



## Liturgy and Catechesis: Exploring their Intertwined Relationship

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**Abstract.** The article, entitled “Liturgy and Catechesis: Searching for an Intertwined Relationship”, aims to explain the closest connection between liturgy and catechesis, which from the beginning of Christianity has been realized as a unity in growing faith. Its main focus is to describe their interconnected in Christian history through some documents. For this purpose, the discussion is divided into two parts. First, exploring their intertwined relationship in the first four centuries. In this section, we are going to present several Christian figures and/or the earliest liturgical documents. Second, to examine the recent documents, starting from *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. The method of this article is supported by document research; there are two categories, early and recent documents. The documents are analyzed comprehensively using commentaries on the documents and other books related to the sources.

**Keywords:** Evangelization, intertwine, liturgy, mystagogy, sacraments.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Anscar J. Chupungco, an expert on Liturgy, stated that “liturgical renewal is the confluence of several factors: the revision of the liturgical books, translation, and adaptation, rediscovery of the theological and spiritual dimension of the rite, and the renewed liturgical catechesis”(Chupungco 1992:134). Among these factors, liturgical catechesis deserves more attention from liturgists and pastors, particularly in the post–Vatican II era. It is not an exaggeration to say that liturgical reform and its promotion would not have taken off without catechesis. The agenda of Vatican II regarding liturgical reform cannot move forward without catechesis, and the changes in the liturgical rite and texts will not affect the Christian life without it.

People will not understand the theological and spiritual dimensions of the liturgy without catechesis. And, even though *Sacrosanctum Concilium* No. 34 urges that the rites should not require much explanation, liturgy needs catechesis; the people of God must be enlightened on several spiritual aspects of the liturgical celebration. This means catechesis is an indispensable companion of the liturgy.

Liturgy and catechesis are like “two wings of a bird”; one supports and presupposes the other. The main task of catechesis is to explain the faith celebrated in the liturgy and its rites; symbols, dynamics, and prayers. Therefore, without catechesis, the liturgical celebration becomes merely a ceremonial celebration. On the other hand, catechesis activities should be from the liturgy and return to it. The ultimate purpose of catechesis is to guide the faithful in encountering and experiencing the mystery of Christ celebrated in the liturgy.

The inseparable relationship between them has been recognized by Christians since their early development. Christian documents in the first four centuries showed that catechesis always precedes liturgy; homilies, discourses, treatises, and catechesis. In the modern era, the harmonious relationship between them was formulated adequately, particularly in the documents of Vatican II and its descendants.

In the era of advanced technology and rapid information, catechists are encouraged to realize their inestimable vocation. They play a rich role in the church in explaining faith and exploring the meaning of the liturgical celebrations. Therefore, they are supported to be courageous in accompanying the faithful to experience the presence of Christ; explaining the liturgical celebrations not merely by the traditional methods, face-to-face in a class or a hall, but also a public and digital space, by using social media.

## **2. METHOD**

The article is compiled by studying certain documents; it is done by collecting, and selecting documents related to the theme, and determining which is to be investigated. Then they are divided into two categories; the first four centuries' documents and the moderns. The first category consists of Didache, Apostolic Tradition, (The Baptism – *Baptismo* of Tertullian, Apology of Justine Martyr, and Cyril of Jerusalem. The second category consists of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Evangelium Nuntiandi*, *Catechese Traedenti*, and Directory for Catechesis.

The article depicts the intertwined relationship between liturgy and catechesis found in the documents above. For that purpose, it presents two main topics to be explored; the intertwined connection between liturgy and catechesis in the early Christian documents, and in the modern documents.

## **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Liturgy and Catechesis in the First Four Centuries***

During the Patristic period, the liturgy was the heartbeat of the Church. The Fathers were not only bishops, or theologians, but were also catechists, genuine teachers of the Christian faith. Most of their works promoted the liturgical catechesis, such as initiation, mystagogical, and eucharistic catechesis. They exemplified how catechesis is related to the liturgy in harmony. Through their homilies, they explained the Scripture from a liturgical perspective, teaching the community topics inspired by the liturgical experience. When

explaining the rites of initiation, they highlighted their spiritual insight for the benefit of the flock. In other words, catechesis and liturgy are entwined.

