus*. Decree on the Pastoral Office of the Bishops in the Church, 28 October 1965, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966) 673-696, n. 14; Cf CEI, *Il rinnovamento della Catechesi*, Roma, Fondazione di Religione Santi Francesco di Assisi e Caterina da Siena, 1988, n. 37; Cf *GCD*, n. 17.

¹² *GCD*, n. 21; Cf *RdC*, n. 30.

¹³ Cf *Messaggio del Sinodo sulla catechesi*, n. 1; Cf *Puebla*, n. 977.

people and adults in the faith 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.”¹⁴ The *General Directory for Catechesis* states that “catechesis ‘distinct from the primary proclamation of the Gospel’, promotes and matures initial conversion, educates the convert in the faith and incorporates him into the Christian community.”¹⁵ Another significant description of the *Directory* affirms:

[Catechesis] is a comprehensive and systematic formation in the faith. [...] This comprehensive formation includes more than instruction: it is an apprenticeship of the Christian life, it is a “complete Christian initiation”, which promotes an authentic following of Christ, focused on his Person; it implies education in knowledge of the faith and in the life of faith, in such a manner that the entire person, at his deepest levels, feels enriched by the word of God; it helps the disciple of Christ to transform the old man in order to assume his baptismal responsibilities and to profess the faith from the “heart”.¹⁶

Some other definitions formulated by contemporary scholars and presented by E. Alberich include that of A. Exeler which states that *catechesis is one form of evangelization of Christians, an action of the ecclesial community, an action of the Church that accompanies the entire life and is always in relationship with the concrete situation of human beings, by means of which its members are enabled to understand, celebrate and live the evangelical message, and to participate actively in the realization of this community and in the propagation of the Gospel*. Here, catechesis is seen as a way to the knowledge of faith and as an initiation in the fellowship of Christ, and it aims at stimulating a critical conscience so that Christians will be enabled to collaborate in the renewal of the Church and in the transformation of the society in the evangelical way, and thus, it is presented as an act of education to a mature faith. Another definition, given by J. J. Rodríguez, states that *catechesis is that ecclesial action, inserted in the prophetic ministry, which, by way of teaching the revealed mystery, leads the one to be catechized, child or adult, to an active faith and to*

¹⁴ *CT*, n. 18; Cf *CCC*, n. 5.

¹⁵ *GDC*, n. 61.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, n. 67.

*ecclesial commitments required by faith; again another one, given by J. Audinet, states that catechesis is an action by means of which a group of human beings interprets its situation, lives and communicates it in the light of the Gospel.*¹⁷

In synthesis it can be affirmed that the essence of the catechetical function is linked to a triple reference: the Word of God, faith and Church.¹⁸ *Catechesis is first of all ministry of the Word, and thus, is service of the Gospel, communication of the Christian message and annunciation of Jesus Christ who is the centre of the message and the supreme expression of the Word.* Thus, the Word of God constitutes an essential reference pole of catechesis and it is considered in all its richness and intensity, not only as revelation of the truth, but also as illumination, interpretation, admonishment, promise, liberating message. On the other hand, *catechesis is education of faith, an ecclesial mediation favouring the birth and growth of faith, in communities and persons, till its maturity.* As an education of faith, catechesis also needs to take into account the intensity and totality of faith as an existential attitude which, including hope and love in its dynamism, constitutes the fundamental axis of Christian life which consists in adhesion to Christ, identification with what regards the Kingdom, ecclesial belonging, commitment in the world, etc. *Catechesis is also essentially qualified as action of the Church, an expression of the ecclesial reality and an indispensable moment in the mission of the Church.* The ecclesial dimension belongs to the essence of the catechetical action and determines its constitutive elements, i.e., the content, subject, method, modality, etc.¹⁹ On the basis of this reflection, can be called catechesis any form of ecclesial service of the Word of God orientated towards helping persons and communities to be mature in the Christian faith.²⁰

All the above mentioned descriptions and definitions show that catechesis is more than instruction or teaching.²¹ It is true that catechesis is also teaching but is first of all an educational action and a process of initiation. It transmits a doctrine and a knowledge (knowledge of faith as such – *fides quae*), but above all, is a process of maturation of attitude

¹⁷ Cf ALBERICH, «Catechesi», 106-107.

¹⁸ Cf ID., «Identità e dimensioni fondamentali della catechesi», 84-94.

¹⁹ Cf ID., «Catechesi», 107.

²⁰ Cf ID., «Identità e dimensioni fondamentali della catechesi», 84.

²¹ Cf GDC, n. 68; Cf CT, n.33; Cf CCC, n. 1231; Cf AG, n. 14.

and assumption of a project of life (interiorization of faith – *fides qua*). It is, at the same time, word, memory and witness; it includes knowledge of the Word of God, celebration of faith in the sacraments, confession of faith in daily life.²²

2. Biblical and Theological Nature of Catechesis

The language of faith is triple: biblical, theological and liturgical.²³ In regard to the Bible or the sacred Scripture, the Second Vatican Council affirms that:

[The Church] has always regarded, and continues to regard the Scriptures, taken together with sacred Tradition, as the supreme rule of her faith. For, since they are inspired by God and committed to writing once and for all time, they present God's own Word in an unalterable form, and they make the voice of the Holy Spirit sound again and again in the words of the prophets and apostles. It follows that all the preaching of the Church, as indeed the entire Christian religion, should be nourished and ruled by sacred Scripture.²⁴

In reference to catechetics, or the ministry of the Word in general, the second Vatican Council states that it is “healthily nourished and thrives in holiness through the Word of Scripture.”²⁵ Bible and catechesis are two forms of transmission of faith that have to stay together: the Bible as content – not the only one but the primary and central one – and catechesis as a mediation or means of communication – not the only one but a fundamental one. The Bible might be viewed in diverse ways, e.g., as a book of humanity, of cultures, of religions, etc. However, in catechesis we need to have a correct *approach* to the Bible as well

²² Cf ALBERICH, «*Catechesi*», 107; Cf *Messaggio del Sinodo sulla catechesi*, nn. 7 and 11.

²³ Cf J. COLOMB, *Al servizio della fede*, vol. I, Leumann (TO), LDC, 1969, 95-106; Cf *GDC*, nn. 95-96. Here, immediately, we will deal with the biblical and theological nature of catechesis; while the liturgical nature will be treated ahead in this chapter. In relation to the biblical, theological and liturgical nature of catechesis we can indicate the sources of catechesis. The source for excellence of catechesis is the Word of God present in the Scripture and Tradition. Some catechetical documents refer to a triple source of catechesis: the Scripture, liturgy and the life of the Church. Others refer to four sources of catechesis: Scripture, Tradition, liturgy and created things, or four signs which manifest the design of God: biblical, liturgical, ecclesial and creatural signs (Cf E. ALBERICH, «*Fonti della catechesi*», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 281-282; Cf *GDC*, nn. 94-96; Cf *GCD*, n. 45; Cf *CT*, n. 27; Cf *RdC*, n. 104).

²⁴ VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Dei Verbum*. Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, 18 November 1965, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966) 817-835, n. 21; Cf *CCC*, n. 104.

²⁵ *DV*, n. 24.

as a correct understanding of the specific *contributions* and *dimensions*. The Bible enters in the catechistical process by reason of its intrinsic connection with the Word of God, in interaction with the living Tradition. At the centre of catechesis we have the Word of God and not arguments or remarks on the Bible. The Bible is a manifestation of the Word of God and has a sacramental role in regard to the Word of God.²⁶ As such, it is to be read through a 'spiritual' eye that penetrates from sign to mystery. In fact, in catechesis sign is to be distinguished from mystery.²⁷

The catechistical approach consists in an alert listening to the Word of God in faith, in the community, for the transformation of life. Only the Bible, by reason of its connection with the Tradition, is not enough for realizing a valid catechesis, i.e., the biblical document is not to be isolated from other signs or documents through which the Word of God resounds such as the doctrine of the Church, liturgy, testimony, etc. The Bible can be considered in catechesis in two levels: as *biblical catechesis* when it does not deal with a biblical theme as such (e.g. it might deal with a certain event in the actual world) and where the Bible is present as a necessary dimension for interpretation; or as *catechesis of the Bible* when the Bible in itself (a Gospel, a certain figure or event in the Bible) becomes object of catechesis. Here, it is to be noted that to do a good 'biblical catechesis' is needed to make a good 'catechesis of the Bible', i.e., to know the Bible in itself in an increasingly better way; and 'catechesis of the Bible' is really so, i.e., achieves its objectives for nourishing faith, when it follows a catechistical route and not only exegetics. Therefore, making an exegesis of the Bible, like what is done in a biblical course, is not enough for making 'catechesis of the Bible' as such. The Bible is valorised in the wider context of catechistic communication.²⁸

The specific role of sign in the Bible demands that its presence in catechesis be explicit, abundant and well articulated. Doing catechesis on the Word of God through the biblical sign signifies bringing forth an education of faith marked by such typical quality of sign. It implies

²⁶ Cf M. VAN CASTER, *Le strutture della catechesi*, Roma, Paoline, 1968, 47-48; Cf RdC, nn. 105-108.

²⁷ Cf C. BISSOLI, «*Catechesi e Bibbia*», in ISTITUTO DI CATECHETICA UPS, *Andate e insegnate*, 109; Cf E. ALBERICH, *Catechesi e prassi ecclesiale. Identità e dimensioni della catechesi nella Chiesa di oggi*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, ²1990, 55-86.

²⁸ Cf BISSOLI, «*Catechesi e Bibbia*», 109-110.

assuming the contents of faith from the source, from the fundamental experience of Jesus and the first community, which in its turn is to be viewed within the general frame work of the people of God in the OT, and this favours formation to the sense of Christian radicalism as well as of a critical mentality. On the other hand it implies learning a religious language which always remains central and inseparable from the content, such as symbolic language, narration, witnessing, etc. It also implies acceptance of the role of the Bible as a foundational document, as an objective documentation though not to be separated from the rational understanding of faith. Finally, as the highest contribution, encounter with the Bible makes a person enter into communion with God, everyone in a unique way, taking in consideration the Pneumatological or spiritual component characteristic of the communication of faith.²⁹

The catechistical act is an act of communication which involves different factors, stabilizing a network of relations and a series of functions, which in reference to the Bible include: the exegetical, hermeneutical, pedagogical-didactic and theological-ecclesial dimensions. The Bible brings into the catechistical process the communication of itself, in both the biblical catechesis and catechesis of the Bible. The Bible has to manifest itself, i.e., to give its content or message authentically and this can take place only when the modality with which the text expresses itself is respected. This implies the exegetical dimension of the correct approach to a biblical text. Another fact is that, the catechistical act does not consist in only the reading of a biblical text, but aims in making the hearers understand it and be illuminated by it, so that it becomes a Word of God for them in the concrete situation of life. Therefore, there is a need for actualizing it and making it significant, which is the hermeneutical dimension. In addition, the catechistical act, by its nature, is an act of teaching-learning and therefore assumes a pedagogical and didactic dimension. Lastly, the catechistical act is addressed to believers, and thus, is realized in the context of a community of believers, the Church, where the experience of faith and of the Word of God is mediated by other signs such as liturgical celebration, fraternal communion, social commitment, service of charity. This represents the theological-ecclesial dimension of the encounter with the Bible, i.e., the

²⁹ Cf *Ibid.*, 110-111.

understanding of the sacred text according to the faith of the Church, provided by theological reflections and other practical dynamisms.³⁰

The theological nature of catechesis derives from the theology of revelation, theology of faith and theology of the Word. Catechesis draws its content from theology which in its turn draws from the rich catechetical experience of the Church. Catechesis has a theological nature but is different from theology. Both are very closely related but they have different goals, methods and criteria. Theology seeks a fuller understanding of the Gospel message through a reflection on the life of Christians and the teachings of the Church using critical methods. It also uses philosophy, history, linguistic and other disciplines in an attempt to understand and express Christian truth more clearly. Catechesis makes use of theology in order to proclaim faith in a better way and to lead individual Christians and the community to a maturity in faith and to the fullness of the Gospel message.³¹

Academic theological language³² regards, above all, the intellectual level and is concerned with a precise scientific communication between experts; while the finalities of a catechetical language are situated at the level of faith and are concerned with the practical or concrete Christian life. Generally, theology puts forward the question: whether faith can be justified within the field of science, i.e., in front of the methods of scientific knowledge and the results of science; while catechesis deals with the problem: if faith can be justified in the context of ordinary human life, in the experiences and existential crisis of men.³³

3. Integral Nature of Catechesis

The ideal of the Reign of God is made present in the world through the four fundamental functions or dimensions of the Church: *kerygma* which consists in the salvific announcement

³⁰ Cf *Ibid.*, 111-113.

³¹ Cf ALATHARA, *Introduction to Catechetics*, 85-86.

³² Here we specify saying 'academic' or sapiential theology to accentuate the presence of ordinary theology of the common people in their attempt to reflect on life issues on the basis of Christian faith. See: J. ASTLEY, *Ordinary Theology. Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology*, Burlington, Ashgate, 2002.

³³ Cf C. DE SOUZA, «*Il linguaggio della catechesi*», in ISTITUTO DI CATECHETICA UPS, *Andate e insegnate*, 185-186.

of the Reign, *diakonia* which consists in the efforts towards the realization of the Reign in service, *koinonia* which implies living the Reign in fraternity and communion, and *leitourgia* which indicates the celebration of the Reign by means of celebrative rites and symbols of Christian experience.³⁴ Catechesis being at the service of the Reign takes part and is concretized in all these sectors of ecclesial praxis and in this way has an integral nature.³⁵

3.1. *Catechesis in the Kerygmatic Dimension*

Catechesis stands for the proclamation of the Christian message and thus, in the strict sense, it belongs to the dimension of *kerygma*.³⁶ As ministry of the Word catechesis is Christocentric. The Word of God is primarily a Person. In Jesus the Word of God became a concrete person in space and history. Jesus represents the culmination of revelation, the supreme manifestation of God. Thus, if God continues to reveal himself in history it is not much to transmit truths regarding the destiny of man, but above all, to communicate himself, i.e., to encounter human beings personally and to offer himself to them. In this sense catechesis is primarily an invitation to a personal encounter with Christ. More than a mere communication of a doctrine of truth, it serves as mediation towards a personal encounter with Christ.³⁷

As such catechesis assumes the task of stimulating and favoring conversion. Conversion as the starting point and the unifying nucleus of the dynamism of faith belongs properly to the first moment of evangelization. However it is not usually easy to distinguish the two moments – the moment of first proclamation and the moment of catechesis – and in reality, it is not

³⁴ Some authors prefer to speak of the ecclesial dimensions in terms of *martyria*, *diakonia*, *koinonia* and *leitourgia*. However, in this study we will speak in terms of *kerygma*, *diakonia*, *koinonia* and *leitourgia* considering the concept of *martyria* as encompassing all four dimensions (Cf ANTHONY, *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation*, 111-112).

³⁵ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 38-42.

³⁶ In this chapter, as well as in the chapters which follow, *kerygma* is not to be understood in the way it is used in the fifth chapter, i.e., it is not meant to indicate in an exclusive way the initial proclamation of the Christian message preceding catechesis, but refers to all forms of ministry of the Word in the Church. It is seen as the content of Christian Scriptures and Tradition and includes first proclamation, catechesis and theology.

³⁷ Cf *Ibid.*, 82-83; Cf Z. TRENTI, «Gesù sorpresa di Dio: domande e provocazioni dell'uomo a Cristo e di Cristo all'uomo», in U. MONTISCI (Ed.), *Gesù sorpresa di Dio. L'annuncio di Gesù Cristo, cuore della catechesi*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2005, 39-40; Cf DV, n. 2; Cf CT, n. 5.

possible to take for granted the option of faith in those who frequent catechesis. Therefore, in its task catechesis includes a call to conversion where it is not present. As *Catechesi Tradendae* states: “Catechesis must often concern itself not only with nourishing and teaching the faith but also with arousing it unceasingly with the help of grace, with opening the heart, with converting, and with preparing total adherence to Jesus Christ on the part of those who are still on the threshold of faith.”³⁸ We can also refer to conversion as a continuous process in view of the continuous process of transformation during the life journey of growth.³⁹

Catechesis matures initial conversion, educates the convert in the faith and incorporates him into the Christian community. Catechesis is a true initiation; it fosters access to the mystery of the Christian existence. It sustains and strengthens the attitudes of faith. Education to Christian attitudes with a view to profession of the faith constitutes the unifying and decisive task of catechesis. The attitudes of Christian existence – faith, hope and charity – constitute the central objective of all catechetical actions.⁴⁰ Catechesis is a maturing stage in the sense that it is:

...the period in which the Christian, having accepted by faith the person of Jesus Christ as the one Lord and having given him complete adherence by sincere conversion of heart, endeavors to know better this Jesus to whom he has entrusted himself: to know his “mystery”, the kingdom of God proclaimed by him, the requirements and promises contained in his Gospel message, and the paths that he has laid down for any one who wishes to follow him.⁴¹

Catechesis promotes an appropriate knowledge of the Christian message. It has the service of offering a deeper and complete knowledge of the Christian message. It transmits the doctrines of faith initiating individuals and communities in the reading of the Scripture and facilitating deeper understanding of the Creed.⁴² The *GDC* states: “who has encountered Christ desires to know him as much as possible, as well as to know the plan of the Father

³⁸ *CT*, n. 19.

³⁹ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 140-141.

⁴⁰ Cf *Ibid.*, 141-142; Cf *GDC*, n. 61; Cf U. MONTISCI, *L'iniziazione cristiana in Italia in un tempo di transizione*, in “Catechesi” 76 (2006-2007) 3, 51-55.

⁴¹ *CT*, n. 20.

⁴² Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 142-145; Cf *CT*, nn. 27-28.

which he revealed. Knowledge of the faith (*fides quae*) is required by adherence to the faith (*fides qua*). Even in the human order the love which one person has for another, causes that person to wish to know the other all the more.”⁴³

Catechesis as education to faith is also concerned with the behavioral dimension that promotes different forms of life and action distinctive of Christian existence. Catechesis illuminates and interprets life. It correlates the Word of God with human life in order to give meaning to human existence. It is in regard to this religious reading of life that it acquires a role of prophecy in the interpretation of history and the future prospective. It stimulates individuals to a continuous transformation and to commit themselves to social transformation.⁴⁴

The aspect of witness is essential in the proclamation of the Word. “Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one.”⁴⁵ Thus, it is important for those who assume this task to be witnesses of an authentic Christian life. As *Redemptoris Missio* states: “people today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission.”⁴⁶ This witness involves “simplicity of life, the spirit of prayer, charity towards all, especially towards the lowly and the poor, obedience and humility, detachment and self-sacrifice. Without this mark of holiness, our word will have difficulty in touching the heart of modern man. It risks being vain and sterile.”⁴⁷

3.2. Catechesis in the Diakonal Dimension

With the sign of *diakonia*, the Church is called to bear witness to a new manner of love and service in the world. It makes efforts for the integral promotion of human beings and the transformation of the world society. The ecclesial function of *diakonia* which implies service,

⁴³ *GDC*, n. 85.

⁴⁴ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 85-87 and 146-147.

⁴⁵ *EN*, n. 21.

⁴⁶ *RM*, n. 42; Cf *EN*, n. 41.

⁴⁷ *EN*, n. 76.

promotion, charity, solidarity, liberation, etc., comprises a vast range of activities such as assistance, education, social and political commitment, etc., as expressions of Christian love towards the neighbour.⁴⁸ It is useful to note that *diakonia* is not limited to the intra-ecclesial sphere, i.e., it is not directed to the members of the Church only but is a service for the world, directed to all human beings.⁴⁹ As *Ad Gentes* states:

Christian charity truly extends to all, without distinction of race, creed, or social condition [...]. Just as Christ [...] so also the Church, through her children, is one with men of every condition, but especially with the poor and the afflicted. For them, she gladly spends and is spent (cf. 2 Cor. 12: 15), sharing in their joys and sorrows, knowing of their longings and problems, suffering with them in death's anxieties. To those in quest of peace, she wishes to answer in fraternal dialogue, bearing them the peace and the light of the gospel.⁵⁰

Diakonia as an integral part of the Gospel proclamation and witness of the Church enters into the sphere of catechesis not only as an introduction or as a consequence but as a constitutive element of the same process of catechesis. If a vocation of *diakonia* (service) exists in the mission of the Church, then it is also a task of catechesis, because catechesis has the responsibility of initiating and educating to the diverse forms of commitments. The operative dimension is an essential component of the attitude of faith and as such the exercise of charity and service are constituent elements of the itinerary of education in the faith. It can be concluded that faith does not grow and mature unless it becomes *diakonia*.⁵¹

Catechesis is concerned with the fundamental reality of human life. It participates in the anguishes of humanity and tries to offer a possibility for an integral liberation or holistic salvation. It is concerned with human promotion giving a preferential option for the poor. This preferential option for the poor does not only imply promoting some activities for them, but rather recognizing them as the privileged subjects of the ecclesial presence. Today the full

⁴⁸ Cf ALBERICH, *Catechesi e prassi ecclesiale*, 170-177.

⁴⁹ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 40, 189-196; Cf ALBERICH, «*Evangelizzazione e catechesi in un mondo che cambia*», 33-34; Cf *Puebla*, n. 1145.

⁵⁰ AG, n. 12.

⁵¹ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 190 and 198.

recognition of the preferential option for the poor is a challenge and a criterion of authenticity for catechesis.⁵² As *Evangelii Nuntiandi* states:

...how in fact can one proclaim the new commandment without promoting in justice and in peace the true, authentic advancement of man? We ourselves have taken care to point this out, by recalling that it is impossible to accept “that in evangelization one could or should ignore the importance of the problems so much discussed today, concerning justice, liberation, development and peace in the world. This would be to forget the lesson which comes to us from the Gospel concerning love of our neighbour who is suffering and in need.”⁵³

Catechesis educates for *diakonia* in all its forms and at all operative levels. *Ad Gentes* states: “Let Christians labour and collaborate with others in rightly regulating the affairs of social and economic life. [...] Furthermore, let them take part in the strivings of those people who, waging war on famine, ignorance, and disease, are struggling to better their way of life and to secure peace in the world.”⁵⁴ Accordingly, catechesis has the task of educating and encouraging different forms of testimonies of charity and service in the world; of promoting attitudes of generosity and responsibility; of promoting specific vocations and motivations for commitments especially in the field of justice and peace, social and political action.⁵⁵

In this task, catechesis has to maintain an equilibrated position. Because sometimes there is a tendency of identifying catechesis with the commitment for transformation insisting so much on faith as liberation in regard to temporal situations, salvation as the realization of a more human society, etc. Such a catechesis reduces faith to the temporal sphere. On the other hand, in some catechetical actions, the proclamation of the Word and experience of faith are emphasized so much as to exclude the relationship with the exercise of *diakonia*. Such a catechesis is insufficient in regard to the social doctrine of the Church and results in a lack of sensitivity to social and political problems, neglects the poor and the oppressed, neglects the social dimension of faith and finally escapes to spiritualism. Therefore, there is a need of a

⁵² Cf *Ibid.*, 49 and 197; Cf *Puebla*, nn. 382, 707, 733, 769, 1134, 1217.

⁵³ *EN*, n. 31.

⁵⁴ *AG*, n. 12.

⁵⁵ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 197-198.

more balanced position that favours a profound relationship between the diaconal moment and catechesis without any unilateral polarization, i.e., there is a need of recognizing the relevance and importance of service-charity for the credibility and effectiveness of the Gospel proclamation.⁵⁶

3.3. *Catechesis in the Koinoniac Dimension*

Communion or *koinonia* has a central place in the mystery of the Church. The *GDC* states that “the Christian community is the historical realization of the gift of ‘Communion’ (*koinonia*), which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁷ *Koinonia* indicates the participation of all baptized Christians in the ecclesial life. It also indicates the profound unity between the universal Church and the particular Churches which make up the Christian community.⁵⁸ This communion is concretized at all levels in the life of the Church. It “is realized and made visible in the rich variety of immediate Christian communities in which Christians are born into the faith, educated in it and live it: the family, parish, Catholic schools, Christian associations and movements; basic ecclesial communities.”⁵⁹

The sign of *koinonia* (communion, fellowship, reconciliation, unity) is a response to the yearning for fellowship and peace present in all humans of all times. It manifests a new mode of life shared and lived together which aims at the possibility of living collectively as reconciled integrated persons, welcoming all with respect, freedom and uniqueness. In a world torn apart by division, discrimination and egoism, Christians are invited to give evidence to the utopia of the Reign of fellowship and union, with due respect to the individual’s liberty, comprehension, esteem and sincere love.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Cf *Ibid.*, 189-190; Cf ALBERICH, «*Catechesi, diakonia e impegno nella società*», in ISTITUTO DI CATECHETICA UPS, *Andate e insegnate*, 131-134; Cf *Puebla*, n. 485.

⁵⁷ *GDC*, n. 253.

⁵⁸ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 213-214; Cf ALBERICH, «*Evangelizzazione e catechesi in un mondo che cambia*», 34-35; Cf ID., *Catechesi e prassi ecclesiale*, 148-155.

⁵⁹ *GDC*, n. 253; Cf *Messaggio del Sinodo sulla catechesi*, n. 13.

⁶⁰ ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 40.

Today there is a clear community consciousness in catechetical action. Catechesis promotes communion and community life by educating to grow in fraternal love; by educating the spirit of simplicity, humility and fraternal correction; by educating common prayer and mutual forgiveness; by facilitating communication and dialogue; by educating for a just obedience and mature attitude towards authority; by promoting ecumenical sensitivity, etc.⁶¹ The reference to community is at the centre of catechesis, as the *GDC* states “the Christian community is the origin, locus and goal of catechesis.”⁶²

“Christian community is in herself living catechesis.”⁶³ If catechesis is not sustained by the witness of the community then it runs the danger of becoming meaningless. Community is an indispensable condition for catechesis because if there is no community of faith, there cannot be communication of the faith; and if faith is not shared, it is not possible to grow in the faith. Therefore, the object of catechesis can be realized only in the community. In addition, catechetical action finds its natural and fundamental place in the community. There are the traditional places of catechesis: the parish, school, associations etc., and the new ones: groups, movements, communities, etc. The quality or the authenticity of the community is the criteria to ascertain whether the environment is a place of catechesis or not.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Cf *GDC*, n. 86.

⁶² *Ibid.*, n. 254.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, n. 141.

⁶⁴ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 219-221; Cf *GDC*, n. 141; Cf *CT*, n. 24; Cf P. BRAUD, «Il vissuto autentico della comunità cristiana, vero luogo d’iniziazione?», in H. DERROITTE (Ed.), *Catechesi e iniziazione cristiana*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2006, 85-87. The criteria of authenticity required for a group to be recognized true ecclesial community consist of the following elements: 1) *The Gospel and faith profession*. The founding event of Christian communion is the Gospel and the confession of faith in Christ. It is this faith, professed and lived, that makes the community structure genuine. Other motives like friendship, tradition, ethnic belongings, etc., make sense only at the base of the fundamental reference to faith. 2) *Ecclesial communion*. A community born from its own exclusive initiative and living in autonomous self-sufficiency, in isolation from the wider community, cannot be considered a Christian community. 3) *The presence of all the Ecclesial functions*. Authentic community ensures the typical roles of ecclesial mediations: *kerygma*, *diakonia*, *koinonia* and *leitourgía*. The absence of any one of these functions prevents a group from being qualified as a Christian community. 4) *Acceptance of the coordinating factor or guide*. It is fundamental for the community to have a point of reference, either directly to the Episcopal ministry or to other levels of ordained ministry. A community which exercises inappropriate authority can not be considered authentic Christian community. 5) *Baptismal, vocational and missionary fecundity*. The generation of new members by baptism which shows the maternity of the Church; the vocational fecundity which ensures its continuity and the missionary fruitfulness which enables the Church to reach out to other communities are criteria of authenticity. 6) *Safeguarding the ecclesial values of faith, love and building up*. The way the ecclesial body faces and settles

Christian community is the agent as well as the recipient of catechesis. Even though the community makes use of particular persons or structures for the exercise of the catechetical action, the true agent of catechesis remains to be the entire believing community. These particular persons or structures offer their particular service in the name of and together with the community which is responsible for the transmission of faith. In the community context, all are agents of the Word and of experience, all are ‘participants’ serving the Word of God. In every community all believers are ‘catechists’ and ‘catechized’ at the same time, because the Church builds up by the testimony of all believers.⁶⁵ On the other hand, catechesis is directed not only to individual persons but also to the community as such. “With the help of catechesis, Christian communities acquire a more profound knowledge of God and of his salvation, centred on Christ, Word of God incarnate; they develop by endeavouring to make their faith mature and enlightened and they share this mature faith with those who wish it.”⁶⁶ Community is the ultimate recipient of catechesis. This aspect of community as the ultimate recipient of catechesis removes the individualistic concept of catechesis. In the process of catechesis the personal relationship needs to be integrated within the context of a community. Without neglecting the usefulness of activities in separate groups according to the needs of participants, it is generally preferable that catechesis be carried out in the global environment of the Christian community where a dialogue, between participants of diverse conditions, and experiences is possible.⁶⁷

Community building is the goal of catechesis. Catechesis creates and builds the Christian community because it is the place of education and of experience of the Church and is the factor for the renewal of the Church. Catechesis creates and builds the Church because it educates people to acquire a mature and well balanced sense of belonging and feeling of love for the Church which would enable them to identify themselves to it. Catechesis is a factor that creates the Church also because it is in itself an experience of the Church. Finally,

internal conflicts and tensions, with the spirit of faith, love and building up demonstrates its maturity in the spirit of communion (Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 217-218).

⁶⁵ Cf *Ibid.*, 221.

⁶⁶ *GCD*, n. 21.

⁶⁷ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 221-222.

catechesis participating in the critical and prophetic role of the Word of God stimulates the Church for a continuous renewal and self-purification, and often, it is catechesis that gives origin to new groups and ecclesial communities.⁶⁸

3.4. *Catechesis in the Liturgical Dimension*

Liturgy is an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. It is a sacred action that, without exhausting the entirety of the ecclesial action, surpasses all others, and constitutes the summit towards which all the activity of the Church is directed and is the font from which all her power flows.⁶⁹ “It involves the presentation of man’s sanctification under the guise of signs perceptible by the senses and its accomplishment in ways appropriate to each of these signs. In it full public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and his members.”⁷⁰

The sign of *leitourgia*, in its diverse moments (Eucharist, Sacraments, worship, devotions and prayers) becomes the ensemble of rites, symbols and celebrative moments of Christian experience as proclamation and gift of salvation. It responds to the profoundly deep-rooted need of humans to celebrate, to accept and express life as a rite and gift of salvation. Confronted with the constraints of rationality and the lack of significance, the Christian community is called to create a space where life and history, liberated from its vagueness, is celebrated and exalted as a project and the place for the realization of the Reign.⁷¹

There is an essential relationship between liturgy and the Word. The Word is not an element that precedes the liturgical act or that which is added to the rite but is a constituent reality of the same rite. The interpretative prophetic word is always essential to awaken the salvific reality in the liturgical sign; the essential elements of the liturgical sign (proclamation, memory, promise, and invitation) can be understood only through the Word. The close relationship between liturgy and the Word is, above all, evident in the sacraments. They

⁶⁸ Cf *Ibid.*, 163 and 223.

⁶⁹ Cf *SC*, nn. 7-10.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, n. 7.

⁷¹ ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 41.

become sacraments or mysterious manifestations of the salvific action of Christ by the word of faith. Therefore, the ministry of the Word is at the centre of the liturgical ritual. In addition, the fruitfulness of a liturgical act depends on the faith of the individual or the community. In fact, liturgy is effective and significant only if it is celebrated from the perspective of faith. A sacramental event is realized only in faith. As such, faith is not something external to the sacrament, but constitutes the sacrament.⁷² From this perspective of the Word and faith which are central in liturgy we can now describe the relationship between liturgy and catechesis.

Catechesi Tradendae states that “catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity, for it is in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, that Christ Jesus works in fullness for the transformation of human beings.”⁷³ The CCC refers to liturgy as “the privileged place for catechizing the People of God,”⁷⁴ and the *RdC* refers to it as catechesis in action and as the inexhaustible font of catechesis.⁷⁵ Indeed liturgy has an essential catechetical dimension. It is an eminent and most effective form of catechesis, an ongoing catechesis of the Church. In expressive and unitary form it contains the totality of the Christian message and can be called a living catechism.⁷⁶

Catechesis has a liturgical nature in the sense that it promotes knowledge of the meaning of liturgy and the sacraments and educates individuals in all that is necessary for a true liturgical life (*liturgical catechesis*).⁷⁷ More than this, catechesis is liturgical because it has the function of initiating a person into the mystery of Christian celebration of the liturgy, so that the Christian celebration becomes an expression of that journey of faith that guarantees its truth and authenticity.⁷⁸ “Liturgical catechesis aims to initiate people into the mystery of Christ [...] by proceeding from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the thing signified, from the ‘sacraments’ to the ‘mysteries’.”⁷⁹ Catechesis promotes conscious and active

⁷² Cf *Ibid.*, 244-246.

⁷³ *CT*, n. 23; Cf CCC, n. 1074.

⁷⁴ CCC, n. 1074.

⁷⁵ Cf *RdC*, nn. 114 and 117.

⁷⁶ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 250-251.

⁷⁷ Cf *GDC*, n. 85.

⁷⁸ Cf G. MORANTE, «*Catechesi e Liturgia*», in ISTITUTO DI CATECHETICA UPS, *Andate e insegnate*, 126.

⁷⁹ CCC, n. 1075; Cf *RdC*, n. 115.

participation of the liturgy by all people. It promotes education to prayer and meditations as irreplaceable moments in the life of faith.⁸⁰

Liturgy is an essential reference for catechesis. Since liturgy has a central part in the life of faith, catechesis has to refer to it as a source of inspiration, a means for testimony and a celebrative context for one's actions. Liturgy makes use of symbolic language full of evocative and revelatory elements. The symbolic language is an ideal means to communicate religious experience. And in this sense, liturgy becomes a potential instrument for catechetical communication. Feasts and celebrations have an essential significance for the life of persons as such, and have a fundamental importance in the communication of faith. They provide a privileged way of proclaiming the value and the profound sense of life and constitute a way for religious expression. Catechesis is called to integrate this celebrative dimension.⁸¹ *"Only that which is celebrated can be understood in its profundity [...]* Therefore, catechesis cannot do without the celebrative and ritual moments. *Without the celebration of the faith there is neither communication nor maturation of the faith."*⁸²

4. Authentic Nature of Catechesis

At the level of the individual catechesis has an authentic nature in the sense that it aims at the transformation of the person in the totality of his being and thus leading to the building of an authentic personality. Catechesis is concerned with the fundamental attitudes of life around which the personality of the individual is organized. The concept of attitude denotes a way of being which includes three essential components: *cognitive, affective* and *behavioural*.⁸³ In fact, catechesis, as an education towards maturity in faith aims at the development of these components of the attitude in a coherent way.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Cf G. MORANTE, «*Catechesi e Liturgia*», 126-127; Cf GDC, nn. 84 -85.

⁸¹ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 253-257.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 256.

⁸³ Cf *Ibid.*, 133; Cf ANTHONY, *Evangelization: Growing Understanding*, 30-31; Cf Z. TRENTI, *Educare alla fede. Saggio di pedagogia religiosa*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2000, 180-184 and 174-176.

⁸⁴ Catechesis as education in the faith does not directly affect faith in itself, but the attitudes of faith with the aim of nurturing a harmonious development in the cognitive, affective and operative components (Cf ANTHONY, *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation*, 165); Cf GDC, n.35.

4.1. *Maturity in Faith in the Cognitive/Intellectual Dimension*

Catechesis helps individual persons in the development of the cognitive dimension of the attitude. At the intellectual level, catechesis provides knowledge of the fundamental elements of the Christian message and helps to deepen this knowledge. Catechesis assists individual persons to understand the implications of faith making them capable of giving reason for what they believe. It helps them to discern the hierarchy of truths in order to be able to distinguish what is essential or what cannot be changed from that which can be changed, and in this way helps individuals to cultivate a sense of openness and flexibility to religious experience making them capable of facing changes and of adapting to it. In addition, it helps individuals to acquire a faith which is critical in a balanced and constructive way.⁸⁵

4.2. *Maturity in Faith in the Affective/Emotive Dimension*

Catechesis helps individuals to develop the affective-emotive dimension of the attitude in a balanced way. It facilitates individuals in the development of a faith which is autonomously motivated, i.e., it stimulates individuals to give a free and personal response to Christian proposals without any conditioning and to assume full responsibility in their choice. Catechesis trains individuals in acquiring a creative faith, a faith which is open to new situations that become a continuous source for new interpretations and initiatives. In addition, catechesis enables individuals to acquire a consistent faith which is able to make a long term commitment to a project of life without being conditioned by immediate impulses. Finally, at the affective-emotive level, catechesis assists individuals to have a faith which is dialogic, i.e., a faith which is not self-sufficient or intolerant but which is open to dialogue even with other faith confessions and cultural situations.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 133-134; Cf Z. TRENTI, *La fede dei giovani. Linee di un progetto di maturazione alla fede dei giovani*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2004, 121.

⁸⁶ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 134-135.

4.3. *Maturity in Faith in the Operative/Behavioural Dimension*

Finally, catechesis aims towards maturity in faith of individual persons at the behavioural or operational dimensions of the attitude. Catechesis educates individuals in developing an active and dynamic faith that reinforces their actions. It trains them to have a coherent faith in the sense that the personal behaviour manifested in the practices of daily life corresponds with the professed faith.⁸⁷ In synthesis, catechesis assists individuals to acquire a faith that orients and illuminates the entire activity of their life. At the end, faith is to be evaluated as mature or not by its existential significance, by its attitude in front of historical situations, especially in front of those provoking and dehumanizing ones. Therefore, catechesis educates individuals to verify the significance of faith in concrete experience, especially the daily experiences.⁸⁸

5. **Ecumenical Nature of Catechesis**

The work of evangelization is bound to witness and as such the division among Christians becomes a serious reality that impedes this work.⁸⁹ “Certainly, such a division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the most holy cause, the preaching of the gospel to every creature.”⁹⁰ *Evangelii Nuntiandi* affirms this by stating:

The power of evangelization will find itself considerably diminished if those who proclaim the Gospel are divided among themselves in all sorts of ways. Is this not perhaps one of the great sicknesses of evangelization today? Indeed, if the Gospel that we proclaim is seen to be rent by doctrinal disputes, ideological polarizations or mutual condemnations among Christians, at the mercy of the latter’s differing views on Christ and the Church and even because of their different concepts of society and human institutions, how can those to whom we address our preaching fail to be disturbed, disoriented, even scandalized?⁹¹

⁸⁷ Cf *Ibid.*, 135-136.

