MEDIEVAL CANON LAW ON CATECHESIS AND CHRISTIAN FORMATION[1]

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Abstract. By reconstructing medieval catechetical legislation, this paper presents a distinct field of research within the Church's canonical system, one that has been overlooked for a long time in canonical historical study, which has always interested itself in matrimonial, liturgical, or disciplinary norms. Drawing primarily from conciliar and synodal canons and episcopal directives, this study demonstrates that long before the Council of Trent, the Church was already systematically legislating on the teaching of Christian doctrine and Christian formation. As Church practice shifted from adult to infant baptism, catechetical formation moved from the holistic pre-baptismal catechumenate to doctrinal and moral instruction through the catechetical sermons of bishops, parish priests, and monks; confessional handbooks; and vernacular catechisms for children. Informally, however, Christians were able to learn the faith through the Christian culture in which they lived, which served a catechetical and formative purpose – the great feasts attended by masses of people, works of art, paintings, music, processions, etc.

1 This article is adapted from the author's work published in *Loyola Monographs* no. 7, *The Evolution of Church Legislation on the Object and Means of Catechesis: A Historico-Juridical Study of Cann. 773 and 779 with Special Reference to Philippine Catechesis* (Quezon City: Loyola School of Theology, 2024). The author's earlier study, "The First Four Hundred Years of Catechesis," *Landas* 34, no. 2 (2020): 1–22, provides a historical foundation for the present discussion. GenAI Disclosure Statement: No GenAI tools were used in the research, writing, or preparation of this article.

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However, local church legislation aimed at educating people in the faith proved insufficient to arrest the tide of religious decay and ignorance, especially on the eve of the Reformation. The overwhelmingly Christian setting itself became a breeding ground for a religious culture of maintenance and preservation that, unwittingly, tended to overlook the importance of intensive, missionary-style Christian initiation and formation in the spirit of the early Church.

Keywords: catechesis, medieval church, catechetical legislation, doctrine and morals, vernacular, Christian environment

Sources of Catechetical Legislation

Medieval catechesis can be described as a process whereby Christian teaching, moral precepts, prayers, and devotions were taught to believers during the medieval period. Quite distinct from contemporary catechesis, medieval catechesis was not a separate system of religious education, but part of the church's pastoral, liturgical, sacramental, homiletic, and cultural context. It shaped Christians in faith and practice through preaching, pastoral care, participation in liturgy, memorization, devotions, and visual and material culture.

Beyond catechesis, the Church, from its very beginnings, has developed institutions and laws – especially with regard to organization, liturgy, and moral life – that regulated the life of the community. In the first centuries, these norms were found in sources such as the Apostolic Tradition, the *Didaché*, the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, and the Apostolic Constitutions. However, one cannot obviously claim the existence of a precise

juridical science at this early point in time.[2] That development culminated only later, around the mid-twelfth century, with the *Concordia discordantium canonum*,[3] in which Gratian organized existing norms of the early Church down to his day.

With the peace of Constantine and the granting of religious freedom to Christians beginning in the fourth century, legislation by councils and popes became sources of law in response to new situations and problems concerning doctrine, discipline, and organization, including catechesis. Bishops of the empire convened synods and councils and issued norms for their local churches. Popes wrote decretals in response to concrete questions regarding matters of discipline and law.[4] In the fifth century, the popes no longer limited themselves to resolving concrete difficulties but, on their own initiative, issued general norms for entire regions. This trend continued during the Middle Ages and to the present day.[5]

After the conciliar canons and the papal decretals, the texts of the Fathers and other Church writers occupy a third important place. Not only were they considered the most complete and reliable transmitters and interpreters of apostolic teaching, but they also established liturgical and moral

2 Brian E. Ferme, *Introduzione alla storia del diritto canonico. Il diritto antico fino al Decretum di Graziano* (Roma: Pontificia Università Lateranense – Mursia, 1998), 41-42. See also Peter J. Huizing and Ladislas M. Orsy, "Canon Law - History," *Britannica*, updated May 16, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/topic/canon-law/History (accessed September 22, 2025).