As the number of Christians grew, the Fathers incessantly taught the mystery of Christ both to the catechumen and the faithful. Therefore, liturgical catechesis was a priority for the fathers. Catechizing and homilies were based on the liturgical celebration, aiming to lead the believers to the mystery of Christ celebrated in the liturgy.

The Fathers lead them to the mystery through the catechesis. In ancient times, there were two stages of baptism preparation; long and short. Catechizing was adjusted to the stages. Following Hippolytus' testimony, candidates should be prepared for three years. During this time, catechumens were urged to take care of the poor and widows, participate in the liturgy of the Word, exercise prayer, and live according to Christian morals. The short preparation started on Ash Wednesday, involving fasting, exorcism, and guidance to the baptism celebration (Whitaker 1970:3-4). As Anscar J. Chupungco notes, "For a week the bishop gathered them and explained step by step what the words they heard and the signs they saw signified". The bishop was responsible for the catechesis, explaining the rite of baptism, the meaning of the gesture, the matter, and the symbols.

After baptism, catechizing was important, as it led neophytes to the mystery of Christ celebrated in the liturgy on the Paschal Vigil. The rite of initiation experienced in the baptism was explained in depth, highlighting the spiritual meaning of the symbols, rite, and moral implications (Milavec [tanpa tahun]:13). This type of catechizing is called mystagogy.

**The Didache (1<sup>st</sup> /2<sup>nd</sup> AD)**, an early liturgical document, noted how the catechesis led the candidates to the liturgical celebration. In Chapter Seven, instructions regarding baptism presuppose a set of catechesis found in Chapters One to Six, which discuss the two ways: "one of life and one of death". The text stated: "*Having said all these things beforehand, immerse in the name of the Father and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*(Milavec [tanpa tahun])" The words "*Having said all these things*" indicate that the candidate must be taught before being baptized. It is founded in Chapters One to Six, a set of catechesis regarding the two ways of life: "*There are two ways: one of life and one of death – (and) [there is] a great difference between the two ways, ...*" (Milavec [tanpa tahun]). This catechesis emphasizes observing moral conduct according to Church standards.

**Justine Martyr's Apology (100-165)**, Chapter 61, highlights catechesis before one is baptized. He stated that one could be baptized after being taught, meaning baptism presupposes understanding and understanding presupposes catechesis. Justine noted: "As many as are

persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their past sins, we praying and fasting with them. Then they are brought by us where there is water ... (Dods, M - Reith 2015:40)” Justine insisted that one had to have the ability to live according to Christ’s conduct, “undertake to be able to live accordingly”. One must follow the instructions of the community such as praying, fasting, and repenting. Catechesis must lead one to change attitude and morals adjusting to Christian ethics.

**Tertullian (160-240)** offered an interesting preparatory of baptism catechesis. He argued that not only was faith sufficient for human salvation, but also that baptism was essential (YILMAZ 2020:376). His explanation is based on the Scripture. He referred to St. Paul who said: “had sufficiently learned and believed the Nazarene to be the Lord, the Son of God,” before he was baptized. He also referred to the eunuch who was not suddenly seized with an eager desire to be baptized, but after going up to the temple for prayer’s sake, he is intently engaged in the Scripture. (Ac 8:26-40).

Catechizing is a central activity before baptism. The citation below is one of Tertullian’s catechesis regarding the meaning of chrism’s oil:

After that, we come up from the washing and are anointed with a blessed unction, following that ancient practice by which, ever since Aaron was anointed by Moses, there was a custom of anointing them for the priesthood with oil of a horn. That is why [the high priest] is called a Christ, from “chrism” which is [the Greek for] “anointing”: and from this also our Lord obtained his title, though it had become a spiritual anointing, in that he was anointed with Spirit by God the Father (Whitaker 1970).

**The Apostolic Tradition (215)** is the first document to mention the catechumenate as an organized institution in the early Church. It states: “Those who come forward for the first time to hear the word shall first be brought to the teachers at the house before all the people [of God] come in” (Whitaker 1970). Catechumens must be instructed for three years, during which their motives and lifestyle were examined; whether they lived piously while catechumens, honored the widows, visited the sick, or fulfilled every good work (Whitaker 1970). A sponsor had to give testimony regarding the candidate and teachers of catechesis had to guide them, praying by themselves and fasting.