⁸⁸ Cf TRENTI, *La fede dei giovani*, 122.

⁸⁹ Cf *EN*, n. 77; Cf *RM*, n. 50.

⁹⁰ VATICAN COUNCIL II, «*Unitatis Redintegratio*». Decree on Ecumenism, 21 November 1964, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 57 (1965) 90-112, n. 1.

⁹¹ *EN*, n. 77.

The above affirmations show the urgent need for promoting unity among Christians and that this constitutes one of the primary concerns of the Church today. In this regard catechesis has an important contribution in the sense that it promotes an ecumenical spirit in the community beginning from individual persons. It helps individual persons to overcome resistance and rigid attachment to their identity by helping them distinguish the essential elements of faith from the other elements that are bound to the historical and cultural situations and by helping them acquire a true knowledge of the other Churches and Christian confessions because it is mainly ignorance that leads people to prejudice. In addition, catechesis educates the members of the community to cultivate a true appreciation of the values of the other Churches, to cultivate an attitude of esteem and love towards them, and to acquire an attitude of dialogue and collaboration with them. In favor of this, catechesis also promotes diverse forms of activities together with other Christian Churches such as moments of prayer, study, social services, etc.⁹²

There is also a necessity of *catechesis on ecumenism* which is concerned with transmitting a correct knowledge of the history and the important events in the ecumenical movement. However, the importance of catechesis in the ecumenical sphere does not consist in this. Catechesis is important for ecumenism, above all, because it promotes the above mentioned ecumenical attitudes in the members of the community. This constitutes *ecumenical catechesis*, whose objective consists in the promotion of these attitudes. In this aspect, it is all the environment of catechesis, starting from the catechetical texts, that needs to be penetrated by ecumenical sensibility. Ecumenical catechesis recognizes the Sacred Scripture as the chief ecumenical document as it is the principal source of unity among all the Churches.⁹³

The task of ecumenical catechesis is not easy because it implies a profound transformation of mentality.⁹⁴ It implies forming a new model of a Catholic, because as the Second Vatican

⁹² Cf E. ALBERICH, «*Catechesi ecumenica*», in ISTITUTO DI CATECHETICA UPS, *Andate e insegnate*, 136-137; Cf CONGREGAZIONE PER LA DOTTRINA DELLA FEDE, *Nota dottrinale su alcuni aspetti dell'evangelizzazione*, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007, n. 12; Cf *Guide for Catechists*, n. 14; Cf CT, nn. 32-33; Cf GDC, nn. 197-198.

⁹³ Cf ALBERICH, «*Catechesi ecumenica*», 137-138; Cf A. M. GALLIANO, *Il catechista e la chiesa che si rinnova. Note sui temi del concilio Vaticano II in rapporto alla catechesi*, Roma, Paoline, 1971, 77-83.

⁹⁴ Cf E. FORTINO, «*Ecumenismo*», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 231-233.

Council states: “there can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without interior conversion.”⁹⁵ For catechesis it implies also the renewal of catechisms, catechetical methods, etc. The realization of an authentic and effective ecumenical catechesis depends also on the formation of catechists in this aspect.⁹⁶ Catechists must be prepared from “the ecumenical point of view, so that they may correspond as exactly as possible with the facts.”⁹⁷

6. Contextual Nature of Catechesis

Catechesis is at the service of the Reign in the world and for the world. The Reign of God embraces all humanity and refers to mankind in history in all the concrete situations of life. As such catechesis has a contextual nature, i.e., it takes into consideration the cultural, religious, eco-economic, social and political contexts of a society. It encounters the local culture as well as other cultures, dialogues with non-Christian religious traditions and is concerned with human promotion in view of liberating the poor and the oppressed. As such it has an inculturizing, dialogic and liberative nature.⁹⁸

6.1. *Inculturizing Nature of Catechesis*

The Church is rooted in the local culture and context, and as such, inculturation is something that belongs to the very nature of the local Church.⁹⁹ The process of inculturation of the Church can be described as “the integration of the Christian experience of a local Church into the culture of its people, in such a way that this experience not only expresses itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates, orients and innovates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion, not only within the culture in question but also as

⁹⁵ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 7.

⁹⁶ Cf ALBERICH, «*Catechesi ecumenica*», 138.

⁹⁷ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 10.

⁹⁸ Cf ANTHONY, *Evangelization: Growing Understanding of a Complex Process*, 25-29; Cf ID., *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation*, 161-162; Cf M. MIDALI, *Practical Theology. Historical Development of Its Foundational and Scientific Character*, Roma, LAS, 2000, 306 and 308.

⁹⁹ Cf ID., *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation*, 153; Cf ID., *Evangelization: Growing Understanding of a Complex Process*, 26.

an enrichment of the Church universal.”¹⁰⁰ This indicates that there is “a dialectical encounter between Christian faith and a particular culture in which the culture is affirmed, challenged, and transformed toward God’s reign, and in which Christian faith is likewise affirmed, challenged, and enriched by this unique instance of its realization.”¹⁰¹

Catechesis being at the service of the incarnated Word has a very demanding but promising task in the field of inculturation:

It is called to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures. For this purpose, catechesis will seek to know these cultures and their essential components; it will learn their most significant expressions; it will respect their particular values and riches. In this manner it will be able to offer these cultures the knowledge of the hidden mystery and help them to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought.¹⁰²

Catechesis nurtures a mature attitude of faith in the cognitive, affective, and operative components of individual Christians within a given cultural context. It helps individual Christians to live and witness their faith in the concrete context of their lives, i.e., it helps them cultivate an inculturizing attitude in living their faith, to integrate the Christian message in concrete life. It helps to transform a particular cultural setting by enlightening from within the way of life of those who live in it, initiating them to the Christian values in co-relation with the values of the local culture, and inserting them into the concrete life-experience of the Christian community in that particular cultural context. In this way, favouring the interaction between faith and culture in the cognitive, affective and operative components of the attitude of the individual Christians, it becomes an instrument of inculturation and can be termed as *inculturizing catechesis*.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ A. ROEST CROLLIUS, *What is So New About Inculturation? A Concept and Its Implications*, in “Gregorianum” 59 (1978) 4, 735; Cf ANTHONY, *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation*, 45.

¹⁰¹ T. GROOME, *Inculturation: How to Proceed in a Pastoral Context*, in “Concilium” 30 (1994) 2, 122; Cf ANTHONY, *Evangelization: Growing Understanding of a Complex Process*, 25-26; Cf ID., *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation*, 162.

¹⁰² CT, n. 53; Cf GDC, n. 203.

¹⁰³ Cf ANTHONY, *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation*, 166-167 and 281-282; Cf ID., *Inculturazione e Catechesi*, in “Itinerarium” 12 (2004) 26, 160-161.

Catechesis promotes also the inculturizing praxis of the Church. By reflecting, in its content and form, the actual process of inculturation going on in the Church catechesis becomes an area and channel of inculturation. For this, the catechism texts need to be documents of inculturation of faith.¹⁰⁴ They “must present the synthesis of the faith with reference to the particular culture in which catechumens and those to be catechized are immersed.”¹⁰⁵ However, this does not mean preparing catechisms with the local culture’s literary and aesthetic elements but making them truly reflect the local patterns of thought and situation of life. “It therefore, calls for great incarnational effort and cultural tuning to be able to express the faith in a manner that is culturally incisive and perceptive.”¹⁰⁶

In addition, catechesis provides the basic motivations and correct dispositions for inculturation by clarifying the theological foundations of inculturation, by indicating the criteria for the authenticity of the inculturizing action and by providing a spirituality of action (*catechesis on inculturation*). Catechesis on inculturation is necessary to make the native Christians be sensitive to inculturation, to motivate them for an active collaboration, and by the presentation of the criteria for authenticity prevents them from an extreme position of cultural patriotism.¹⁰⁷

6.2. Dialogic Nature of Catechesis

The nature of Christian message is dialogic and catechesis, in the task of proclaiming this message, has a dialogic nature. Catechesis does not exclude but is open to the salvific claims of other religions traditions. This is an essential factor that can serve as criteria for the authenticity of a catechetical action.¹⁰⁸ The *Guide for Catechists* states that inter-religious dialogue is “a way of making Christ known,” and that “in certain conditions, it is indeed the

¹⁰⁴ Cf ID., *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation*, 167 and 282; Cf ID., *Inculturazione e Catechesi*, 159-160.

¹⁰⁵ GDC, n. 133.

¹⁰⁶ ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 101; Cf J. GEVAERT, «Inculturazione», in ID., *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 339; Cf C. DE SOUZA, «Catechesi e pluralismo culturale e religioso», in ISTITUTO DI CATECHETICA UPS, *Andate e insegnate*, 156-157.

¹⁰⁷ Cf ANTHONY, *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation*, 167 and 281; Cf ID., *Inculturazione e Catechesi*, in “Itinerarium” 12 (2004) 26, 157-159.

¹⁰⁸ Cf ID., *Evangelization: Growing Understanding of a Complex Process*, 27.

only way to bear witness to Christ.”¹⁰⁹ In a similar way, *Redemptoris Missio* states that “through dialogue, the Church seeks to uncover the ‘seeds of the Word,’ a ‘ray of that truth which enlightens all men’; these are found in individuals and in the religious traditions of man kind.”¹¹⁰

Catechesis transmits an accurate knowledge of other religions, their history, their organization, their values, the elements not conforming to the Gospel, etc. In this regard catechesis also transmits the conviction that salvation comes from Christ and that the Church is the ordinary means of salvation and that she possesses the fullness of revelation and salvific means. This implies that dialogue should not lead to religious relativism. Proclamation of Christ and engagement in inter-religious dialogue, though they are intimately related, they are distinct and should not be manipulated.¹¹¹

Catechesis promotes an attitude of esteem and openness towards other religious traditions. It educates the members of the ecclesial community to practice this dialogue in their daily life, i.e., it encourages them to favor relations with the followers of other religions; to share and bear witness to their own religious values and, at the same time, to be open in understanding the religious values of the others with truth, humility and frankness; to mutually help one another in living according to those values for the building of a more just and fraternal society. In addition, catechesis promotes practical cooperation with non Christians in safeguarding religious values, in the defense of the rights of the human person particularly of the poor, in the cause for peace and development, etc.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ *Guide for Catechists*, n. 15.

¹¹⁰ *RM*, n. 55; Cf VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Nostra Aetate*. Declaration on the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, 28 October 1965, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966) 740-744, n. 2; Cf *CCC*, nn. 839-845 and 856.

¹¹¹ Cf *Guide for Catechists*, n. 15; Cf *RM*, n. 55; Cf W. BÜHLMANN, *The Church of the Future. A Model for the Year 2001*, New York, Orbis Books, 1986, 83-84. See also: CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES – PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations*, 19 May 1991, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 84 (1992) 414-445; SECRETARIAT FOR NON-CHRISTIANS, *The Church's Attitude to Followers of Other Religions*, 4 September 1984, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 76 (1984) 816-828.

¹¹² Cf *RM*, nn. 56-57; Cf *Nostra Aetate*, n. 2; Cf *Guide for Catechists*, n. 15; Cf *GDC*, n. 200.

6.3. *Liberative Nature of Catechesis*

As it has been mentioned, catechesis is concerned with integral human development. It offers its contribution for the progress of human beings in all dimensions of life including the political, social, economic and ecological aspects. In a particular way it is concerned with the question of poverty and misery and aims at the building of a more just human society. Liberation and development are integral parts in the sense that liberation points to the transformation of unjust laws and practices and as such leads to development. Catechesis enters in the context of the struggle for justice primarily by helping individuals fight against evil in themselves and in the society. It challenges the unbalanced distribution of resources in the world promoting an alternative mode of development that takes into consideration the poor.¹¹³

Catechesis presents various contents and themes of the Christian message putting in evidence their social dimension and political significance and thus highlighting the liberating action of Christ and the transformative potential of faith. The transcendental dimension of faith gives deeper significance to any political action. Faith constitutes an important principle of orientation for stimulating and evaluating political action. Catechesis as education in the faith introduces in the political field, basic criteria and ethical demands such as the principle of non-violence and justice, the dignity of human life, the principle of integral liberty, the just distribution of the common good, the defence of the weak, and so on. As such it has a critical role of denouncing and purifying concrete political practices and finds reasons of incompatibility with certain political ideologies.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Cf ANTHONY, *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation*, 133-135; Cf ALBERICH, *Catechesi e prassi ecclesiale*, 164-169; Cf ID., «*Catechesi, diakonia e impegno nella società*», 128-131; Cf ID., «*Evangelizzazione e catechesi in un mondo che cambia*», 33-34. Here we will analyze the liberative dimension of catechesis making a particular reference to its relationship with political activity. Because “political action far from being a particular sector of an activity (next to the social, economic, cultural, educational actions, etc), has a global character inasmuch as it is inherent in all activities of a social nature” (ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 202).

¹¹⁴ Cf *Ibid.*, 86 and 203; Cf CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, Vatican City, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2003, n. 4.

Catechesis is called to illustrate adequately the significance of political action, its different forms and characteristics and its relationship to the integral development of the human person. More profoundly, it is called to clarify and deepen the relationship between Christian faith and political options in such a way as to overcome the dualist or fundamentalist position and helps individuals to interiorize Christian attitudes in the political field. Catechesis has the duty of educating people towards a political conscience based on Christian values. Educating towards political conscience also means promoting vocations for political commitment by encouraging Christians to devote themselves to the welfare of the society. Catechesis also offers motivations and criteria for fulfilling these functions with competence and honesty in a dynamic understanding of the Christian attitudes of faith, hope and love for the integral salvation of all men. In addition, since catechesis is an ecclesial action that influences the social and educational spheres, political action becomes an aspect that deserves special attention within its diaconal dimension. In this sense, catechesis has also the responsibility of promoting promotional works and services at the social and political level.¹¹⁵

In relation to the political activity, catechetical action always needs to be carefully analyzed and responsibly fulfilled in order to avoid the danger of manipulation. Catechesis as education in the faith should always maintain a balanced position. It should not become an instrument in favour of certain political ideologies or parties. It should also not become too spiritualistic or unrealistic by staying neutral in front of critical political situations. Catechesis need always conserve its Christian and ecclesial identity and need always be attentive to the dangers inherent in political action, e.g., the danger of intruding into the legitimate autonomy of the temporal order. Respect to the nature of catechesis as education to faith is essential for proceeding effectively in its contribution for the maturation of the political conscience of believers without reducing the originality and purity of the Christian message.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 205-206.

¹¹⁶ Cf *Ibid.*, 206; Cf G. BIANCARDI, *Fede e ideologia politica. Quale rapporto?* in “Catechesi” 75 (2006) 5, 17-19; Cf CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions*, n. 6.

Conclusion

As it has been shown in this chapter catechesis is not to be reduced to a simple religious instruction given in preparation for the reception of sacraments or to a mere transmission of the doctrines of faith or moral precepts. Catechesis, though it strictly belongs to the kerygmatic function which proclaims the Reign, it finds its place and assumes its proper task in a close relation to the other ecclesial functions. It proclaims the Reign (*kerygma*) and leads to a faith response; it educates towards the realization of the faith option in service and love of other persons (*diakonia*); it educates to live this faith in fraternity and in communion with others (*koinonia*); and leads to its celebration (*leitourgia*). As such catechesis becomes a means for the proclamation, realization in service and fellowship, and celebration of the Reign; and this shows that, in the life of faith, there cannot be separation of the different moments of proclamation, service, communion and celebration; all are moments of a single process of development; they are all complementary aspects of the Christian experience that should exist in unity and harmony.

At the individual level, catechesis is a true initiation fostering access to the mystery of the Christian existence and gradually leading the person to a true transformation in all aspects of the personality so that faith becomes a determining factor for the way of thinking, relating and behaving of the individual. At the universal level, catechesis has also an ecumenical dimension in the sense that it promotes unity with the other Christian Churches. At the contextual level, catechesis aims at the transformation of the entire context of persons. It takes in consideration the religious, cultural, eco-economic, social and political contexts of a society. On the basis of this analysis on the nature of catechesis we will, in the next chapter, develop the identity, apostolate and formation of catechists in the Church.

Chapter Seven

IDENTITY, APOSTOLATE AND FORMATION OF CATECHISTS IN THE CHURCH

Catechists as persons to whom the service of catechesis is entrusted assume an extraordinary importance in the pastoral mission of the Church. However, in many cases, the identity of catechists is not entirely understood as deriving from a particular vocation which gives rise to an effective ministry or service within the pastoral field of the Church. Speaking of the Catechists' Union, it has been shown in the second part that the members assume this identity as catechists on the basis of a specific vocation which is strongly reinforced by a total donation of self through consecration rendering the members to be catechists with all their being, with such an internal attitude. This fact invites the members of the Union, in a particular way, to acquire a deeper understanding of their identity and to have a far reaching vision of their mission as catechists. Therefore, in this chapter we will attempt to articulate the identity of catechists and their apostolate in the ecclesial community and in the society of today. In dealing with the apostolate, we will focus on young people since young people occupy a central place in the mission of the Union.

As we have mentioned above, today the mission of catechists assumes an extraordinary importance which implies that it is a service that requires a serious preparation and formation particularly in view of the actual demands of evangelization. Thus, underlining its importance, in this chapter we will also deal with the process of formation of catechists. We will develop

this analysis on the identity, apostolate and formation of catechists on the basis of actual ecclesial documents and the affirmations of contemporary thinkers on the subject.

1. Identity of Catechists

The magisterial documents clearly indicate that catechesis is a responsibility of the entire Christian community. As such the term ‘catechist’ can be applied to all members of the Church to indicate that by force of their baptism and confirmation, they are entrusted to the prophetic mission and they are called to announce and give witness to the Gospel message and to help the persons around them grow in the life of faith.¹ However, here in using the term ‘catechist’ we will consider the pastoral ministry of an agent of catechesis officially recognized by the Church.² In this sense, we will see the vocational identity of catechists as a response to a true and proper call from God, the common functional traits which characterize all catechists as well as the spirituality of catechists.

1.1. *Terminological Clarification and Definition of a Catechist*

In line to the nature of catechesis, we can describe the nature of the person of a catechist around three poles – namely the Word of God, faith and the Church. The catechist is a minister of the *Word of God*, he is at the service of the Gospel, communicating the Christian message and announcing Christ’s mystery. He is primarily an educator of *faith*, favouring the birth and maturity of faith in individual persons and communities. The catechist is always at the service of the Church – he works in the Church and for the Church.³

Different definitions are given to the person of a catechist in view of the specific primary role entrusted to him in different situations and times. But in general, the catechist is defined as *a pastoral worker who, possessing a basic human and Christian maturity and a certain pastoral competency, promotes and guides an organic and progressive itinerary of Christian*

¹ Cf *GDC*, nn. 220-221.

² In expressing the person of the catechist in a pronoun form we will use the male expression in order to avoid double expressions like ‘he/she’.

³ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 68.

*formation for a determined group of persons in the name of the ecclesial community to which he belongs and through the mandate of the bishop or a delegate.*⁴

Today other terms, such as religious educator, Christian educator, faith educator, faith formator, etc., are used to indicate a catechist. Some feel that there is no difference between these names; while others think that there is a slight difference. As it will be shown ahead, each name reveals a particular emphasis seen from a specific perspective. In addition, the names are formed in particular historical, conceptual and theological settings. For example, the term 'religious educator' is commonly used in the Unites States, but is mainly used to denote the teacher who teaches religious faith in schools. The term 'Christian educator' is commonly found in the Protestant areas in the Unites States.⁵ The term 'catechet' which indicates an expert in catechetics or a professor of catechetics, is used in some countries to indicate a teacher of religion in secondary schools and sometimes it is also used as equivalent to catechist.⁶

1.2. *Vocational Identity of a Catechist*

Being a catechist is a response to a true and proper vocation; it is a response of faith and of love to God who calls a person for a specific mission. "At the origin of the catechist's vocation, therefore, apart from the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, there is a specific call from the Holy Spirit, a 'special charism recognized by the Church' and made explicit by the Bishop's mandate."⁷ No one can choose to become a catechist unless there is this internal call for such a mission; and the greatness or relevance of a catechist lies in this basic fact of the origin of his mission. The specific elements of the vocation of a catechist consist in a conscious decision for Jesus Christ in a permanent journey of faith, a responsible belonging to the Church in a spirit of communion and service, and a capacity to integrate faith with

⁴ Cf L. SORAVITO, «Catechista», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 126.

⁵ Cf G. CHOONDAL, *The Formation of Lay Catechists*, Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2004, 20-26.

⁶ Cf G. STACHEL, «Catecheta», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 109-110.

⁷ CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES, *Guide for Catechists*. Document of Vocational, Formative and Promotional Orientation of Catechists in the Territories Dependent on the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, 3 December 1993, Nairobi, Paulines, 2000, n. 2.

ordinary life.⁸ The general vocation of catechists is also characterized by distinctiveness, i.e., there are also distinct specific vocations directed towards specific apostolic services. Therefore, each catechist is called to discover, discern and mature one's own particular vocation.⁹

1.3. *Common Functional Identity of Catechists*

The common functional traits by which every catechist is to be characterized can be in synthesis presented as follows:

The catechist is a prophet. As a prophet, the specific service of the catechist is to transmit the Good News of Jesus Christ. He is called to make explicit the treasures of the mystery of Christ, and as much as possible, to make the reality of God perceivable. The catechist fulfils this mission by illustrating the salvific events narrated in the Bible and presenting the ecclesial experience with all its expressions. Furthermore, as a prophet, the catechist is called to interpret history in the light of faith in order to discover the 'signs of God'. He has also the duty of helping others to interpret the biblical, post-biblical and experiential 'signs' through which God reveals himself. In this way the catechist assists others in the comprehension of the signs through which God manifests himself.¹⁰

The catechist is an educator. As an educator, the catechist is called to promote conversion and growth in the spiritual life of others, helping them to walk in the steps of Jesus till the style of his life is incarnated in them. The attitudes of faith, hope and charity, life of prayer, dedication for the cause of justice and peace, dedication to the service of others and

⁸ Cf COMMISSIONE EPISCOPALE PER LA DOTTRINA DELLA FEDE, *La formazione dei catechisti nella comunità cristiana*. Orientamenti pastorali, documenti CEI, 25 marzo 1982, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 1982, n. 22; Cf G. MORANTE, «I catechisti: identità e formazione», in ISTITUTO DI CATECHETICA UPS, *Andate e insegnate*, 335; Cf A. BOTANA, *L'identità del catechista*, in "Sussidi per la catechesi" 7 (1992) 2, 34 -36; Cf G. GATTI, *Il ministero del catechista*, Bologna, Dehoniane, 1978, 21-29.

⁹ Cf *Guide for Catechists*, n. 2.

¹⁰ Cf SORAVITO, «Catechista», 127-128; Cf GATTI, *Il ministero del catechista*, 29-32; Cf A. MONGOVEN, *The Prophetic Spirit of Catechesis: How We Share the Fire in Our Hearts*, New York, Paulist Press, 2000, 275-276.

community life develop and mature only by means of experience. Therefore, the catechist is called to create the conditions which permit others to live the Christian project, motivating experiences of ecclesial life of prayer and charitable services.¹¹

The catechist is a spokesman of the ecclesial community. The exercise of systematic catechesis is a service which is to be regulated by the ecclesial authority. The catechist undertakes this service in the name of the Church and cannot be considered an absolute patron, i.e., a catechist can not undertake catechetical activities according to one's own criteria and prospective but has to exercise these activities in communion with the Church and the pastors.¹²

Every catechist should be able to apply to himself the mysterious words of Jesus: "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me." [Jn 7:16. ...] What assiduous study of the word of God transmitted by the Church's Magisterium, what profound familiarity with Christ and with the Father, what a spirit of prayer, what detachment from self must a catechist have in order that he can say: "My teaching is not mine"!¹³

The catechist is a witness. The catechist, beyond the communication of the Christian message by means of words, is called to be a concrete sign by his life. The catechist gives testimony to his faith by fulfilling his prophetic service with coherence, readiness and courage – courage to face the challenge which the world of today presents to the Church, the courage to let oneself be involved in all problems of human life, and the courage to donate oneself freely and with joy.¹⁴ Jesus' teaching was majestic, uniquely consistent and persuasive because his words were never separable from his life and his very being. In imitation to Christ, the whole life of the catechist is to be a continuous witnessing.¹⁵

¹¹ Cf SORAVITO, «Catechista», 128; Cf GDC, nn. 84-86; Cf A. WYLER, *Il catechista "educatore"*, Bologna, Dehoniane, ²1980, 121-176.

¹² Cf SORAVITO, «Catechista», 127.

¹³ CT, n. 6.

¹⁴ Cf SORAVITO, «Catechista», 128.

¹⁵ Cf CEI – UCN, *Orientamenti e itinerari di formazione dei catechisti*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 1991, 27; Cf CT, n. 9.

The catechist is a missionary. This trait of the catechist is very important in our world of today which is characterized by a major pluralism. The catechist is a person who knows how to make the Gospel message arrive to men in different situations and conditions of life by using different modalities. It can be by his silence which provokes a moment of reflection or it can be by his explicit catechetical act carried out in the ecclesial community or by his exemplary life style. The catechist becomes the means through which God arrives to men in different situations.¹⁶

The catechist is a mediator. The above mentioned statement underlines the fact that “the catechist is essentially a mediator. He facilitates communication between the people and the mystery of God, between subjects amongst themselves, as well as with the community.”¹⁷ The catechist is called to bring people close to God; however, it is not the catechist but God himself who operates with his grace in all situations. The catechist is called to become, in a progressive way, the place of an encounter between faith and life. Thus, his mission assumes a sacramental character, i.e., he has the role of giving visibility to the presence of God. Dialogue has a central place in this mission of the catechist.¹⁸

The catechist is a companion in the way of life. The catechist is a guide who walks closely with others, particularly the young, in the journey of life towards the final end. Today the way, i.e., life itself as a movement or as a sequence of steps is considered to be the privileged place of catechesis. The catechist assumes the role of a friend to whom individuals can open themselves to share their life situation and experiences. He is called to show his presence and help to others by constantly praying with them and for them considering their growth as one’s own and by sharing in their joys and worries. This mission invites the catechist to be attentive to the culture of today.¹⁹

¹⁶ Cf *OIFC*, 27-28.

¹⁷ *GDC*, n. 156.

¹⁸ Cf *OIFC*, 27-28.

¹⁹ Cf *Ibid.*, 28-30; Cf CEC DON BOSCO, *Scuola per catechisti. Schede per la formazione personale e di gruppo*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2005, 40-41.

The catechist is man of harmony. This indicates the internal rhythm of the catechist from which flows the fidelity and creativity of his service. The catechist is a person who to some degree has acquired a fundamental synthesis between faith and concrete life, and searches to incarnate the Christian message in the daily life of other persons and in the totality of the world context. He proposes the Christian faith not only as light and energy which illuminates and invigorates human life in all its dimensions but also as a welcoming house, a community, which keeps alive the walk towards the end.²⁰

1.4. *Spirituality of a Catechist*

The need for a spirituality proper to catechists arises from their apostolic vocation. Catechists should have a specific spirituality because they are called for a specific service in the Church. In regard to the lay catechists, their spirituality is closely bound up with their status as lay Christians, made participants in Christ's prophetic, priestly and kingly offices. It includes a new and special motivation – a call to sanctity. Catechists are called to live out their vocation in holiness; a true catechist is a saint.²¹

The spirituality of a catechist is presented in the *Guide for Catechists* as follows:

Openness to the Word. Since the apostolic vocation of a catechist is primarily that of announcing the Word of God, then the fundamental spiritual attitude should be one of openness to this Word. The Word is the Revelation of God himself. It is preached by the Church, celebrated in its liturgy and lived more fully by the saints. Openness to the Word means an encounter with Christ, hidden in his Word, in the Eucharist and in our brothers and sisters. In other words, it means openness to God, to the Church and to the world.²²

Openness to God, One and Triune, is a characteristic of the spirituality of catechists inviting them to root themselves in the living Word of God with a Trinitarian dimension: the Father, who communicates the Word; the Son, the incarnate Word, who speaks only the Word

²⁰ Cf *OIFC*, 30-31.

²¹ Cf *Guide for Catechists*, n. 6; Cf CEC DON BOSCO, *Scuola per catechisti*, 45-48.

²² Cf *Guide for Catechists*, n. 7.

of the Father (cf. *Jn* 8:26; 12:49); and the Holy Spirit, who enlightens the mind to understand God's Word and opens the heart to receive the Word with love and to put it into practice (cf. *Jn* 16:12-14). By his intimate union with the Trinity, the catechist comes to a fuller knowledge of the truth; and shares in the love of the Father who wishes that all men be saved; lives in communion with Christ; and allows himself to be guided and transformed by the Spirit to become an enlightened preacher of the Word and a courageous witness of Christ.²³

Openness to the Church is another fundamental spiritual attitude of catechists. The Word of God is entrusted to the Church to conserve it faithfully, to deepen its understanding with the light of the Holy Spirit and to proclaim it to the whole world. Catechists, as living members of the Church, are required to have a deep sense of belonging and responsibility in regard to this mission of the Church. However, as it is mentioned before, the catechists' service is never an individual or isolated act, but is always in union with the Church from which they receive the mandate. Openness to the Church is expressed by a sincere love for it, dedication to its service and a willingness to suffer for its cause to the point of giving one's life if necessary. In particular it is expressed by obedience to the head pastors.²⁴

Openness to the world is a characteristic of the spirituality of the catechist in virtue of the apostolic love of Jesus the Good Shepherd, who came to gather and unite the scattered children of God (cf. *Jn* 11:52). Catechists are called to work in the world and for the world without being attached to it. This means that they must be thoroughly involved in the life of the society around them and be attentive to its needs. They need to have a supernatural view of the world and trust in the power of God's Word which would not remain without effect. They need to face all challenges with courage, without drawing back from fear of difficulties or love of oneself.²⁵

Coherence and authenticity of life. As it is mentioned above, the Word which the catechists preach must be that which they themselves live and are witnesses. They need to speak of a God whom they themselves know and are familiar. An authentic life signifies a life

²³ Cf *Ibid.*

²⁴ Cf *Ibid.*; Cf G. GATTI, *Catechisti nuovi nello spirito*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 1979, 23-34.

²⁵ Cf *Guide for Catechists*, n. 7.

rooted in an intimate union with God, a life continuously nourished by prayer, a life continuously shaped by the Holy Spirit. It implies a life of spiritual intensity manifested in an internal and external order. For catechists, the truth of their life confirms their message. For the lay catechists, no matter their lay state of life and the continuous involvement in the secular order, it is possible to attain a high degree of communion with God which renders their witness and activity more convincing and efficacious.²⁶

Missionary zeal. The loving knowledge of Christ leads a person into a burning zeal to make him known and loved by others. Catechists should have a strong missionary spirit like the Samaritan woman who after having met Jesus hurried back to the town to tell the people about him (cf *Jn* 4:28). Catechists need to be enthusiastic and courageous and should be convinced of what they say without ever being ashamed of the Gospel. They need to preach Christ boldly and to dedicate themselves actively to the service of others looking only for the glory of Christ without expecting any immediate gratification. They need to be inspired by the burning zeal of St. Paul who, for the sake of the Gospel, accommodated himself to all kinds of people in different situations, desiring to bring them to salvation by all possible means (cf *1 Co* 9: 22-23).²⁷

The Cross, the stamp of authenticity. The generous and conscious acceptance of the mystery of the Cross makes another element of the spirituality of Catechists. Catechists should always remember that the Cross is the stamp of their authenticity. The Christ whom they have to preach is the crucified Christ: “a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles” (*1 Co* 1: 23) but the power and wisdom of God for those who have been called (cf. *1 Co* 1: 24). In the Cross they find their strength and hope, the most mysterious and greatest gift of grace. The Cross is the sign of their communion with the Redeemer. The catechists should strive to follow the Lord on his own difficult road. They should be prepared to live the paschal mystery

²⁶ Cf *Ibid.*, n. 8; Cf *EN*, nn. 41 and 76.

²⁷ Cf *Guide for Catechists*, n. 9.

of Christ in all difficult situations, sufferings, problems and obstacles which they face in their daily apostolic work.²⁸

Devotion to Mary. The spirituality of a catechist should be enriched by a deep devotion to the Mother of God.²⁹ In Mary, the catechists find a simple and effective model since:

[Jesus] was formed by her in human knowledge of the Scriptures and of the history of God's plan for his people, and in adoration of the Father. She in turn was the first of his disciples. She was the first in time, because even when she found her adolescent son in the Temple she received from him lessons that she kept in her heart. She was the first disciple above all else because no one has been 'taught by God' to such depth. [...] Mary is a 'living catechism' and 'the mother and model of catechists'.³⁰

2. Apostolate of Catechists as Companions of the Young

The figure of a catechist in various moments in history has assumed specific primary functions. Today, more than ever, the role of a catechist as a companion in the journey of life has taken a primary place. As we have mentioned before, today, the place of catechesis is the way itself, i.e., life itself which is presented as a movement, as a variety of situations and a sequence of steps, and the catechist is a *companion in the way* who accompanies others throughout the entire itinerary of faith till the definitive aim of putting the person being accompanied into a vital communion with Jesus Christ.³¹ The catechist is called to give a basic and progressive Christian formation in all spheres of life;³² he is called to help others not only

²⁸ Cf *Ibid.*; Cf JOHN PAUL II, «*Spread the Work of Redemption by Traveling the Evangelic Way of the Cross*», 67, n. 5.

²⁹ Cf *Guide for Catechists*, n. 10; Cf GATTI, *Catechisti nuovi nello spirito*, 64-69.

³⁰ *CT*, n. 73.

³¹ Cf *OIFC*, 28-29; Cf MORANTE, «*I catechisti: identità e formazione*», 336; Cf *CT*, n. 5.

³² In regard to the process of Christian formation by means of catechesis we can consider three models or approaches: 1) *The model of teaching*: this model or approach considers the persons as objects of formation, as a point of application of a certain formation whose source, means, model and control are constituted by the catechist. There is an asymmetrical relationship where knowledge passes in a unilateral way from the catechist as a teacher to the others. Today this relationship where one dominates and the other is dominated cannot be supported. 2) *The model of animation*: this model is no more centered on the knowledge of the catechist as a teacher but on the experience and the resources of the persons in formation. Knowledge is considered as virtually

in knowing the Christian faith, but also in living and celebrating it, and then in announcing it to others in their turn.

Human life is a journey towards the fullness of salvation, both in the human and spiritual sense, and with youth comes the moment of the first great decisions towards this goal. At this age young people have to trace out the specific way proper to one's own fulfillment and must ever more decisively assume responsibility for their destiny: "Good and evil, grace and sin, life and death, will more and more confront one another within them, not just as moral categories but chiefly as fundamental options which they must accept or reject lucidly, conscious of their own responsibility."³³

It is true that the walk of life is totally personal; however, it is not individualistic. All persons, particularly the young, need someone more experienced to guide and accompany them, someone who respects and valorizes their person and who is ready to put himself at their maximum service for love.³⁴ A person who accompanies is one, who, with deep faith, as an instrument of the Spirit who shapes and transforms a person to be radically similar to Christ,

present in the persons. The educational intervention and the expressions of the catechist are all characterized by this assumption. In this case the catechist is an animator. His principal task is that of favoring the dynamics of a group by using all the necessary means. His person provokes a catalyzing effect. Ideally, this model searches to establish an equal relationship between the catechist and the other persons; however, in practice, there remains an exercise of a form of leadership from the part of the catechist. 3) *The model of learning*: in this model the pedagogical relationship is not centered on the transmission of knowledge from the part of the catechist, nor on the subjects or the group who are considered as the virtual sources of knowledge, but is centered on the confrontation of the persons with a certain knowledge which is still, at least in part, extraneous to them, and on helping them to appropriate this knowledge in an active way. The stress is on 'knowing how' and on 'being' (*saper fare* and *saper essere*). According to this model the person is considered to really know something as long as he actively appropriates it and as long as his behavior comes to be affected by what is known. The attention moves from the subject, from the catechist as a teacher and from the content and becomes centered on the activity of the subject and on his process of learning. The figure of the catechist is neither a teacher, nor animator, but a companion and a guide. He is, above all, a person who indicates the way and provides the necessary means in the process of learning. The means are the information which the person is devoid of, the key for interpretation, the methods and the significances. If the first model demands competence in regard to the contents, and if the second essentially demands attitudes for listening and communication, this third model demands a service of accompaniment that embraces information, attitudes and instruments. The first and the second models though they have advantages and importance they have considerable limits. The third model does not oppose the other two but in a certain way completes them. On the other hand, it is not to be reduced to a combination of the other two models because it has its own pedagogical logic which is not present in the first, nor in the second, nor in the combination of the two (Cf E. BIEMMI, *Compagni di viaggio. Laboratorio di formazione per animatori catechisti di adulti e operatori pastorali*, Bologna, Dehoniane, 2003, 172-177).

³³ CT, n. 39.

³⁴ Cf V. SALVOLDI, *In cammino verso l'amore*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2000, 4.

commits himself to others, so that, guided by him, they would overcome their spiritual and material, personal and interpersonal problems and difficulties.³⁵ A companion in a journey of faith is a person who participates “in the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way.”³⁶

Here, we will see the role of catechists as companions of the young in the journey of faith, rather in the journey of life towards the ultimate objective. We will also see two biblical models that illuminate this apostolate of catechists as companions, providing some methodological elements that would help catechists in their approach towards the young in this most relevant apostolate.