3 *Corpus Iuris Canonici, Editio Lipsiensis secunda post Aemilli Ludovici Richteri curas ad librorum manu scriptorum et editionis Romanae fidem recognovit et adnotatione critica instruxit Aemilius Friedberg, Pars prior, Decretum Magistri Gratiani, (Lipsiae 1879; Ristampa, Graz* 1959).

4 Ferme, *Introduzione alla storia del diritto canonico*, 43.

5 Constant van de Wiel, *History of Canon Law* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1992), 16.

rules on the basis of apostolic teaching.[6] In this sense, their writings formed an authoritative source of canon law, but not as constitutive or legislative sources. This means that, though the Western Church has never granted the force of law even to positions unanimously held by the Fathers, they were nonetheless a source of inspiration for the legislators of the time, i.e., the bishops and the pope. They were important witnesses of the discipline and of the law in force, both universal and particular. Nevertheless, in the East, the writings of the Fathers had been recognized as having the force of law from the sixth century onwards.[7] The fact that Gratian incorporated the writings of the Fathers into his *Decretum* attests to their unique value.[8]

Many medieval local councils and synods developed a body of legislation on the teaching of Christian doctrine.[9] Ecumenical

6 Giuseppe Groppo, "*Catecumenato antico*," in *Dizionario di Catechetica*, ed. Jean Gevaert (Leumann: Editrice Elle Di Ci, 1986), 133–36. For the West, the four great Church fathers and doctors are Ambrose (+ 397), Jerome (+ 420), Augustine (+ 430) and Gregory the Great (+ 604). For the East, they are Athanasius (+ 373), Basil (+ 379), Gregory Nazianzen (+ 390) and John Chrysostom (+ 407).

7 van de Wiel, *History of Canon Law*, 21.

8 The *Decretum Gratiani*, collection of nearly 3,800 texts touching on all areas of church discipline and regulation compiled by the Benedictine monk Gratian about 1140. For centuries, the *Decretum* was the text on which the teaching of canon law in the schools was based. It was glossed and commented on by canonists. It became the first part of the *Corpus Juris Canonici*, the great body of canon law, and it served as an important source for the official codification of canon law in 1917 and its revision in 1983. "Gratian's *Decretum*," Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gratians-Decretum (accessed September 25, 2025).

9 Many of these medieval conciliar legislations are discussed in the following sources: Manuel Fernández Magaz, "Historia de la catequesis medieval a través de los concilios," *Sinite* 5 (1964): 25–52; Angel Matesanz Rodrigo, "Historia general de la catequesis," in *Nuevo Diccionario de Catequética*, vol. 1, ed. Vicente Pedrosa Arés, Maria Navarro Gonzales, Ricardo Lázaro Recalde, and Jesus Sastre García (Madrid: Editorial San Pablo, 1999), 1132–48.

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councils, in exercising legislative power for the entire Church, also sought to provide a united and coordinated direction to the legislation of the local churches. Through these councils, bishops, archbishops, primates, and patriarchs exercised their pastoral care over their regional communities. Often, these councils were called to address problems of doctrine and discipline and became opportunities for the constant renewal of the local churches.[10]

Pastoral Challenges of the Period

As early as the fourth century, various Germanic tribes from northern Europe began migrating into and invading the crumbling Roman Empire. Alaric, the Goth, eventually captured and sacked Rome in 410. Soon, Slavic peoples began moving into the Empire. Although Roman influence continued in the cities until the sixth century, the Western Roman Empire was already collapsing. During this period of upheaval, the outcome of wars among the Germanic tribes determined future developments. The Frankish people eventually prevailed.[11]

10 Gabriel Le Bras, "*La Iglesia medieval*," in *Historia de la Iglesia: De los orígenes a nuestros días*, ed. Augustin Fliche and Victor Martin, vol. 12 (Valencia: Editorial Católica, 1976), 628–629. One can notice from the beginnings of the Church the interesting phenomenon wherein particular norms of various regions would acquire a general and universal value through their reception and acceptance by other local churches.