**Cyril, the Bishop of Jerusalem (313-386)**, was preoccupied with the catechesis and wrote the Catechesis, a compilation of homilies for the baptismal candidates and the newly baptized (mystagogical catechesis). Through his homilies, he taught both candidates and neophytes,

connecting his teachings to the rites, gestures, and Scripture texts in the sacraments. He used theological terms to describe the early Christian customs Antonius B. Wibowo, “Rediscovering Mystagogy Through the History of Christianity,” (Melintas 26 (2010): 301–2). For example, he explained why Jesus was baptized, saying: “Jesus sanctified Baptism, being Himself baptized. Since the Son of God was baptized, what religious man can despise Baptism? He, however, was baptized, not to receive forgiveness of sins, for He was sinless: but being sinless, to grant divine grace and dignity to the baptized. Since the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise shared the same, that we, partaking of His bodily” (Newman 1838:30).

The character of the baptismal catechesis was rooted in Scriptural references. The Father based their teaching on Scripture by synchronizing the Old and New Testament. For instance, he gave the reason why Jesus should be baptized “he was baptized not to receive forgiveness of sin [...] but to grant divine grace and dignity to the baptized”. In this catechesis, he led the candidates to the mystery of baptism and highlighted the theological tone of Jesus’ baptism.

In other catechesis, Cyril gave a message to the newly baptized, saying:

Keep this anointing unspotted. If it abides in you, it will teach you all things, as you have just heard the blessed John say in his long discourse about the anointing. For this sacrament is the spiritual preserver of the body, and the salvation of the soul... Now that you are anointed with this holy Myron, keep it in yourself spotless and unsullied—advance in good works, and please the ‘pioneer of your salvation’, Jesus Christ. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen (Newman 1838).

### ***Liturgy and Catechesis in the Documents of Vatican II and Post***

#### ***1) Sacrosanctum Concilium (1963)***

The first document of the Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, in its first article, emphasizes the profound connection between liturgy and catechesis, when it declares: “It desires to impart an ever-increasing vigor to the Christian life of the faithful” (Concilium Vaticanum II 1963:No. 1). This desire is explained in three propositions: to adapt the liturgy more suitably to the needs of our times, to foster whatever can promote union among Christians, and to strengthen whatever can help to call the whole of mankind into the household of the Church. However, liturgical renewal requires liturgical catechesis; it needs catechesis to

impart, promote, and explain both liturgical renewal and liturgical celebration and to promote the liturgy. This is the first convergence between liturgy and catechesis.

The intimacy between them continues in article 48. Liturgy is the celebration of the mystery of Christ through significant dan sacramental signs – symbols, rites, and prayer, “*per ritus et preces*”. Therefore, they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration (Concilium Vaticanum II 1963). Pastors and priests should realize that the faithful celebrate the liturgy by mere observation, abiding by the laws governing valid and licit celebration. However, “they should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy” (Concilium Vaticanum II 1963). The words “participation fully conscious” presuppose understanding, mindfulness, and awareness. Making them understand, mindful, and aware is the core activity of catechesis and catechists.

The inseparable relation between liturgy and catechesis is underscored by article 10: “The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time, it is the font from which all her power flows” (Concilium Vaticanum II 1963). The Catechism of the Catholic Church, standing on document, says that liturgy is the privileged place for catechizing the People of God. Therefore, 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” (Paul John. II 1992:1074).

Being the summit of the Church activities, liturgy is the source of the catechesis. The main purpose of the catechists is to lead the faithful to encounter God in the liturgical celebration. This means that, finally, catechesis brings the people to celebrate the mystery of God in the liturgy. In this sense, “catechesis is mystagogy that by proceeding leads the faithful from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the thing signified, from the “sacraments” to the “mysteries” (Paul John. II 1992).

This fits with Article 35, which emphasizes the promotion of a catechesis more explicitly liturgical. This article underscores two important points; first, catechesis is inserted into the framework that highlights the didactic dimension of the liturgy, in the awareness that liturgical life needs to be supported by a catechetical depth; second, it constitutes the liturgy, as a source from which to draw to develop an authentic Christian spirituality (Noceti, S. - Repole 2014:155).