2.1. *Accompanying the Young towards Maturity in Faith*

The task of catechists is to transmit “the attitudes of the Master himself.”³⁷ As we have seen in chapter six, today the goal of a catechetical action is understood not in terms of acquisition of knowledge, but in terms of acquisition of attitudes of faith beginning from the basic attitude or experience of conversion. Religious knowledge without affective and operative participation remains a theory. Faith is not just an intellectual or moral fact but implies a gradual transformation of the person in all his being: intellect, will and action.³⁸

³⁵ Cf L. GONZÁLEZ, *Guidati dallo Spirito. Accompagnamento spirituale di stile integrativo*, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998, 25.

³⁶ GS, n. 1.

³⁷ GDC, n. 85.

³⁸ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 123-126. According to James Fowler faith is expressed in terms of the human quest for relationship with the transcendence which calls for an alignment of the will in view of transcendent value and power and involves an orientation of the total person or ‘a resting of heart’ in the transcendence as one’s ultimate concern giving purpose and meaning to one’s strivings, thoughts and actions (Cf J. FOWLER, *Stages of Faith. The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, San Francisco, Harper Collins Publishers, 1981, 14-15). Faith is a continuous response of love to the call of God. It implies a relationship with God which involves the entire man in his interior life as well as exterior actions. In the Christian atmosphere faith is described as the free, conscious and trustful abandonment of man to God who is revealed in Jesus Christ. It means welcoming the salvific intervention of God accomplished in Jesus Christ. In the field of catechesis, faith can be expressed in terms of a personal encounter and communion with Christ (Cf F. ARDUSSO, «Fede», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 275-278).

Faith implies a dynamics of growth: a *journey* or an *itinerary*.³⁹ From the theological-pastoral point of view the following phases can be distinguished: *interest* in the Gospel,

³⁹ Fowler proposes six stages in the journey of faith – though this kind of division into stages is not accepted by some authors like Hintersteiner (Cf N. HINTERSTEINER, ‘*Stages of Life*’ *Theories Faced with Globalized Culture*, in “*Concilium*” (2007) 5, 35-44). According to Fowler the journey of faith begins around the 2nd year of a child’s life: the *undifferentiated faith* which is a pre-stage in which the seeds of trust, hope and love are fused in an undifferentiated way, with sensed threats of abandonment, inconsistencies and deprivations. In this stage the supply of basic trust and the relational experience of mutuality are very important. The transition to the first stage begins when the use of symbols in speech and ritual play begin. 1) *Intuitive-projective faith* (age 4-8) which is a fantasy-filled phase when the child establishes meaning and trust by intuition. The child starts to imitate related adults, especially parents, and is strongly and permanently influenced by their actions and moods. In this stage there is the beginning of self-awareness and the birth of imagination. God is imagined in an anthropomorphic, magical form. The growing desire to know and clarify the reality marks the transition to the second stage. 2) *Mythic-literal faith* (age 7/8-11/12) when the child joins one’s immediate group or faith community. There is a kind of affiliative faith. In this stage, reasoning and thought go beyond intuition. The child begins to differentiate between natural and supernatural realities but there is still the anthropomorphic concept of God. The child starts to appropriate stories, beliefs and observances which symbolizes a sense of belonging to a community. Beliefs, symbols, moral rules and attitudes are appropriated with literal interpretations and in a linear way. In this stage narratives and stories have strong influence. The implicit clash or contradiction in narratives and stories marks the transition to the third stage. 3) *Synthetic-conventional faith* generally begins at the age of 11/12 and promotes the widening of the person’s experience to other places beyond the family circle such as school, peers, church, and society. It is a stage when the individual tries to conform to the expectations and judgments of others and is dependent on them. The individual lacks in constructing an autonomous judgement or identity. At this stage faith must provide a basis for identity and outlook. This stage begins and is pre-eminent in adolescence though it can be seen in adults. In this stage faith is still conventional and not self-chosen. There is a synthesis but not a personal autonomous synthesis but one reached by subordination to a higher authority. The transition to the next stage is marked by serious clashes between respected authority sources, marked changes in policies, etc., which initiate a critical reflection. 4) *Individuative-reflective faith* generally begins at the age of 17/18 when the young (or can even be adult) begins to take seriously the responsibility for one’s own commitments, lifestyle, beliefs, attitudes, etc. There is a demarcation of one’s own identity and differentiation from others, there is self-dependence. In this stage critical reflection is important because, though faith becomes autonomous or individually chosen, the person starts to be aware of the paradoxes of life. The person faces unavoidable tensions such as self-fulfilment as a primary concern versus service to and being for others, and so on. Dissatisfaction with one’s compromises and the awareness that life is more complex than clear distinctions and abstract concepts makes a person move to the next stage. 5) *Conjunctive faith* which involves the integration into one’s self and outlook much of the reality which was previously suppressed or unrecognized. The person recognizes that beyond one’s conscious self there is the unconscious self. There is a willingness to accept life with all its paradoxes, challenges and difficulties. In this stage the person strives to unify opposites in mind and experience, and opens oneself to the truths of the other, ready to get near that which is different and threatening. Commitment is freed from the confines of tribe, class, religious community or nation. There is an active concern for all people. The person is capable of depending on others without losing one’s independence. The experience of reaching mid-life can stimulate the beginning of this stage. 6) *Universalizing faith* in which the self ceases to be at the centre of experience and moves towards a centre where participation in God, or the Ultimate, becomes the focus. The persons who arrive at this stage possess a special grace that makes them transparent, simple, more fully human, and intensely liberating, and they have a transforming presence in the world. It is an ideal stage of union with God possible on this earth. According to Fowler, the persons who arrive at this stage are extremely rare (Cf FOWLER, *Stages of Faith*, 119-211); Cf T. GROOME, *Christian Religious Education. Sharing Our Story and*

conversion, profession of faith which is explicitly and effectively lived, and the *journey* towards perfection.⁴⁰ Conversion is the decisive turn that transforms life in a radical way leading to a new mentality and life style as different from the past. It can be described as a process of ‘breaking’ from the past that leads to the rebuilding of a new identity in which Christ is the centre and the foundation. The adhesion to Christ is strengthened by the process of learning and deepening the Christian life which leads to the profession of faith and incorporation into the Christian community. Finally, the person tends towards maturity and perfection in faith that points towards the eschatological consummation.⁴¹

Therefore, catechists, first of all, have the task of stimulating and favoring conversion in young people. They are called to encourage young people to open their heart to Christ and adhere to him. Then, they have the task of sustaining and strengthening the attitudes of faith in them: a faith strengthened by hope and perfected by charity. In fact, the central mission of catechists in regard to the individual person is educating the attitudes of Christian existence: faith, hope and charity. *Educating the attitude of faith* means stimulating docility and abandonment to the Word of God; it signifies helping the young to adhere to Christ and to make him the centre of their life by a personal and unconditional choice. *Educating the attitude of hope* signifies helping the young to have an unshakeable trust in the promises of God, to be enduring in front of adversities, to renounce all forms of auto-sufficiency, and to have basic optimism with regard to the future without ever falling into desperation.⁴² Hope is that attitude which enables a person to see that which can not be seen, till the point of making him evaluate and express that which can be seen from the part of that which can not be seen.⁴³ *Educating towards the perfection of charity* signifies helping the young people in the practice of the love of God realized in the love of the neighbor; it implies the formation of a strong moral personality. Finally, catechists are called to provide the young with a progressively

Vision, San Francisco, Harper and Row Publishers, 1980, 66-73; Cf W. H. CLARK, *The Psychology of Religion. An Introduction to Religious Experience and Behavior*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1961, 55-136.

⁴⁰ Cf GDC, n. 56.

⁴¹ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 128-129.

⁴² Cf *Ibid.*, 140-142.

⁴³ Cf R. TONELLI, *Fede*, in “Note di Pastorale Giovanile” 34 (2000) 8, 38.

continuous and appropriate knowledge of the Christian message and assist them to integrate it to life experience.⁴⁴

In this way catechists help young people to acquire a stable faith – a faith which is interiorized in the totality of their person. Faith is said to be interiorized when the Christian message penetrates into the core of the being, in the totality of life, in such a way that it becomes the coordinating factor that harmonizes all the values and motivations of the person.⁴⁵ Such a mature faith constitutes the central point of reference for life options and becomes the source of wisdom and meaning in life. It becomes the fundamental attitude of life around which the personality of the individual is organized and by which the individual interprets existential situations. In the catechetical-pastoral field, as it has been mentioned before, the concept of attitude denotes a way of being which includes three essential components: *cognitive*, *affective* and *behavioural*. Mature faith develops these components of the attitude in a coherent way. If these components or dimensions do not grow mutually then there is no maturity in faith.⁴⁶ Here we will illustrate this major apostolate of catechists in accompanying the young towards maturity in faith by making use of biblical models.

2.2. Two Biblical Models of Accompaniment

As we have mentioned before, today, the place of catechesis is the way itself, i.e., life itself in all the variety of situations, and the catechist is no other but a companion in the way, i.e., in the journey of life towards the ultimate end. Here, we will try to analyze two models of accompaniment in the Bible – from the New as well as the Old Testament. One is the episode on the road to Emmaus (cf *Lk* 24:13-35), and the other is the journey of Tobias (cf *Tb* 3:7-11:15). The Emmaus episode is a model of great interest and importance in the field of catechesis. It is a focal point that helps catechists to grasp the fundamental process of catechesis. The journey of Tobias is another very important model showing the indispensable

⁴⁴ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 142-147.

⁴⁵ Cf L. MEDDI, *Il processo di interiorizzazione della fede*, in “Note di Pastorale Giovanile” 32 (1998) 7, 33.

⁴⁶ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 133; Cf Z. TRENTI, *Educare alla fede. Saggio di pedagogia religiosa*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2000, 180-184 and 174-176.

need of a companion for a success of a journey, especially in the most critical moment of life when young people have to decide for the direction of their life; it also shows the fact that a full realization consists in the achievement of a true treasure of love.

2.2.1. *The Journey towards Emmaus – a Journey towards Fullness of Truth*

The Emmaus episode helps to understand the process, content, structure or method and goal of catechesis. In the Emmaus journey, the process is shown as gradual or progressive; the content is the revelation of the Truth, the Good News – news of hope; the specific structure or method consists of narration, interpretation (incarnation of the message in daily life) and witnessing; and the goal is conversion, a fuller communion with God and commitment.

2.2.1.1. *The Core of Catechesis*

The reflection on the Emmaus episode reveals the core of the process of catechesis. It presents a dynamic process that links human stories with Christ's story. It shows the fact that a true catechetical process nurtures faith by integrating daily life events with Scripture and the teaching of the Church and by that light provides new insights to fundamental human experiences.⁴⁷ It shows that “pedagogical instructions adequate for catechesis are those which permit the communication of the whole Word of God in the concrete existence of people.”⁴⁸ *Gaudium et Spes* affirms this by stating:

The Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the time and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, if it is to carry out its task. In language intelligible to every generation, she should be able to answer the ever recurring questions which men ask about the meaning of this present life and of the life to come, and how one is related to the other. We must be aware of and

⁴⁷ Cf T. GROOME – M. CORSO (Eds.), *Empowering Catechetical Leaders*, Washington, National Catholic Educational Association, 1999, 62-63; Cf G. ZEVINI, «Linee di spiritualità biblica per i giovani d'oggi», in C. BUZZETTI – M. CIMOSA (Eds.), *I giovani e la lettura della Bibbia*, Roma, LAS, 1992, 197-198.

⁴⁸ *GDC*, n. 146.

understand the aspirations, the yearnings, and the often dramatic features of the world in which we live.⁴⁹

The faith and hope of the two disciples of Emmaus was greatly damaged in front of the situation of suffering, i.e., in front of the passion and death of Jesus. St. Paul speaks of the ‘scandal of the cross’ (*1 Co 1: 23*), which the Jews and the pagans had an extreme difficulty to understand. The disciples of Emmaus were expecting a political and religious liberation, but in their own way and not in God’s way. The experience of the disciples of Emmaus specifically regards the world of today.⁵⁰ Today there are many persons, especially the young ones, who, faced with and challenged by an extreme situation of hardship and adversity of every kind: injustice, extreme poverty, sickness, insecurity, etc., tend to get desperate in regard to their future and do not know what to do; while there are some others who tend to find solutions of their own. As *Gaudium et Spes* states:

There are still others whose hopes are set on a genuine and total emancipation of mankind through human effort alone and look forward to some future earthly paradise where all the desires of their hearts will be fulfilled. Nor is it unusual to find people who having lost faith in life extol the kind of foolhardiness which would empty life of all significance in itself and invest it with a meaning of their own devising. Nonetheless, in the face of modern developments there is a growing body of men who are asking the most fundamental of all questions or are glimpsing them with a keener insight: What is man? What is the meaning of suffering, evil, death, which have not been eliminated by all this progress?⁵¹

Therefore, catechists are called to provide human persons, particularly the young, with adequate answers to their fundamental questions of life. Above all, they need to be bearers of paschal joy and hope. “The most valuable gift that the Church can offer to the bewildered and restless world of our time is to form within it Christians who are confirmed in what is essential and who are humbly joyful in their faith.”⁵² Catechists are called to enkindle and to restore the

⁴⁹ GS, n. 4.

⁵⁰ Cf GEVAERT, *Il dialogo difficile*, 88-91.

⁵¹ GS, n. 10.

⁵² CT, n. 61.

faith and hope of many. They need to help persons be aware of the active presence of Christ in the Church, in daily life and in all creation;⁵³ to witness that Christ is traveling with each one and that it is necessary for every Christian to walk with him in this life that passes through suffering and death in order to achieve eternal life in the Kingdom of God. Accordingly, the definitive apostolate of catechists is “to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ.”⁵⁴

2.2.1.2. *Methodological Elements*

The image of the disciples of Emmaus represents the existential situation of many young people. In the light of the episode, some methodological elements can be deduced for catechists for helping young people in the process of maturation in faith.⁵⁵

Recognizing the desire of young people to grow in faith. The two disciples were walking and this indicates availability or desire for growth from the part of the young person. At the beginning of a faith journey the young is still far from the ideal and catechists need to be realistic.⁵⁶ They should not suppose that young people already have all the answers. Many can be found in a state of perplexity in face of the Gospel message. That was the situation of the two disciples of Emmaus. On the road they were pondering trying to find some meaning to the horrible event of Jesus’ condemnation to death.⁵⁷ This does not mean the two disciples had a superficial attitude in front of life. On the contrary, they were idealists searching for something great and absolute, and they were even disposed for making sacrifice. However, they still were not able to see the human life in the light of the paschal mystery.⁵⁸ And this indicates the situation of many young people today in our world.

⁵³ Cf GROOME – CORSO, *Empowering Catechetical Leaders*, 62.

⁵⁴ CT, n. 5.

⁵⁵ Cf A. CENCINI, *Vita consacrata. Itinerario formativo lungo la via di Emmaus*, Milano, Edizioni San Paolo, 1994, 119.

⁵⁶ Cf *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Cf GROOME – CORSO, *Empowering Catechetical Leaders*, 67.

⁵⁸ Cf GEVAERT, *Il dialogo difficile*, 90.

Walking together with the young. This shows the importance of a personal accompaniment. It can be done by an attentive listening and by stimulating a free discussion with the aim of knowing progressively what the young person is truly living or experiencing interiorly. Catechists need to help the young discover their motivations and aspirations. In this process, it is always important to respect the principle of graduality.⁵⁹ It is also very important to develop a high level of trust with the young person. “The two Emmaus disciples [...] after they came to trust ‘the stranger’ and his questions they shared their experience and troubled thoughts with him. In response he shared with them his profound insights into the Scriptures.”⁶⁰

Helping young people discover what is becoming obstacle. Normally, in the beginning of the process towards maturation, to many young people, reality is something relevant to their person and their needs. As a result of this, their objective point of view is usually erroneous. Their image of God may also be affected by this erroneous perception. Many tend to understand God according to one’s desires. The same was the situation of the two disciples of Emmaus. So catechists, in the imitation of Jesus, need to look attentively into the young persons entrusted to them and little by little help them to know what is becoming obstacle. They need to help young people to be more docile.⁶¹

Helping young people know and accept their proper self. Jesus was asking questions to the disciples not simply for acquiring information but, above all, for helping them verbalize what was in their heart; to help them be aware of their problem and of the real cause of their frustration. Catechists, as companions, need to help the young understand what is there in their heart by making them speak of oneself – first of all to their proper self than to others; making

⁵⁹ Cf CENCINI, *Vita consacrata*, 120-122; Cf C. BISSOLI, «Tu solo sei così forestiero in Gerusalemme?» (Lc 24: 18), in “Note di Pastorale Giovanile” 34 (2000) 7, 46-47.

⁶⁰ GROOME – CORSO, *Empowering Catechetical Leaders*, 68.

⁶¹ Cf CENCINI, *Vita consacrata*, 122-126.

them learn to dig inside oneself. The young need to be helped to know and accept their proper self with the weak as well as the strong sides.⁶²

Helping young people to put themselves in God's project. Jesus was offering a precise proposal of his person in a way the Scriptures say of him and from the point of view of the mystery of the Cross. This is a very important indication to help young people see themselves from the point of view of the Scriptures, from the view of the desire of God for them. The young should be helped to root themselves in the Scripture and be guided by it. Listening to the Word of God (the method) and the mystery of the Cross (the content) are the points of reference and confront for the young person.⁶³

Orientating young people towards an autonomous decision. Jesus accompanied the disciples all the way till they reached their village explaining, clarifying and illuminating them and when their eyes were starting to open he pulled himself behind as if to go. By distancing himself he invites them for a stop, i.e., for a liberal decision, before the breaking of bread.⁶⁴ This is exactly what catechists have to do in the process of accompaniment of young people.

Stimulating the young to discover Christ as the truth of their life. The insistence of the disciples in asking Jesus to stay with them is a sign of their desire to remain with him. Young people need to be helped to discover in Christ the unique person who has the truth about them and to feel that they cannot stay without him. Catechists need to stimulate young people to open themselves for a permanent relationship with Christ, to stimulate and strengthen their desire for a permanent walk with him.⁶⁵

Helping young people to make a personal experience of God. At the breaking of bread, the two disciples were able to recognize Jesus fully. This signifies the necessity for the young person to make a personal experience of God. This experience leads to a renewed knowledge

⁶² Cf *Ibid.*, 126-128; Cf G. INFANTINO, *La «strada» verso Emmaus*, in "Via Verità e Vita. Comunicare la fede" 55 (2006) 4, 39.

⁶³ Cf CENCINI, *Vita consacrata*, 132-135; Cf BISSOLI, *«Tu solo sei così forestiero in Gerusalemme?»*, 48-50.

⁶⁴ Cf CENCINI, *Vita consacrata*, 135-138.

⁶⁵ Cf *Ibid.*, 138-139; Cf INFANTINO, *La «strada» verso Emmaus*, 39-40; Cf BISSOLI, *«Tu solo sei così forestiero in Gerusalemme?»*, 50-51.

of God and of oneself. It is only after this experience that the person truly perceives himself as image of God and acquires a new identity in him. Experience is a concrete existential situation that transforms the whole being. Though all this is an action of the grace of God, catechists have an important role in stimulating young people towards it by a concrete testimony.⁶⁶ Once the person has reached this level the role of the catechist who accompanies may not be as intense as before. The person can grow in an internal union with Christ more autonomously.

Training young people to be true disciples of Christ. The two disciples, having made that experience, spontaneously set out for a mission. They quickly left to meet the others to narrate their experience. A true Christian is by nature a missionary and has a sense of belonging to a community. This is the goal of the apostolate of catechists, to form within the Church true disciples of Christ or witnesses who being transformed in Christ, would commit themselves to the service of others in the Church and society.⁶⁷

2.2.2. *The Journey of Tobias – a Journey towards Realization in Love*

Another biblical model of accompaniment in the journey of faith, put forward by Fausto Negri, is the book of Tobit which presents two young persons – Tobias and Sarah (cf *Tb* 3:7-11:15).⁶⁸ The book of Tobit demonstrates the importance of accompaniment in all aspects of the personality of a young person. It gives particular importance to the emotional dimension and stresses on the fact that a person can be realized only by immersing oneself in love and by offering oneself as an instrument of love towards others.

Tobias is a figure of a young person who is in a journey towards realization or maturity. To achieve it he had to travel far, to overcome fears and dominate hidden emotions by the help of a companion.⁶⁹ Sarah is a young girl who desired love ardently but at the same time was afraid of it because she was not able to establish a stable relationship. Today Sarah can

⁶⁶ Cf CENCINI, *Vita consacrata*, 139-142.

⁶⁷ Cf BISSOLI, «*Tu solo sei così forestiero in Gerusalemme?*», 52; Cf ZEVINI, «*Linee di spiritualità biblica per i giovani d'oggi*», 197-198.

⁶⁸ Cf F. NEGRI, *Fare strada in compagnia*, in “Via Verità e Vita. Comunicare la fede” 56 (2007) 5, 40.

⁶⁹ Cf ID., *L'amore è il vero «tesoro»*, in “Via Verità e Vita. Comunicare la fede” 56 (2007) 1, 40-41.

represent the fragility of many young people and their fear in front of life: the difficulty to accept oneself, a sense of being inadequate, anguish in regard to love relationships, fear of not being likeable, anxiety for the future and so on.⁷⁰ Catechists are called to help young people in overcoming all these difficulties by offering themselves as true companions, above all by opening the door for hope.⁷¹

2.2.2.1. *Essential Task of Catechists as Companions*

The apostolate of catechists as companions essentially consists in walking together with the young as the angel who was willing to walk with Tobias (cf *Tb* 5:10). Catechists are called to offer themselves as friends or guides in order to help the young understand life better and to live it fuller in the world. As the angel who assures Tobias that he knows the roads (cf *Tb* 5:10), catechists as good companions of a journey need to be persons who already know the way; persons capable of giving clear indications in unknown situations and ways, i.e., in moments of difficulty and crisis. In other words, they need to be persons who, for first, have done that journey or that profound experience and have acquired maturity. Catechists as persons who accompany the young need also have a positive and trustful view in regard to life and need to assure the young of it in a realistic way (cf *Tb* 5:16). As the angel did for Tobias, they need to convince the young of the goodness of the journey, no matter the difficulties and challenges, because it is a journey made with a specific objective to give sense to life and to bring them to their proper realization.⁷²

Catechists need to help the young person learn to be autonomous. The angel gave advice and encouragement and stayed close to Tobias but did not substitute Tobias in what he had to do (cf *Tb* 6:4). In this sense, the dangers become opportunities to challenge oneself and difficulties become occasions for growth for the young. The catechist has the role of stimulating, motivating, encouraging, giving directions, above all of being there with the young, while leaving the grace of God work in them. In the journey of faith, there is the

⁷⁰ Cf *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷¹ Cf V. SALVOLDI, *In cammino verso la libertà*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2001, 4-5.

⁷² Cf NEGRI, *Fare strada in compagnia*, 40-41.

danger of getting blocked because of fears and catechists need to assist the young to fight against the causes of fear and manifest to the young that these fears are too little to become blocking obstacles to the great project of life. The angel encourages Tobias (cf *Tb 6:18*); he sustains and calms him; indicates for him the possible solutions and finally leads him towards his complete realization.⁷³

2.2.2.2. *Accompanying the Young in All Aspects of the Personality*

A catechist called to accompany young people needs to sustain them in all aspects of the personality because a person is a unity of sensations (body), thoughts (intelligence) and emotions (heart). The psychological well being of the person, where emotions have a fundamental part, is worth special attention. The control of emotions is not easy and it renders a person to be fragile. As is demonstrated in the book of Tobit, a good companion helps the young person to overtake these emotions and make use of them as special occasions for maturity.⁷⁴

If young people cannot express their emotions adequately, they tend to construct a distorted vision of themselves, of others and of the reality in general. Thus, catechists as companions need to help them know and identify their emotions, to be attentive to their interiority, to enter into the unconscious world where there are more profound and hidden emotions and to draw out these emotions to the conscious self by identifying and accepting them. Only in this way can young people know more their profound self, dominate their emotions and correct their behavior. In addition, many young people suffer from some relational disturbances. The root causes can be many and the passage towards the confrontation with them can be difficult. It is very important for the catechist as a companion to dedicate oneself patiently and constantly in helping the young uncover the root causes of the things which make them suffer and confront them. Catechists need also help the young challenge the reality by formulating their authentic needs and desires. They need to motivate

⁷³ Cf *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Cf F. NEGRI, *Il sostegno emotivo*, in “Via Verità e Vita. Comunicare la fede” 56 (2007) 3, 40.

the young to express their sensations and emotions – positive as well as negative – without fear. Only in this way can a young individual become his real self, i.e., if he lives in harmony with his real self.⁷⁵

2.2.2.3. *Realization in Love*

Born from an act of love, a person can be realized only by immersing oneself in love.⁷⁶ Tobias started his journey in search of material treasure; however, the final treasure turned out to be the realization of his person through the new capacity which he acquired by the help of his companion – the capacity to love.⁷⁷ Catechists are called to witness to young people that the real treasure of life consists in nothing but in loving and that only when this true treasure is recovered can one recover the other treasures. Love enables a person to go beyond his limits. It overtakes fears, anguishes, and internal miseries, and renders the person full giving him his real identity.⁷⁸ A person's liberty is full when that of others initiates.⁷⁹ Tobias achieved his full liberty when he went out towards Sarah to heal and love her (cf *Tb 6:18*), i.e., when he, in his turn, became an instrument of God's love to another person,⁸⁰ and this is the goal of the apostolate of catechists – to make others instruments of God's love.

3. Formation of Catechists

As it has been shown, catechists have a very important and relevant apostolate in the Church and in the world of today, particularly in relation to the young who represent the hope for a better future. However, catechists cannot realize this apostolate in an efficient way, if they are not primarily prepared by a proper process of formation and training. As the *GDC* states: “the quality of any form of pastoral activity is placed at risk if it does not rely on truly

⁷⁵ Cf *Ibid.*, 40-42.

⁷⁶ Cf SALVOLDI, *In cammino verso l'amore*, 5; Cf G. SOVERNIGO, *Amare con tutto il cuore. Laboratorio di formazione affettiva*, vol. I, Bologna, Dehoniane, 2004, 16-18.

⁷⁷ Cf NEGRI, *L'amore è il vero tesoro*, 40-41; Cf SOVERNIGO, *Amare con tutto il cuore*, vol. IV, 21-22.

⁷⁸ Cf F. NEGRI, *Lasciare il padre e la madre*, in “Via Verità e Vita. Comunicare la fede” 56 (2007) 2, 41.

⁷⁹ Cf SALVOLDI, *In cammino verso la libertà*, 14.

⁸⁰ Cf NEGRI, *Fare strada in compagnia*, 40-41.

competent and trained personnel. The instruments provided for catechesis cannot be truly effective unless well used by trained catechists.”⁸¹ As a consequence, the adequate formation of catechists cannot be overlooked; rather it is to be given absolute priority in the pastoral program of the Church.⁸² Here, we will deal with the different dimensions and aspects of formation of catechists, the itinerary of the formation as well as the preparation of formators.

3.1. *Dimensions of Formation*

The formation process touches the identity of the catechists and their function. It aims at facilitating an adult Christian identity and at developing a specific competence at the service of faith communication. It promotes human, spiritual and ecclesial maturity; biblical and theological competency, knowledge of the human person and of the environment; pedagogical, methodological and didactic competency as well as a relational capacity. This implies an integral formation in the quadruple dimensions of ‘being’, ‘knowing’, ‘knowing-how’ and ‘being-with’.⁸³

3.1.1. *Formation in the Dimension of “Being”*

This is the most profound dimension that regards the existential aspect of the catechists. It refers to the maturity of the personality of the catechists both from the human and Christian points of view. More than knowledge and capacity, catechists should be distinguished primarily by their very “being”, i.e., for their personal and interior qualities, for their spirituality and ecclesial identity.⁸⁴ “Formation, above all else must help [the catechist] to mature as a person, a believer, and as an apostle.”⁸⁵

⁸¹ GDC, n. 234.

⁸² Cf *Ibid.*

⁸³ Cf L. SORAVITO, «Catechista (formazione)», in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 128; Cf MORANTE, «I catechisti: identità e formazione», 338-340; Cf CHOONDAL, *The Formation of Lay Catechists*, 158-194.

⁸⁴ Cf U. MONTISCI, *Dimensioni della formazione: essere*, in “Via Verità e Vita. Comunicare la fede” 56 (2007) 3, 37; Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 287-288.

⁸⁵ GDC, n. 238.

3.1.1.1. *Human Maturity*

The *GDC* states that “the formation of the catechist tends to make of him an ‘educator of man and of the life of man’.”⁸⁶ The human quality of catechists has a decisive influence on others. If catechists are to be entrusted with the mission of accompanying other people, they need to possess a sufficient human maturity; and this, along with Christian maturity, is the first objective of the formation of catechists. In the process of formation, the catechist is helped to develop a more harmonious personality; to acquire, gradually, an interior stability and unity; to have more equilibrium in the affective level; to be critical and open minded; to be capable of offering oneself in love for the service of others; to be capable of taking initiatives, of making dialogue and good relationship with different categories of persons; to be capable of a free and responsible collaboration.⁸⁷ The *GDC* affirms the above statement as follows:

On the basis of this initial human maturity, the exercise of catechesis, by constant consideration and evaluation, allows the catechist to grow in a balanced and in a critical outlook, in integrity, in his ability to relate, to promote dialogue, to have a constructive spirit, and to engage in group work. It will cause him to grow in respect and in love for catechumens and those being catechized.⁸⁸

3.1.1.2. *Christian Maturity*

As educators in the faith, catechists are called to have a serious and reliable life of faith, a certain maturity of faith, so that they can present themselves as credible witnesses. Formation nourishes the spirituality of the catechist making him grow as believer and as a testimony whose activities spring spontaneously and in truth from his person.⁸⁹ In addition, the catechist is called to be a person who embodies and makes visible in a relevant manner the new model of believer suited to changed cultural and social contexts.⁹⁰ He has a double commitment: to

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, n. 238; Cf *CT*, n. 22.

⁸⁷ Cf MONTISCI, *Dimensioni della formazione: essere*, 37; Cf *Guide for Catechists*, n. 21; Cf GRUPPO ITALIANO CATECHETI, *La formazione dei catechisti*, Bologna, Dehoniane, 1980, 167-168.

⁸⁸ *GDC*, n. 239.

⁸⁹ Cf *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 288.

be faithful to the Christian message and to those to whom he transmits the message and to the social context in which they live.⁹¹ Formation aims in helping catechists to be open to the cultural and social situations of the world and of their society. Catechists who have profound but unilateral spirituality, who are not inserted well in the reality of the world, can not carry out a catechesis that is in agreement to the current demands and cannot offer an effective service.⁹²

The present *catechetical moment* being lived by the Church requires catechists who can “integrate”, who are capable of overcoming “unilateral divergent tendencies” and who are able to provide a full and complete catechesis. They must know how to link the dimension of truth and meaning of the faith, orthodoxy and orthopraxis, ecclesial and social meaning. Formation must contribute to the enrichment of these factors lest tensions arise between them.⁹³

Therefore, during the formation process the catechist is to be trained to be adult in the faith, i.e., to be capable of integrating faith and concrete life, of constructing a firm and practical faith; capable of standing on his own, of rethinking his own faith personally, of having a personal access to the fonts of revelation (though not independently from the Church) and actualizing it; of giving reason to what he believes and of sharing it with others; capable of discerning the signs of times, of giving a mature judgement in regard to life, the world and the events of the Church and of those outside the Church, of seriously assuming and resolving the fundamental problems of life; capable of narrating and witnessing one’s own experience of salvation and of situating it within the Christian tradition.⁹⁴

For the realization of this maturity, the catechist is to be helped to elaborate a personal project of life which is in coherence with what he believes, what he lives and what he teaches. In front of a weak and fragmented identity, the project of life favours a strong identity centred on Christ and the Gospel values. It requires constant nourishment by the Word of God,

⁹¹ Cf *GDC*, n. 238.

⁹² Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 289.

⁹³ *GDC*, n. 237.

⁹⁴ Cf MONTISCI, *Dimensioni della formazione: essere*, 37-38; Cf ASSEMBLÉE DES EVÊQUES DU QUEBEC, *Jésus Christ chemin d’humanisation. Orientations pour la formation à la vie chrétienne*, Montréal, Médiaspaul, 2004, 33-34.

profound prayer and intense sacramental life, continuous reflection on ones own experience of Christian life, discernment of different facts made in the light of the Gospel, and constant reference to the teaching of the Church.⁹⁵

3.1.1.3. *Mature Ecclesial Identity/Apostolic Maturity*

Catechists are also called to possess a mature and adult form of sense of the Church. They are called to be involved in the experience of the Church with internalized attitudes of belonging, a sense of community and apostolic conscience. Thus as the *GDC* states formation “constantly nourishes the *apostolic consciousness of the catechist*, that is, his sense of being an evangelizer,”⁹⁶ so as to help the catechist to “be aware of and live out the concrete evangelization efforts being made in his own diocese, as well as those of his own parish so as to be in harmony with the awareness that the particular Church has of its own mission.”⁹⁷ The same document states that:

The formation of catechists is nothing other than an assistance for them in identifying with the living and actual awareness that the Church has of the Gospel, in order to make them capable of transmitting it in [its] name. In concrete terms, the catechist – in his formation – enters into communion with that aspiration of the Church which [...] desires to transmit the Gospel by adapting it to all cultures, ages, and situations.⁹⁸

Formation is to promote a missionary conscience so that the catechist starting from the concrete project of his own diocese and parish, can operate joyfully and responsibly, even in times of difficulty, with feeling of belongingness, as an organic part of the Church who is in mission in the world.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Cf *Ibid.*, 38; Cf *FdC*, n. 18.

⁹⁶ *GDC*, n. 239.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, n. 236.

⁹⁹ Cf MONTISCI, *Dimensioni della formazione: essere*, 37-39.

3.1.2. *Formation in the Dimension of “Knowing”*

Catechists are called to give adequate testimony to their faith by their way of life and also by word. They are called to teach and give reason to their faith especially in this time when there is a much changing culture with different ideologies that confront the Christian values. For this reason, they are required to possess a profound, organic and systematic knowledge of the Christian message. They are also required to have adequate knowledge of the human person and his environment.¹⁰⁰

3.1.2.1. *Biblico-Theological Competency*

In general, formation in the *biblico-theological* area includes the following elements: a study of the fundamental texts of the Bible in view of its use in catechesis; a study of the fundamental stages of the history of salvation; a synthetic vision of the Christian message in a Christocentric perspective reflected in the light of the conciliar documents and the actual teachings of the Church; a reflection on the renewed vision of the Church in its historical and sacramental dimensions; a reflection on the “new model of the Christian”;¹⁰¹ a study on the theological foundation of moral conscience and on actual moral problems in catechetical and pastoral perspective.¹⁰²

The objective of the biblico-theological formation is to help catechists possess a sufficient knowledge of the fundamental events of salvation in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, and also throughout the history of the life of the Church; to help them acquire the capacity to read, interpret and actualize the essential events of the Bible; the capacity to give reason to the essential truths of faith expressed in the Apostolic Symbol; the capacity to explain the liturgical and sacramental signs; the capacity to read the actual historical events and human realities and express the right judgment and inspiration in the light of the

¹⁰⁰ Cf ID., *Dimensioni della formazione: sapere*, in “Via Verità e Vita. Comunicare la fede” 56 (2007) 4, 37-38; Cf WYLER, *Il catechista “educatore”*, 179-183.

¹⁰¹ The new model of the Christian indicates a Christian who is committed to become a witness and promoter of the values of the Reign, who is sensitive to the social dimension of faith and is committed towards social transformation rather than being a mere participant of religious practices.

¹⁰² Cf *FdC*, n. 27.

Gospel.¹⁰³ The biblico-theological formation is also meant to help catechists grow in the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity by giving special attention to the aspects of moral and prayer life. In fact, in this process of formation, the transmission of the content of Christian faith is not simply matter of information but it meant to help the catechists be more conscious and responsible in their service of communicating faith to others and to have a life coherent to the message.¹⁰⁴ In a particular way, this formation is meant to help catechists know the actual teachings of the Church and “to know the pastoral problems of the day, the pastoral project of the Church to which they belong, the nature and the dimension of the catechetical act.”¹⁰⁵ It is also meant to help catechists be open and attentive to ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue.

The biblico-theological formation should be given in a synthesized form and the content should correspond to the apostolate which the catechists have to carry out. The various elements of the Christian faith should be presented in harmony with each other and in an organic structure that respects the hierarchy of truths. The formation, though theological, must in some way adopt a catechetical style; and it must be a theological formation that is close to the concrete life of man.¹⁰⁶

3.1.2.2. *Knowledge of the Human Person*

Although the biblical and theological foundation remains to be essential for any catechetical action, it should not be the exclusive aspect of the intellectual preparation of catechists. If catechists are ministers at the service of man, it is indispensable for them to have an acute knowledge of the personality of man. To facilitate the integral growth of the persons entrusted to them, catechists need to possess a fundamental knowledge of the psychological conditions and the actual demands of the people in that particular environment. Therefore,

¹⁰³ Cf SORAVITO, «*Catechista (formazione)*», 128-129; Cf *GDC*, n. 240.

¹⁰⁴ Cf MONTISCI, *Dimensioni della formazione: sapere*, 38-39.

¹⁰⁵ ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 289.

