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## **The Relationship between the First Proclamation and a Kerygmatic type of Catechesis**

### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to try and highlight the fecund relationship between the first proclamation and a kerygmatic type of catechesis as this is found in the *Directory for Catechesis* promulgated by the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, the first proclamation has been given a renewed meaning in that it is not only considered as the first proclamation in time, but it is extended as a primary proclamation throughout the life of the person. The kerygmatic type of catechesis posited in the *Directory* seeks to present Jesus Christ in a way in which the Good News becomes an accompanying factor throughout the entire life of the person. It is this person-centredness which is at the basis of the relationship between the first proclamation and a kerygmatic type of catechesis.

### **Keywords**

Directory for Catechesis, First Proclamation, Kerygmatic Catechesis

The aim of this paper is to try and highlight the relationship between the first proclamation and a kerygmatic type of catechesis as this is elaborated upon in the *Directory for Catechesis* (= *Directory*).<sup>1</sup> The two terms, namely, ‘first proclamation’ and ‘kerygmatic catechesis’ can be considered as two keywords with which one can understand better the entire reasoning and thinking which undergirds the *Directory*. The stance which will be adopted in this paper is the pastoral and catechetical point of view. One can see the importance of these two terms initially by considering the fact that they appear several times in the entire *Directory*. A simple survey from the empirical point of view on the number of times in which they appear reveals that the term ‘first proclamation’ or ‘first announcement’ appears at least 24 times in the text of the *Directory*.<sup>2</sup> Analogously, the term ‘kerygmatic catechesis’ and other phrases referring to a kerygmatic type of catechesis appear at least 8 times throughout the *Directory*.<sup>3</sup> In both instances the Preface of the *Directory* is being excluded, and moreover, only direct references are being considered. One may rest assured that there are many other indirect and secondary references to both of these terms, and it would be impossible and beyond the scope of this paper to reference them all here.

Since in our contemporary society everything seems to blend with other things, it seems that we are past the age of clear distinctions and definitions. However, it is still important to seek to give a working definition of these two terms according to their meaning in the *Directory*, and then seek to endeavour to find a relationship between them.

## 1. The First Proclamation

The aim of the first proclamation in the process of evangelisation and of catechesis is always to announce the Good News in a nutshell, and to do this in such a way that the interlocutor moves on to the point of conversion.<sup>4</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization, *Directory for Catechesis* (23 March 2020), London 2020, Catholic Truth Society.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Directory for Catechesis*, para. 31, 33, 37, 41, 56–58, 63, 66–68, 78, 117, 152, 230, 232, 238, 240, 280, 297, 303, 341, 421.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Directory for Catechesis*, para. 2, 57–60, 145, 253, 282, 327, 353, 420.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Directory for Catechesis*, para. 66.

is a fundamental aspect in the entire process of evangelisation, since a first proclamation which does not induce the interlocutor to conversion is fruitless and futile. The interlocutors who undergo the first proclamation may be either those who do not know of Christ and have therefore never heard of him, or those who have initially adhered to the faith but have then distanced themselves from it for several reasons.<sup>5</sup>

Whilst in previous documents of the Church pertaining to evangelisation in general, and to catechesis in particular, the first proclamation as a specific moment in the process is referred to as one particular moment which is very specific and clearly defined at the beginning of the process of evangelisation,<sup>6</sup> the *Directory* extends and expands this to a process which not only can, but must cover the entire lifespan of the human being. In fact, the *Directory* speaks of a first proclamation in such a way that this is not only the first in terms of precedence and position by being situated at the beginning, but that it constitutes a proclamation of basic beliefs which need to be revisited over and over again throughout the lifetime of the interlocutor.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, more than a first proclamation or first announcement, we can speak more of a primary proclamation rather than a first proclamation. Such a proclamation can be referred to as a primary proclamation because it is made up of the basic notions and elements of the faith, rather than being numerically the first. However, for clarity's sake and in order to respect the nomenclature used in the *Directory*, in this paper the term first proclamation will be retained as much as possible.