We realize that, on one hand, the catechesis leads people to a deep and fruitful experience of the liturgy, as the summit and the font of Christian activities. This means liturgical celebration is not effective without catechetical effort. On the other hand, liturgy is the source of the catechesis; catechists must teach the people the meaning of the liturgy. Therefore, the source of the catechists could be the liturgical years, sacraments, the liturgy of the hours, and sacramentals. Catechists should explain the meaning of the liturgical rites; prayer, gestures, sacramental symbols, etc.

## 2) *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975)

This document was released by Pope Paul VI in memoriam in the 10<sup>th</sup> closing of Vatican II and to follow up the Synods of the Bishops, highlighting the urgency of evangelization in the modern world. The attention on evangelization appears at the beginning of the document, where the Pope states: “There is no doubt that the effort to proclaim the Gospel to the people of today” (Paul VI 1975:1).

The document emerged due to the concerns of the Pope and the bishops, as referred to in the two previous synods. They had a deep anxiety about the advanced modern technology and its impact on modern society. Their solicitude arose from questions such as: Do people still listen to the Gospel? Does evangelization have a strong influence on human conscience? Is there a more effective method for evangelization that has a strong impact on the human heart?

The same topic is also evident in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Modern society is not interested in hearing words, preaching, or evangelization of the Gospel. They are not moved by words. Recognizing the problem of evangelization in the modern world, the Pope published the document as a reflection of the Church, hoping it would bring new encouragement to evangelize the Gospel in truth, so that as many anxieties as possible could be answered. The document takes a praxis approach to theology, suggesting a dialogue between the Gospel and concrete experience; that evangelization is not just the application of the Gospel to each particular experience of life. However, we can discover and understand more deeply the story of God amongst us by examining life itself.

Although the main issue is evangelization, the Pope also touches on the connection between catechesis and the liturgy. The role of catechesis appears in article 44: “Truly the effort for evangelization will profit greatly - at the level of catechetical instruction given at church, in the schools, where this is possible, and in every case in Christian homes- if those giving catechetical instruction have suitable texts...” (Paul VI 1975). The Pope realizes that

evangelization will strongly affect the catechesis in the Church, school, and in every case in Christian homes.

The Pope underlines that evangelization is not enough just through preaching the word of God, and testimony. It must touch supernatural life, which is expressed in the seven sacraments. In other words, the connection between the proclamation of the word and the sacramental cannot be separated. This is the theological ground for linking catechesis with the liturgy. A catechesis is a form of preaching the word of God that leads people to the celebration of the sacraments by shedding light on their meaning and purposes (Chupungco 1992). Pope Paul VI echoes this in Article 47 saying that evangelization, of which catechesis is an essential element, reveals all its richness when it shows the close connection between the Word and the sacraments. The celebration of the sacraments without the solid support of the catechesis will, in great measure, deprive the sacraments of their efficacy (Paul VI 1975).

In the spirit of Vatican II, evangelization and catechesis guide the people of God to the sacraments and encourage them to participate in sacramental celebrations. At this point, evangelization and catechesis have the same purposes: teaching and leading the people to live according to the Gospel, accepting the sacraments, and participating in the liturgy.

### *3) Catechesi Tradendae (1979)*

This document, published on 16 October 1979, is a further reflection on the previous documents, such as the Directory for Catechesis, the World Congress of Catechists (1971), *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and the Synod of Bishops. *Catechesi Tradendae*, issued on the first anniversary of John Paul II's pontificate, bears similarities to the *Evangelii Nuntiandi*; one highlights the catechesis in the modern world, while the other emphasizes evangelization in the modern world.

John Paul II, considering the importance of the catechesis in our time, said: "The Church has always considered catechesis one of her primary tasks [...] Christ gave the apostles a final command - to make disciples of all nations and to teach them to observe all that He had commanded" (Paul John. II 1979:1). Therefore, teaching people and helping them understand the liturgy is the core activity of catechesis.

Referring to Jesus' commission, he reminded us that catechesis is one of the main tasks of the Church. As Jesus commissioned his disciples, the Church is commissioned to catechize the people in the modern world. The Pope underscored that the catechesis must be centered on Christ, meaning it leads the faithful to the mystery of salvation (Paul John. II 1979). This is evident in the Directory for Catechesis, Article 21, which states: "With the aid of catechesis,



communities of Christians acquire a more profound living knowledge of God and of His plan of salvation, which has its focus on Christ, the incarnate Word of God” (Paul John. II 1979:21).