¹⁰⁶ Cf *GDC*, n. 241.

sufficient use of the human sciences should be made during the process of formation.¹⁰⁷ The *GDC* states:

It is necessary for the catechist to have some contact, with at least some of the fundamental elements of psychology: the psychological dynamics motivating man; personality structure; the deepest needs and aspirations of the human heart; progressive psychology and the phases of the human life-cycle; the psychology of religion and the experiences which open man to the mystery of the sacred.¹⁰⁸

Thus, formation towards a sufficient knowledge of the human person needs to consider the following themes: the fundamental dimensions of human existence and the problems of man; a vision of man in view of his openness to religious experience; the various religious expressions and the root of contemporary atheism; knowledge of the fundamental characters of modern man that includes the cultural tendencies, social problems, and historical situations; knowledge of the psychological dynamisms of different age groups and different situations.¹⁰⁹

The objective of this formation in the anthropological area is to enable the catechist to possess a particular familiarity with different experiences and to find the proper language for communicating the Christian message, so that “the catechist will be able not only to impart the gospel message accurately, but also to evoke an active reception of the message on the part of those to be catechized and will be able to discern whatever is in harmony with the faith in their spiritual odysseys.”¹¹⁰

3.1.2.3. *Knowledge of the Environment*

Catechists also need to have an adequate knowledge of the contemporary world and of their particular environment in all the contextual dimensions.

¹⁰⁷ Cf *FdC*, n. 20.

¹⁰⁸ *GDC*, n. 242.

¹⁰⁹ Cf *FdC*, n. 27.

¹¹⁰ *GCD*, n. 112; Cf *GDC*, n. 241.

Catechists need to be fully situated in time and space, completely identified with their people, open to the real problems, and with cultural, social and political sensitivity. Those catechists, who in a certain way remain on the margins of the social and cultural life of the community often do not render an effective service, despite the fact that they are generous, devoted and faithful to the Church.¹¹¹

It is very necessary for catechists to possess a basic knowledge of the social sciences in order to have an awareness of the socio-cultural context in which man lives and by which he is strongly influenced. The formation of catechists should include the analysis of the religious, sociological, cultural, economic and political situations of man, because these facts of common life influence the success of evangelization to a great degree.¹¹²

Here it is useful to note that, in the formation of catechists, the study of human and social sciences is not to be considered as an end in itself. These sciences are fundamental and necessary but they are only at the service of evangelization which is more than a human work. Therefore, they should not be used as criteria for the pedagogy of faith apart from the theological criteria that presents the divine pedagogy. Theology and these sciences should mutually enrich each other respecting the autonomy of each one.¹¹³

It is also useful to note that the intellectual preparation of catechists is not something that has to be done once and for all. After the basic formation there is always a need for catechists to update their knowledge. In addition, the formation in the area of “knowing” acquires a considerable significance only if there is in the process a profound integration between the *knowledge of faith* and the *experience of faith*. Transmission of theological information is not useful if it does not make catechists capable of constructing certain capacities like rereading their own perception, confrontation with ecclesial documents and the capacity of inculturating them, i.e., capacity to mediate the Christian message in new contexts and adopting it to specific group of persons.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 289.

¹¹² Cf *GDC*, n. 242.

¹¹³ Cf *Ibid.*, n. 243.

¹¹⁴ Cf MONTISCI, *Dimensioni della formazione: sapere*, 39.

3.1.3. *Formation in the Dimensions of “Knowing-How” and “Being-With”*

This regards the working competence of catechists and their capacity to be with others. Catechists need to have an appropriate pedagogical, methodological, and didactic competence as well as a relational personality. Concretely, this formation can be seen in five dimensions: that which regards educational skills, communication skills, relational capacity, capacity for animation and capacity for correct catechetical planning.¹¹⁵

3.1.3.1. *Educational Skills*

Besides the acquisition of the necessary knowledge, catechists, as true educators, need to acquire the necessary qualities of an educator such as tact and sensitivity towards persons, the ability to understand and welcome them, the skill to promote learning processes, the ability to facilitate growth in the person.¹¹⁶ The *GDC* states that: “Formation seeks to mature an educational capacity in the catechists which implies: an ability to be attentive to people, an ability to interpret or respond to educational tasks or initiatives in organizing learning activities and the ability of leading a human group toward maturity.”¹¹⁷

During a systematic catechetical programme the person should be the centre of the activity than the doctrinal content. Today, a pedagogical process gives primary attention to the person and to the dynamic process of his growth and his transformation than to the doctrine to be transmitted. That’s why today more attention is given to the theme of language of communication. The educational process should be presented in such a way as to help the person integrate the content with his previous experience of life. It is concerned with the journey of the person; with the need of helping him acquire the interpretative key for life. Learning is given more importance than teaching and the integration between theory and

¹¹⁵ Cf ID., *Dimensioni della formazione: saper fare*, in “Via Verità e Vita. Comunicare la fede” 56 (2007) 5, 37; Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 289.

¹¹⁶ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 289-290.

¹¹⁷ *GDC*, n. 244.

practice is given more stress. The person should be helped to be capable of integrating the content and making it personal possession by interiorizing it in his own vision of life.¹¹⁸

Catechists need to be facilitators and coordinators of this kind of experiential learning, but first, they themselves need to be formed in this way. In the process of formation catechists should be helped to acquire a didactic orientation of an ongoing formation that helps them “to enter into the process of self-formation that supports the practice of “learning to learn” with sufficient autonomy and creativity.”¹¹⁹ The *GDC* states: “the goal or ideal is that catechists should be the protagonists of their own learning by being creative in formation and not by just applying external rules.”¹²⁰ Continuing, the *Directory* states: “the most important factor is that the catechist should acquire his own style of imparting catechesis by adapting the general principles of catechetical pedagogy to his own personality.”¹²¹

3.1.3.2. *Communication Skills*

Catechists need to be familiar with the techniques and languages of communication. One of the main obstacles blocking the fruitful communication of faith is the lack of an appropriate language. It is very important that the language which catechists use be significant to the concrete life of the persons. The communication of faith should not be purely rational, but need to be incarnated to the concrete life experience of the specific group of persons.¹²² “The best of theological and biblical knowledge will be wholly unproductive if the catechists do not possess the art of meaningful experiential communication.”¹²³

In dealing with young people catechists need to be attentive to the mode of communication of the young. Therefore, formation needs to help catechists to be open to the plurality of

¹¹⁸ Cf U. MONTISCI, *Una formazione che trasforma*, in “Via Verità e Vita. Comunicare la fede” 56 (2007) 2, 38; Cf Z. TRENTI – R. ROMIO, *Pedagogia dell'apprendimento nell'orizzonte ermeneutico*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2006, 9-10.

¹¹⁹ ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 297.

¹²⁰ *GDC*, n. 245.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, n. 244.

¹²² Cf MONTISCI, *Dimensioni della formazione: saper fare*, 37; Cf GRUPPO ITALIANO CATECHETI, *La formazione dei catechisti*, 171-173; Cf CEC DON BOSCO, *Scuola per catechisti*, 79-94.

¹²³ ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 290.

languages present: the various verbal languages, gestures, iconic and audio-visual means of communication. Generally, in catechesis, symbolic and evocative languages are more preferred. And it is necessary to give adequate space to non verbal communication.¹²⁴ Closely related to the question of language of communication is also that of media of communication. Our time is characterized by a rapid diffusion of instruments of social communication. It is a time when we can not do without them. During the process of formation catechists need to be helped to acquire a critical capacity for the use of mass media so that they can make advantage of these instruments for the communication of faith.¹²⁵ The *GDC* affirms this stating:

Good use of the media requires of catechists a serious commitment to knowledge, competence, training and up to date use of them. But, [...] it must be remembered that “it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church’s authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message in to the “new culture” created by modern communications... with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology”.¹²⁶

3.1.3.3. *Relational Capacity*

Formation has to help catechists develop a true relational personality that would make them capable of constructing positive and profound relations. This quality is essential for catechists because the ecclesial community where they belong is a network of relational dynamisms, and also because this is a quality to which the contemporary culture is particularly sensitive. In fact, the construction of interpersonal relationships by means of and inside the educative community constitutes one of the fundamental conditions that assure the growth of a person. Catechists need to establish fraternal relationships with other catechists in the ecclesial community. They also need to be convinced that this kind of relationship is decisive in their

¹²⁴ Cf U. MONTISCI, *Il catechista animatore di adolescenti*, in “Catechesi” 74 (2004) 5, 41-44; Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 281; Cf S. BARBETTA, *Rievangelizzare gli adolescenti. Una comunità che progetta il cammino umano-cristiano degli adolescenti*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2005, 163-167.

¹²⁵ Cf MONTISCI, *Dimensioni della formazione: saper fare*, 38; Cf BARBETTA, *Rievangelizzare gli adolescenti*, 169-171.

¹²⁶ *GDC*, n. 161.

catechetical activity particularly in dealing with the young who are always in search of such warm and authentic relationships. In view of this function, catechists have to develop special qualities such as a readiness for dialogue, a willingness to work with others, a good capacity of expression, a good capacity of being altruistic, optimistic, creative and enthusiastic, etc.¹²⁷

3.1.3.4. *Capacity for Animation*

During the formation process catechists have also to develop a good capacity for animation. The catechist is essentially an animator in an environment especially in a group – since the group is the natural setting in which animation is most fruitful. Catechists have to be able to put forward the contents of the Christian message taking into account the persons and the concrete environment of work. They have to know the dynamic processes involved in human growth, and be able to select resources and educative opportunities and organize them in free, authentic and developmental relationships.¹²⁸

Catechists have to be good catalysts and active mediators inside a group. They have to be capable of creating inspirational environments, of providing suggestions and motivations for stimulating the persons in the group to be protagonists of their own growth, i.e., for arousing and mobilizing the internal resources of the persons helping them discover, develop and mature them.¹²⁹ Catechists should be capable of working in harmony with others in the group without any sense of authority or domination; while, at the same time, have to avoid excessive spontaneity or permissiveness. As animators catechists need to be capable of appreciating the talents and the originality of each person in the group. They also need to develop special qualities such as: a quick perceptive capacity, a good memory, a good capacity for inductive reasoning, a balanced judgement, openness of mind, a sense of realism, etc.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Cf MONTISCI, *Dimensioni della formazione: saper fare*, 37; Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 226-227; Cf *Guide for Catechists*, n. 21.

¹²⁸ Cf J. VALLABARAJ, *Empowering the Young towards Fullness of Life*, Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2003, 127 and 130.

¹²⁹ Cf *Ibid.*; Cf MONTISCI, *Il catechista animatore di adolescenti*, 41-44; Cf BARBETTA, *Rievangelizzare gli adolescenti*, 167-169.

¹³⁰ Cf MONTISCI, *Dimensioni della formazione: saper fare*, 38; Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 290; Cf G. MORANTE – V. ORLANDO, *Catechisti e catechesi*

3.1.3.5. *Capacity for Correct Catechetical Planning*

Catechists are required to possess the capacity for an effective catechetical intervention. They have to know how to actualize a catechetical project with the persons entrusted to them by making use of proper techniques and instruments, and need to know how to verify the work done in view of the end proposed and the means used to achieve it. Therefore, in the process of formation catechists are to be assisted to acquire the capacity for an effective catechetical planning. They have to be able to discern, i.e., to know and interpret the participants' situation as a point of departure; and then to elaborate a project, to actualize the project following an appropriate strategy and finally to make an evaluation or verification of the action in view of improvement or further realization.¹³¹

3.2. *Itinerary for the Formation of Catechists*

Catechists need to undergo an organic and systematic itinerary which harmoniously integrates the formation in the dimensions of 'being', 'knowing', 'knowing-how' and 'being-with'. The itinerary of formation presupposes a moment of call, which is to be followed by a specific initial preparation, participation in courses of qualification and a practical training, and is open to a continuous and permanent process of growth. Here, we will analyze the essential moments of this itinerary which is to be inserted within the entire faith-itinerary of the ecclesial community.

3.2.1. *The Call*

As we have mentioned before, being a catechist is a vocation; it is a response to God's invitation. The catechist is a person committed to the service of Christ and sent by Christ through the mediation of the Church. Being a catechist is a great mission and it is necessary to

all'inizio del terzo millennio. Indagine socio-religiosa nelle diocesi italiane, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2004, 180; Cf G. CIONCHI, *Catechisti oggi. Note di catechetica, psicopedagogia e didattica per la pastorale dell'età evolutiva*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 1999, 238 and 260-261.

¹³¹ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 290; Cf GDC, n. 245.

make great attention in the moment of vocational discernment. If there is no such internal call in the person, the process of formation can not give rise to catechists of high quality, and later, the presence of such catechists will not bear the desired fruit in the community and in the society. Therefore, it is necessary for those who are responsible of the ecclesial community to take into consideration some basic conditions in regard to the choice of catechists. The future catechists should be persons who have already made a profound choice and decision to grow in Christian faith; persons who are ready to undergo the necessary preparation; persons ready to serve others and offer their free collaboration for the growth of the Christian community.¹³²

The *Guide for Catechists* presents some basic criteria in the selection of candidates to which can be added other more specific criteria according to the local conditions by the local authorities:

The first criterion concerns the *person of the catechist*. No one should be admitted as a candidate unless he is truly motivated by an internal call. A person should not seek to be a catechist simply because he was not able to find another suitable work. He should be a person in whom true faith is concretely manifested in his actions; a person who loves the Church and wants to put himself at its service in communion with its pastors. In this regard, a great attention should be given in the choice of catechists from different ecclesial movements and groups. The dimension of their ecclesial communion needs to be particularly verified.

The second basic criterion concerns the *process of selection*. The act of catechesis is an ecclesial service, and as such the decision belongs to the pastors – in particular the parish priests – and to the community which should be fully involved in the proposal of the candidates and their evaluation. The final confirmation of the choice and the official mandate should be given by the bishop or his delegates.

Another criterion concerns the *acceptance of candidates in catechetical centres*. Each centre, in accordance with its character, needs to have its own special requirements in regard

¹³² Cf SORAVITO, «*Catechista (formazione)*», 129; Cf FdC, n. 22; Cf GRUPPO ITALIANO CATECHETI, *La formazione dei catechisti*, 178-181.

to the scholastic level needed for admission; its own conditions for participation; its own formation programme.¹³³

3.2.2. *Initial/Basic Formation*

The catechist's ministry should necessarily be preceded by an initial or basic training period which would continue progressively. The formation needs to assume a *systematic* form with precise objectives; with successive and complementary stages; with a continuous deepening starting from an essential nucleus. It also needs to be *organic* in regard to the different dimensions. It needs to harmonize the basic triple dimensions of formation. This implies an itinerary of formation which integrates the spiritual-ecclesial preparation with the biblical-theological, anthropological-cultural and methodological-didactic preparation. This integration is made possible by making reference to the concrete catechetical act in which the dimensions of formation are to be based. The best way to become a catechist is to do catechesis and to reflect systematically upon it. Therefore, together with the basic courses of qualification catechists need to undergo a process of practical training. The institution of catechetical schools or centers and the organization of catechetical workshops are of fundamental importance in a diocese for the basic formation of catechists.¹³⁴

3.2.2.1. *Catechetical Schools/Centers*

The presence of schools or centres for a catechetical formation is indispensable. Inside the global process of formation in the human, Christian and ecclesial sphere the catechetical schools or centres provide an instrument which favours the acquisition of specific competence in the field of catechesis. The schools provide a necessary passage in the entire process of formation in the order of competence that regards the content and methodology. These schools represent a moment of study and conscious reflection, which is done along with an interior and operative, personal and communitarian experience. The schools can be organized at different

¹³³ Cf *Guide for Catechists*, n. 18.

¹³⁴ Cf *FdC*, n. 23; Cf SORAVITO, «*Catechista (formazione)*», 129.

levels according to the specific specializations and according to the conditions of the local Church with a basic-school or basic-centre which would be the base for all the catechetical movements of formation.¹³⁵ We can think of different itineraries of specialization: for ministerial education of the community, for the formation of catechists of Christian initiation, for animators of adolescents, educators of young people, for adults, for persons in different conditions and states of life, for the formation of catechists who would teach in the schools of the zone, for missionary catechists, for animators of group of catechists, etc. However, this depends on the human and material resources of the local Church.¹³⁶

The proper dimension of the basic-school or centre of formation is that of being regional or national, or in particular situations can be diocesan or even parochial. The proper dimension of the schools for specialization is that of being diocesan or in particular situations can have an inter-diocesan or regional or even national dimension. If it is possible, it would also be advisable that the catechists make a specialization in catechetical ministry for at least two years in higher institutes with specialized professors so that their formation would be deeper.¹³⁷

If there are no centres, the diocesan authority needs to ensure a formation by means of short courses given by qualified persons. Individual parishes or group of parishes cooperating with each other should organize such process of formation.¹³⁸ The local Church has to make the specific program of the contents to be presented during the process of formation and the time of their duration. But generally, it should concentrate around the essential themes indicated before, i.e., the *biblico-theological*, *anthropologico-cultural* and the *pedagogical, methodological and didactic* themes, and approximately it can be for two years in the following way: in the biblico-theological area at least 35-40 hours a year; in the

¹³⁵ Cf *FdC*, n. 23; Cf *GDC*, n. 248; Cf *AG*, n. 17.

¹³⁶ Cf CIONCHI, *Catechisti oggi*, 141-145; Cf *OIFC*, 33-93.

¹³⁷ Cf *FdC*, n. 26.

¹³⁸ Cf *Guide for Catechists*, n. 29.

anthropologico-cultural area at least 10-15 hours a year; and in the pedagogical, methodological and didactic area at least 10 hours a year.¹³⁹

As we have mentioned before, during the entire period of formation special attention should be given to the spiritual growth of the candidates. The art of being a catechist depends on the openness to God; therefore, every formative moment needs to be penetrated by this essential dimension. Another thing to be considered during the period of basic formation is finding time for particular initiatives; for example providing brief courses of few days to discuss on particularly relevant problems in catechetical action; or to learn the educative function and use of mass-media; to discuss actual pastoral documents; to reflect on actual conditions of society and so on.¹⁴⁰ The centres of formation should also aim “at being places of research and reflection on themes connected with the apostolate, such as: catechesis itself, inculturation, inter-religious dialogue, pastoral methods, etc.”¹⁴¹

Regarding the means and instruments of formation the local Church needs to provide some fundamental documents of reference. In addition, there are the essential documents of the universal Church such as the *General Directory for Catechesis*, *Catechesi Tradendae*, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Guide for Catechists*, the conciliar documents, pontifical teachings. It is also necessary to make reference to the local liturgical books and the pastoral documents of the local Church. A particular attention should be given to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The local Church needs to prepare a local catechism for different age groups – in a sequential order from infancy to adulthood – and catechism for other particular situations.¹⁴²

3.2.2.2. *Catechetical Workshops*

During the process of formation, catechists need to make a concrete catechetical experience so that they will be able to correlate theory with practice. The integration of

¹³⁹ Cf *FdC*, 48-51; Cf UCN, *Formazione dei catechisti per l'iniziazione cristiana dei fanciulli e dei ragazzi*. La formazione dei catechisti nella comunità cristiana, documenti CEI, 4 giugno 2006, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2006, 59-63.

¹⁴⁰ Cf *FdC*, 51-52.

¹⁴¹ *Guide for Catechists*, n. 30.

¹⁴² Cf *FdC*, n. 33; Cf *Guide for Catechists*, n. 30.

formation with practical training will enable catechists to read a catechetical experience in the light of the newly acquired competence and will make them more suitable for their service.¹⁴³

The *GDC* states:

This educational capacity and this “know-how” along with the knowledge, attitudes and techniques which it involves “can be better acquired if they are taught simultaneously while the apostolic works are being performed (for example, during sessions when lessons of catechesis are being prepared and tested)”. The goal or ideal is that catechists should be the protagonists of their own learning by being creative in formation and not by just applying external rules. This formation must be closely related to praxis: one must start from praxis to be able to arrive at praxis.¹⁴⁴

Formation in workshops is the best way where theory and practice can be integrated. Workshops favour the personalization of the formation rendering the person to be autonomous and protagonist of his formation. Today where there is a rapid social, cultural and also ecclesial change, a formation that enables the person to live these changes interiorly is more than ever necessary and workshops are suitable for facilitating such a formation.¹⁴⁵ Three types of approaches can be presented in this kind of formation:

- an *approach centred on the person*, in which the formation is perceived as development of the person around three key-terms: being, existing, interiorizing;
- a *psycho-pedagogical approach*, in which the formation is perceived as an act of communication around the key-terms: cooperating, sharing, and confronting;
- a *socio-political approach*, in which the formation is thought as a process of transformation constructed around the key terms: restructuring, liberating, harmonizing.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Cf M. MAZZARELLO – S. CELLAMARE, *Quale formazione e come. Una scuola per catechisti di iniziazione cristiana si interroga*, in “Catechesi” 74 (2004) 1, 37-38.

¹⁴⁴ *GDC*, n. 244; Cf *GCD*, n. 112.

¹⁴⁵ Cf G. BARBON, *Nuovi processi formativi nella catechesi. Metodo e itinerari*, Bologna, Dehoniane, 2003, 229-230; Cf UCN, *Formazione dei catechisti per l’iniziazione cristiana*, nn. 39-41; Cf E. BIEMMI, *La formazione dei catechisti in Italia: dalle “scuole” ai “laboratori”*, in “Catechesi” 69 (2000) 3, 7-11.

¹⁴⁶ Cf BARBON, *Nuovi processi formativi nella catechesi*, 231.

The third approach favours the transformation of the person and of the environment in which he is called to operate and is a point of reference for those who want to undergo a process of formation in workshops. The process of personalization of what is learned, the process of learning to cooperate and to confront oneself with others is not enough, it is necessary to be transformed and then go out to transform the Church and the society. Today formation needs to be situated inside the changing social context.¹⁴⁷

3.2.3. *Ongoing/Permanent Formation*

The nature of the catechetical service itself calls for a formation which should be permanent. The ends to be achieved by a process of formation are inexhaustible and this is why catechists are called to dedicate themselves for a continuous or ongoing formation.¹⁴⁸ The *Guide for Catechists* states:

The fact that persons should never stop growing interiorly, the dynamic nature of the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, the process of continual conversion and growth in apostolic love, changes in culture, the evolution of society and constant updating of teaching methods, all mean that catechists should keep themselves in a process of ongoing formation during the whole course of their service. It should include human, spiritual, doctrinal and apostolic formation, and they should be helped in this and not merely left to their own devices.¹⁴⁹

There are two stages in regard to the ongoing formation. In the early period of the apostolate of catechists ongoing formation largely includes the reinforcement of the basic training and its application in practice.¹⁵⁰ Later, ongoing formation necessitates “updating on various points, so as to keep in touch with developments in theology and changing circumstances. In this endeavour one can ensure the quality of catechists, avoiding the risk of wearing down. In certain cases of special difficulty, such as discouragement or a change of

¹⁴⁷ Cf *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Cf *FdC*, n. 23; Cf CHOONDAL, *The Formation of Lay Catechists*, 199-201.

¹⁴⁹ *Guide for Catechists*, n. 29.

¹⁵⁰ Cf *Ibid.*

work, it will entail a process of renewal and revitalization.”¹⁵¹ Catechists need to know current teachings of the Church. They also need to participate in formative initiatives such as encounters organized by the dioceses and parishes, spiritual retreats, conferences. These occasions need also be participated by catechists in the basic process of formation as part of their formation. Though they are not systematic and organic as the courses in the centres of formation, they are good occasions that favour experience.¹⁵²

In addition, it is very important for catechists to make an experience of a group in the period of basic formation as well as afterwards for an ongoing formation. The constant meeting of group of catechists favours interpersonal relationships and communion; it offers an instrument and environment of education to ecclesial life and enhances their communitarian commitment. The group meeting of catechists need not have an organic and systematic form; primarily it needs to be a place of spiritual and ecclesial growth where the fundamental moments of the life of the Church take place: reflection on the Word of God, prayer, sharing of experiences, preparation to catechetical meetings, moment of friendship. However, the group of catechists should not be conceived as a new ecclesial movement or new association.¹⁵³

3.2.4. *Auto-formation and Formation in the Ecclesial Community*

For their ongoing formation, catechists should not limit themselves to the occasions offered in the group or in the diocese or the parish. Every catechist needs to dedicate himself, autonomously, to continue the formation by way of personal commitment. The degree of growth and maturity and the fruitfulness of the apostolate of catechists depend on how much they personally dedicate themselves to their formation.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Cf *FdC*, n. 30; Cf *Guide for Catechists*, n. 30.

¹⁵³ Cf *FdC*, n. 25; Cf G. GATTI, «Il gruppo: modello ecclesiale per la formazione dei catechisti», in GRUPPO ITALIANO CATECHETI, *La formazione dei catechisti*, 131-162; Cf G. RUTA, «Catechisti dell'iniziazione cristiana di fanciulli e ragazzi», in C. BISSOLI – J. GEVAERT (Eds.), *La formazione dei catechisti. Problemi di oggi per la catechesi di domani*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 1998, 121-122; Cf CEC DON BOSCO, *Scuola per catechisti*, 53-64.

¹⁵⁴ Cf RUTA, «Catechisti dell'iniziazione cristiana di fanciulli e ragazzi», 126.

It is also to be given attention that it is in the ecclesial community that the catechist is called for a mission and it is there that he actualizes his vocation as a minister of the Word of God, as educator and testimony of faith in accordance to the needs of the community. Therefore, catechists need to be inserted in the community and the community needs to welcome them in their responsibility as ministers of the Word. This implies that the formation of catechists needs to take place inside the community and that the entire community needs to favour their formation. The local Church, the parish and every other association or ecclesial movement – under the guide of pastors – need to contribute to their formation so that the formation will take place inside a wide ecclesial experience.¹⁵⁵

3.3. *Formators of Catechists*

The primary formator is Christ himself who forms the person of the catechist through the Holy Spirit. Catechists need to be aware of this and need to respond with a spirit of faith and an attitude of prayer and recollection. Then, in the wider sense, the entire ecclesial community is responsible for their formation; and inside the community, the Bishop and parish priests have a primary place as formators. While in the strict sense, formators are those qualified persons designated by the Church to train catechists.¹⁵⁶

Formators are entrusted with a most important role and should be chosen with great care. They need to be good Christians, loyal to the Church, and need to possess proper intellectual qualifications and personal experience in the catechetical field. It is very important to have sufficient and suitable formators in the entire process of formation. It is also very important that they work as a team made up of priests, religious and lay people, chosen among the most experienced catechists and chosen for their spiritual, moral and pedagogical qualities.¹⁵⁷ Formators need to live the ecclesial dimension of their mandate, need to respect the program provided by the local Church and realize it in a communitarian spirit. They should be

¹⁵⁵ Cf *FdC*, n. 24; Cf *GDC*, n. 246; Cf *Guide for Catechists*, nn. 29-30.

¹⁵⁶ Cf *Guide for Catechists*, n. 27; Cf *FdC*, n. 32; Cf CHOONDAL, *The Formation of Lay Catechists*, 195-197.

¹⁵⁷ Cf *Guide for Catechists*, n. 27.

exemplar persons capable of teaching others by the witness of their lives. They need to be available to the candidates and need to communicate their enthusiasm and zeal to them.¹⁵⁸

Formators must be well prepared and sustained. The *GCD* indicates the need of higher institutes for experts or formators as follows: “Higher institutes of catechetics should be further developed or founded, so that suitable catechists may be trained to take charge of catechetics at diocesan level or in religious congregations. Such higher institutes can be national or international. They should set university standards with regard to the curriculum, length of courses and conditions for admission.”¹⁵⁹ However, poor countries need to be assisted by the Universal Church. As the *GDC* states: “At this level of formation there is much opportunity for fruitful co-operation between the Churches [...] such collaboration has due respect for the particular circumstances of poorer Churches and their responsibilities.”¹⁶⁰

The formator though he finds his identity of role in the works, objectives, and responsibilities of the educative project, he is not to be identified with the figure of a professor who is usually associated with the image of giving courses. The formator is principally concerned with the transformation of the candidates and uses methods that favor this transformation. We can mention three different figures of a formator which also represent their pedagogies: the figure of a formator as an expert who substantially assumes problems on the account of the candidates and tries to find adequate solutions for them; or the figure of a formator as an expert where the problems are no more the objects of his action but the candidates, i.e., he is concerned with the problems in relation to the candidates; or the figure of a formator as an expert who indicates the way for the solution but gives space to the active involvement of the candidates, the candidates are not considered as objects of the educative project where all is controlled by the formator but are given a wide space and autonomy. The third one represents the real figure of a formator who teaches the candidates to be experts themselves in regard to the formation of their person.¹⁶¹ The formator encourages the

¹⁵⁸ Cf *Ibid.*, n. 36.

¹⁵⁹ *GCD*, n. 109; Cf *GDC*, n. 251.

¹⁶⁰ *GDC*, n. 252; Cf *CT*, n. 71.

¹⁶¹ Cf R. PAGANELLI, *Formare i formatori dei catechisti. Valori e itinerari sottesi al processo formativo*, Bologna, Dehoniane, 2002, 258-262.

candidates to be creative in discovering new things; helps them in actualizing and evaluating them; and assists them in rethinking the action again in a new way.¹⁶² Formators need to devote themselves to a continuous research. In addition, formators from different centers should meet with each other occasionally to exchange ideas and teaching methods and learn from the experience of others.¹⁶³

Conclusion

As we've seen in this chapter, the figure of a catechist occupies an important place in the mission of the Church particularly in regard to the youth. It has been shown that the identity of a catechist derives from a specific vocation, as a response to a proper call from God. In fact, catechists can have great quality and can bear the desired fruits in the community and in the society only when their identity derives from such an internal call that moves their entire being and attitude towards this specific mission. We have seen that the catechist is a companion in the journey of faith of individuals, or rather a companion of life who accompanies individual persons, particularly the young, in all the variety of the situations of life. As the biblical models show, today, the figure of a catechist can best be presented as a friend who would always be there for the other; a mature guide capable of indicating the way for the other without imposing pressure and without depriving the other of self-autonomy while walking closely with the other. Catechists assist young people towards maturity in faith in all aspects of their personality. Only in this way can faith bring transformation and this is what catechists aspire to achieve in the young by helping them towards the realization of the self in love and in the fullness of truth. In addition, as shown by the biblical models, beyond the personal transformation of the individuals, the apostolic goal of catechists is to form true disciples of Christ who would commit themselves fully to the service of their ecclesial community and society. All these show the greatness of the mission of catechists; while, on the other hand, indicate the absolute necessity for a careful preparation by means of an effective process of

¹⁶² Cf E. BIEMMI, «La difficile posizione del formatore», in PAGANELLI R. (Ed.), *Diventare Cristiani. I passaggi della fede*, Bologna, Dehoniane, 2007, 164.

¹⁶³ Cf *Guide for Catechists*, n. 30.

formation without which it would be difficult for catechists to realize their identity and their mission in the Church and in the society. Catechists need to be prepared by an appropriate formation which touches not only the intellectual aspect (*knowing*) but, above all, the existential aspect (*being*) and the aspect of communication and relationship (*knowing-how and being-with*).

Finally, on the basis of the discussions made in the previous chapters, we will, in the next chapter, point out some basic aspects that are in need of renewal in the identity and mission of the Catechists' Union. We will do this in view of proposing some concrete lines of action towards a renewal of the Union from the perspective of the apostolate of the members particularly in regard to young people, the local Church and the local society.

Part Four

TOWARDS A RENEWAL OF THE “CATECHISTS’ UNION”

Chapter Eight

RENEWAL OF THE “CATECHISTS’ UNION” WITH A FOCUS ON THE CATECHETICAL AND SOCIAL APOSTOLATE

It has been shown in the second part of this study that one of the peculiar dimensions of the Union as a Secular Institute rests in the fact that, in addition to the primary commitment of the members in the professional, ecclesial and social environment, it offers its apostolate also by means of particular institutions of its own. As it has been shown in the fourth chapter, such institutions and initiatives include: the House of Charity which aims towards the professional training of young people, the AMI which aims towards their vocational preparation, the Mass of the Poor which aims towards the material and spiritual assistance of the poor and the needy, the Crusade of Suffering which aims towards the moral support of people enduring great physical and moral suffering encouraging them to offer their pain for the transformation of the world, etc. The Union has also another peculiar element in the fact that it incorporates a wide category of members of different states of life, which gives fullness to its apostolate through diversity of roles and functions.

These elements show that the Union has a very important and wide apostolic mission. As it has been indicated in the fourth chapter, the apostolic mission of the Union has a catechetical, educational and social dimension. The educational mission generally refers to the professional preparation of young people to which the Union has been and is still offering remarkable contributions. However, in respect to the catechetical and social apostolate there are some fundamental aspects that call for renewal or improvement. Accordingly, on the basis of what

had been shown in the third part, this chapter will propose some elements for renewal with a major focus on the catechetical and social dimension of the apostolate of the Union. In addition, on the basis of the apostolic demand, it will indicate some aspects that need to be considered in the process of formation of the members. Finally, on the basis of what had been shown in the first part of this study in regard to the true identity of Secular Institutes, it will indicate some elements for renewal in what really touches the identity of the Union as a Secular Institute.

1. An Appraisal of the Union’s Need for Renewal

Today, in observing the general catechetical praxis in the Catechists’ Union, we can see that there is a style not adequate for our time, a style not capable of responding to the challenges of the actual world. The Union is still attached to the ‘traditional’ catechetical style and as long as it remains like this it will not have a promising future. Here, we can identify some of the major aspects that call for a change or for improvement.

The first thing to mention can be the presence of a wide gap between the adult Catechists and the young people entrusted to them. Usually it is said of the young people that they are not like the young people of the past, they are not docile, they do not listen to adults, they are rebellious, etc. However, the truth is different because many of the young people demonstrate a genuine religious concern and express a growing interest in Jesus. They search for authentic values to live by and usually accept the solutions presented to them. The fact is that the adults tend to see the young people of the present time in view of the reality of the past in which they themselves lived as young persons. They usually do not see the young within the new cultural situation, the changing reality, and the new existential demands. In most cases, it is the young people who are not listened and the insights which they give are not taken into consideration. Therefore, there is a need of renewing the general outlook in regard to the young generation.

The above mentioned fact calls the Catechists of the Union to change their approach towards the young. Today, in the general catechetical practice, there is a style which is more of a lesson than a dialogue and mostly there is a teacher-student or parent-child relationship

with the young. This kind of relationship is not bad, however something more is needed for the fact that usually young people do not open themselves in this kind of relationship for fear of being judged or misunderstood. They prefer to share their experiences, projects and problems of life with their friends who are young people like them and who usually cannot be of great help since they are themselves inexperienced. Today the Catechists have less influence on the young because they do not enter deeply into the world of the young so as to know them more intimately. The aspect of a spiritual friendship that helps both the Catechists and the young to travel towards the end, i.e., towards maturity in faith with easiness and joy is missing.

It is to be remembered that the Union found its origin in a historical moment characterized, on the one hand, by an increasing secularization of society, and on the other hand, by an extreme suffering. In that time, generally speaking, humanity was distancing itself from God in many aspects and man was somehow becoming empty, deprived of the capacity to understand the proper motive of his existence on earth. In this situation, through Fr. Leopold, Jesus wanted to indicate the Cross to the world; Fr. Leopold was irresistibly feeling attracted to the Cross so as to reveal to the world the strong force that can be drawn from it. Even today the society of the world is passing through similar moments and the victims are mostly the young. Today in the great part young people suffer as a result of not being able to understand the sense of life; they suffer because they feel empty. Many of them live with unresolved interrogative which sometimes becomes irresistible. Fr. Leopold has become a witness that the great question of life, the ‘why’ is revealed in the Cross. Despite this fact, today, it seems that the Cross of Christ is not strongly enough proposed to the young by the Catechists of the Union; it is not sufficiently indicated to the young as the response to the great interrogative regarding the sense of life, i.e., as an expression of the truth of their life and their identity.

Another aspect that calls for renewal or improvement is the service which the Catechists of the Union offer in vocational animation of young people. As it has been mentioned, the Catechists’ Union gives special attention to the vocational orientation of young people and in every place where it has a Centre offers a special service for the vocational pastoral care of young people through the Association of Mary Immaculate (AMI) whose main objective is to

help young people to discover and to concretize the particular vocation towards which God calls them. AMI is in fact one of the most significant initiatives and precious services of the Union in its mission towards the young. However, in the present time this association is not producing the desired fruits. This is mainly because there is less commitment on the part of the Catechists and, in the itinerary proposed, some essential pedagogical elements are missing. The Catechists need to understand profoundly the phenomenon of vocation, i.e., the greatness of God’s project on a person so as to commit themselves more responsibly and need to have a great pedagogical sensibility so as to offer a more effective service.

As we have mentioned before, in the Catechists’ Union, there is a style of ‘traditional catechesis’ that has to be overcome. Sunday Mass, devotional cults, feasts and other liturgical-devotional moments are given a major concern, i.e., the primary concern is stimulating the religious practice of young people. This is very important; however, little attention is given to the aspect of personalization or interiorization of faith. In the catechetical practice of the Union, the choice to be a Christian is taken for granted. It is not thought of helping young people to make such a choice in an evocative way or of stimulating them to rediscover their Christian identity. What is sought is making them good Christians and this, as we have said, mostly in view of religious practices. In fact, the ministry of the Word is actualized in reference to religious practices, and almost always in view of the liturgical functions. Therefore, a profound renewal needs to be made in regard to this aspect. The Catechists need to pay special attention that the message which they transmit penetrates into the internal world of young people arousing in them free and conscious choice because this is the only way which leads the young to a true transformation and leads them to be true witnesses capable of transforming the world.

In regard to the catechetical content little attention is given to the overall contextual situation of young people. There is lack of reading the signs of the times, of observing the new contextual situations and of corresponding to the young according to their real needs in the actual time. The mode of communicating the catechetical message is also another aspect that calls for improvement. There is a need of adapting a way of communication which is comprehensible to young people so that the message presented can be accessible to them. It

has been mentioned in the history of the Union that the first concern of the founder was of helping young people to be perseverant in their faith. As such the Catechists have a great responsibility and are called to make great efforts to favor the conditions that help young people to be perseverant in their faith. There is a need of promoting a true process of initiation, of discovering and enhancing the catechumenal action because this is a necessary condition for helping young people acquire a solid faith. There is also a need of making a good choice of catechetical models, of making a careful and correct catechetical planning and of evaluating it regularly with the right criteria.