The first proclamation as the presentation of the fundamental truths of the faith at the beginning of the process of evangelisation can take place in many different milieus and by many different individuals. The *Directory* diversifies between the first proclamation which is addressed *ad gentes* and the first proclamation in other ecclesial contexts.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Directory for Catechesis*, para. 41. One may also see Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (11 August 1997), [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/clergy/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccatheduc\\_doc\\_17041998\\_directory-for-catechesis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/clergy/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_17041998_directory-for-catechesis_en.html) (01.02.2021), para. 61–62.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *General Directory for Catechesis*, para. 61–68.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Directory for Catechesis*, para. 67–68.

### 1.1. First Proclamation *Ad Gentes*

The first proclamation *ad gentes* commences through a whole process of inculturation and mixing with people in such a way that they start to ask why the evangelising person is acting and behaving in such a way, and moreover, doing so without seeking compensation. Although this may be a silent proclamation which is based more on actions rather than words, it still arouses the question in the interlocutor of why and for what reasons the evangeliser is behaving in that particular way. These questions constitute the important moment of preparing the terrain for the first proclamation. For the interlocutor they constitute the first stepping-stones to the adherence to the faith which is not just based on mere curiosity but through a genuine conviction. It is here that an initial interest in the Gospel is also registered, and Jesus Christ as the saviour of humanity is introduced. Here the process of evangelisation proper now starts and moves from the effect of pure actions to an oral proclamation.<sup>8</sup> This is at times also referred to as the pre-catechumenate.<sup>9</sup> This form of first proclamation addressed *ad gentes* may include many aspects amongst which we find elements of diakonia, the putting into practice of the preferential option for the poor, and many other actions on a human level. Although these may be considered as part of the pre-evangelisation process, they are really and truly an integral part of the process of evangelisation although this remains incomplete in itself if it does not lead to conversion and to adherence to the faith.

### 1.2. A Problematic First Proclamation in the Family Context

In families, it is the parents or guardians themselves who are called to be the protagonists of the first proclamation for their children.<sup>10</sup> However, can we say that this is taking place in our families today? Are our families still the cradle of evangelisation or have they delegated this role to significant others which include teachers of religion in schools, catechists in parishes and to ordinary

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. J. Gevaert, *La proposta del Vangelo a chi non conosce il Cristo. Finalità, destinatari, contenuti, modalità di presenza*, Leumann (To) 2001, Editrice Elledici, pp. 50–76.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Directory for Catechesis*, para. 66.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Directory for Catechesis*, para. 226–228. One may also see Carl-Mario Sultana, *The Role of the Family in Educating Children for the Faith*, “Roczniki Theologiczne. Annals of Theology” 62 (2015) 11, pp. 5–17.

pastoral ministers, including priests? Has this been delegated to grandmothers who seem to have taken on the faith formation role which belongs strictly to parents? What will happen in the near future when the younger generations become grandparents themselves but have not received a solid first proclamation when they were young? What will happen in the subsequent first proclamations as proposed by the *Directory* if there were no true and proper foundations of the faith in the original first proclamation? This state of affairs presents us with a dilemma which we need to tackle as soon as possible if we are not to find ourselves in a situation where we are trying to form interlocutors who have no solid foundations of the faith.

### 1.3. The contents of the first proclamation as pre-evangelisation

The focus of the first proclamation is always the presentation of Jesus Christ and of the Good News in a nutshell. This means that the first proclamation is a process which is strictly linked to Sacred Scripture. More specifically the Gospels are the main source of the proclamation. The basic notion that is communicated during this form of first proclamation is that Jesus Christ is the Lord and Saviour of all humankind, and that he loves everyone no matter the race, skin colour or the past of the interlocutor.<sup>11</sup> This makes the first proclamation a Christocentric kerygma which naturally then helps to unfold the more theocentric and communitarian-centred contents and practice of the faith. Here we may need to differentiate between those who are really and truly at the very beginning of their walk in the faith and those who have already been somehow initiated and are in the process of restoring their faith.

The first proclamation presents another dilemma: which Christ do we have to proclaim as kerygma during the first proclamation? The reason for this is that it may prove to be very difficult to communicate the life of a Hebrew person from such a distant past to contemporary interlocutors. If such is the case one needs to be very cautious on the texts of the Gospel which one chooses and which can be used for the first proclamation.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html) (01.02.2021), para. 164.