Although the document’s main issue focuses on catechization in the modern world, it traces its connection with the liturgy. Following his predecessor, John Paul II confirms the connection between catechesis and liturgy. The Pope says: “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” (Paul John. II 1979).

Catechesis prepares people for the sacraments; every form of catechesis necessarily leads them to the sacraments of faith. The authentic practice of the sacraments is bound to have a catechetical aspect. In other words, sacramental life turns into mere ritualism if it is not based on serious knowledge of the meaning of the sacraments, and catechesis remains at the mere intellectual level if it fails to come alive in the sacramental practice. However, leading people into the liturgical life requires knowing that the rich treasury of liturgical prayer is a resource for marking not only sacramental moments but also other moments, including the ordinary events of our lives.

#### 4) *Directory for Catechesis (1971)*

As stated in the foreword, the document intends to provide the basic principles of pastoral theology so that pastoral action in the ministry of the Word can be more fittingly directed and governed.

The connection between catechesis and liturgy is expressed in Article 25, which quotes *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Article 7, admitting and defining liturgy as a sacred action surpassing all others. No other action of the Church can match its claim efficacy, nor equal its degree. Starting from that notion, the Directory, in supporting SC, Article 14, states that the catechesis is responsible for promoting an active, conscious, genuine participation in the liturgy. Furthermore, catechesis not only explains the meaning of the ceremonies, but also forms the people of God for prayer, thanksgiving, repentance, praying with confidence, community spirit, and understanding the meaning of the creeds correctly. All these things are necessary for a true liturgical life (Sacred Congregation for the Clergy 1971:25). Therefore, catechesis has the duty of presenting the seven sacraments according to their full meaning.

Liturgical catechesis is a way of forming people of God to the Christian life. Formation of the liturgical catechesis should be before, ongoing, and after. Catechesis teaches catechumens to understand the sacrament they are going to receive. Having been baptized, catechesis leads them to the mystery of the sacrament, and mystagogical catechesis leads the faithful to the maturity of faith. As stated in the Directory for Catechesis: “Within the scope of pastoral activity, catechesis is the term to be used for that form of ecclesial action that leads both communities and individual members of the faithful to the maturity of faith” (Sacred Congregation for the Clergy 1971).

The spirit of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* aims to lead people into the liturgical celebration actively, fully, and consciously, supported by the Directory, saying: “Every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the priest and his Body the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others [...] Therefore, catechesis must promote an active, conscious, genuine participation in the liturgy of the Church, not merely by explaining the meaning of the ceremonies, but also by forming the minds of the faithful for prayer” (Sacred Congregation for the Clergy 1971).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Since the first four centuries, there have been intertwined relationships between liturgy. It appears in the earliest liturgical documents. The Fathers of the Church played a crucial role in explaining the rich meaning of liturgical celebrations before and after receiving the sacraments. That means catechesis is an instrument in guiding people of God into the mystery of Christ.

Recent documents started from *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, highlight and confirm the intertwined relationship between liturgy and catechesis. On the one hand, liturgy, as the *fons et culmen* of the Christian life, is the main source of catechesis and to which people should be guided. On the other hand, catechesis makes them understand liturgical celebration. Without catechesis, the liturgy becomes a mere ritualistic celebration. Catechesis focuses on explaining the liturgical celebration: sacraments, daily worship, the liturgical year, sacramentals, devotions, rites, symbols, etc. It does not merely touch the cognitive level but, also leads the faithful to encounter God in the liturgy and in their personal lives. Hence, liturgy and catechesis are two sides of the same reality; liturgy is the main field of catechesis to serve the people of God, and catechesis teaches and leads them to the mystery of Christ celebrated in the liturgy.

In the era of advanced technology, where information comes and goes, the catechists are encouraged to realize their vocation in accompanying the faithful, not merely by traditional catechesis, but also by using public and digital space. In applying that, they should realize that

liturgy and catechesis are heritages of the Church that always “walk together”; one supports, needs, and presupposes the others.

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