In addition, in regard to the question of perseverance, today, many young people are seen to abandon their Catholic faith for joining other new religious movements or sects because these sects or religious movements promise them a religious experience that responds to their longing for fellowship and security, they touch their concrete life experiences, they promote dialogue and sharing, they promote intense relationships that take place in a very warm and welcoming environment. This aspect of an authentic climate of fraternity and communion is really missing. Therefore, there is a need of promoting such favourable environment in the catechetical group because this is what young people yearn for and is the fundamental condition that assures their growth.

Another very important aspect to consider is the missionary dimension of the apostolate of the members. It is true that the Catechists’ Union does not limit its apostolic commitment only to Christians. Its apostolate, particularly in that which regards educational and charity services, extends to all people. However, this apostolic service is provided as long as the people themselves come to ask for it. In the Union the ‘missionary action’, i.e., the concern for going out towards the persons who are in need is practically missing. There is a need of penetrating more into the society and intensifying the apostolate within it. There is an urgent need of re-thinking the mission of the members in the world today and of assuming a missionary orientation, i.e., of going out to the heart of the society to witness and serve in every possible way in the religious, cultural, social, political, economic realities.

Finally, in the Catechists’ Union, the aspect of dialogue and collaboration with other pastoral workers is missing. There is a tendency of isolation or segregation. At maximum,

ecclesial communion is limited to the parish environment. There are also many other aspects urgent for the evangelizing mission of the Church, such as the ecumenical cause as well as the concern for inter-religious dialogue, which are given a marginal place. In addition, taking in consideration the diversity of roles and functions to which the Catechists are called to, there is a need of providing them with specific forms of orientation or preparation for a specific role. All these factors show the necessity of a profound and courageous renewal of the Union particularly from the perspective of the apostolate, which, on the other hand, implies renewal of the formation program and, of course, renewal of its identity as a Secular Institute.

2. Towards a Renewal of the Ecclesial Dimension of the Union’s Apostolate

It has been shown in the fourth chapter that the Catechists of the Union have a very significant mission in the Church of today particularly in regard to the young who represent the hope for a better future. As it has been shown, within the pastoral program of their local Church they carryout a wide range of catechetical activity that includes the vocational animation and accompaniment of young people. They also dedicate themselves for the religious perseverance of young people. However, as it has been mentioned above, today it is greatly felt that the Union makes a step forward not only in intensifying this mission but also in making a reform taking in consideration the actual situation of our time. Here, on the basis of what has been shown in the seventh chapter in regard to the apostolate of catechists in the accompaniment of the young and what has been shown in chapter five and six in regard to the original and actual practice of catechesis, we will attempt to indicate in what way a renewal can possibly be realized for the achievement of better fruits in the womb of the Church.

2.1. Towards a More Relevant Catechetical Apostolate among the Young

To realize their catechetical mission towards the young more successfully the Catechists of the Union are called to study carefully the actual situation of young people in order to find out their real needs, major problems and concerns, to understand in which aspects they really need assistance, and then to indicate for them the right solution in an appropriate and convincing

way. As it will be indicated below, this implies getting closer to the young, entering deeply into their world and being part of their life situation. It requires more commitment, rather it demands a total accompaniment of the young, but it is the only way to help young people grow in their faith in a consistent way and to realize their vocation in accordance to God’s design.

2.1.1. *Renewed Vision of the Young*

“The future of humanity lies in the hands of those who are strong enough to provide coming generations with reasons for living and hoping.”¹ This is why young people are to be looked as resources and why youth ministry calls for a very careful and sensitive approach towards them. Today the Catechists of the Union are invited to have a renewed outlook and approach towards the young. First of all they need not consider young people as problems but as precious resources and need to offer themselves to them as true friends – trusted adult friends with whom the young can share experiences and feelings without fear.

2.1.1.1. *Looking at Young People as Precious Resources*

After the II Vatican Council many facts that were considered problems have become for the Church the ‘signs of time’ and the long journey, from the time of the Council till now, has allowed the introduction, consolidation and exercise of a more mature and engaging expression – a more mature expression in the way that the problems have become *resources*, precious contributions in the achievement of common objective, and a more engaging expression because the resources are challenges to be confronted.²

The Catechists of the Union need to have a fundamental change of perspective both in regard to the youth and in regard to the actual cultural situation in which they are found. First

¹ USCC, «*To Teach as Jesus Did. A Pastoral Message on Catholic Education, 1972*», in *The Catechetical Documents. A Parish Resource*, Chicago, Liturgy Training Publications, 1996, 102, n. 82.

² Cf R. TONELLI, «*Dalla situazione culturale e giovanile una sfida alla pastorale giovanile*», in ISTITUTO DI TEOLOGIA PASTORALE UPS, *Pastorale giovanile. Sfide, prospettive ed esperienze*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2003, 76; Cf ID., *Per la vita e la speranza. Un progetto di pastorale giovanile*, Roma, Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1996, 122-123.

of all, they need to think of the actual condition of the reality, even in its most provoking expressions, more as a *resource* to be confronted than a *problem* to be solved. Today, in regard to the young and in regard to the cultural changes and new situations of daily life it is spoken of problems. The figure of a ‘problem’ has its own precise epistemological reason, even when the one pronouncing it does not know. Everything which lets go the expectations of a person unfulfilled is a problem. What is to be called a problem is, therefore, the gap existing between personal expectations and their realization. He who speaks of problems in regard to young people, culture and time situations confesses the gap existing between his world and the world around him and implicitly declares his being unsatisfied. Therefore, the Catechists are strongly recommended to eradicate this kind of view and attitude in regard to the young generation.³

2.1.1.2. *Getting Closer to the Young*

Young people can not be expected to accept the proposals of adult persons unless, the adults, in their turn, are willing to listen to their needs and expectations. Thus, the Catechists must strive not only to teach the young but also to learn from them and prudently see things in their eyes and make necessary changes with the insights suggested by them.⁴ The approach of Pope John Paul II towards young people can be an efficient school for the Catechists. The Pope had such a readiness to welcome young people with love and esteem and to listen to them with all sincerity. In one of his meetings with young people he declared that it is not more important that which he will have to say to them, but more important is that which they will have to say to him. He said to the young people that they talk to him not necessarily with words, but also with their presence, their songs, even with their dance, with their presentations, and lastly with their enthusiasm.⁵ This is what the Catechists are called to do: even when young people do not have the capacity or the courage of expressing themselves,

³ Cf ID., «Dalla situazione culturale e giovanile», 75-76.

⁴ Cf USCC, «To Teach as Jesus Did», 111-113, nn. 127-136.

⁵ Cf R. TONELLI, *La fede giovane dei giovani. Il dialogo tra Giovanni Paolo II e i giovani*, in “Note di Pastorale Giovanile” 33 (1999) 9, 46.

they need to be capable of observing their needs and aspirations from their external manifestations. This signifies entering deeply into their world, getting closer to them in order to know them more.

The Pope was very close to the young, in a very special way, and young people were able to feel it even from far away. For him the young people were a fragment of the future planned by God to change history in the direction of the Gospel. They were signs to be welcomed with eagerness and to be interpreted in faith. The attention of young people towards him was also very great because they were able to feel him as a friend. Many times the Pope had spoken inviting the young for a courageous renunciation in many aspects and the young people were responding with enthusiasm and joy because they were able to feel that his words come from a strong passion for them and for life. In the Pope the young people were able to sense the closeness of God’s mystery.⁶ This is strongly needed from the Catechists if they really want to bring a positive influence on the young: offer themselves as friends with all truth and sincerity, with strong enthusiasm and dedication; and in this way they will succeed in bringing young people closer to God.

2.1.1.3. *Building a Spiritual Friendship with the Young*

As we have mentioned before, today many young people prefer to share their ideas, worries and aspirations with their friends and not with adults for fear of being judged or misunderstood. Usually they reveal themselves to peers who are usually found in a similar situation and thus can not be in a position to help the other so much. That’s why today, the Catechists like all those who dedicate themselves to the accompaniment of the young need to assume the role of a friend. The beauty of friendship consists in the fact that there is a reciprocal sharing, as the young learns from the adult, the adult also learns from the insights which the young offers to him. It is true that, in respect to the young, the adult is a more mature person with more knowledge and experience. However, in friendship differences are not underlined, i.e., there is no fear of potency of the other and this is its force. “You are my

⁶ Cf *Ibid.*, 44-47.

friends, if you do what I command you. I shall no longer call you servants” (*Jn 15:14*). Catechists have this model given by Jesus which invites them to be friends of the young and which, at the same time, invites the young to follow the Catechists as their companions who guide them according to the Will of God.⁷

As we have seen by means of the biblical models presented in the previous chapter, in friendship the young grows progressively walking with the other and the fruit is gathered with joy. By the sweetness of friendship the Catechists can lead the young to virtue and by its force help them to destroy vice. The corrections they give to the young will not cause suffering. The young will find a great joy and security in having someone with whom they have the liberty to talk, one to whom they can confide their mistakes and failures without fear, one to whom they can tell their progresses in life, one to whom they can entrust all the secrets and projects of their heart. On the other hand, spiritual friendship gives the Catechists more motivation to pray for the young; to feel the suffering, worries and failures of the young like one's own; to consider their growth like one's own.⁸

The foundation of the stability and constancy in friendship is love and trust. Catechists are called to love young people as a fundamental element but this is not enough. There is another fact which is decisively important: that young people should not only be loved but they themselves should feel and know that they are loved.⁹ There are some basic things which the Catechists as companions, should consider for the fruitfulness of the friendship oriented towards maturity in faith:

Intention. A true spiritual friendship is the one sought for God and for the value which it has in itself without thinking of any other advantage. Jesus has given us a model of a true friendship saying “you must love your neighbor as your self” (*Mt 22:39*). It implies loving the other gratuitously, for what he is. Friendship is full of beauty and grace; it is virtue and not affair. And it is always to be remembered that there is a third in between – Christ, the centre

⁷ Cf D. PEZZINI (Ed.), *L'Amicizia spirituale. Aelredo Di Rievaulx*, Milano, Paoline, 2004, 172-175.

⁸ Cf *Ibid.*, 105-119 and 181.

⁹ Cf P. BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere. Il sistema educativo di Don Bosco*, Roma, Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 2000, 292-295.

from whom the friendship should start, according to whose will it should proceed and find its end and purpose in him.

Fidelity. This is the most important quality which nourishes and protects friendship. It implies remaining always the same in good and bad times. Fidelity looks with the same eye the rich and the poor, strong and weak, healthy and sick. The faithful friend does not look at any thing but the heart of his friend. Fidelity can be proved also by little things. For example, nothing more destroys a friendship than revealing the secrets of the other. “Anyone who is trustworthy in little things is trustworthy in great” (*Lk 16:10*).

Patience. In friendship there are many occasions in which patience is put in proof. Sometimes friendship is lost with the failures of the other even in little things; the other is reproached bitterly and so the greatest gift comes to be destroyed for little mistakes. In friendship the other should not be expected to do and to be all what is desired, i.e., the other should not be expected to be perfect. Friendship should always be characterized by a merciful love and patience and in as much as possible corrections should be given without despising the other.¹⁰

Friendship should not be so formal. Though there can be moments of austerity in it, it should remain more liberal. However, one of the most important things to be expected from the Catechists as companions is prudence. They should always be persons of great internal equilibrium characterized by profound self control. They should know how to effectively relate with young people.

2.1.1.4. *Helping Young People Cultivate Some Fundamental Attitudes of Life*

On the other hand, young people need to be educated in acquiring the following fundamental attitudes:

¹⁰ Cf PEZZINI, *L'Amicizia spirituale*, 162-167.

Letting oneself be guided by a trustful adult person. Young people need to be educated to open themselves up and to let themselves be guided, instructed and helped by someone whom they can trust. They need to be like children who tend to open themselves without reserve. This attitude is very fundamental and a basic condition for a faith journey and for the integral development of their person; because an experienced adult person illuminates young people to see themselves and all the reality around them in an objective point of view and in the light of the Gospel.

Acceptance of a certain authority. Young people need to learn to accept willingly a certain form of authority that has something to say in relation to their person: it could be authority of the Gospel, authority of parents, authority of teachers, authority of the Church, authority of law in general. They need not feel inconvenient or hostile in front of such authorities. They are not to be asked to obey blindly but with critical and clear understanding and for their own good.

Will and capacity to love other persons. Young people need to be trained to go out of themselves overcoming any form of egocentrism even if this would require of them great sacrifice. They need to open themselves up in a free and liberating love which may consist in a type of loving relationship with someone whom they have chosen or in a total abandonment to God’s love which transforms them and opens them up to a wider relationship of love with others: family, friends, other Christians, even enemies.

Being attentive to the great interrogatives of life. Young people need to be stimulated to be open to the great existential questions. They need to have the attitude of asking serious questions that regard the sense and ultimate purpose of life. This attitude and its constant exercise will strengthen them and will make them firm in front of paradoxes that radically touch their existence. This attitude will also enable them to see, beyond certain negative experiences such as the presence of evil, every form of suffering and death, the manifestation and realization of God’s salvation.

Acceptance of a truth that can not be experimented scientifically. Young people need to learn to accept with readiness a truth that goes beyond what their own rational capacity or the empirical sciences can offer. Scientific truths are very important; however, there are other great non-scientific dimensions of life, those which constitute the reasons for living, loving and hoping. The truth of the Gospel goes beyond the capacity of these sciences; there is the concept of the mystery which can not be accessible with technological instruments and human rationality. Young people need to learn to abandon every form of auto-sufficiency in front of God with an attitude of humility towards him.¹¹

2.1.2. *Accompanying the Young towards Vocational Discernment and Realization*

Youth can represent a privileged age only in the amount in which it can predict the passion for the future, for the responsibility with which it can plan it, and if it can realize it. The dignity of young people rests in their vocation; in its responsible and appropriate realization.¹² Human vocation puts man into an essential relationship with God and as such a catechetical itinerary is a true vocational itinerary where the catechist assists young people to discover the signs of the specific call of God and to verify it in the light of the Gospel, and then sustains them in the walk towards its realization.¹³ Today, the Catechists of the Union are invited to intensify and render more effective their service in accompanying young people in the discernment and realization of the vocation to which God calls them. For this, they need to have a deep understanding of the phenomenon of vocation and need to know how to assist young people in the vocational itinerary.

2.1.2.1. *Understanding the Profound Sense of Vocation*

Christian life is a vocation and consists in the courageous decision of directing one’s existence towards the Reign of God, towards the full victory of life over death. It consists in

¹¹ Cf GEVAERT, *Il dialogo difficile*, 71-75.

¹² Cf TRENTI, *La fede dei giovani*, 160-161.

¹³ Cf M. LLANOS, *Servire le vocazioni nella Chiesa. Pastorale vocazionale e pedagogia della vocazione*, Roma, Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 2005, 350-351.

sharing the cause of Jesus, the cause which filled his life and lead him till death: the cause of the Reign of God – the cause of life. Thus, the vocation of a Christian consists in this: in continuing serving life like Jesus. It means committing oneself for life – to live one’s life to the full and to help others live life to the full. Everyone is called to love his own life not only in good moments but always, which implies inner peace and joy, recognition and development of one’s gifts, realization of the self and a sense of hope for the fullness of life, and to discover that life is a vocation to service, a commitment of love towards others which concretely takes to the experience of the cross of Christ. This vocation towards the fullness of life is realized in the name of God and in accordance to his project because the cause for life cannot but put at the centre God who is the source of life. Thus, it primarily demands deepening relationships with God.¹⁴

Catechists need to have this profound sense of vocation in order to commit themselves more responsibly in helping young people towards the realization of their vocation towards fullness of life in Christ. They also need to see vocation in the totality of human existence and in the totality of the person as such. Though there are fundamental moments in the vocational itinerary of a person, the entire reality of a person is to be seen as a vocation or as a continuous call where the person is called to give a permanent response, and this specific vocation or call is to be viewed within the global dimension of human existence since personal vocation is realized in the totality of the vocation of all humanity.

It is also very important for the Catechists to know the constitutive elements of a vocation of a person which includes: election, call, mission and assistance. Vocation is to be understood as an eternal *election*. There is divine initiative – God calls; and when God calls, he does it with an absolutely transcendent and liberal choice. God’s election is absolutely gratuitous, and this is true not only in regard to the extraordinary vocations but in every single vocation. God’s election is also effective, it makes the person worthy of that election and capable of realizing that to which he is called. God reveals his election to man in time by a *call*. God calls

¹⁴ Cf TONELLI, *Per la vita e la speranza*, 189-193; Cf VALLABARAJ, *Empowering the Young towards Fullness of Life*, 57-63; Cf T. GROOME, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry. The Way of Shared Praxis*, San Francisco, Harper Collins Publishers, 1991, 16-17.

by way of his Word, by a person, an event or other means which he provides. The call of God demands a radical option. It is necessary for the one called to leave his proper plans and aspirations for taking other ways which God proposes even if it may be difficult. The person called is free to say yes or no. A call implies an invitation to an active and committed participation in the realization of God’s project. By a call God entrusts a person with a *mission* where usually the person called is found to ask what God wants of him. The mission which God entrusts to a person does not necessarily imply doing something but, above all, it implies being his true disciple. Beyond the specific mission, the vocation of every person is to live in communion with God. The particular vocations are realized in different modality which can be expressed in terms of ministry of order that includes bishops, priests and deacons; or in terms of lay ministry which is realized in the world in different ways, in marriage or in celibacy; or in terms of religious and consecrated life. The other aspect of God’s action in vocation is *assistance*. The mission entrusted to a person is realized by divine assistance through the gift of the Holy Spirit which gives a vital and transforming force to the weakness of the person called by God.¹⁵

The knowledge of these fundamental aspects of the phenomenon of vocation will also facilitate the Catechists to acquire a certain pedagogical sensibility and offers them the key for analyzing a vocational itinerary which includes a fundamental religious experience which marks the first encounter with God, the elaboration of a personal project of life which follows a fundamental moment of decision, and the realization of this project which requires faithfulness and responsible commitment.

2.1.2.2. *Helping the Young to Make a Fundamental Religious Experience*

Catechists have a very important role in helping young people make a fundamental religious experience. The Church, which in itself is a vocational mystery, embraces in itself all vocations and is the womb of vocations: it gives birth, protects, nourishes and sustains vocations with the grace of God and according to his Will. Therefore, the ecclesial

¹⁵ Cf LLANOS, *Servire le vocazioni nella Chiesa*, 156-170.

community, specifically the parish community, is the privileged place where the Catechists can carry out their service as vocational animators. The parish constitutes an original mediation of a call through the announcement of the Word, the liturgical celebrations, the construction of groups of prayer, the organization of charity services, etc. In this atmosphere, it is most probable that a young person can make a fundamental religious experience.¹⁶

Through these mediations, Catechists assist young people to make a profound experience of something that leads them to understand the sense of life; that enables them to penetrate to the depth of human existence; something that leads them to perceive the truth about life. In other words they stimulate young people to open their heart to God and to be conscious of a fundamental call.¹⁷ It is true that all human beings consciously or unconsciously, continuously search for God, because deep in the heart we are rooted in God. This can be seen in the continuous sense of dissatisfaction which man experiences in daily life. Young people want to find more and do not usually know where and how, and so continue to search. It is in this irresistible internal search, that Catechists are called to help young people, by means of a particular mediation, to open themselves towards a first encounter with God.¹⁸

Catechists are also called to help young people in analyzing and interpreting their fundamental religious experience and getting through with it. To do this, first of all, they need to receive young persons with an unconditional welcome in the way they are, and then to get closer to them with a loving attention, to be able to know what the Holy Spirit is accomplishing in each one of them. They need to be capable of intuiting at least part of the mystery which is urging the young persons in their interiority and in some way help them to express it. The Catechists can explore this by observing closely, by analyzing and evaluating the signs: the sentiments, interests, and aspirations of the person, i.e., by a process of

¹⁶ Cf *Ibid.*, 171-172.

¹⁷ Cf GEVAERT, *Il dialogo difficile*, 164-174.

¹⁸ Cf Z. TRENTI, *Opzione religiosa e dignità umana*, Roma, Armando Editore, 2001, 29-43 and 77-80; Cf R. M. de PISÓN LIÉBANAS, «*I fondamenti antropologici dell'esperienza religiosa*», in DERROITTE, *Catechesi e iniziazione cristiana*, 40-42.

discernment. This discernment is a process of verification and confrontation which enables to understand the specific form of the vocation of the person.¹⁹

Within the mediatory function of the Church, the Catechists have also the role of proposing the specific call to young people by proclaiming the Gospel regarding vocation in a clear language, in an adequate and coherent way. Of course, vocation is radically a personal fact and God is the one who initiates it interiorly; however, it can be stimulated and educated, and the Catechists do so as instruments in the hands of God. The Catechists educate in favor of vocation and act as mediators of God’s call.²⁰

2.1.2.3. *Helping the Young to Make a Personal Project of Life*

The mediatory role of the Catechists in regard to the vocation of the young does not finish with the fundamental moment of call but continues towards its realization in a progressive way. The Catechists are called to offer a sufficient vocational orientation. To orientate signifies to educate young people to know more deeply the sense of life and to make a deeper experience of faith, and also to help them be aware of the freedom and responsibility with which they have to act in view of their vocation. There are two conditions necessary from the part of the young person: making a free decision and entrusting oneself to God’s providence. The Catechists do not substitute the action of the grace of God nor the freedom of the individual. Their duty is to help the young people to be conscious of the divine action in them and encourage them to give a responsible response and collaboration.²¹

The Catechists need to follow young people much closely in the process of decision making which is usually a very difficult moment. Vocational decision making is, first of all, to be interpreted from a psychological point of view. It is an exceptional and fundamental situation in the life of the young person and can be considered as a moment of crisis. In front of diverse alternatives for choice, each one with particular value, the young has to prefer one instead of the others. The choice will have consequences for the future and the young is

¹⁹ Cf LLANOS, *Servire le vocazioni nella Chiesa*, 173-175.

²⁰ Cf *Ibid.*, 175 -176.

²¹ Cf *Ibid.*, 176 -177; Cf TRENTI, *Opzione religiosa e dignità umana*, 83-87.

conscious of it. Usually young people are not sure which one of the possible alternatives would lead them to a fuller satisfaction of their profound aspirations, or the alternatives presented to them might seem equally respondent to the fulfillment of the fundamental exigencies of their personality (for example consecrated life and married life) and do not know which one to choose and therefore they enter into an existential disorientation. Here, the illuminating intervention of the Catechists is indispensable. Usually many young people are seen to take great risks, even risks of life, for little adventures, but in the case of vocation many feel afraid and they need someone who would give them a strong hand. Therefore, in this process of decision making, Catechists have a very important role in helping young people reach a successful way out.²²

After this, Catechists assist the young in the elaboration of a personal project of life, i.e., in organizing their life around the decided option. When young people overcome the sense of risk and decide for a particular commitment courageously, the uncertainties disappear and the future becomes well oriented towards a single determined way. The personal project is the central axis around which the young constructs his personality. It interiorly anticipates the future personality of the young; it shows the quality of life which the person decides to follow. It is the unifying principle of proper experiences; it offers light and unifies life making it significant and full of sense. In this aspect, the role of the Catechists is to help the young make an attentive reading of their existence in order to concentrate on what is essential and authentic. This implies inviting them into profound moments of prayer and presenting to them the true project of Christian life through the meditation of the Gospel. The Catechists also educate the young to construct their life project around the essential cultural values of the environment around them. This dynamism of a project of life is to be given great importance because it links the present to the past and projects the young to a future realization and thus creates a fundamental continuity in the development of the person.²³

²² Cf LLANOS, *Servire le vocazioni nella Chiesa*, 278-282.

²³ Cf *Ibid.*, 299-305.

2.1.2.4. *Encouraging the Young to Realize Their Project Faithfully*

Finally, young people need to be encouraged to commit themselves towards the realization of their project. A person who is not faithful to his project contradicts himself. In a normal situation, a person should do what he has planned to do as long as that is the right thing for him. The project contains in itself a promise to make it arrive to the end and this promise is unconditional in the sense that it needs be fulfilled in face of favorable or unfavorable situations, and it should not be swayed by a change of sentiments. Therefore, in the journey towards realization, the first thing which Catechists need to do is to encourage young people to be faithful to their project.²⁴

In the realization of their vocation young people need to be educated to depart from the mission of the Church. Every vocation participates in the mission of the Church in a proper and particular way. By way of sacramental signs (the sacred orders or matrimony) and canonical legislations, the Church confers a particular mission to the baptized individuals making them participate in its divine mission both inside the ecclesial community and in the entire world. Christ has entrusted this mission to the Church in its totality so that the Church organizes and develops it relying on personal charisms. Specific vocations exist for the realization of the universal vocation of the Church. Some of these vocations are essential to the organic structure of the Church; others have particular role in the community and in the world and in diversified ways all walk towards sanctity. If a person aims at the realization of self without regard to the mission of the Church or without regard to the growth of other persons in the world remains to be auto-centric and closed. Therefore, young people need to be educated to a sense of ‘the other’, to offer themselves to ‘the other’ and to love because these are the most important qualities that lead them towards a fuller realization of their vocation.²⁵

After all this, the Catechists still need to walk with the young in the moment and after the moment in which they initiate their mission in life by way of their proper vocation for

²⁴ Cf TRENTI, *Opzione religiosa e dignità umana*, 45-50.

²⁵ Cf LLANOS, *Servire le vocazioni nella Chiesa*, 177-178.

marriage or for a specific consecration or role. When they start to acquire an essential stability and start to walk in joy they can be more autonomous. However, no person can be completely auto-sufficient because man is a limited creature. The person continues to grow by staying together with others in the community.

2.1.2.5. *Major Tasks of Catechists as Vocational Animators*

Summarizing what we have said above, we can deduce the following elements which indicate the principal tasks of the Catechists of the Union as vocational animators of young people:

Unconditional acceptance of the person. The first step required of the Catechists is to enter into a personal relationship with the young and create confidence. The unconditional welcome can be seen in three dimensions: *an existential acceptance* which consists in confirming the young in their unique identity, manifesting love for their person and respecting their freedom and autonomy; *acceptance of the latent signs of future in the other* which enables the Catechists to act even in most desperate situations thinking that there are hidden possibilities for good in the young and that the young is able to generate a bright future and so enables them to help the young discover these hidden energies and potentialities by way of attentive listening; and the third is *acceptance of the symmetrical relationship or reciprocity* which opens the young persons to be active protagonists.

Discerning the vocational identity of the person. Vocational discernment is a complex process, fundamentally spiritual, that needs prudence and action of the Holy Spirit. It implies the process of knowing and evaluating the presence of those signs or facts of the human reality that manifest that the young person is called for a determined vocation. It is necessary for the Catechists to make a careful observation for the presence of certain attitudes and required virtues; for the presence of authentic, adequate and valid motivations; and a right intention.

Courageous proposal. The Catechists can also propose a concrete faith journey for the young in vocational terms. However, this proposal should be fruit of a very profound dialogue

and knowledge of the young and needs to respect their freedom and autonomy. Many pastoral operators have fear of doing this proposal and prefer to remain silent; however, this silence causes many young people to feel insecure and unconfirmed in the choices which they make for life.

Orientating the young. This means helping the young to re-elaborate the vocational proposal in front of a challenging culture; helping them to look more towards the future than the past and to feel responsible. This requires of the Catechists a great pastoral zeal and a capacity to deal with new cultural challenges. Putting the young person at the centre of the process, they need to encourage and illuminate the person in making a decision.

Helping the young in the elaboration of a project of life. Making a project of life is a way of practical response to the eternal call, trying to concretize in ones own life the Will of God. The Catechists, as vocational animators, need to help the young to elaborate their project of life in view of a specific mission and according to the logic of the Gospel which is a logic of love that enables a person to donate oneself for some purpose.

Personal and group accompaniment towards realization. After the maturation of a decision and the elaboration of a project of life the Catechists assist young people towards the realization of their project and towards the fullness of their person. Personal accompaniment is necessary because it takes into account the specific personal vocation of each person, and group accompaniment helps the young persons to grow together with others and to learn from the experience of others.²⁶

2.1.3. *Helping Young People to be Consistent in Their Catholic Faith*

As we have mentioned before, today more than ever, young people question and search for the real sense of their life and show a sincere religious yearning. However, a great number of Catholic young people are seen to join different religious movements and sects abandoning

²⁶ Cf *Ibid.*, 233-327.

their Catholic faith. These sects and new religious movements attract many young people because they promise young people a religious experience that responds to their longing for security and they promote intense personal and gratifying relationships that take place in a warm and welcoming climate of acceptance and fellowship.²⁷ In addition, as it is stated below, there is the fact that today young people manifest a growing mistrust towards institutions:

For many, there seems to be a deep discrepancy between what the Church ought to be and what it is in reality. The Church is presented more as an institution and not as communion, more as a society and not so much as a community. Such trends offer possible explanations for many current problems regarding the sacramental ministry and catechesis, for the crisis in ecclesial belonging, for the flights towards sects, for the many cases of defection and abandonment of Christian, priestly and religious life. The relative success of some sects can be attributed to the yearning for fellowship that is often not found within the ecclesial communities. Excessive institutionalization, unnecessary bureaucracy and the marked prevalence of the criteria of efficiency and conservation often obscure the human and liberating face of communion of the faith, suffocate the progress of community life and compromise the credibility of the Church.²⁸

It is a grave matter that calls for an urgent pastoral concern and intervention. At the end, there is a fundamental question that needs to be clarified: is it the young people who are distancing themselves from the Church or it is actually the Church who is distancing itself from the young people? This calls for a real process of discernment in regard to the life experience and pastoral attitude of the Church.²⁹

The Catechists’ Union, as an Institute whose primary objective is the perseverance of young people in faith, is called to contribute greatly to this religious reality of young people. But how can the Catechists of the Union, today, help the young to be consistent in their Catholic faith? Here, there are some essential elements to be considered:

²⁷ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 150-151; Cf *Guide for Catechists*, n. 16; Cf *GDC*, n. 201.

²⁸ ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 215.

²⁹ Cf A. FONTANA, *Il mondo è cambiato: cambiamo la pastorale*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2006, 7-19; Cf J. L. MORAL, *Giovani senza fede? Manuale di pronto soccorso per ricostruire con i giovani la fede e la religione*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2007, 108-112; Cf *GDC*, n. 201.

Proper initiation into the Christian mystery. It is very important that young people from early time of their childhood be assisted to develop a strong faith identity. However, particular attention is to be given to the period of preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation, specifically the Holy Communion and Confirmation. In this period, the Catechists should not reduce catechesis to a simple religious instruction, but should promote a true initiation; they need to foster a radical transformation and a real participation in the paschal mystery of Christ through the Word and the sacraments which leads to a full incorporation into the Church and the beginning of a new life. In as much as possible, the true catechumenal period with all its essential phases needs to be restored.³⁰ In addition, after this basic period of initiation, the Catechists need to accompany young people constantly through a permanent catechesis.³¹

Communicating a significant message. The message to be transmitted to young people should not be abstract but needs to be profoundly related to their person and closely linked to their concrete life experience.³² It needs to respond to their fundamental questions and aspirations and to illuminate their fundamental choices and their actual way of living. Today many young people “feel the uneasiness of a faith that is culturally isolated and leaves them rooted in two worlds that are seemingly incompatible: the Christian faith, as it has been inherited and transmitted and the tangible cultural world with its aspirations, values and

³⁰ Cf MONTISCI, *L'iniziazione cristiana in Italia in un tempo di transizione*, 51-55; Cf H. DERROITTE, «Iniziazione e rinnovamento catechetico. Criteri per una rifondazione della catechesi parrocchiale», in ID., *Catechesi e iniziazione cristiana*, 54-56; Cf RCIA, nn. 4-8. See: UCN (Ed.), *L'iniziazione cristiana*. Documenti e orientamenti della Conferenza Episcopale Italiana. 1. Catecumenato degli adulti, 2. Catecumenato dei fanciulli e dei ragazzi, 3. Itinerari per il risveglio della fede cristiana, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2004.

³¹ Pope Benedict XVI, in the apostolic exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* stresses the importance of the mystagogical catechesis and states that “a mystagogical catechesis must be concerned with bringing out the significance of the rites for the Christian life in all its dimensions – work and responsibility, thoughts and emotions, activity and repose. Part of the mystagogical process is to demonstrate how the mysteries celebrated in the rite are linked to the missionary responsibility of the faithful. The mature fruit of mystagogy is an awareness that one’s life is being progressively transformed by the holy mysteries being celebrated. The aim of all Christian education, moreover, is to train the believer in an adult faith that can make him a “new creation”, capable of bearing witness in his surroundings to the Christian hope that inspires him” (BENEDICT XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church’s Life and Mission, 22 February 2007, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 99 (2007) 105-180, n. 64).

³² Cf P. CHINAGLIA, *Natura, fine e contenuto della catechesi*. Presentazione del «Documento di base», Leumann (TO), Elledici, [n.y.], 20-21 and 144-147; Cf RdC, nn. 52, 55, 77 and 96.

convictions. Such behaviour manifests a fracture and an interior disintegration.”³³ Therefore, Catechists are called to activate dialogue between faith and culture and to be open to the real demands of young people.³⁴ “This dialogue ought not to exclude the balanced use of critical rationality and a call for a deep renewal of the traditional religious representations.”³⁵

Using an appropriate language. This does not mean that the Catechists have to imitate the way of speaking of adolescents and young people or using vulgar expressions; on the contrary, they need to be good examples in the use of an adult and dignified way of expression. Catechists are called to use appropriate language in the sense that they need to adapt a way of communication which is comprehensible to young people; they need to have the capacity for interpreting experiences widely and profoundly, specifically in interpreting the most mysterious of all experiences – that which takes place between God and man – so that it can be accessible to the young. For young people it is preferred to use a symbolic and narrative language than a purely rational and demonstrative one.³⁶

Personalization or interiorization of faith. Interiorization signifies the fact that young people come to accept the notion of a certain reality or value consciously, because they come to understand it objectively and are convinced, and not because it can not be discussed or because it is indicated by some authority such as family, school, Church, society. This phenomenon of interiorization generates in young people an awareness of themselves and of their autonomy and helps them discover their interiority. From this comes out the process of liberation from dependence on others which enables young people to assume a personal

³³ ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 137.

³⁴ Cf *Ibid.*; Cf R. J. REICHERT, *Renewing Catechetical Ministry. A Future Agenda*, New York, Paulist Press, 2002, 27-29; Cf Z. TRENTI, *Inculturazione della fede*, in “Catechesi” 64 (1995) 9, 6-10.

³⁵ ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 137.

³⁶ Cf F. PAJER, *Nuova metodologia catechistica, Fondamenti metodologici della catechesi alla luce del «Documento di base»*, Roma, Paoline, 1972, 103-113; Cf BARBETTA, *Rievangelizzare gli adolescenti*, 163-167; Cf J. VALLABARAJ, *Delving into the World of the Catechetical Education of Adults. A Multi-Perspective Elaboration*, Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2008, 272-273; Cf REICHERT, *Renewing Catechetical Ministry*, 23; Cf *GDC*, n. 185; Cf *CT*, n. 40.

responsibility towards the reality.³⁷ Therefore, the task of the Catechists is not only informing young people of the contents of faith, but motivating them to personalize it which indicates the experience of a re-conversion and internalization of the attitudes of faith freely chosen; and this would be the unshakable base for their consistency and firmness because it implies inner transformation that can not be much affected by external happenings.³⁸

Strengthening the sense of belonging. The fruit of a personalized faith is the joyful sense of belongingness and identification of oneself with the faith community. The belongingness to the community of believers will no more be a result of a mere tradition but fruit of a personal option and conviction. Catechists motivate young people to strengthen their sense of belonging by a concrete love for the Church that manifests itself in a zealous and responsible participation in its life.³⁹

Implementing the renewed model of the church. The Catechists have to promote the renewed vision of the Church where there is primacy of fellowship and communion. It is the *hierarchical or institutional model* of the Church which has become the reason of great dissatisfaction and reason of alienation of many young people from the Church. Today, Catechists are called to practically implement the ecclesiological *model of communion and service*. The catechetical reflection needs to facilitate the rediscovery of the central place of communion in the mystery of the Church. The reality of the Christ event and the call by means of the faith has to prevail in such a way that the institutional aspect of the Church will not suffocate the authentic aspect of communion in the life and mission of the Church. In addition, the Catechists need to encourage the concrete participation of all within the ecclesial body and give due appreciation for the participation and role played.⁴⁰

³⁷ Cf U. MONTISCI, «Giovani e catechesi», in ISTITUTO DI CATECHETICA UPS, *Andate e insegnate*, 272; Cf B. DESCOULEURS, «Pastorale dei giovani e iniziazione alla vita spirituale», in DERROITTE, *Catechesi e iniziazione cristiana*, 146-147.

³⁸ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 136; Cf PAJER, *Nuova metodologia catechistica*, 71-82.

³⁹ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 136-138.

⁴⁰ Cf *Ibid.*, 214-215; Cf METTE, *Evangelizzazione e credibilità della chiesa*, 93-99.

Promoting a warm environment of acceptance and relationships. This is an essential requirement to which young people are particularly sensitive. Young people are in a continuous search for an authentic and warm relationship. This is quite natural; in fact, the construction of interpersonal relationship is one of the fundamental conditions that assure the growth of a person. Therefore, it is a fundamental requirement for the Catechists to promote warm and fraternal relationships among the young people in the catechetical group and make them feel at home where each one of them is unconditionally accepted and where their unique values are greatly appreciated.