#### 1.4. An Extended First (or Primary) Proclamation

*Evangelii Gaudium* gives a somewhat new interpretation to the first proclamation than that with which we are accustomed to. It does not consider the first proclamation as a single specific moment at the beginning of the process of evangelisation, but it is extended throughout the life of the person in such a way that it becomes a process which is revisited several times throughout the lifetime of the interlocutor. This ultimately means that there are several ‘first’ or ‘primary’ proclamations throughout the lifetime of the individual: “This first proclamation is called “first” not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things. It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level and moment.”<sup>12</sup>

It is in this respect that we can refer to this process as the primary proclamation since it contains the fundamental contents of the proclamation which needs to be re-visited at different moments in the lifetime of the person, and not just at the beginning of the process of evangelisation and eventual catechesis.

The *Directory for Catechesis* presents this new interpretation of the first proclamation as a qualitative proclamation in that it seeks to reread the Good News of the Gospel in the light of the daily life and endeavours of the individual concerned. This is done in such a way that it is helpful to repeat the contents of this primary proclamation several times in the lifetime of the interlocutor, depending on the particular ‘season of life’ in which one is living. In this respect, the Good News of the Gospel is reapplied in a novel and relevant way to the life of the individual according to what s/he is going through at the moment, thus making it relevant throughout life. This is the same thrust which the kerygmatic type of catechesis proposed by the *Directory* is given. In this respect, the re-presentation of the first proclamation to the interlocutor in the light of what s/he is going through at the moment constitutes the point of contact between the first proclamation and a kerygmatic type of catechesis. It is the first proclamation which seeks to help the interlocutor to be more open and to accept the kerygma as the Good News of salvation.

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<sup>12</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, para. 164.

## 2. A Kerygmatic Type of Catechesis

The notion of a kerygmatic type of catechesis permeates the *Directory for Catechesis*. Moreover, this is done in such a way that while seeking to push forward a more kerygmatic type of catechesis, this is not done at the expense of taking us back in time to the kerygmatic movement which was typical of the 1930's through to the 1960's.<sup>13</sup> While the *Directory* pushes forward a more kerygmatic type of catechesis, diverse methodologies and didactic methods with which evangelisation and catechesis have been enriched in recent decades are safeguarded.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the *Directory for Catechesis* speaks of a plurality of kerygmas which can be traced in the Gospels, and not to a single kerygma.<sup>15</sup> This renders the kerygma very rich in that multiple facets of Christ and of his teachings can be presented to different categories of people at different moments of their lives. This brings forth the creativity with which the Good News of Christ needs to be presented to contemporary human beings.

It is in presenting catechesis with this kerygmatic characteristic that *Evangelii Gaudium* features once again. This apostolic exhortation posits a kerygmatic type of catechesis in the sense of seeking to help the interlocutors to encounter the person of Jesus Christ and not simply to know more about him in terms of knowledge. "We must not think that in catechesis the kerygma gives way to a supposedly more "solid" formation. Nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation. All Christian formation consists of entering more deeply into the kerygma, which is reflected in and constantly illuminates the work of catechesis, thereby enabling us to understand more fully the significance of every subject which the latter treats. It is the message capable of responding to the desire for the infinite which abides in every human heart. The centrality of the kerygma calls for stressing those elements which are most needed today: it has to express God's saving love which precedes any moral and religious obligation on our part; it should not impose the truth but appeal to freedom; it should be marked by joy, encouragement,

<sup>13</sup> Cf. G. Biancardi, U. Gianetto, *Storia della catechesi. 4. Il movimento catechistico*, Roma 2016, LAS, pp. 201–227; A. Läpple, *Breve storia della catechesi*, Brescia 1985, Queriniana, pp. 196–204; C.M. Sultana, *Catechesis in Europe during the 20th Century*, in: G. Bonney, R. Vicent, *Sophia – Paideia. Sapienza e Educazione (Sir 1, 27). Miscellanea di studi offerti in onore del prof. Don Mario Cimosà*, Roma 2012, LAS, pp. 426–430.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Directory for Catechesis*, para. 194–223.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Directory for Catechesis*, para. 58.