Encouraging an educative effort in the group. Creating warm relationships in groups does not mean imitating what the other sects do. We can not generalize, but in most cases, there is superficiality in these sects; they risk in being absorbed into an emotional world that seemingly opens persons into the sense of mystery or of the transcendent. Such experience brings about a kind of psychological dependence on the group or on its leaders, and is very difficult for the young person to grow.⁴¹ Therefore, the risk of superficiality should be avoided. The Catechists need to constitute in the group an inspirational educative environment “which is required for the growth in the faith focusing on maturity and autonomy of an adult religiosity that is capable of overcoming childish and psychological dependence that provide refuge, security and gratification for many anxious people.”⁴²

2.2. *Towards a Renewal of the Catechetical Content and Method*

As it has been shown in the first section of this chapter, in the catechetical field of apostolate of the Union a major renewal is needed in respect to the catechetical content and method. In regard to the catechetical content a central place has to be given to the person and his concrete needs. After all, catechesis is at the service of individual persons finalized to help

⁴¹ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 150.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 151.

them live life to the full and to hope.⁴³ Therefore, the catechetical content has to respond to the existential situation of individual persons and has to be communicated in a way accessible to them.⁴⁴ In this section, we will show how the figure of Jesus Crucified has to occupy a central place in the catechetical activity and how it has to be presented as the most secure point of reference to be indicated to all but particularly the young who find themselves surrounded by major concerns and difficulties of life that include the question of sense of life and the realization of their person. We will also indicate some catechetical models responsive to the demands of our time, both in relation to content and method, and we will attempt to evolve the correct itinerary for an effective catechetical project.

2.2.1. *Proposing the Figure of Jesus Crucified to Young People*

Today, besides the grave difficulties that come from the external environment, a great quantity of young people, experience intense internal suffering as a result of not being able to understand the sense of their life. As *Catechesi Tradendae* affirms, in this period, in all situations of the world, catechesis “takes on considerable importance, since it is the time when the Gospel can be presented, understood and accepted as capable of giving meaning to life and thus of inspiring attitudes that would have no other explanation.”⁴⁵ As a consequence, today, the catechetical activity of the Union has to focus in helping young people in this existential question, i.e., in helping them understand the sense or meaning of their life. Here, after highlighting some aspects of the internal situation of young people that need to be highly considered, we will show how the Cross of Christ can be the unique source of their strength leading them to the hope for a full life in him. We will also show the role of the Catechists in leading the young to this light of the Cross where they can find all the solution for their life.

⁴³ Cf TONELLI, *Per una pastorale giovanile al servizio della vita e della speranza*, 13-17 and 92-94; Cf VALLABARAJ, *Empowering the Young towards Fullness of Life*, 211-213.

⁴⁴ Cf E. ALBERICH, «Come annunciare e comunicare Gesù oggi. Indicazioni metodologiche», in U. MONTISCI (Ed.), *Gesù sorpresa di Dio. L’annuncio di Gesù Cristo, cuore della catechesi*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2005, 129-151; Cf VALLABARAJ, *Delving into the World of the Catechetical Education of Adults*, 261-282.

⁴⁵ *CT*, n. 39.

2.2.1.1. *Understanding the Internal Suffering of Young People*

In their catechetical apostolate towards the young, the Catechists are first of all called to know and understand the internal situation of young people and the root causes of many of their actions. As it is mentioned above, today, the greatest suffering of many young people consists in not being able to understand the sense of life or in not being able to realize their person in the desired way.⁴⁶ The adolescent is in a very delicate moment of development: has many potentialities but still does not have control over them, has many dreams but does not know which one to realize and how to realize, has many limits but is not fully aware and does not accept it, and does not know to which degree these limits could be overcome. An important dimension of development in the adolescent is primarily the research of oneself, then of other people and values. These researches are in no way easy, they are realized after so many failures, errors, dark moments, discouragements and many times among temptations of giving up.⁴⁷ The passage from adolescence to youth marks a transition to new identity. It is the age in which the most important need is that of having a substantial and positive perception of one self. When this need or question of identity is not satisfied, then comes a reaction – suffering, like an internal resentment – towards no one in particular, but against oneself, against the “I” which proved unworthy of receiving appreciation and praise from others, the “I” which is not good as it should be. It is really a great and bitter suffering when in this way the young people put away their hope and the positive perception of their person. But this is not all. Most of the time young people in this condition do not usually find a trustful person to listen to them closely, or do not know how to say it, and they keep everything in themselves, till they can. If they still remain deprived of companionship and help, the crisis and the suffering increases and becomes unsupportable or explodes in undesirable acts or violence.

⁴⁶ Cf USCC, «*To Teach as Jesus Did*», 111-112, nn. 127-128; Cf L. GALLO, «*Quale volto di Gesù proporre ai giovani di oggi?*», in BUZZETTI – CIMOSA, *I giovani e la lettura della Bibbia*, 95-96.

⁴⁷ Cf BARBETTA, *Rievangelizzare gli adolescenti*, 62.

And in this moment they are usually not understood by the adults who tend to criticize them for being aggressive or for errors which at this time the young has difficulty to control.⁴⁸

The root of the suffering of many adolescents and young people, which is usually unknown to others, arises from something which they feel to be missing; usually it arises from a wrong understanding which they have of themselves and can be seen at three levels. At a *somatic or bodily level*, there are many who suffer thinking they are not likable; they do not see their unique beauty as creatures of God; many feel that they are not much interesting in their external look and feel insignificant. At a *psychological level*, many do not know the potentialities they possess; feel that they are of lower quality; feel unsuccessful even when this happens just only one time; and think that all their identity as good persons rests in the external performance they do. At a *relational-sentimental level*, many do not have an emotional security, they search in others protection and gratification, the centre of their relationship is not unconditional love of the other but some interest; for many relationship is like a proof and measure of one’s identity as lovable and good person, that’s why when a relationship breaks, many young people suffer in an absolutely unsupportable way and react in a dramatic way. This third level by which many young people relate their identity is the most sensible one as a consequence of which many young people hurt themselves and others.⁴⁹

Therefore, the Catechists, understanding this existential situation of young people need to commit themselves to their safety and well-being without judging, condemning or suffocating them. They need to sustain the young with a merciful love and great patience, always respecting their feelings, thoughts and projects. They need to be like the good shepherd who gives his life for his sheep (*Jn 10:11*) and who goes in search of the lost sheep till he finds it (*Lk 15:4*). Only with this kind of loving dedication, can they help the young to go on safely despite the challenges, difficulties and failures encountered in life. Here, the quality of

⁴⁸ Cf A. CENCINI, *La croce verità della vita. Ricerca vocazionale ed esperienza della croce*, Milano, Paoline, 2002, 12-16.

⁴⁹ Cf *Ibid.*, 16-21; Cf MONTISCI, «*Giovani e catechesi*», 270.

Catechists is very important because only a right person can re-elaborate intelligently the problem of the young and can put them on the right way towards fulfillment.⁵⁰

2.2.1.2. *Proposing the Cross as the Truth of Life*

In the catechetical activity, the Catechists of the Union are invited to propose the Cross of Christ to young people as the source of reference, as the centre and general attraction towards which all their actions and being is to be directed. All human beings need to refer themselves to something; they aspire to find an ultimate reference, a centre which makes them feel stable. This centre is a dynamic concept, like the gravitational point which attracts every thing to itself, and rightly speaking, is the Cross of Christ. “And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all people to myself” (*Jn* 12:32). The Catechists need to motivate young people to choose the Cross as the centre of their being and this will make them get out from any other illusory centre which they tend to construct inside themselves and they will be persons with a centre outside themselves. At a more personal level, Catechists need to help the young to discover the Cross of Jesus as a moment of truth, because the Cross of Jesus more than any word or event expresses the truth of God as Savior and Lover, and the truth of man – saved and loved by God. It is this discovery which makes young people to be adult persons in the faith.⁵¹

Young people are always in search of love; in fact, love is the true and unique motivation of life; it is for love that human beings live. But this love is already given. The Cross of Jesus is the greatest expression of the greatest love – God’s love, and as such is the strongest expression of the mystery of life – the mystery of love. Only the Cross can liberate young men from every fear which surrounds life: the fear of being unworthy, the fear of being unloved, the fear of being unwanted, the fear of others, the fear to love, the excessive worry for oneself,

⁵⁰ Cf BARBETTA, *Rievangelizzare gli adolescenti*, 62-63; Cf R. REZZAGHI, «Catechisti dei giovani», in BISSOLI – GEVAERT, *La formazione dei catechisti*, 130-141.

⁵¹ Cf CENCINI, *La croce verità della vita*, 40-42; Cf GALLO, «Quale volto di Gesù proporre ai giovani di oggi?», 96-97.

the excessive fear of something which can hurt, the fear of suffering and death. In the perspective of the Cross there is the truth of the “I” which tends to be desperate.⁵²

From our analysis, it emerges that young people need to be told and need to understand the essence of life centered on the Cross of Jesus; and therefore, Catechists need to indicate for them the Cross of Jesus as an expression of the truth of their life, a truth which provokes liberty and which provokes a question of sense, end and direction of life. They need to indicate the Cross for the young as the proof showing to what degree they are worthy of love, as an expression of their greatness and dignity as human beings; as an expression of their true identity and of the nobility of their being, liberating every one of them from any illusion.⁵³

2.2.1.3. *Demonstrating the Triumphant Power of the Cross*

Besides the fundamental internal suffering that regards question of identity, young people also suffer from other causes: such as the experience of poverty, sickness, death and the consequences of injustice in the world. In front of all these, some young people are tempted to deny the presence of God or the goodness of God and tend to follow ways that separate them from God, from others and from themselves; while many others turn out to God with questions of why these things happen.⁵⁴ In these crucial situations of life, the Catechists are called to demonstrate the triumphant power of the Cross. They need to demonstrate to young people that suffering is a privileged way towards God, towards fullness of life, and encourage them to accept and to unite their suffering with that of Jesus. “In all truth I tell you, unless a wheat grain falls into the earth and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies it yields a rich harvest” (*Jn 12:24*). In the Son, who was delivered to death, the Father declared life over death. In dying Jesus was fighting for life; the love for life lead him to death, and in a life

⁵² Cf CENCINI, *La croce verità della vita*, 42-46.

⁵³ Cf *Ibid.*; Cf G. MOIOLI, *La parola della Croce*, Milano, Edizioni Viboldone, 1985, 52-54; Cf M. FARINA, «Tra amore alla vita e croce. Dalla prospettiva della teologia pastorale», in G. COFFELE – R. TONELLI (Eds.), *Verso una spiritualità laicale e giovanile*, Roma, Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1989, 215-230; Cf G. COFFELE, «Tra amore alla vita e croce. Dalla prospettiva della teologia dogmatica», in *Ibid.*, 193-214; Cf G. GATTI, «Tra amore alla vita e croce. Dalla prospettiva della teologia morale», in *Ibid.*, 231-234.

⁵⁴ Cf J. GEVAERT, *Male e sofferenza interrogano. Atteggiamenti cristiani di fronte alla sofferenza*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2000, 9-11; Cf BARBETTA, *Rievangelizzare gli adolescenti*, 84-85.

given for love till death, Jesus achieved victory over death.⁵⁵ In the same way, anyone who wants life has to give his life for others and courageously plant the cross at the centre of his life. Only the one who carries his love for life till the cross can construct a full and complete life for him and for others. This demands the courage for dying. Fullness of life paradoxically implies emptying one's life. It implies losing one's life as a supreme sign of one's concrete and historical commitment for life. In the Christian experience there is the exigency for mortification. One does not employ himself in a hard life because one prefers death to life or because one wants to anticipate his death. It is only because one wants to detach himself from the things which he will be definitely separated by death, i.e., putting death in front one wants to live as a winner and wants to love his life more intensely by possessing it fully. Therefore, the Cross is to be indicated for young people as the sign of an authentic love for life, the font of victory and joy, the way towards the abundance of life.⁵⁶

In addition, Catechists need to indicate for young people that the arms to overcome the forces of evil are those mentioned above. Jesus, the Son of God, has entered the human history consciously and has given the answer to questions which the human mind was not able to accept or to explain and has indicated the way on how to fight against evil and win over it – the way of obedience and love. The arms of Jesus to win evil were obedience to the Father, loving humanity and fighting till the end against every evil, and this he did in every moment of his life. To win the power of darkness, he did not use the divine power; instead, preferred to demonstrate the greatness of his love by offering himself to death on the Cross.⁵⁷

This testimony is necessary today for young people so that they can have a positive understanding of their lives no matter of the pains they have to endure; that they can choose to follow Christ unconditionally; and can fight against the force of darkness inside and outside themselves with trustful certainty of participating in the victory of Christ.⁵⁸ In this way, their suffering instead of destroying them in desperation or exploding in acts of violence will

⁵⁵ Cf R. TONELLI, «Le grandi dimensioni di un progetto di spiritualità per i giovani d'oggi», in COFFELE – TONELLI, *Verso una spiritualità*, 179-181; Cf GEVAERT, *Male e sofferenza interrogano*, 144-148.

⁵⁶ Cf TONELLI, *Per la vita e la speranza*, 192-194.

⁵⁷ Cf BARBETTA, *Rievangelizzare gli adolescenti*, 85-86; Cf MOIOLI, *La parola della Croce*, 51-64.

⁵⁸ Cf BARBETTA, *Rievangelizzare gli adolescenti*, 86-87.

turnout to be an extraordinary power transforming their lives and that of others, and they will be constructors of a better world. This is the objective of the groups of persons in the Union with the name *Crusade of Suffering*, who consciously offer their physical and moral suffering for the transformation of the world. The Catechists of the Union have a great responsibility towards such groups as they represent the real crusade against evil in our time.

Today there are also many young people with traumatizing experiences as a result of an incurable sickness, or death of a beloved person, or young people who have become victims of alcohol, drug, Aids, etc. Catechists have a great responsibility to manifest the preferential love of God for them with a most delicate care and prayerful counselling. They need to dedicate themselves to help these young people fight against worry and to acquire an inner peace by generating hope in them. By a relationship of love and trust, they can encourage them to empty their worries, to avoid negative and destructive thoughts and to feel relieved. Catechists need to pray together with them regularly so that they may feel the closeness of God who is the source of an absolute peace. They need to assure them of the seriousness of the Christian hope in Christ who has won over every form of evil including death.⁵⁹

2.2.2. *Choosing Suitable Catechetical Forms and Structures*

We have been trying to show that the apostolate of the Catechists needs to correspond to the concrete experience of young people and has to be finalized in helping them live life to the full and to hope. This is why, in the elaboration of a catechetical itinerary, the Catechists need to give special attention to the relevance of the message and to the mode of communication so that the message can really be received by the persons to give sense to their life. Here, we will analyze two catechetical forms or approaches: narrative catechesis⁶⁰ and ‘symbolic

⁵⁹ Cf C. RUZINDAZA, *Living Positively with Aids*, Nairobi, Paulines, 2001, 45-58.

⁶⁰ Narrative catechesis is greatly forwarded by Riccardo Tonelli, SDB, emeritus professor of Youth Ministry at the Pontifical Salesian University, Rome. He has been Coordinator of the Department of Youth Ministry and Catechetics and Director of the periodical ‘Note di pastorale giovanile’. He has offered an immense contribution in the educational and pastoral studies that regard young people.

catechesis’,⁶¹ indicating them for the Catechists of the Union for their catechetical activity with young people. In addition, we will give a special focus to the importance of the catechumenal institution within the context of the Union.

2.2.2.1. *Catechizing by Narrating*

In catechizing young people, the Catechists of the Union are invited to make use of the narrative form which consists in narrating stories which interconnect the story of Jesus, the story of faith and of the life of the Church, the story of their own experience in life and that of the young people to whom the narration is offered. These three stories different in intensity and in significance are united because the authenticity and the truth of each element demands the other elements to enter into a reciprocal relationship.⁶² The Catechists need to narrate the texts of ecclesial faith – the Scriptures, the documents of the life of the Church, the story of great believers, the actual life of the ecclesial community including all the fundamental problems of daily life – as persons who are profoundly immersed in it, i.e., as persons who have made a concrete experience of it.⁶³

By narrating the Catechists create a mode of communication that favors a special form of interpersonal interaction. In narration the mode of communication is more welcoming and the content transmitted penetrates into the internal world of the young and gives sense to their existence. This form of catechesis enables the Catechists to communicate truth and its most demanding implications in a way which is not hard or authoritative. By narrating the catechists invite the young to enter into their life-experience and they also become available to integrate themselves with the life-experience of the young people; they welcome the young and let themselves be welcomed by the young. For this, the Catechists need to love and to be

⁶¹ Symbolic catechesis is one of the most important insights that emerged from the historical and theological renewal of catechesis through the catechetical movements in the twentieth century and is mostly practiced in the United States.

⁶² Cf R. TONELLI, «L’evangelizzazione e il suo linguaggio», in ISTITUTO DI TEOLOGIA PASTORALE UPS, *Pastorale giovanile*, 212-213.

⁶³ Cf *Ibid.*, 213; Cf GALLO, «Quale volto di Gesù proporre ai giovani di oggi?», 90.

convinced of the reality which they narrate and make others love it. In this way, narration becomes an invitation to a personal and courageous decision.⁶⁴

In addition, narration enables the Catechists to create a climate of wonder and hope which is a fundamental condition to accept an invitation, to put in discussion one’s internal world and to look out to the world of the other who is usually unknown. This is what was happening in the road to Emmaus when Jesus was narrating the scriptures to the two disciples: the present becomes filled with the past, bringing the memory of what had been lived and was forgotten; the present becomes also filled with a view for the future not yet experienced but which assumes the warm experiential tone of the present narration. The view towards the future becomes full of hope because narration demonstrates how that which will happen in the future becomes the reason of what is being lived or experienced now.⁶⁵ Therefore, narration of the stories of life has the purpose of helping others especially those who are found in dramatic problems, in crisis of sense of life and in suffering, to live life to the full with an internal peace. Helping others to live life to the full, despite all the injustice, sufferings and difficulties means helping others to find the reason to hope and to live with that motive; it means restoring hope to those who are getting desperate especially the young.⁶⁶

Narrating is witnessing and by narrating the Catechists become witnesses. By narrating, the Catechists donate that story by which they themselves have already been saved so many times and it becomes a total communication that guarantees the other to do a new experience. Sincerity is an important condition in narration and the Catechists as persons who want to serve life and consolidate hope should not reduce their proposal to fragments of their own life. No one can give a full life to himself or to others. Suffering, insecurity and death continuously threat every claim for auto-sufficiency. Catechists need to indicate and offer a higher and more secure reference – the Lord, in which all can have secure hope and full life. The Catechists as

⁶⁴ Cf R. TONELLI, *La narrazione nella catechesi e nella pastorale giovanile*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2002, 113-116; Cf UCN, *Formazione dei catechisti per l’iniziazione cristiana*, nn. 28-30.

⁶⁵ Cf TONELLI, *La narrazione nella catechesi*, 116-117; Cf M. POLLO – R. TONELLI, *È possibile educare narrando?*, in “Note di Pastorale Giovanile” 31 (1997) 6, 20-30.

⁶⁶ Cf R. TONELLI, *Per una pastorale giovanile al servizio della vita e della speranza. Educazione alla fede e animazione*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2002, 13-17 and 92-94.

narrators are only instruments. The centre of every narration and the unique protagonist is Jesus, crucified and risen, the unique font of the vital force contained in the narration.⁶⁷

It is true that narration necessarily involves personal way of expression because what is narrated derives from what is personally experienced. However, there should not be any imposition or any form of persuasion. The language of narration is in itself evocative and can penetrate deep into the existence of the other person. Therefore, in narrating the Catechists need to avoid explanations, interpretations, and comments. The narration should speak by itself and the young persons should be left free to find themselves alone with the hidden protagonist, Jesus, in front of the problems which are uniquely theirs.⁶⁸

2.2.2.2. *Using ‘Symbolic Catechesis’*

The Catechists of the Union are also invited to use ‘symbolic catechesis’ for catechizing young people. It is a form of catechesis which consists in correlating the symbols of human events and experiences, the signs of the times, with the symbols of faith – the Bible and the life of the Church – in order to help young people interpret life by means of faith symbols and also to understand faith by means of life symbols.⁶⁹ By this form of catechesis, the Catechists can help young people to integrate life and faith symbols in a harmonious, dialogical, critical, and thought-provoking way. They can stimulate young people “in a searching for truth and identity, not abstract truth but the truth of Christian life; not abstract identity but, concretely, identity as a Christian in this world today. And the search focuses not only on the question Who am I? but on Who are we as a Christian community?”⁷⁰

According to this approach, the Catechists are invited to start from concrete experiences of the life events of the community and develop the itinerary in four moments or actions: reflecting on a common human experience; interpreting the experience through a faith symbol;

⁶⁷ Cf TONELLI, *La narrazione nella catechesi*, 118-119; Cf ID., «L’evangelizzazione e il suo linguaggio», 213; Cf J. C. REICHERT, «Servire l’esperienza della Rivelazione: dall’istruzione all’iniziazione», in DERROITTE, *Catechesi e iniziazione cristiana*, 123-126.

⁶⁸ Cf TONELLI, *La narrazione nella catechesi*, 118-119.

⁶⁹ Cf MONGOVEN, *The Prophetic Spirit of Catechesis*, 117.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

moving outward from the experience to acts of justice; praying together about the shared experience. In this form of catechesis, the process itself is the content of catechesis, i.e., the process is in itself a living out of the Christian faith. The faith commitment of young people is strengthened by way of deepening relationships among them; by broadening their insights and understandings regarding the teachings of the Church; by the experience of doing justice as integral to daily life; and worshiping with the entire community of believers and living out the elements of Christian life together.⁷¹

This form of catechesis focuses on the community as the body of Christ, as well as on the individuals as organic members of the body. It emphasizes much on the unity of this body, as one people, in its commitment and vision of all reality. Through this approach, the Catechists help young people to be active protagonists in the building of community. Building community means building relationships among them, but it also means building relationships between the catechetical community and the parish, between the catechetical community and the world. Today the individual is exalted more than the community and this is giving rise to increasing insensibility towards others within the human community. The building up of relationships within the catechetical community of common faith and common values relates both the individuals and the community to other communities or other Christian Churches. As such ‘symbolic catechesis’ has also an ecumenical value in the sense that it tries to foster unity with other Christian Churches. Young people are educated to foster reverence for these Churches as well as for other religious confessions, helping them examine and understand where the difference is and how much there is in common.⁷²

In addition, this form of catechesis makes authentic efforts for human promotion. Education to justice and peace is given a major concern, and young people are motivated to act on behalf of these values. They are educated as to what structures of society bring about injustice and how they can contribute to change those structures. Young people are educated to be intelligent observers of all that surrounds them so as not to be slaves of the reality around

⁷¹ Cf *Ibid.*, 118-121 and 139-141.

⁷² Cf *Ibid.*, 141-143; Cf USCC, «*To Teach as Jesus Did*», 90-91, nn. 21-26.

them and are educated to an increasing knowledge of their life and of the culture which surrounds them so as to make good use of their liberty.⁷³

2.2.2.3. *Taking Initiatives for the Restoration of the Catechumenate*

Within the pastoral program of their local Church, the Catechists of the Union are also called to inspire a choice for the catechumenate, and with the collaboration of the local Church authority, they are invited to take initiatives for the institution of the catechumenal project.⁷⁴ Today at the pastoral level, the traditional catechetical practice has proved to be insufficient as a result of the emerging situations and new pastoral demands, particularly in regard to the diversity of the subjects and their needs: there are non-baptized children and adolescents who ask baptism in the scholastic years; or persons who are already baptized but who did not receive further catechesis and the other sacraments of initiation; or adult Christians who are baptized and have received the other sacraments of initiation but who want to re-discover the significance of faith and ecclesial belonging. At the theological level, there is a need of implementing the Conciliar and post-conciliar reflections, i.e., there is a need of rethinking the catechetical practice especially in function of the renewed model of the Christian, of the community, and of the Church. The importance of the catechumenate is also felt today at the socio-cultural level, particularly in reference to the actual situations of the world that include secularization, which calls the Christians of today to purify and deepen the roots of their Christian identity, and pluralism which puts the Christian vision of life in a competitive situation where no choice can be deduced unless it is justified and consciously matured. It is in this context that today the Catechists of the Union are called to implement the catechumenal project in their local Church.⁷⁵

⁷³ Cf MONGOVEN, *The Prophetic Spirit of Catechesis*, 130-134.

⁷⁴ Cf GDC, nn. 59 and 90-91; Cf *Messaggio del Sinodo sulla catechesi*, n. 8.

⁷⁵ Cf ALBERICH, «*Catecumenato moderno*», 137-138; Cf FLORISTÁN, «*Restaurazione del catecumenato in Europa nel nostro secolo*», 197-221; Cf AMALORPAVADASS, «*Ripristino e rinnovamento del catechumenato in Europa*», 59-69; Cf LAURENTIN – DUJARIER, *Il catecumenato: fonti neotestamentarie e patristiche*, 257-392.

The catechumenate as a period of basic formation to Christian life which is realized with great seriousness and commitment has a very far reaching outcome. Through the catechumenal project the Catechists can bring about a profound transformation in the lives of young people and in the pastoral field of the local Church in general. The presence of the catechumenate, above all, represents a return to the origins; and therefore, the valorisation of a historical lesson which brings for the Church of today the traditional values of the ancient Church.⁷⁶ Like in the practice of the ancient Church:

- the seriousness of the Christian choice, which has to be done with responsibility and commitment, is to be scrutinized by the Church authority with the required rigour;
- the process of interiorization of faith and of the Christian life, i.e., the structure of the catechumenate in regard to the stages, the rituals of passage, the progressiveness, is to be given the necessary duration of time;
- in the process of Christian initiation, the attitudes of faith, much more than the sacramental celebrations, are to be given central value; evangelization, conversion and growth in faith are to be the true focal points so that the Christian initiation comes to be polarized by the proclamation of the mystery of Christ and the exercise of his ways;
- the period of basic formation to Christian life is to be realized through a global experience that includes and integrates the knowledge of the mystery of Christ, the celebration of faith, the communitarian experience, and the exercise of Christian commitment in the world;
- finally, in as much as the catechumenal itinerary starts from community and leads towards the community it is to involve all the community in its practice – it is to involve different ministers in the community namely bishops, priests, deacons, catechists, god-parents, etc.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Cf ALBERICH, «*Catecumenato moderno*», 138.

⁷⁷ Cf *Ibid.*; Cf RCIA, nn. 10-16; Cf E. ALBERICH, «*La catechesi di iniziazione oggi: il catecumenato*», in ISTITUTO DI CATECHETICA UPS, *Andate e insegnate*, 244-246; Cf R. PAGANELLI, «*Catecumenato. Una scelta qualificante*», in ID., *Diventare Cristiani*, 55; Cf SARTORE, «*Attualità della Catechesi patristica per la Chiesa di oggi*», 24-27; Cf G. GROppo, *Itinerario di maturazione nella fede a dimensione catecumenale*, in “*Catechesi*” 43 (1974) 7, 41-48.

Therefore, through the catechumenal action, the Catechists will be able to realize in their catechetical service a passage from an infantile initiation into an initiation which gives privilege to young people and adults; from a catechesis which is prevalently doctrinal to a global and experiential catechesis centred in faith and in the totality of Christian experience; from a catechesis centred on the sacraments to a catechesis centred on growth in the faith; from an individualistic mentality to an ecclesial perspective in as much as every catechumenal itinerary involves and mobilizes the Church community.⁷⁸

2.2.3. *Planning an Effective Catechetical Action*

For a fruitful and holistic catechetical action, the Catechists need also make a careful planning. Though there can be variations and particular specifications, there are some essential moments that they need to consider in the process. In addition, in this process of catechetical planning, the Catechists are invited to work in group with other persons who are qualified and experienced in different fields relevant to the pastoral activity. The participation of young people to whom the catechetical service is directed is also very important.

2.2.3.1. *Working Together with Other Pastoral Workers*

In the process of catechetical planning, the Catechists of the Union need to have the mentality of collaboration and of working together in equip with other pastoral workers. First of all, the entire catechetical project needs to be considered within the pastoral project of the local Church, and it is to be coordinated within the entire pastoral planning of that particular Church. The Second Vatican Council clearly states that “all the undertakings and organizations, whether their object be catechetical, missionary, charitable, social, family, educational, or any other pastoral end, will act together in harmony.”⁷⁹ Therefore, the Catechists need to work together with other pastoral workers, particularly the liturgical

⁷⁸ Cf ALBERICH, «*Catecumenato moderno*», 138; Cf FONTANA, *Il mondo è cambiato: cambiamo la pastorale*, 62-65; Cf GDC, nn. 219-220.

⁷⁹ CD, n. 17; Cf GDC, nn. 219-220.

animators, animators of charity, other catechists or ministers of the Word, feeling part of a unique community at the service of the Reign of God. This also testifies their complementary relationship and insertion in the four evangelizing signs namely *kerygma*, *diakonia*, *koinonia* and *leitourgia*.⁸⁰

In addition, in the process of catechetical programming, the participation of young people to whom the catechetical action is addressed is indispensable. In fact, the Catechists have to elaborate the catechetical project starting from the very insights of the young people themselves. The “immediate contact with the young often gives those engaged in youth work a deep insight into the needs and concerns of youth.”⁸¹ Only in this way they will be able to help young people “to take part in the Church’s mission in the world in ways appropriate to their age and responsive to their interests [...] and to interpret young people, their problems and their concerns to the Christian and general communities.”⁸² Therefore, the Catechists need to welcome young people as co-workers. The educative attention given to the young is shown in such an attitude of research done together with them and in giving them trust.⁸³

2.2.3.2. *Following the Correct Itinerary of Catechetical Planning*

Catechetical planning has fundamental moments that have to be realized effectively. According to Mario Midali, the methodological itinerary needs to integrate three phases which are not separated from one another but are strictly correlated. These are: the *kairological phase*, the *projectual phase* and the *strategic phase*.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 263; Cf G. BARBON – R. PAGANELLI, *Cammino per la formazione dei catechisti*, Bologna, Dehoniane, 1992, 138-140; Cf *Guide for Catechists*, n. 26.

⁸¹ USCC, «*To Teach as Jesus Did*», 113, n. 135.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 112, n. 131.

⁸³ Cf *Ibid.*, 112-113, nn. 130-136; Cf MONTISCI, *Dimensioni della formazione: saper fare*, 39; Cf BIEMMI, *Compagni di viaggio*, 310.

⁸⁴ Cf MIDALI, *Practical Theology*, 325.

1) *The Kairological Phase*

Catechists have, first of all, to make an evaluating analysis of the existing catechetical praxis, if there is any, and also of the context in order to make evident the practical imperatives which can be identified through an empirical analysis of the social, cultural, religious and ecclesial reality. This phase includes the *phenomenological or descriptive moment*, the *hermeneutic or interpretative moment*, the *criteriological moment* and the *kairological normative moment*:

The *phenomenological or descriptive moment* consists of the phenomenological analysis or description of the particular situation or praxis. The Catechists have to make a careful observation of the situation of departure which includes knowledge of the existing catechetical action and knowledge of the context in which the new activity is going to be developed, i.e., knowledge of the religious, social, cultural, political and economic environment and of the concrete situation of the persons concerned including their demands, problems and expectations. They also need to make use of data from the past in order to see if the situation in question depends on that. It is to be noted that the study of the general context, later contributes to the preparation of a significant, realizable, inculturated and dialogical catechetical project.

The *hermeneutic or interpretative moment* consists of the critical stance which aims at facing the given situation or praxis as a problem to be studied, to be interpreted and to be critically evaluated. The Catechists need to make a careful analysis in the search for the causes and meanings, and for the identification and interpretation of the fundamental question. This helps them to arrive at a more enlightened awareness or consciousness of the situation which will bring about a clarification or a possible change of the question involved. It is important to make this critical evaluation because it not possible to deduce directly the operational indications only from the knowledge of the situation without any prior interpretation and critical evaluation of the various elements of the situation, such as the existing catechetical action, the environment, the persons, the institutions, etc.

The *criteriological moment* is a determinant moment by which the phenomenological description and the critical interpretation of the given situation are carried out on the basis of rational and theological criteria. It is carried out by making use of means that come from human sciences and from faith as reference framework or scale of value.

The *kairological and normative moment* consists of a process of discernment in order to perceive signs of the presence of salvation or non-salvation in the present historical, religious, social and ecclesial reality. The objective of the discernment process is to find out the values of the past which could be kept or reactivated, to specify the new values which could be assumed, to distinguish which aspects of the actual praxis should be abandoned, kept or reformed and to identify and clarify the problems to be solved. This phase entails making practical choices, inspired by faith and directed to concrete situations.⁸⁵

2) *The Projectual Phase*

This phase consists of the projection of the desired praxis starting from here and now looking ahead at the goals to be reached in a long period of time. Using adequate resources and methods, the Catechists elaborate a coherent and realistic project: they point out the general and particular objectives to be achieved, they make a choice of a global catechetical model, determine the contents and the operational process. In short, the Catechists prepare the framework and substance out of which the catechetical action will evolve. This phase consists of the *subjective critical element*, the *normative kairological moment*, the *criteriological moment*:

The *subjective critical element* is a starting point where the actual situation or praxis is perceived and evaluated as unsatisfactory and in need of improvement. For identifying or diagnosing such a situation the empirical cycle can be used.

⁸⁵ Cf *Ibid.*, 327-334; Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 271-273; Cf G. RUTA, *Progettare la pastorale giovanile oggi*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 2002, 35-79; Cf ID., *Programmare la catechesi. Teoria e pratica per animatori e catechisti*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 1996, 49-89; Cf BARBON – PAGANELLI, *Cammino per la formazione dei catechisti*, 155-172; Cf VALLABARAJ, *Empowering the Young towards Fullness of Life*, 197-205.

The *normative kairological moment*. In this moment the Catechists identify the objectives and the long ranged goals to be reached for a renewed or re-oriented praxis. They need to make a prophetic discernment for foreseeable possible changes in the future and discern how the Christian community can face these changes. It is a faith discernment of the signs of God in the present situation integrated with the prophetic discernment of the desirable future which comes from God.

The *criteriological moment* of the second phase is a projectual criteriology. In this moment the Catechists implement the task of identification of goals by making use of rational and theological criteria. Even in this phase the criteriological moment is determinant to comprehend the normative moment.⁸⁶

3) *The Strategic Phase*

In this phase the Catechists make a programmed description of how to crossover from the given situation or praxis to the new one, i.e., they program the concrete actualization of the project and its verification. This does not simply indicate the description of practical tactics or operative techniques but involves a complex of elements necessary to guarantee the possibility of a crossover from the current praxis to the one projected. It requires a very much committed reflection inspired by the values of the Gospel so that the passage towards the attainment of the programmed goals can be efficacious. This phase is carried out by using pastoral planning program. It consists of the *descriptive and critical moment*, the *normative and kairological moment*, and the *criteriological moment*:

The *descriptive and critical moment* critically takes under consideration the various pastoral ministers concerned on different levels in reaching the established goals, the recipients or praxis beneficiaries, the implementation ways, the implementation times, the resources needed to reach the goal, the experimentation, the verification and rectification, and

⁸⁶ Cf MIDALI, *Practical Theology*, 335-340.

personalization of the programmed strategy in the sense that it must be known and owned by all who are involved in the praxis.

The *normative and kairological moment* consists of a prophetic discernment of the operative type capable of discovering the possibilities of salvation in the pathway which leads from the present situation to the future projected in the second phase. In this moment the Catechists define and render operative the strategy in accordance to the necessary imperatives, behavior patterns, rules and evangelical values.

The *criteriological moment* consists of a strategic criteriology which is different from the criteriology used in the kairological and projectual phase. It makes use of rational and faith criteria but is developed not in view of pastoral judgment of the current situation or praxis nor in view of establishing the long ranged goals but in view of a planning program towards a future at hand, i.e., in view of the goals to be reached in a short time. The principles developed in this moment are not to be quickly reduced to general principles but should be re-formulated on the basis of the experience done and in reference to the ecclesial strategy.⁸⁷

Therefore, for obtaining good results, a catechetical planning has to implement a correct methodological itinerary. It might look difficult but respecting such an itinerary is indispensable for the effectiveness of a catechetical action carried out in function of concrete persons and determined contexts. Each of the above indicated phases has a basic importance in catechetical planning and cannot be undervalued. However, this does not mean that a catechetical planning has to follow these phases point by point in every case. This itinerary is meant to provide a leading logic that is open to different forms of application.

2.2.3.3. *Evaluating the Catechetical Action in Respect to the Ecclesial Dimensions*

As we have demonstrated in chapter seven by means of the biblical models, the final aim of any catechetical action is making true disciples or witnesses who being transformed

⁸⁷ Cf *Ibid.*, 340-346; Cf M. MIDALI, «*Progettazione Pastorale*», in M. MIDALI – R. TONELLI (Eds.), *Dizionario di Pastorale Giovanile*, Leumann (TO), Elledici, 1989, 895-902.

themselves would commit themselves fully to the service of the Church and the transformation of the world.⁸⁸ As *Evangelii Nuntiandi* states: “Finally, the person who has been evangelized goes on to evangelize others. Here lies the test of truth, the touchstone of evangelization: it is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn.”⁸⁹ Therefore, this fact is the criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of a catechetical action and can be seen in accordance to the general outline of the ecclesial functions of *kerygma*, *diakonia*, *koinonia*, *leitourgia*:

- *Kerygma*: a good catechetical action initiates young people in announcing the Word of God. It enables them to participate in the prophetic function, in the apostolic and missionary tasks of the Church. It enables them to have a good orientation in view of vocational and ministerial options; it enables them to mature and realize their own mission in the Church and in the world.
- *Diakonia*: a good catechetical action leads young people to the exercise of charity and service such as commitment to social and political values, commitment for justice and peace, solidarity with the poor, etc.
- *Koinonia*: a good catechetical action promotes fraternity, collaboration, capacity to communicate and to dialogue. It favours just obedience and mature attitude towards ecclesial authority. It promotes ecumenical sensitivity.
- *Leitourgia*: a good catechetical action initiates young people into the mystery of Christian celebration. It promotes conscious and active participation in the liturgy. It promotes prayer and meditations as fundamental moments in the life of faith.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Cf BENEDICT XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n. 64; Cf REICHERT, *Renewing Catechetical Ministry*, 45-63; Cf VALLABARAJ, *Delving into the World of the Catechetical Education of Adults*, 120-126; Cf DUJARIER, «Devenir disciple du Christ. Catéchuménat et “Discipulat”», 521-537.

⁸⁹ EN, n. 24.

⁹⁰ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 146-147; Cf BIEMMI, *Compagni di viaggio*, 306-313.

3. Towards a Renewal of the Social Dimension of the Apostolate

As members of a Secular Institute who are called to live their consecration and apostolate in the world among other lay people, the members of the Union are also called to intensify the social dimension of their apostolate.⁹¹ Within the ecclesial project, they are called to be at the service of all people, and as such their service needs to go beyond the intra-ecclesial sphere. They need to play a great role in the transformation of the situation of the people of the society in which they live. As it will be indicated below, they can offer their contribution in the renewal of their society by living their prophetic function in a special way responsive to the actual situation of the world. Commitment to the transformation of the society might also require them to enter more deeply into the political activity of the society. In fact, if faith has to transform a certain political and social situation, it has to penetrate into it and the Catechists, as lay people, are called to be main protagonists for the insertion of Christian faith in politics and social life, first of all, as educators in faith in view of individual persons and their culture, and if possible, according to their talent and inclination, by taking an active role in the political leadership of the society as a form of a particular service (*diakonia*). We will develop this section on the basis of what has been shown in the second chapter in regard to the

⁹¹ In common with all lay members of the Church – but far more by reason of their special consecration – the members of the Union “have as their own vocation to seek the Kingdom of God by illuminating and ordering temporal affairs according to the plan of God” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church. Compendium*, Nairobi, Paulines, 2006, n. 188; Cf CCC, nn. 897-900 and 940). They are called to live their vocation to holiness in the world – a call given to all baptized – by participating in the *priestly, prophetic and kingly* office of Christ (which correspond to the four ecclesial functions: *leitourgia, kerygma, koinonia, and diakonia*). Today, the Catechists are called to participate in the *priestly office* of Christ by offering as a sacrifice, particularly in the Eucharist, “their own lives with all of their works, their prayers, their apostolic undertakings, their family life, their daily work and hardships borne with patience and even their consolations of spirit and body. In this way, [...] offer to God the world itself” (CCC *Compendium*, n. 189; Cf CCC, nn. 901-903 and 941). They offer their *prophetic function* in the world by adhering in faith to the Word of God and proclaiming it to the world by witness of their lives and their words. Their act of evangelization and catechesis has “a particular efficacy because it is accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world” (CCC *Compendium*, n. 190; Cf CCC, nn. 904-907 and 942; Cf GS, n. 43). Again as all lay faithful, the Catechists are called to participate in the *kingly function* of Christ by the power which they have received from him to overcome sin in themselves and in the world and by exercising various ministries at the service of the society and by diffusing moral values in the temporal activities and institutions of the society. In the universal fulfilment of the kingly function, the Catechists have an important place, in the sense that with their competence and activity in the temporal sphere, elevated by the grace of God, they can contribute efficiently, to the welfare of all men, in the just distribution and use of the common good and be at the service of the universal human development (Cf CCC *Compendium*, n. 191; Cf CCC, nn. 908-913 and 943; Cf LG, n. 36).

apostolate of Secular Institutes as well as in reference to the contextual nature of catechesis which is shown in the sixth chapter.

3.1. *Living the Prophetic Mission to the Full in the Society*

Today the Catechists of the Union are called to live their prophetic mission in the society in a fuller way. Through the prophetic role, they are called to provide stimulus for the continuous self-purification and renewal of their society. Like the prophets, they are called to speak out for the edification, exhortation and consolation of all people in the name of God; to be instruments of the extraordinary grace by which God reveals his plan for all people, reveals his infallible love and mercy, as well as acknowledges their sins and calls for repentance and conversion. The Catechists need to strive to make the light of the Word of God reach and penetrate in every action and thought of man in the society. However, the word which they communicate will have power only if it generates from God himself: “For, as the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not return before having watered the earth, fertilising it and making it germinate to provide seed for the sower and food to eat, so it is with the word that goes from my mouth: it will not return to me unfulfilled or before having carrying out my good pleasure and having achieved what it was sent to do.”⁹² Here, we will attempt to indicate some of the prophetic roles which the Catechists are called to realize in the world society of today.

3.1.1. *Catechists as Critical Observers of the ‘Signs of the Times’*

The first task of the Catechists is to discover the signs of the times. Discovering the signs of the times means being attentive to the actual situation and way of life of the people and then giving significance to it in view of transformation.⁹³ It means being aware of the ‘spirit’ of a precise period of time, i.e., of the happenings, interrogatives, needs, aspirations, expectations

⁹² Is 55: 10-11; Cf B. YACUM, *La profezia*, Milano, Editrice Ancora, 1980, 8-18; Cf E. BIANCHI, «*Quale profezia la vita religiosa offre al nostro tempo?*», in J. M. ALDAY (Ed.), *I religiosi sono ancora profeti?*, Milano, Ancora, 2008, 12-13; Cf GATTI, *Il ministero del catechista*, 29-32.

⁹³ Cf GS, n. 4.

of the men of the time. It signifies discovering the basic forces orientating a specific historical moment. However, this does not imply that all changes or phenomena of a precise historical moment are signs of times; signs of times are only those movements or events in which the proper sensibility of the time and the system of values towards which the period is being orientated are revealed.⁹⁴

This prophetic discernment requires of the Catechists interior liberty, pure heart, honest and clear mind, a life penetrated by the Gospel and by the Spirit of God. Usually a prophet can see and sense things which other people can not normally see or sense. This sensation is not fruit of laborious study or perspicacious intuition but is generated from the revelation of the Holy Spirit who removes from the mind and heart the veil which blinds and blocks men from seeing the reality in the eyes of God.⁹⁵ The Catechists are called to observe the society in which they live prayerfully and reflectively. They need to look at the signs of the times in daily life, both personal and social, and turn to the symbols of faith for interpretation: “For faith throws a new light on all things and makes known the full ideal which God has set for man, thus guiding the mind towards solutions that are fully human.”⁹⁶ The Catechists need to look and distinguish signs of grace from signs of evil, signs of God’s presence from signs of God’s absence, and then evoke a consciousness among the people in order to bring an alternative. They need to help the people see whether the values and meanings of the dominant situation of life are worthy of respect or that they are a bondage enslaving them.⁹⁷

In this important prophetic mission, the Catechists are called to be “humble yet daring bearers of the transforming power of God’s kingdom.”⁹⁸ Today, the “world appears particularly sensitive to the witness of those who can courageously assume *the risk and responsibility of discerning the times* and of the plan for building a new and more just humanity.”⁹⁹ As *Evangelii Nuntiandi* states:

⁹⁴ Cf M. MIDALI, «*Segni dei tempi*», in MIDALI – TONELLI, *Dizionario di Pastorale Giovanile*, 977-978.

⁹⁵ Cf YACUM, *La profezia*, 14-15.

⁹⁶ GS, n. 11.

⁹⁷ Cf MONGOVEN, *The Prophetic Spirit of Catechesis*, 159 and 276-278.

⁹⁸ JOHN PAUL II, «*Bearing Witness to Christ in Secular Life*», 74, n. 5.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 75, n. 6.

Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine. Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one.¹⁰⁰

Therefore, the Catechists of the Union, through word and witness of their lives are called to move the heart and mind of people so as to lead them to the transforming power of God.¹⁰¹ The “catechist whose voice emerges from a strong and compelling faith commitment has power, given by the Holy One through the Spirit, to move people to repentance and conversion.”¹⁰²

3.1.2. *Catechists as Concrete Signs of God’s Presence among His People*

In this particular time, in a situation where it is becoming very difficult for many to sense the presence of God, the Catechists are called to be visible signs of his presence. As Pope John Paul II stated: “Our time is one of great cultural and social upheaval. Thus it seems ever more apparent that the Christian mission in the world cannot be reduced to giving a pure, simple example of honesty, competence and fidelity to duty. All this is presupposed. It is a question of putting on the mind of Jesus Christ in order to be signs of his love in the world.”¹⁰³ The Catechists, in their concrete lives need to manifest to others the closeness of God, unconditionally loving and sustaining each one of them in every moment of their existence.

“The world which, paradoxically, despite innumerable signs of the denial of God, is nevertheless searching for Him in unexpected ways and painfully experiencing the need of Him – the world is calling for evangelizers to speak to it of a God whom the evangelists

¹⁰⁰ EN, n. 21.

¹⁰¹ Cf MONGOVEN, *The Prophetic Spirit of Catechesis*, 276.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ JOHN PAUL II, «*Bearing Witness to Christ in Secular Life*», 75, n. 6; Cf BIANCHI, «*Quale profezia la vita religiosa offre al nostro tempo?*», 13-14.

themselves should know and be familiar with as if they could see the invisible.”¹⁰⁴ Therefore, the Catechists are called to reflect Christ’s deep concern, tenderness, compassion openness, availability and interest in people’s problems and to be ‘universal brothers’ of all people, especially of the least and the poorest, offering themselves for others as an expression of Christ’s love. They also need to manifest to others the Church’s spirit, her openness to and interest in all peoples and individuals.¹⁰⁵ The Catechists are called to be:

the sign of a Church which is the friend of men and can offer them comfort in every kind of affliction, ready to support all true progress in human life but at the same time intransigent towards every choice of death, violence, deceit and injustice. For Christians they are also a sign and a reminder of their duty, on God’s behalf, to care for a creation which remains the object of its Creator’s love and satisfaction, although marked by the contradictions of rebellion and sin and in need of being freed from corruption and death.¹⁰⁶

3.1.3. *Catechists as Advocators for Justice*

For the prophets, “justice was not a duty imposed by religion; *it was religion*, and they challenged everyone to justice. This is an essential component of catechesis.”¹⁰⁷ Today, the Catechists of the Union are called to be advocators for justice to human rights as an essential part of their mission. Every person has rights and duties simultaneously deriving from his very nature. At the socio-political and religious-cultural level, every person has the right of respect for his person; the right to freedom within the limits of the moral order and the common good; the right to practice his religion privately and publicly; the right to be informed truthfully about public events; the right to take an active part in public affairs and to contribute one’s part to the common good of the citizens. The dignity of man also requires that an individual enjoys the right to act freely and responsibly, without being pressured by an external force of

¹⁰⁴ EN, n. 76.

¹⁰⁵ Cf RM, n. 89.

¹⁰⁶ JOHN PAUL II, «*Bearing Witness to Christ in Secular Life*», 74, n. 5.

¹⁰⁷ MONGOVEN, *The Prophetic Spirit of Catechesis*, 280.

authority.¹⁰⁸ “For any human society that is established on relations of force must be regarded as inhuman, inasmuch as the personality of its members is repressed or restricted, when in fact they should be provided with appropriate incentives and means for developing and perfecting themselves.”¹⁰⁹

The Catechists are invited to offer their contribution in the task of establishing justice particularly in the field of human relations.¹¹⁰ They are called:

to establish with truth, justice, charity, and liberty new method of relationships in human society: the relations among individual citizens, among citizens and their own countries, among nations themselves, among individuals, families, intermediate associations and individual states on the one hand, and with the community of all mankind on the other. This is the most exalted task, for it is the task of bringing about true peace in the order established by God.¹¹¹

Today there is also a great crisis in the relationship between man and the environment and the Catechists are called to offer the right education in this aspect. The underlying cause of the problems in regard to man and the environment “can be seen in man’s pretension of exercising unconditional dominion over things, heedless of any moral considerations which, on the contrary, must distinguish all human activity.”¹¹² Catechists are called to foster a correct vision of man and of things in reference to the transcendent reality because “there can be neither justice nor peace in the world, so long as men fail to realize how great is their dignity; for they are created by God [...] who must be regarded as the first and final cause of all things he has created.”¹¹³ It is the duty of the Catechists to recall man of the principle from which nature sprung and its purpose, and that it could attain its aim and perfection only by directing

¹⁰⁸ Cf JOHN XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*. Encyclical Letter on Peace on Earth, 11 April 1963, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 55 (1963) 257-304, nn. 9, 12, 34.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, n. 34.

¹¹⁰ Cf SECRETARIAT FOR UNBELIEVERS, *Humanae Personae Dignitatem*. On Dialogue with Unbelievers, 28 August 1968, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 60 (1968) 692-704.

¹¹¹ *PT*, n. 163; Cf BENEDICT XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*. Encyclical Letter on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth, 29 June 2009, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009, n. 53.

¹¹² PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004, n. 461.

¹¹³ JOHN XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*. Encyclical Letter on Christianity and Social Progress, 15 May 1961, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 53 (1961) 401-464, n. 215.

itself towards the reality which brought it into being.¹¹⁴ Catechists need to educate care for the environment, respect and responsibility for the common good which is destined for all and which extends not only to the present but also to those of the future.¹¹⁵ “A correct understanding of the environment prevents the utilitarian reduction of nature to a mere object to be manipulated and exploited. At the same time, it must not absolutize nature and place it above the dignity of the human person himself.”¹¹⁶

Catechists also need to promote strongly the preferential option for the poor since “the principle of the universal destination of goods requires that the poor, the marginalized and in all cases those whose living conditions interfere with their proper growth should be the focus of particular concern.”¹¹⁷ However, this does not only mean fighting against hunger or poverty but is “a question, rather, of building a world where every man, no matter what his race, religion, or nationality, can live a fully human life, freed from servitude imposed on him by other men or by natural forces over which he has not sufficient control.”¹¹⁸

3.1.4. *Catechists as Promoters of Peace*

The Catechists of the Union are called to be promoters of peace in the world. Peace derives from justice.¹¹⁹ As *Gaudium et Spes* states: “it is the fruit of that right ordering of things with which the divine founder has invested human society and [...] can not be obtained on earth unless the welfare of man is safeguarded and people freely and trustingly share with one another the riches of their mind and talents. [...] Accordingly, peace is also the fruit of love, for love goes beyond what justice can ensure.”¹²⁰ Catechists are called to promote internal

¹¹⁴ Cf LEON XIII, *Rerum Novarum*. Encyclical Letter on the Condition of Labor, 15 May 1891, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 23 (1890-1891) 641-670, n. 22; Cf PONTIFICAL COUNCIL, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine*, n. 464; Cf *MM*, nn. 212-217.

¹¹⁵ Cf PONTIFICAL COUNCIL, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine*, nn. 466-467.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, n. 463; Cf BENEDICT XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 48; Cf *RN*, nn. 6-7.

¹¹⁷ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine*, n. 182; Cf *Puebla*, nn. 1134, 1147, 1217.

¹¹⁸ PAUL VI, *Populorum Progressio*. Encyclical Letter on the Development of Peoples, 26 March 1967, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 59 (1967) 257-299, n. 47; Cf *RM*, n. 59.

¹¹⁹ Cf JOHN PAUL II, *Dalla giustizia di ciascuno nasce la pace per tutti*. Messaggio per la celebrazione della Giornata Mondiale della Pace, 8 dicembre 1997, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 90 (1998) 147-156, n. 1.

¹²⁰ *GS*, n. 78.

peace in the hearts of men because “there can be no peace between men unless there is peace within each one of them, unless, that is, each one builds up within himself the order wished by God.”¹²¹

In the attainment of peace in the natural order, Catechists need to influence the society from within. They need to demonstrate that peace cannot be obtained by violence “but by peaceful means. Even when the use of force can be justified in view of the need and defence of basic human rights, [...] yet the gospel prophet will almost always eschew force rather than resort to it. In this way the escalation of violence is checked, its absurdity is exposed, and the ultimate meaning of history is made credible.”¹²² In regard to the transformation of the world at the service of peace, Catechists need also conscientize people that for a true change there is a need of going deep into the roots of problems. “Uncovering systematic violence and making people aware of it are always difficult because the source of this violence is usually remote from its final disastrous effect.”¹²³ As J. Walsh states, in our time:

There is a temptation to concentrate solely on alleviating the symptoms of any problem. This method of action is more direct, and somehow people seem to feel it is more Christian than to delve into economic, political, social, or religious systems. Yet we have come to realize that the only Christian thing to do is to uncover the sources of problems and then to strive resourcefully to bring about systemic change. In this matter the only way to have real success is not by putting a Band-Aid over a festering wound, but by having trust in actions on behalf of justice and peace that deal with both symptoms and sources.¹²⁴

“Salvation and justice are not to be found in revolution, but in evolution through concord.”¹²⁵ This means that peace cannot be achieved once and for all. It must be built up

¹²¹ *PT*, n. 165; Cf BENEDICT XVI, *Message for the 2007 World Day of Peace*, 8 December 2007, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 100 (2008) 38-45, nn. 11-13.

¹²² BÜHLMANN, *The Church of the Future*, 82-83; Cf *PT*, n. 162; Cf BENEDICT XVI, *Message for the 2007 World Day of Peace*, n. 14; Cf P. RYAN (Ed.), *The Role of Christians in Politics in Africa Today*, Nairobi, Paulines, 2002, 85-87.

¹²³ J. WALSH, *Evangelization and Justice. New Insights for Christian Ministry*, New York, Orbis Books, 1982, 46.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 46-47; Cf *RM*, n. 59.

¹²⁵ *PT*, n. 162.

continually. It is the fruit of a progressive transformation that is achieved gradually as time goes on.¹²⁶ As educators to peace, Catechists need to give special attention to the youth who will have to take responsibility in regard to the future of the society in the social, political, cultural, economic and religious spheres.¹²⁷ There is a need of “forming the youth in peace-value and equipping them with the necessary knowledge, skills, strength, moral and spiritual power for becoming peace-builders and peacekeepers of tomorrow.”¹²⁸

3.1.5. *Catechists as Sowers of Hope*

Like the prophets, the Catechists need to be people of hope. Prophets saw and acknowledged the reality of evil and they confronted their people with the concreteness of sin in the world; however, they uttered their word with an offer and expectation of hope. They were assuring the people that God is among them and that his righteousness will replace injustice.¹²⁹ As we have mentioned before, hope is a fundamental attitude which enables a person to *see* that *which can not be seen*, till the point of making him evaluate and express that *which can be seen* from the part of that *which can not be seen*.¹³⁰ Hope interiorized in faith “draws the future into the present, so that it is no longer simply a “not yet”. The fact that this future exists changes the present; the present is touched by the future reality, and thus the things of the future spill over into those of the present and those of the present into those of the future.”¹³¹

In this particular time, the Catechists are called to cultivate this essential attitude of hope among all people who “on account of the many difficulties, crisis and conflicts which bring about so much suffering and misery [...] are at times tempted to think that the Lord has

¹²⁶ Cf *GS*, n. 78; Cf *PP*, n. 76.

¹²⁷ Cf J. PUDUMAI DOSS et al. (Eds.), *Youth India: Situation, Challenges & Prospects*, Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2006, 141-161.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹²⁹ Cf MONGOVEN, *The Prophetic Spirit of Catechesis*, 273.

¹³⁰ Cf TONELLI, *Fede*, 38.

¹³¹ BENEDICT XVI, *Spe Salvi*. Encyclical Letter on Christian Hope, 30 November 2007, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 99 (2007) 985-1027, n. 7.

abandoned them, that he has forgotten them.”¹³² The Catechists need to be testimonies of the paschal hope.¹³³ They need to demonstrate to the world that, no matter how great the cross might be, all lives and all reality will be renewed and be fully restored in the risen Lord – font of every hope – and that there should be no room for despair when he is among us, for he will console and heal us.¹³⁴

In a particular way, the Catechists are called to cultivate the attitude of hope among the youth whose future hopes and aspirations for new life is being increasingly challenged. Today there are many young people who, faced with the demand for meaning and living with the experience of evil, fall into fatalism and desperation.¹³⁵ The Catechists, each one of them, “is called to become the bearer of hope «the adversary of the absurd, the prophet of meaning» through the proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth who reveals the love of the Father and inaugurated the advent of the Reign.”¹³⁶ The hope which the Catechists are called to proclaim and witness is not only a desire; it is a concrete reality that shapes daily existence by bringing human expectations in contact with the origin of justice, love, peace and life itself; it is a dynamic and creative reality capable of changing the present; and it concretizes itself in projects which anticipate in history the sense of new humanity brought about by the resurrection of Christ.¹³⁷

In such a way, hope becomes the font for optimism in view of the future; it becomes the font of energy and good-will that enables a person to work for the future.¹³⁸ As pope Benedict XVI stated: “our daily efforts in pursuing our own lives and in working for the world’s future either tire us or turn into fanaticism, unless we are enlightened by the radiance of the great

¹³² JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in Africa, 14 September 1995, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 88 (1996) 5-82, n. 143.

¹³³ Cf GATTI, *Il ministero del catechista*, 125-133.

¹³⁴ Cf CEI, *Testimoni di Gesù Risorto, speranza del mondo*. Traccia di riflessione in preparazione al Convegno Ecclesiale di Verona, 29 aprile 2005, Milano, Paoline, 2005, nn. 1-9; Cf A. CENCINI, *Liberare la speranza. Percorsi pedagogico-vocazionale*, Milano, Paoline, 2006, 58-60.

¹³⁵ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 40.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹³⁷ Cf CEI, *«Rigenerati per una speranza viva» (1Pt 1,3): testimoni del grande «sì» di Dio all'uomo*. Nota pastorale dell'Episcopato italiano dopo il 4° Convegno ecclesiale nazionale, 29 giugno 2007, Milano, Paoline, 2007, nn. 7-8; Cf CENCINI, *Liberare la speranza*, 64-68.

¹³⁸ Cf F. ARDUSSO, *«Speranza»*, in GEVAERT, *Dizionario di Catechetica*, 598-601.

hope that cannot be destroyed even by small-scale failures or by a breakdown in matters of historic importance.”¹³⁹ Moreover, hope opens a person’s mind and heart to the mysterious love of God; it becomes an assurance for God’s mercy and becomes an invitation to conversion.¹⁴⁰

3.2. *Active Promotion of Political Action*

So far we have seen the most important aspects of the prophetic mission which the Catechists are called to contribute in the world of today. This mission of the Catechists, taking in consideration personal inclination, talent and preparation, can further be intensified by a more direct participation in the political activity¹⁴¹ of the society particularly in its leadership because in the face of oppressive and unjust socio-political structures raising the prophetic voice might not be enough; there is a need of concrete transforming action within these structures. Therefore, those Catechists who feel called to such kind of service are greatly encouraged to enter more deeply into the political process and be active protagonists in the insertion of Christian faith in the political action and structures of their society.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ BENEDICT XVI, *Spe Salvi*, n. 35.

¹⁴⁰ Cf CEI, «*Rigenerati per una speranza viva*», n. 17.

¹⁴¹ In the field of ecclesial reflection the term *political activity*, in the *strict sense*, signifies the administration of common goods through the exercise of power in the legislative, executive and judicial organs by means of responsible persons and institutions namely the government, parties, parliament or other administrative structures. In the *broad sense*, political action implies all direct or indirect forms of participation in the promotion and participation of the common good and in the exercise of power through different forms of presence and activities like education, cultural action, public opinion, pastoral activity, social service and so on (Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 201; Cf GROOME, *Christian Religious Education*, 15; Cf RYAN, *The Role of Christians in Politics in Africa Today*, 70; Cf A. BONANDI, «*Etica e Politica nella società odierna: un rapporto problematico*», in G. ANGELINI et al., *Politica come vocazione*, Roma, Edizioni Dehoniane, 1990, 88-89).

¹⁴² In our discussion here, we’ll focus more on the role of the Catechists in political activity in the strict sense. However, we are not denying that the primary vocation of the Catechists in this field aims towards the transformation of the foundations at the cultural and social level and not at the political structures as such. In fact, the Church teaches that “it is insufficient and reductive to think that the commitment of Catholics in society can be limited to a simple transformation of structures, because if at the basic level there is no culture capable of receiving, justifying and putting into practice positions deriving from faith and morals, the changes will always rest on a weak foundation” (CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions*, n. 7); Cf RYAN, *The Role of Christians in Politics in Africa Today*, 70; Cf W. JENKINSON – H. O’SULLIVAN (Eds.), *Trends in Mission. Toward the 3rd Millenium*, New York, Orbis Books, 1991, 260; Cf WALSH, *Evangelization and Justice*, 85.

Today, “the Church praises and esteems those who devote themselves to the public good for the service of men and take upon themselves the burdens of public life.”¹⁴³ The Church though by reason of her role and competence is not to be identified with any political system, it encourages lay Christians to take part, according to their talent, in “the difficult yet noble art of politics”;¹⁴⁴ encourages them to prepare themselves for it, and, forgetting their own conveniences and material interests to be engaged in it.¹⁴⁵ In the broad sense, the Catechists of the Union are called to participate in political activity not only as a special dimension of the lay vocation,¹⁴⁶ but also as catechists, i.e., they do it as a special dimension of their vocation as catechists.¹⁴⁷ Here, we will indicate some necessary elements on how the Catechists of the Union can offer their contribution in the society by a more direct involvement in the political action of the society.

3.2.1. *Maturing a Political Conscience*

The Catechists are called to have a great awareness of the importance of political action for the transformation of the world. A correct understanding of the significance of politics will enable the Catechesis to overcome the prejudice that it is not necessary to be involved in politics and helps them to overcome the habit of being passive and non critical in regard to

¹⁴³ GS, n. 75.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Cf *Ibid.*; Cf CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions*, n. 6.

¹⁴⁶ The members of the Union, as lay people, can participate in political activity in the strict sense, just as they can participate in any other professional sector of the society. It does not mean that the members of the Union are required to assume this role, or that it is a particular mission of the Union, but is meant to indicate that the members are encouraged to assume that role as long as they have the inclination.

¹⁴⁷ The Catechists are called to participate in the political activity of their society also in respect to the political dimension of catechesis as «*diakonia*». As it has been mentioned above, in the broad sense, all catechists are called to participate in political activity in diverse ways. They offer their contribution: by presenting various themes of the Christian message, evidencing their social and political significance and thus highlighting their liberating and transformative potential; by means of promotional works and services at the social level; by encouraging Christians to devote themselves to the welfare of the society; by educating towards a political conscience based on Christian values and by stimulating effective forms of commitments to justice; by illustrating the significance of political action, its different forms and characteristics, its relationship to the integral development of the human person, etc (Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 204-206).

it.¹⁴⁸ Political conscience is “an ethical imperative that challenges the sense of responsibility and demands that individuals assume precise commitments.”¹⁴⁹ However, “the complexities of the political world and the rightful autonomy of the temporal order complicate the relationship between Christian faith and the option for concrete political involvement.”¹⁵⁰ As such, it is not enough to be a good Christian for becoming a good politician.¹⁵¹

It is true that faith constitutes an important principle of orientation for stimulating and evaluating political action and gives deeper significance to it by providing basic criteria and ethical demands such as the principle of non-violence, the dignity of human life, the just distribution of the common good, etc. However, it is also true that politics constitutes a non-religious sector of activity with its own laws, and in this sense, it is not possible to draw the concrete lines of a political project directly from the Christian faith. In the field of politics, scientific and technological progress offer a wide range of possible interventions and instruments of analysis to know, interpret and change the social realities. Therefore, it is very important for the Catechists to know these progresses in their option for transforming the concrete historical situation by means of political action. They need to know how to mediate the scientific analysis of the reality and the lines of action which can not be deduced directly from faith.¹⁵²

They are required to have a wide vision of life, able to reflect their coherence with faith in the laicity and professionalism of political life.¹⁵³ “They will strive to unite the two harmoniously, remembering that in every temporal affair they are to be guided by a Christian conscience, since not even in temporal business may any human activity be withdrawn from God’s dominion.”¹⁵⁴ They need to clarify and deepen the relationship between Christian faith

¹⁴⁸ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 205.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 202; Cf AA, n. 7.

¹⁵⁰ ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 203; Cf COMMISSIONE EPISCOPALE PER I PROBLEMI SOCIALI E IL LAVORO – EPISCOPATO ITALIANO, *La formazione all’impegno sociale e politico*. Nota pastorale, 1 maggio 1989, Bologna, Dehoniane, 1989, n. 15.

¹⁵¹ Cf B. SORGE, «Politica», in MIDALI – TONELLI, *Dizionario di Pastorale Giovanile*, 865.

¹⁵² Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 201-203.

¹⁵³ Cf SORGE, «Politica», 865; Cf COMMISSIONE EPISCOPALE PER I PROBLEMI SOCIALI E IL LAVORO, *La formazione all’impegno sociale e politico*, n. 20.

¹⁵⁴ LG, n. 36; Cf ChL, n. 42.

and political options in such a way as to overcome the dualist or fundamentalist position and to interiorize Christian attitudes in the political field. In addition, Catechists need always commit themselves with careful discernment and prudence. They should not ignore the dangers inherent in political action such as losing sight of their ecclesial identity particularly their identity as educators of faith.¹⁵⁵

3.2.2. *Cultivating the Fundamental Principles of Orientation*

The direct involvement of the Catechists in political activity has to be determined on the basis of the exigency of the concrete situation and calls for a careful preparation. As we have mentioned before, to be involved in political action, it is not enough to have an authentic religious experience. It is also not enough to possess the right professional competence in that field. The Catechists need to develop, to a large extent, a *vital synthesis* between religious conscience and professionalism; between faith and historical reality. They need to have also a great capacity of mediation and dialogue.¹⁵⁶ Above all, they need to be oriented by the following fundamental principles:

Living politics like one’s true and proper “vocation”. The Catechists are called to live this mission as a call oriented towards the absolute end. It is very important to consider that politics, no matter its great importance, does not constitute an absolute element. Instead it proves that the difficulties and temptations of the most demanding walks of life can not block a person in his journey towards perfection and sanctity.

Evangelical style of living the exercise of power as “service”. The exercise of power is surely an essential component in politics; however, it is to be lived in a spirit of a humble service. It is always necessary to give priority to the common good and to the interests of the society without self-interest and without counting one’s sacrifices. Exercising power in a spirit

¹⁵⁵ Cf ALBERICH – VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 204-206; Cf ALBERICH, *Catechesi e prassi ecclesiale*, 177-184; Cf G. BIANCARDI, *Fede e ideologia politica. Quale rapporto?* in “Catechesi” 75 (2006) 5, 17-19; Cf *Puebla* 558.

¹⁵⁶ Cf SORGE, «*Politica*», 873.

of service also means promoting solidarity and love by which the poorest and most marginalized people are privileged.

Spirit of “discernment”. It is very important to live always in a spirit of discernment for not falling into a mentality of our time which sacrifices many fundamental values for the attainment of temporary benefits. The Catechists need to struggle primarily for the fundamental values of man and for the transformation and renewal of the society.¹⁵⁷

4. Towards a Formation Program Suitable for an Effective Apostolate

Taking in consideration the fundamental importance of inculturation and the ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue for the effectiveness and credibility of the evangelizing action of the Church, today the Catechists’ Union is called to provide a formation program that promotes these basic aspects in the members. During the formation process it has also to favour the members to do an experience in the ecclesial environment where they are called to live their vocation as Catechists and help them grow together with other catechists. In addition, the Catechists’ Union needs to be concerned in providing a formation program for diverse categories of Catechists in view of the diverse groups of persons who require catechesis.

4.1. Formation to the Praxis of Inculturation

As it has been shown, inculturation is an indispensable condition to live, express and communicate faith. However, inculturation is not “a spontaneous and automatic process; it requires deep conviction, adequate competence, proper criteria, and an appropriate spirituality.”¹⁵⁸ This is why the Catechists need to be well prepared in this praxis of inculturation. They need to be trained in the capacity of mediating the Christian message with their local culture as well as with other cultures of the world. Formation needs to help them to

¹⁵⁷ Cf *Ibid.*, 873-874; Cf BONANDI, «*Etica e Politica nella società odierna* », 104-105.

¹⁵⁸ ANTHONY, *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation*, 292.

be capable of challenging the difficult practice of inculturating faith in the historical and cultural context of the actual time. It has to promote them in the exercise of concrete hermeneutical practice, i.e., in the capacity of interpreting culture starting from faith and interpreting faith starting from culture.¹⁵⁹

In the formation process, the Catechists need to be trained to be creative in inventing new modes of expressing faith in their society without changing the original message, i.e., they need to be helped in the assumption of new languages of faith in continuous fidelity to the biblical language and the traditional language of the Church. It is very necessary that the Catechists be initiated to these three languages which are fundamental to Christian experience: the biblical language (which regards the fundamental experience), the ecclesial language (which regards the historical culture of the Church – tradition, liturgy, ecclesial teachings), and the experiential language (which regards the actual culture – the researches for a historical dialogue) and be trained to make a continuous effort to co-relate these three fundamental languages of faith. They need to be initiated to a sense of proportion, to a discernment for what is essential, to a distinction in regard to diverse interpretative levels in order to distinguish what cannot be changed from what can be changed and to know in what way it can be changed.¹⁶⁰

It is necessary that the Catechists be initiated to a pedagogy of creativity, i.e., they need to be helped to pass from a pedagogy of assimilation to a pedagogy in which they become active protagonists in the creation of new language of faith. In addition, they need to be helped to cultivate some fundamental qualities that favour inculturation: audacity and prudence, firmness in decision and inalterable patience, respect for one’s culture and openness for knowing and welcoming other cultures.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Cf E. ALBERICH, «Un piano per la formazione dei catechisti», in GRUPPO ITALIANO CATECHETI, *La formazione dei catechisti*, 120-123; Cf V. SORCE, *Inculturazione della catechesi: istanze e impegni*, in “Catechesi” 54 (1985) 2, 24-27; Cf TRENTI, *Inculturazione della fede*, 8.

¹⁶⁰ Cf ALBERICH, «Un piano per la formazione dei catechisti», 123-129; Cf ANTHONY, *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation*, 148-149; Cf GROOME, *Inculturation: How to Proceed in a Pastoral Context*, 130-132; Cf REICHERT, *Renewing Catechetical Ministry*, 164-167.

¹⁶¹ Cf ALBERICH, «Un piano per la formazione dei catechisti», 128; Cf P. ARRUPÉ, *Catechesi e inculturazione*. Intervento al Sinodo dei vescovi su “La catechesi nel nostro tempo” (1977), in “Aggiornamenti sociali” 28 (1977) 10, 667.

4.2. *Formation to Ecumenical and Inter-religious Dialogue*

During the formation process the Catechists need to be helped to cultivate an ecumenical attitude, a strong zeal for the re-establishment of Christian communion and for committing themselves to ecumenical initiatives.¹⁶² They need to be helped to acquire:

- a sincere change of mentality which implies overcoming a too rigid form of identity by distinguishing the essential elements of faith from the historical ones and being open to others and taking into consideration their position;
- an adequate knowledge of the other Christian Churches and confessions in a correct and objective form in order to overcome prejudice and to cultivate a true appreciation of their values and richness;
- an attitude of esteem and love towards the other Churches through humility and truthfulness;
- a readiness to listen and to learn from others, to approach the others not as a threat but as a possible enrichment;
- an attitude of dialogue and collaboration with the other Churches.¹⁶³

The Catechists need also be taught the history on the issue of division of Christians in a non polemical way, in fidelity to the truth. They need to know the actual relationships that exist between the Catholic Church and the other Christian Churches, and the ecumenical renewal that is taking place today in the life of the Church.¹⁶⁴

In addition to the ecumenical dialogue, inter-religious dialogue forms part of the Church’s evangelizing concern. Therefore, in the process of formation, Catechists need to be trained to be open to this kind of dialogue and to take part in it. They need to acquire an accurate knowledge of the other religions, their values, their limitations, the elements not conforming to

¹⁶² Cf *Guide for Catechists*, n. 14; Cf *GDC*, n. 197; Cf GALLIANO, *Il catechista e la chiesa che si rinnova*, 77-83.

¹⁶³ Cf ALBERICH, «*Catechesi ecumenica*», 136-137; Cf *CT*, nn. 32-33.

¹⁶⁴ Cf *Unitatis Redintegratio*, nn. 9-10; Cf FORTINO, «*Ecumenismo*», 232-233.

the Gospel, and in what way they should be completed or corrected. They need to be helped to cultivate an attitude of cooperation with non Christians.¹⁶⁵

4.3. *Formation within the Ecclesial Environment*

The Catechists need also receive a particular formation in view of their insertion into a particular ecclesial environment. During the process of formation they need to make a special experience in the basic ecclesial community where they will be involved in their mission as Catechists because it is in this community that they test their vocation and continually nourish their own apostolic awareness.¹⁶⁶ They need to participate in the life of the parish: in the liturgical moment, in its pastoral life, its activities of charity, etc., Formation in the ecclesial community will help them mature their vocation both in the spiritual and professional sense. It will help them acquire an ecclesial conscience of their mission, will increase their sense of belonging and will help them mature their proper identity and role within this community.¹⁶⁷

In a particular way, the Catechists need to be helped to grow together with other catechists inside the parish community. They need to be provided with moments of encounter, study, meditation, prayer and fraternity with these catechists. They need to develop the conscience that a catechetical action is realized in group, that the Word of God is proclaimed and interpreted in union with others. The encounter with other catechists can also be widened to the diocesan level or even beyond. In this way, the Catechists will be enabled to overcome the risk of isolation or segregation, and will be stimulated to live their mission together with catechists of other parishes, of other dioceses or other local Churches.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Cf *Nostra Aetate*, nn. 2-5; Cf *Guide for Catechists*, n. 15; Cf CCC, nn. 839-845, 856; Cf RM, nn. 55-57; Cf GDC, nn. 199-200.

¹⁶⁶ Cf GDC, n. 246.

¹⁶⁷ Cf GRUPPO ITALIANO CATECHISTI, *La formazione dei catechisti*, 185-186; Cf GDC, n. 246.

¹⁶⁸ Cf ID., *La formazione dei catechisti*, 186-187; Cf GATTI, «Il gruppo: modello ecclesiale per la formazione dei catechisti», 135-162; Cf FdC, nn. 24-25.