liveliness and a harmonious balance which will not reduce preaching to a few doctrines which are at times more philosophical than evangelical. All this demands on the part of the evangelizer certain attitudes which foster openness to the message: approachability, readiness for dialogue, patience, a warmth and welcome which is non-judgmental.”<sup>16</sup>

What is the *Directory for Catechesis* exactly referring to when it posits a kerygmatic type of catechesis as the way forward in our contemporary socio-cultural and catechetical milieu? It means that catechesis should be centred around the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ. This has several important implications, namely that our catechesis should take the form of a proclamation of the Person of Jesus Christ and not just a doctrinal presentation of the truths of the faith in an arid and abstract way. In this respect, more importance is to be given to accompanying the person in encountering Christ rather than giving contents. This implies a form of catechesis based on a Christian pedagogy which does not take a top-down approach but based on an itinerary aimed at illuminating the words and deeds of the person by the Holy Spirit. This is in line with what the *Directory for Catechesis* states as the goal of catechesis: “At the centre of every process of catechesis is the living encounter with Christ,”<sup>17</sup> and a continuation with what the *General Directory for Catechesis* had recommended as far back as 1997.<sup>18</sup> A kerygmatic type of catechesis is not obsessed with the simple transmission of information, knowledge and doctrine or of formulae of the faith, but it seeks to facilitate the encounter of the interlocutor with the Person of Jesus Christ.

This principal characteristic of a kerygmatic type of catechesis is the source of all the other positive characteristics with which such a catechesis is endowed. Amongst these positive characteristics, one finds that kerygmatic catechesis is constructivist in nature; that it is relevant to the entire life of the human being; that it renders catechesis something which is not distant from the human being; and that catechesis really touches the human being in his/her weakest points.

A catechesis which is styled on the kerygmatic proclamation of Jesus Christ is a constructivist type of catechesis because it seeks to encounter the interlocutor

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<sup>16</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, para. 165.

<sup>17</sup> *Directory for Catechesis*, para. 75.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *General Directory for Catechesis*, para. 80–81.

where s/he actually stands.<sup>19</sup> It does not seek to present a ready-made package which the interlocutor has to accept unconditionally as if s/he is an empty container which needs to be filled with information. This brings to mind Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of education based on the zone of proximal development and on scaffolding.<sup>20</sup> Using this theory the catechist as an educator for the faith approaches the interlocutor where the latter actually stands and helps him/her to move forward within his/her particular zone of development. It is in line with this that the catechist using a kerygmatic type of catechesis presents Jesus as the Good News who is interested in our qualms and anxieties, and as God with us, who accompanies us in whatever situation we find ourselves in throughout our lives. Jesus is presented as the Good News for each and every generation in a fresh way. This freshness constitutes also a point of contact with the extended primary proclamation which one is called to repeat several times in the lifetime of the interlocutor, according to where the interlocutor is at the moment.

Accompanying the interlocutor where s/he actually also calls for the specialised aid which psychoanalysis and humanistic psychology can offer. These two areas of psychology play a central role in the framework of a kerygmatic type of catechesis which seeks to accompany the interlocutor in the particular stance in which s/he is at that particular moment. We must keep in mind that age is a very important factor in the development of the faith, and one is constantly called to keep this in mind when entering into dialogue with interlocutors. Moreover, there can come moments in the life of the individual which bring about change in the outlook on life and on faith in a radical way, such as a personal illness. Such instances transform the individual in a deep way,

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. J. Grennon Brooks, M.G. Brooks, *In Search of Understanding. The Case for Constructivist Classrooms*, New Jersey 2001, Prentice-Hall, pp. 3, 21; S. McLeod, *Constructivism as a theory for teaching and learning*, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/constructivism.html> (01.02.2021); M. Lamon, *Learning Theory. Constructivist Approach*, <https://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2174/Learning-Theory-CONSTRUCTIVIST-APPROACH.html> (01.02.2021); WNET Education, *Concept to Classroom. Workshop: Constructivism as a Paradigm for Teaching and Learning*, [https://www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class/constructivism/index\\_sub2.html](https://www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class/constructivism/index_sub2.html) (01.02.2021).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. L. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society. The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, Cambridge (MA) – London 1978, Harvard University Press, pp. 79–104; L. Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, Connecticut 2012, Martino Publishing, pp. 82–153; S. Wheeler, *Learning Theories: Jerome Bruner on the Scaffolding of Learning*, <https://www.teachthought.com/learning/learning-theories-jerome-bruner-scaffolding-learning/> (01.02.2021).

and in the same way do they shake the faith of the person and eventually bring about a positive change in it.