4.4. *Formation of Different Categories of Catechists*

In addition, the Catechists’ Union as a Secular Institute whose special apostolate is catechesis needs to be concerned in providing a formation program for diverse categories of Catechists so as to “organize a more balanced distribution of catechists among the various groups who require catechesis.”¹⁶⁹ Through a particular form of formation, the Union is invited to provide members who specialize in different forms of catechetical apostolate in view of diverse age groups, peculiar conditions of life, diverse existential forms of life, diverse socio-cultural environments and professional situations, diverse historical and political conditions of the persons with whom they are called to make the journey of faith and also in view of their particular role in the ecclesial community.¹⁷⁰

As it is indicated in the General Directory, according to the age of the persons, the members of the Union can specialize as *Catechists of children, of adolescents, of the young, of adults or of the aged* and they are required to know in depth the psychological make up of the particular age group, the particular needs, capacity, etc. For this reason, during the formation process “it is necessary to pay attention to all the factors involved, whether anthropological-evolutionary or theological-pastoral, including also up to date scientific data and pedagogical methods prepared for different age groups.”¹⁷¹ *Catechists of children* need a particular preparation so as to lead children to a first encounter with Christ particularly through the sacraments of Eucharist and Penitence, to educate them towards ecclesial life and facilitate in them growth in Christian conscience. *Catechists of adolescents* need to be prepared for the duty of helping adolescents to progressively outline their project of life in comparison with the person of Christ, to develop in them a critical capacity inspired by the Christian message and to be capable of animating group life. *Catechists of young people and of adults* need to receive a particular formation to be capable of promoting a faith itinerary which helps the persons entrusted to them to incarnate faith in their daily life and to assume an active role and

¹⁶⁹ GDC, n. 233.

¹⁷⁰ Cf *Ibid.*, n. 232; Cf SORAVITO, «Catechista», 126-127; Cf MIDALI, *Practical Theology*, 313; Cf GRUPPO ITALIANO CATECHETI, *La formazione dei catechisti*, 173-174.

¹⁷¹ GDC, n. 171.

responsibility in the activities of the Church and society. *Catechists of the aged* need also be prepared with a particular formation for a caring presence among the old, helping them towards the fulfilment of the journey of faith in an attitude of hopeful expectation in finally meeting God and so helping them to live in an attitude of prayer, thanksgiving, forgiveness and inner peace.¹⁷²

In regard to peculiar conditions of life the Catechists of the Union can specialize as *Catechists for the diversely-able, for the handicapped, for the marginalized*, etc. *Catechists for the diversely-able and the handicapped* need to be prepared with a specialized pedagogy to dedicate themselves with a generous and patient care as an expression of the special love of God for the ‘weakest’ and be trained to offer an indirect and occasional form of catechesis. *Catechists for the marginalized* need to be trained to meet the needs and questions of immigrants, refugees, chronically ill people, drug addicts, prisoners, etc. In regard to diverse existential forms of life, socio-cultural environments or professional situations, the Catechists can be prepared as *Catechists for married couples, for family groups, for single persons, for female groups, for male groups, for country people, for those who live in city, for scholars, for the military*, etc. For each group the Catechists are to be trained to acquire the right approach and language adapted to the persons, always taking in consideration their particular needs and experiences.¹⁷³

In view of particular historical and political situation, the Catechists of the Union can specialize as *promoters of justice and liberation* with a particular training in view of the challenges which they might face. They can specialize as *conscience awakeners* who, in the light of the Gospel, try to make people aware of the enslaving situations and help them towards liberation. In front of an increasing secularization, the Catechists can be prepared to become *faith awakeners* or *Catechists of re-initiation* capable of re-establishing faith in the

¹⁷² Cf SORAVITO, «*Catechista*», 127; Cf GDC, nn. 171-188; Cf C. DE SOUZA, «*Those to be Catechized*», in CHOONDAL, *Introducing the General Directory for Catechesis*, 172-175.

¹⁷³ Cf GDC, nn. 189-192; Cf MIDALI, *Practical Theology*, 313; Cf DE SOUZA, «*Those to be Catechized*», 175-176.

believers who have become indifferent. They can also specialize as *constructors of community* capable of educating Christians towards full communion and participation.¹⁷⁴

In a special link with the missionary activity of the Church – *ad gentes*, the members of the Union can also be prepared to be *missionary Catechists* with a particular training in view of the socio-cultural settings of the mission territory and with the mandate of the Bishop can dedicate themselves fully in newly established Churches taking various responsibilities. They can also be trained to be *missionary animators* in the ecclesial community promoting and training persons who are willing to go outside their own country to dedicate themselves either as full-time or part-time catechists where there is a need of building new ecclesial community.¹⁷⁵

In addition, according to their role in the ecclesial community, the members of the Union can be *Catechists of base* trained to promote an itinerary of faith with a specific group of persons; or they can be *animators of catechists* trained for the promotion of other catechists of base in the ecclesial community; they can also be *formators of catechists* who specialize for the duty of facilitating theological, pedagogical and didactical formation of other catechists mainly by means of courses at the parish or diocesan level.¹⁷⁶ In addition to the above mentioned categories, the Catechists’ Union can also train other types of Catechists according to particular demands or situations.

5. Towards a Renewal of the Identity of the Union as a Secular Institute

On the basis of the apostolic orientation that has been proposed in this chapter, it emerges that the Union needs to rethink its identity as a Secular Institute in two particular aspects: in regard to the proper apostolic institutions and in regard to its spirituality. The Union is called to undertake its internal apostolic works in compatibility with the secular responsibility of the members whose primary mission is the life testimony among other people in the womb of the

¹⁷⁴ Cf SORAVITO, «*Catechista*», 127.

¹⁷⁵ Cf *Guide for Catechists*, nn. 2 and 4; Cf *GDC*, n. 232.

¹⁷⁶ Cf SORAVITO, «*Catechista*», 127.

society and the ecclesial community. In line with this, emerges also the need for a more incarnated spirituality.

5.1. *Correct Projection of the Apostolic Works*

As it has been shown in the second as well as the fourth chapter, the Catechists’ Union is one of the few Secular Institutes that have proper apostolic institutions. The presence of these apostolic institutions is of great advantage, in fact has brought forth immense fruits particularly in the first sixty or seventy years of the foundation of the Union. However, as it has been shown in this chapter, the main field of the apostolate of the Union is in the heart of the ecclesial community and in the heart of the society where the members live.

As it has been indicated in the second chapter, in reference to the secular dimension, *Primo Feliciter* states that the apostolate of Secular Institutes is not only “something that happens in the world, but it may almost be said to grow out of the world: its existence is in professions, activities, forms, places, circumstances of a secular nature.”¹⁷⁷ In a similar way, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* states that “their primary and immediate task [...] is to put to use every Christian and evangelical possibility latent but already present and active in the affairs of the world.”¹⁷⁸ This does not mean that the presence of internal apostolic works contradicts these affirmations of the Church documents; however, there is a risk of limiting the secular nature of the Union as a Secular Institute. As lay people, the members of the Union are called to participate in every form of apostolate according to their inclination and competence taking personal initiatives and responsibility. A predetermined or fixed work of apostolate might limit the spontaneity and liberty of the members in the assumption of apostolic responsibility in the society in various levels with an always new method. In other words, the assumption of collective apostolate might risk the aspect of secularity for which the Union as a Secular Institute exists and would make it assume a form more like the Religious Institutes. In addition, the Union as a Secular Institute is called to penetrate in the multiplying apostolic

¹⁷⁷ *PF*, n. 6.

¹⁷⁸ *EN*, n. 70.

works of the Church in the maximum way possible and the presence of proper works of apostolate may isolate it from or may limit its service in the womb of the ecclesial community.¹⁷⁹

Therefore, it seems right for the Union to see if this aspect is compatible with the profession of the members in the world and with their relative apostolate leaving a wide space for them for personal initiatives. The essential quality of secularity and the effectiveness in social penetration should not be diminished by reason of these apostolic works internal to the Union. These works do not constitute the reason for the existence of the Union as a Secular Institute, i.e., the primary mission of the Union consists in the transforming presence – in the form of a leaven – in the world by way of its members. If these apostolic works would cause the members to leave aside or diminish the real sense of their secular mission then the Union in reality would not be a Secular Institute. Thus, it seems necessary to be attentive in maintaining the secular character and mission of the Union.¹⁸⁰

5.2. *More Incarnated Spirituality*

For an effective realization of the apostolic mission, the Union continuously invites the members to a life of continuous prayer which is centred on the contemplation or adoration of Jesus Crucified. It is true that a life of continuous prayer is indispensable for the members of the Union in order to respond faithfully to their vocation to an integral apostolic consecration since apostolic action flows out from one’s intimacy with Christ and is continuously alimanted and renewed in prayer.¹⁸¹ However, the members have also to live fully immersed in the world. They are called to be apostles of Christ in the world. As such, the spirituality of the Union needs to focus in living a life according to the Spirit in the fellowship of the *Word made flesh* in the world.

The Union is called to promote a dialogical spirituality that is well integrated in the apostolic commitment of the members in the family, in the professional field and in various

¹⁷⁹ Cf FRANCESCHINI, «L’apostolato negli Istituti Secolari», 134-135.

¹⁸⁰ Cf *Ibid.*, 135-136.

¹⁸¹ Cf *CIC*, n. 719, §§ 1, 2, 3.

social activities; a spirituality that animates the secular life and action of the members; spirituality well harmonized with the apostolic activity of secular nature. Life of prayer and apostolic activity are not to be seen as two distinct dynamics, i.e., spiritual life is not to be constructed beside the apostolic action as a parallel movement. They are two movements that go in harmony and integrity. Prayer life needs to be permeated by an apostolic concern and apostolic activity needs to be sustained by prayer. Apostolic action stimulates life of contemplation and contemplation of the divine reality flows out in apostolic action.¹⁸²

As members of a Secular Institute, the spirituality of the members of the Union has to be distinguished by three elements: incarnation, presence and witnessing.¹⁸³ As it has been indicated in the second chapter, this consists in living among men with the same rights and duties, with the same personal and professional responsibility but as consecrated, for inventing, in the docility to the Spirit, always-new ways of evangelic life. Concretely, the members, as part of their spirituality, are called to love and cultivate authentic values of the world with a responsible participation, with the exercise of secular profession and living the evangelical counsels in the spirit of the beatitudes in the historical and social environment in which they find themselves. It is about a life which becomes prayer by presence and by witness. Therefore, the members are called to cultivate a concrete spirituality, a spirituality of an apostolic dedication in the world and for the world, or it can be called a spirituality of incarnation intrinsically tied to the theology of earthly realities.¹⁸⁴

Conclusion

From what we have shown, we can conclude that the main question in one way or another seems to fall on the aspect of adaptation – in reference to persons – and inculturation, or more broadly on the aspect of contextualization of the apostolic mission of the Union. It has been shown that today the Catechists of the Union are called to be open to the demands of the time. In the catechetical apostolate they need to pay special attention to the individual persons as

¹⁸² Cf MIDALI, *Spiritualità apostolica*, 26-28 and 31-35.

¹⁸³ Cf BORRIELLO, *Teologia e spiritualità degli istituti secolari*, 90.

¹⁸⁴ Cf *Ibid.*, 89-99; Cf ZENNA, *Consigli evangelici e spiritualità dell’incarnazione*, 25-29.

such, to their situation of life with all their concrete needs and experiences. They need to be concerned with the integral salvation of the persons helping them live life to the full. Accordingly, the message they transmit needs to be relevant, i.e., it needs to correspond to the existential situation of the persons and has to be transmitted in such a way as to penetrate into them.

In a particular way, we have highlighted the necessity of a change of outlook and approach towards the young. We have shown that the Catechists need to assume the role of a companion: to walk closely with the young, to enter into their world, to know them more deeply, show them the right direction of life, help them discover Christ in the Cross as the reference point in the journey of life and discover in him the meaning and mystery of their life. Through the act of accompaniment and testimony they will enable young people fight against the strongest challenges of life and will make them participants of the victory of Christ. It has also been shown that, in the catechetical praxis, Catechists need not simply talk about God or communicate a doctrine of faith but they are meant to communicate God.¹⁸⁵ At the centre there is ‘someone’ and not ‘something’. What is needed to be reached is not simply the transmission of doctrines but a real initiation into the mystery of Christ, a personal encounter with God, a real transformation of life that leads to a commitment towards others. Catechists are called to cultivate in the young generation the new model of believer who manifests his faith more in his commitment towards transformation of the world rather than merely being a practicing faithful.

It has also been indicated that the Catechists, in their catechetical service, need to implement the new model of the Church as communion and to promote the ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. In line with the ecclesiology of service they also need to promote a Church that is a servant of all human kind, directing everything towards the Reign. For this cause, the Catechists are called to serve the society not only by their teaching in favour of justice and peace, but also by an active involvement in the liberation endeavours which might involve an active participation in the political activity. In the concrete life, they are called to be

¹⁸⁵ Cf ALBERICH, «*Come annunciare e comunicare Gesù oggi. Indicazioni metodologiche*», 133-134.

visible signs of God’s presence among his people and be testimonies of the paschal joy and hope.

In addition, in respect to the apostolic exigency, this chapter has indicated some aspects that need to be considered in the process of formation of the members of the Union, particularly those which regard the praxis of inculturation and the ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. It has also highlighted the necessity of formation of the Catechists within the ecclesial environment and the necessity of forming different categories of Catechists for different categories of persons who require catechesis. Finally, it has indicated some elements for renewal in regard to the identity of the Union as a Secular Institute, particularly in regard to its spirituality and apostolic institutions.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This study has analysed the historical evolution, identity, apostolate and formation program of the Catechists' Union (in the second part) highlighting these themes, on the one hand, in reference to the nature of the Union as a Secular Institute and thus examined the historical evolution, identity, apostolate and formation program of Secular Institutes (in the first part). On the other hand, highlighting them in reference to the catechetical mission of the Union in the Church and thus developed a brief historical overview of the catechetical action in the Church and examined the nature of catechesis, the identity, apostolate and formation of catechists in the Church (in the third part). All this analysis was done in function of a proposal for renewal (in the fourth part) particularly in view of improving the apostolic mission of the Union which also implies renewal of the formation program and consequently renewal of its identity.

Following the historical and systematic analysis, which was developed on the basis of the documents and resources of the Union, the emerging orientations of the Church, and the contributions of contemporary scholars on the given themes mentioned above, we identified, in the last part of the study, certain aspects in the actual praxis of the Union that call for a major renewal and offered a proposal that might serve the purpose. This proposal for renewal focuses on the apostolic dimension of the Union and in synthesis, as indicated below, can be viewed in three major aspects: in reference to the objective orientation of the apostolate, the field of apostolate and the mode of realizing the apostolate. In correspondence to these demands of the apostolate a particular attention is also given to the renewal of some aspects in

the formation program of the Union and also renewal of some aspects that touch the identity of the Union as a Secular Institute particularly its spirituality and apostolic institutions.

1. Objective Orientation of the Apostolate of the Union

In our analysis on the nature of catechesis in the sixth chapter, we have shown that catechesis aims towards a real initiation of the person into the Paschal mystery of Christ – towards a true incorporation into the mystery of the Church. The ultimate objective to be reached is the transformation of the person in Christ and the formation of true disciples or witnesses who actively and effectively participate in the mission of the Church in the world. On the basis of this affirmation, we have indicated in our proposal that the catechetical apostolate of the Union needs to look forward towards the realization of this objective. This is why in the proposal we emphasized on the role of the Catechists in assisting young people towards the interiorization of the attitudes of faith in as much as this constitutes the unshakable base for their consistency and perseverance because it implies inner transformation that can not be much affected by external conditions. This was also the reason that we focused on the apostolate of the Catechists in accompanying the young towards vocational discernment and realization till the time when they can stand by their own and become committed Christians ready to offer themselves for the transformation of the world.

In chapter five, in the historical analysis of the catechetical action in the Church, particularly in dealing with the catechetical movements, we have shown that today the Church has made a shift from the phase of *method* and *content* to the *anthropological* phase, or more, according to some scholars, to the *pastoral* (or *spiritual* or *political*) phase, which constitutes a synthesis of all the preceding phases in which the attention is expanded to man in society and to the total liberty of the person and in which the dimension of the community is given particular attention.¹ On the basis of this, we have also made a proposal that the Catechists' Union implements in a fuller way this objective in its catechetical praxis. Man in his concrete

¹ Cf GIANETTO, «*Movimento catechistico*», 448-449; Cf HOFINGER, *Looking Backward and Forward*, 350-357; Cf ERDOZAIN, *L'evoluzione della catechesi negli ultimi anni*, 645-653.

life situation needs to be at the centre of the catechetical practice and from this comes the necessity of focusing on the relevance of the catechetical message, the necessity for an effective mode of communication, the importance for a careful catechetical planning, a careful choice of catechetical models, a constant evaluation of the catechetical praxis, etc., because it has to give meaning to man, i.e., the ultimate objective is transforming man's concrete life situation and helping him to live life to the full. We have stressed on the unity between history of salvation and history of man and we have shown that a catechetical action needs to orientate itself towards the transformation of the life-context of man.

2. Apostolic Field of the Catechists of the Union

In the last chapter, it has been affirmed that the members of the Union in their apostolic mission are called to be open to all people without limit and without the exclusion of anyone. We have tried to affirm this from double point of view: on the basis of the universal dimension of catechesis which constitutes the major apostolic mission of the members and on the basis of the nature of the Union as a Secular Institute. As members of a Secular Institute, the Catechists of the Union are called to transmit the love and the message of Christ to all people. "Their own field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, but also the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media."² Their apostolate is realized in all places, activities, circumstances of the world³ and is realized by an intense Christian presence among others in the society.

As it has been shown in chapter seven, today the Church teaches the place for catechesis to be the way, i.e., life itself as a movement and as a variety of situations.⁴ The members of the Union live this truth in a peculiar way. The peculiar dimension of the members of the Union as Catechists rests in the fact that they are Catechists in the totality of their being as they offer themselves to be Catechists by means of consecration through the profession of the evangelical counsels. As such the members are not Catechists just for some activities which

² *EN*, n. 70.

³ Cf *PF*, n. 6.

⁴ Cf *OIFC*, 28-29.

they do; rather they are so because they have chosen a form of life that requires of them an internal attitude and a style of life which is essentially catechistical. Their life is entirely and always catechistical. This makes them to be Catechists everywhere, continuously, and in every situation of life.⁵

3. Fundamental Ways for Realizing the Apostolic Mission

As we have indicated in our proposal, the Catechists in order to realize the apostolic objectives effectively they need to assume the role of a friend or a companion particularly in regard to young people. This quality will allow them to enter into the inner world of young people, to understand in profundity their needs, feelings, difficulties and aspirations, and to travel with them more closely. On the other hand, this quality allows young people to open themselves to the Catechists with easiness. The knowledge of the other is important for Catechists because, as we have shown, all the catechetical program and itinerary of accompaniment is basically to be oriented in a way that it responds to the concrete needs of the persons. Therefore, as it has been demonstrated in chapter seven by means of the biblical models, if Catechists are meant to lead individuals towards the transformation of life in all aspects then it is important that they offer themselves fully as companions of life. Through the act of companionship and testimony they will be able to indicate for others, particularly the young, the right direction of life and will enable them fight the strongest challenges that might be encountered.

We have stressed on the fact that the Catechists need to take initiatives for the institution of the catechumenate since this is the most effective way for realizing a true initiation into the mystery of the Church. We have pointed out the importance of the catechumenate stating that in the catechumenal model there is seriousness in making the Christian choice and that the individual assumes more responsibility and commitment; that there is stress on the process of interiorization of faith, i.e., central value is given to the attitudes of faith, to the process of conversion and growth in faith; there is a global experience of faith that integrates the

⁵ Cf CONTI, «IV Congresso Mondiale ex allievi dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane», 38 and 65.

knowledge of the mystery of Christ, the celebration of faith, the communitarian experience, and the exercise of Christian commitment in the world; in a particular way there is stress on the aspect of community as the catechumenate involves all the community in its realization. Therefore, through the catechumenal action, the Catechists will be able to realize an experiential catechesis centred in faith and in the totality of Christian experience and can bring about a profound transformation in the individuals.

We have also indicated that the Catechists need to have a missionary spirit in going out to others. They are called to intensify the social dimension of their apostolate by taking different initiatives even at the individual level. Intensifying the social apostolate first of all signifies intensifying the Christian presence among others in the society, which is to be a transforming presence manifested in diverse ways. Catechists need always have the spirit of openness to encounter others in service. They need to take the initiative in reaching out to others and not simply wait for others to come. They need to assume the missionary mandate of the Church, to be bearers of a new way for carrying out the Good News where it has not yet reached – it could be the political sphere of the society, or the economic sphere, and so on.

In addition, for the effective realization of the apostolic objectives, we indicated an implication for the Catechists and for the process of their formation. The members of the Union as lay Catechists and as lay-consecrated persons need to be individuals who have acquired a vital synthesis between faith and concrete life, between supernatural and natural realities, between spiritual events and secular events, between history of salvation and history of man. In short, they need to be persons capable of incarnating the Christian message in the totality of their being, in the daily life of persons and in the totality of the world context. Therefore, it is to this aspect that the process of formation needs to give major attention because the fruitfulness of the apostolic mission of the Catechists in the world greatly depends on this quality.

At the end we want to indicate the limits of this study. This study does not enter much into the internal organization of the Union or the fraternal life of the members. As the sub-title indicates the emphasis is on the apostolate. Even in regard to the apostolate it does not exhaust all the apostolic mission of the Union, e.g., we did not deal with the aspect of familial

catechesis. We have concentrated mainly on the apostolate towards young people since this constitutes the major apostolic mission of the Union. And in regard to the members, in some aspects we have focused on the consecrated Catechists as they are members in the strict sense.

We hope that this study has offered some clarifications in view of the transformation or improvement of the existing apostolic practice of the Union. Hopefully, it has also offered motivations to move forward and to find new pathways for a more fruitful realization of the apostolic mission.

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GENERAL INDEX

Acknowledgements.....	2
Summary.....	4
List of Abbreviations.....	6
GENERAL INTRODUCTION.....	9
1. Synopsis.....	10
2. Status Questionis.....	11
3. Objectives of the Study.....	11
4. Method of the Study.....	12
5. Articulation of the Study.....	13

Part One

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION AND NATURE OF SECULAR INSTITUTES

Chapter I: HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF SECULAR INSTITUTES.....	18
1. From the Early Centuries of Christianity.....	19
1.1. <i>Testimonies of Secular Form of Consecration in the Early Centuries</i>	20
1.2. <i>Before the Apostolic Constitution “Provida Mater Ecclesia”</i>	23
2. Secular Institutes after “Provida Mater Ecclesia”.....	33
2.1. <i>The Apostolic Constitution “Provida Mater Ecclesia”</i>	34

2.2. <i>Secular Institutes and the Second Vatican Council</i>	40
2.3. <i>Secular Institutes after Vatican Second</i>	47
3. The New Code and the Expansion of Secular Institutes.....	54
3.1. <i>Secular Institutes in the Code of Canon Law</i>	55
3.2. <i>Expansion of Secular Institutes in the World</i>	58
Conclusion.....	60

Chapter II: **IDENTITY, APOSTOLATE AND FORMATION PROGRAM OF**

SECULAR INSTITUTES	61
1. Identity of Secular Institutes.....	62
1.1. <i>Biblico-Theological Foundations</i>	62
1.2. <i>Nature and Essential Characteristics of Secular Institutes</i>	67
1.3. <i>Significance of Secular Consecration</i>	69
1.4. <i>Practice of Evangelical Counsels in Secular Institutes</i>	74
1.4.1. <i>Chastity Lived in the World</i>	75
1.4.2. <i>Poverty Lived in the World</i>	77
1.4.3. <i>Obedience Lived in the World</i>	78
1.5. <i>Charism and Spirituality of Secular Institutes</i>	81
1.6. <i>Ecclesial Dimension of Secular Institutes</i>	86
2. Apostolate of Secular Institutes.....	89
2.1. <i>Apostolate Founded on Consecration</i>	89
2.2. <i>Secular Nature of the Apostolate</i>	91
2.3. <i>Hidden Apostolate</i>	94
2.4. <i>Apostolate of Personal Sanctity</i>	96
2.5. <i>Apostolate of Profession</i>	98
2.6. <i>Apostolate in the Apostolic Works of the Church</i>	100
2.7. <i>Apostolate of Priests Belonging to a Secular Institute</i>	102
3. Formation in Secular Institutes.....	104
3.1. <i>Prerequisites for Admission</i>	104
3.2. <i>Basic Characteristics of the Formation</i>	105

3.3. <i>Particular Aspects of Formation</i>	107
3.3.1. <i>Spiritual Formation</i>	107
3.3.2. <i>Doctrinal, Psychological and Moral Formation</i>	108
3.3.3. <i>Professional Formation</i>	109
3.3.4. <i>Formation to the Secular Apostolate</i>	110
3.4. <i>Formation Periods</i>	111
3.5. <i>Formators and Formation Planning</i>	112
3.6. <i>Methods and Means of Formation</i>	114
Conclusion.....	117

Part Two

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION AND NATURE OF THE “CATECHISTS’ UNION”

Chapter III: HISTORICAL ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE “CATECHISTS’

UNION”	119
1. Biographical Notes.....	120
1.1. <i>Life of the Founder, Br. Teodoreto (1871-1954)</i>	121
1.2. <i>Life of Friar Leopold Maria Musso, O.F.M. (1850-1922)</i>	125
2. Remote Origins of the Union.....	131
2.1. <i>The Historical Moment When the Union was Conceived</i>	132
2.2. <i>The ‘Devotion’ to Jesus Crucified</i>	136
3. Early Beginnings of the Union.....	138
3.1. <i>The Encounter between Br. Teodoreto and Fr. Leopold</i>	139
3.2. <i>Development of the ‘Devotion’ to Jesus Crucified</i>	141
3.3. <i>First Developments of the Union</i>	144
3.4. <i>Bulletin of the Union</i>	146
4. Further Developments of the Union.....	148
4.1. <i>Spread of the Union</i>	148
4.2. <i>Difficulties Encountered</i>	150

4.3. <i>The Union as a Lay Congregation</i>	155
4.4. <i>The Union as a Secular Institute</i>	159
4.5. <i>Female and Priest Branches</i>	163
5. First General Presidents of the Union.....	166
5.1. <i>Giovanni Cesone (1926-1933)</i>	167
5.2. <i>Carlo Tessitore (1933-1966)</i>	168
5.3. <i>Domenico Conti (1966-1997)</i>	171
5.4. <i>Leonardo Rollino (1998-2003)</i>	173
5.5. <i>Leandro Pierbattisti (2004-2009)</i>	176
6. Expansion of the Union.....	178
6.1. <i>The Union in Africa</i>	178
6.1.1. <i>The Union in Eritrea as a Traditional Pious Association</i>	178
6.1.2. <i>The Union in Eritrea as a Catholic Movement</i>	181
6.1.3. <i>The Union in Eritrea as a Secular Institute</i>	182
6.1.4. <i>The Union in Other Parts of Africa</i>	184
6.2. <i>The Union in Latin America</i>	184
Conclusion.....	186

Chapter IV: **IDENTITY, APOSTOLATE AND FORMATION PROGRAM OF THE**

“CATECHISTS’ UNION”	187
1. Identity of the Union.....	187
1.1. <i>Charism and Finality of the Union</i>	188
1.2. <i>Spirit of the Union</i>	190
1.2.1. <i>Spirit of Faith</i>	190
1.2.2. <i>Spirit of Zeal</i>	192
1.2.3. <i>Spirit of Fraternity</i>	193
1.2.4. <i>Spirit of Humility</i>	195
1.2.5. <i>Spirit of Reparation</i>	196
1.3. <i>Vocational Forms in the Union</i>	197
1.4. <i>Spirituality of the Union</i>	201
1.5. <i>Internal Organization of the Union</i>	205

2. Apostolate of the Union.....	210
2.1. <i>Spreading the 'Devotion' to Jesus Crucified</i>	210
2.2. <i>Catechetical-Educational-Social Apostolate</i>	212
2.3. <i>Particular Mission for the Young</i>	215
2.4. <i>Apostolic Works of the Union</i>	217
2.4.1. <i>House of Charity for Arts and Crafts</i>	217
2.4.2. <i>Association of Mary Immaculate (AMI)</i>	220
2.4.3. <i>Mass of the Poor and Centre of Spirituality</i>	221
3. Formation in the Union.....	223
3.1. <i>First Formation of Consecrated Catechists</i>	223
3.2. <i>First Formation of Associated Catechists</i>	226
3.3. <i>Formators in the Union</i>	226
3.4. <i>Permanent Formation</i>	227
Conclusion.....	229

Part Three

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION AND NATURE OF CATECHETICAL ACTION IN THE CHURCH

Chapter V: OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF CATECHETICAL ACTION IN THE CHURCH	231
1. Catechesis in the Apostolic Period.....	232
1.1. <i>First Moment of Apostolic Preaching (kerygma)</i>	233
1.2. <i>Second Moment of Apostolic Preaching</i>	234
2. Patristic Period/Period of Catechumenate.....	235
2.1. <i>Catechumenate before Peace of Constantine</i>	237
2.2. <i>Catechumenate after Peace of Constantine</i>	239
3. Catechesis in the Middle Ages.....	241
3.1. <i>First and Second Periods of Christian Preaching</i>	242
3.2. <i>Third and Forth Periods of Christian Preaching</i>	244

4. Catechesis in the Modern Period.....	246
4.1. <i>Reformation and Catholic Catechisms</i>	247
4.2. <i>Confraternity of Christian Doctrine</i>	251
4.3. <i>Catechesis and the Phenomenon of Enlightenment</i>	252
4.4. <i>Catechesis in Popular Schools</i>	254
5. Catechesis in the Contemporary Period.....	255
5.1. <i>International Catechetical Movements</i>	257
5.2. <i>The Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>	259
5.3. <i>The General Directory for Catechesis</i>	261
5.4. <i>Restoration of the Catechumenate</i>	263
Conclusion.....	265
 Chapter VI: NATURE OF CATECHESIS IN THE CHURCH.....	267
1. Terminological Clarification and Definition of Catechesis.....	268
2. Biblical and Theological Nature of Catechesis.....	273
3. Integral Nature of Catechesis.....	276
3.1. <i>Catechesis in the Kerygmatic Dimension</i>	277
3.2. <i>Catechesis in the Diakonal Dimension</i>	279
3.3. <i>Catechesis in the Koinoniac Dimension</i>	282
3.4. <i>Catechesis in the Liturgical Dimension</i>	285
4. Authentic Nature of Catechesis.....	287
4.1. <i>Maturity in Faith in the Cognitive/Intellectual Dimension</i>	288
4.2. <i>Maturity in Faith in the Affective/Emotive Dimension</i>	288
4.3. <i>Maturity in Faith in the Operative/Behavioural Dimension</i>	289
5. Ecumenical Nature of Catechesis.....	289
6. Contextual Nature of Catechesis.....	291
6.1. <i>Inculturizing Nature of Catechesis</i>	291
6.2. <i>Dialogic Nature of Catechesis</i>	293
6.3. <i>Liberative Nature of Catechesis</i>	295
Conclusion.....	297

Chapter VII: IDENTITY, APOSTOLATE AND FORMATION OF CATECHISTS IN	
THE CHURCH	298
1. Identity of Catechists.....	299
1.1. <i>Terminological Clarification and Definition of a Catechist</i>	299
1.2. <i>Vocational Identity of a Catechist</i>	300
1.3. <i>Common Functional Identity of Catechists</i>	301
1.4. <i>Spirituality of a Catechist</i>	304
2. Apostolate of Catechists as Companions of the Young.....	307
2.1. <i>Accompanying the Young towards Maturity in Faith</i>	309
2.2. <i>Two Biblical Models of Accompaniment</i>	312
2.2.1. <i>The Journey towards Emmaus – a Journey towards Fullness of Truth</i>	313
2.2.1.1. <i>The Core of Catechesis</i>	313
2.2.1.2. <i>Methodological Elements</i>	315
2.2.2. <i>The Journey of Tobias – a Journey towards Realization in Love</i>	318
2.2.2.1. <i>Essential Task of Catechists as Companions</i>	319
2.2.2.2. <i>Accompanying the Young in All Aspects of the Personality</i>	320
2.2.2.3. <i>Realization in Love</i>	321
3. Formation of Catechists.....	321
3.1. <i>Dimensions of Formation</i>	322
3.1.1. <i>Formation in the Dimension of “Being”</i>	322
3.1.1.1. <i>Human Maturity</i>	323
3.1.1.2. <i>Christian Maturity</i>	323
3.1.1.3. <i>Mature Ecclesial Identity/Apostolic Maturity</i>	325
3.1.2. <i>Formation in the Dimension of “Knowing”</i>	326
3.1.2.1. <i>Biblico-Theological Competency</i>	326
3.1.2.2. <i>Knowledge of the Human Person</i>	327
3.1.2.3. <i>Knowledge of the Environment</i>	328
3.1.3. <i>Formation in the Dimensions of “Knowing-How” and “Being-With”</i>	330
3.1.3.1. <i>Educational Skills</i>	330
3.1.3.2. <i>Communication Skills</i>	331

3.1.3.3. <i>Relational Capacity</i>	332
3.1.3.4. <i>Capacity for Animation</i>	333
3.1.3.5. <i>Capacity for Correct Catechetical Planning</i>	334
3.2. <i>Itinerary for the Formation of Catechists</i>	334
3.2.1. <i>The Call</i>	334
3.2.2. <i>Initial/Basic Formation</i>	336
3.2.2.1. <i>Catechetical Schools/Centers</i>	336
3.2.2.2. <i>Catechetical Workshops</i>	338
3.2.3. <i>Ongoing/Permanent Formation</i>	340
3.2.4. <i>Auto-formation and Formation in the Ecclesial Community</i>	341
3.3. <i>Formators of Catechists</i>	342
Conclusion.....	344

Part Four

TOWARDS A RENEWAL OF THE “CATECHISTS’ UNION”

Chapter VIII: RENEWAL OF THE “CATECHISTS’ UNION” WITH A FOCUS ON

THE CATECHETICAL AND SOCIAL APOSTOLATE.....	347
1. An Appraisal of the Union’s Need for Renewal.....	348
2. Towards a Renewal of the Ecclesial Dimension of the Union’s Apostolate.....	352
2.1. <i>Towards a More Relevant Catechetical Apostolate among the Young</i>	352
2.1.1. <i>Renewed Vision of the Young</i>	353
2.1.1.1. <i>Looking at Young People as Precious Resources</i>	353
2.1.1.2. <i>Getting Closer to the Young</i>	354
2.1.1.3. <i>Building a Spiritual Friendship with the Young</i>	355
2.1.1.4. <i>Helping Young People Cultivate Some Fundamental Attitudes of Life</i>	357
2.1.2. <i>Accompanying the Young towards Vocational Discernment and Realization</i>	359
2.1.2.1. <i>Understanding the Profound Sense of Vocation</i>	359

2.1.2.2.	<i>Helping the Young to Make a Fundamental Religious Experience.....</i>	361
2.1.2.3.	<i>Helping the Young to Make a Personal Project of Life.....</i>	363
2.1.2.4.	<i>Encouraging the Young to Realize Their Project Faithfully.....</i>	365
2.1.2.5.	<i>Major Tasks of Catechists as Vocational Animators.....</i>	366
2.1.3.	<i>Helping Young People to be Consistent in Their Catholic Faith.....</i>	367
2.2.	<i>Towards a Renewal of the Catechetical Content and Method.....</i>	372
2.2.1.	<i>Proposing the Figure of Jesus Crucified to Young People.....</i>	373
2.2.1.1.	<i>Understanding the Internal Suffering of Young People.....</i>	374
2.2.1.2.	<i>Proposing the Cross as the Truth of Life.....</i>	376
2.2.1.3.	<i>Demonstrating the Triumphant Power of the Cross.....</i>	377
2.2.2.	<i>Choosing Suitable Catechetical Forms and Structures.....</i>	379
2.2.2.1.	<i>Catechizing by Narrating.....</i>	380
2.2.2.2.	<i>Using Symbolic Catechesis.....</i>	382
2.2.2.3.	<i>Taking Initiatives for the Restoration of the Catechumenate.....</i>	384
2.2.3.	<i>Planning an Effective Catechetical Action.....</i>	386
2.2.3.1.	<i>Working Together with Other Pastoral Workers.....</i>	386
2.2.3.2.	<i>Following the Correct Itinerary of Catechetical Planning.....</i>	387
2.2.3.3.	<i>Evaluating the Catechetical Action in Respect to the Ecclesial Dimensions.....</i>	391
3.	<i>Towards a Renewal of the Social Dimension of the Apostolate.....</i>	393
3.1.	<i>Living the Prophetic Mission to the Full in the Society.....</i>	394
3.1.1.	<i>Catechists as Critical Observers of the 'Signs of the Times'.....</i>	394
3.1.2.	<i>Catechists as Concrete Signs of God's Presence among His People.....</i>	396
3.1.3.	<i>Catechists as Advocators for Justice.....</i>	397
3.1.4.	<i>Catechists as Promoters of Peace.....</i>	399
3.1.5.	<i>Catechists as Sowers of Hope.....</i>	401
3.2.	<i>Active Promotion of Political Action.....</i>	403
3.2.1.	<i>Maturing a Political Conscience.....</i>	404
3.2.2.	<i>Cultivating the Fundamental Principles of Orientation.....</i>	406
4.	<i>Towards a Formation Program Suitable for an Effective Apostolate.....</i>	407

4.1. <i>Formation to the Praxis of Inculturation</i>	407
4.2. <i>Formation to Ecumenical and Inter-religious Dialogue</i>	409
4.3. <i>Formation within the Ecclesial Environment</i>	410
4.4. <i>Formation of Different Categories of Catechists</i>	411
5. Towards a Renewal of the Identity of the Union as a Secular Institute.....	413
5.1. <i>Correct Projection of the Apostolic Works</i>	414
5.2. <i>More Incarnated Spirituality</i>	415
Conclusion.....	416
GENERAL CONCLUSION	419
1. Objective Orientation of the Apostolate of the Union.....	420
2. Apostolic Field of the Catechists of the Union.....	421
3. Fundamental Ways for Realizing the Apostolic Mission.....	422
BIBLIOGRAPHY	425
1. Ecclesial Documents.....	425
1.1. <i>Papal and Conciliar Documents</i>	425
1.2. <i>Other Ecclesial Documents</i>	429
2. Sources on the “Catechists’ Union”	433
3. Studies on Secular Institutes.....	441
4. Studies on Catechists, Catechesis and Evangelization.....	448