Such a kerygmatic type of catechesis in an interdisciplinary relation with other sciences seeking to help the interlocutor to enter into a personal and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ calls for specialised catechists who are in tune with reality and can read the signs of the times in an unequivocal manner. These catechists cannot be catechists who simply teach the faith, but they must primarily be authentic witnesses to the faith which they profess, and which they seek to help the interlocutors to embrace. Catechists cannot just speak about Jesus Christ as the saviour, but in their ministry of accompanying others, they need to truly seek to imitate him, and after having encountered him personally, help the interlocutors to encounter Jesus in a personal way themselves.<sup>21</sup>

Once a catechesis with a kerygmatic outlook touches the human being where s/he actually stands, then we can also safely conclude that such type of catechesis remains always relevant. A kerygmatic type of catechesis cannot be distant from the person since its contents seeks to answer the fundamental questions of the interlocutor. As a corollary, it presents faith not as something of the past, but an invitation addressed to contemporary human beings in a holistic way.

The concept of mercy is typical of Pope Francis' Christology which overflows in an abundant way into his anthropology. Through a kerygmatic type of catechesis, the concept of God's mercy helps in presenting Jesus as a God who is close to human beings not to condemn them but to offer them the gift of mercy and reconciliation. It is through this gift of mercy that human beings come to discover themselves as individuals who have not been abandoned to their fate, but as persons loved by God in an individual way so much so that they are invited to enter into communion with him.<sup>22</sup> In presenting Jesus as the Good News of salvation, human beings discover the image of God within themselves.<sup>23</sup> This constitutes the reason for which human beings were originally created.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Directory for Catechesis*, para. 130–132.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Directory for Catechesis*, para. 303b, 327. God's mercy is more evident in particular circumstances, such as in the life of prisoners. Cf. *Directory for Catechesis*, para. 282.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* (7 December 1965), [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html) (13.12.2020), para. 22.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Directory for Catechesis*, para. 2, 33b, 57–60, 175, 196, 303b.

### 3. A Fecund Relationship

The most evident relationship between the first proclamation and a kerygmatic type of catechesis as this is posited in the *Directory for Catechesis* lies in that both seek to be of service to the interlocutor. It is the human being who is at the centre of all catechetical endeavours; it is the individual who is accompanied who is at the centre-stage of both the first proclamation and of the kerygmatic type of catechesis which is proposed by the *Directory*. This regenerated outlook demonstrates a further strengthening of the process started in these last decades in the outlook of catechesis from a content-centred catechesis to a person-centred catechesis. A first proclamation which is revisited as kerygma consisting of a primary proclamation and reapplied to one's life in the light of the endeavours of the human being truly puts the human being at the centre of catechesis.

This fecund relationship endows catechesis with several characteristics which are *sine qua non* in our contemporary society. Amongst these we find that in line with Vatican Council II, the extended first proclamation through a kerygmatic type of catechesis sheds light on all the dimensions of the human being in a holistic way,<sup>25</sup> and it is not just restricted to the religious dimension; catechesis is called to meet the individual where s/he stands rendering it a form of missionary accompaniment throughout life.<sup>26</sup> This renders catechesis relevant and important to the interlocutor in such a way that s/he is able to read and interpret experiences in life in the light of the faith.<sup>27</sup> This obviously results not in a one-track catechesis but in a plurality of catecheses which in our contemporary times are so necessary in order to meet the demands and the needs of the modern day human being.

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<sup>25</sup> The six dimensions of the human being are the physiological dimension, the intellectual dimension, the social dimension, the moral dimension, the emotional dimension and the religious dimension.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Directory for Catechesis*, para. 303.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. E. Alberich, *La catechesi oggi. Manuale di catechetica fondamentale*, Leumann (To) 2001, Editrice Elledici, pp. 107–118; E. Alberich, J. Vallabaraj, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms. A Handbook of Fundamental Catechetics*, Bangalore 2004, Kristu Jyoti Publications, pp. 103–114.

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