11 Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 115–116.

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With the baptism of Clovis, King of the Franks, as a Catholic, i.e., non-Arian,[12] Christianity found itself identified with, and supported by, the new Frankish state after some years of separation from political associations with the Roman Empire. The Church was greatly assisted in its missionary preaching to the various tribes as they came into contact with a largely Christian civilization. With the crowning of Charlemagne by Pope Leo III in 800 as emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, the Church developed a movement called the Carolingian Reform, in which the Emperor embarked on massive efforts to renew society by establishing "a European theocratic Christendom."[13]

From the end of the fifth century, with the baptism of Clovis, until the time of Charlemagne, the conversion of princes followed the conversion of whole tribes. Mass baptisms were held without due preparation and catechesis. As in the earlier period of religious freedom under Constantine, the Church grew in numbers, but its members lacked the personal Christian formation previously provided in the catechumenate.[14] In this regard, the Church had to consider not only the situation of new converts, but also the many baptized Christians who came from families with a long-standing Christian tradition. With the migration of the northern tribes, the Church found

12 Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 421. Bevans and Schroeder highlight the term "Catholic" to distinguish him from the Arians. Catholics held the Trinitarian declaration of the Council of Nicaea (325), especially with regard to the doctrine that Jesus, the Son, was of the same substance as, and co-eternal with, the Father. Majority of the Germanic tribes followed the Arian teaching that denied the teaching of Nicaea, relegating Jesus Christ to one of the Father's creatures, even if he was the most perfect of them. The monks of the Greek East had initially introduced the Christian faith to them, but with this Arian perspective. There arose a movement to form an alliance of Arian Christian Germanic tribes against non-Arian Catholic Christians, and King Clovis supported the latter.

13 Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 116.

14 Matesanz Rodrigo, "*Historia general*," 1135.

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itself in a happy situation of a great influx of new Christians reminiscent of the fourth century, but also faced the most challenging task of catechizing them. At the same time, the Church had to attend to the ordinary pastoral care of Christian communities already spread throughout the Empire.

Given this general background of the early Middle Ages from the fifth to the ninth centuries, the next section explores how the Church carried out the religious formation of her old and new members through catechesis in a milieu that later became increasingly Christian, at least on the surface.

From Adult to Infant Baptisms

The Augustinian doctrine of original sin led to the widespread belief that infants should be baptized *quamprimum*, i.e., at least within a week of birth. Baptizing newborn children withdrew them from that state of original sin, which could not fail to affect them by reason of their coming into the world. With this teaching in mind, parents were required to have a speedy baptism for their infants, especially on account of the high mortality rate at that time.[15] Thus, from the fifth century on, the baptism of adults became the exception rather than the rule.[16] Consequently, adult pre-baptismal instruction also declined. With the disappearance of adult catechesis in the setting of the catechumenate, a primordial form of Christian

15 Henri Bourgeois, *L'initiation chrétienne et ses sacrements* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1982), 75.

16 Le Bras, "*La Iglesia medieval*," 129. For a study on the historical evolution of the practice of infant baptism, see Paul Camelot, "Le baptême des petits enfants dans l'Église des premiers siècles," Maison-Dieu 88 (1966): 23-42.

formation almost became extinct.[17] A renewed form of adult catechesis later succeeded it, with a new terminology and a different approach.

Soon, new liturgico-pastoral developments arose out of the shift from adult to infant baptisms. It happened that the various formative stages of the original catechumenate were reduced to a single rite of baptism.[18] The Rite of Baptism in the early eleventh-century rubric, the Sarum Manual,[19] attests to this transformation. The preparatory rite commenced at the door of the church with the ceremony of making the child a catechumen. The child is breathed upon and signed on the forehead and breast. Then followed the prayers, giving of salt and the series of exorcisms. The child is then brought into the church, the Our Father and Apostles' Creed are recited, after which the child is brought to the font for the *effeta* or the touching of the mouth and ears, the threefold renunciation of Satan, and the anointing of the candidate's breast and back. The rite of baptism then followed.[20]

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17 Maxwell Johnson writes that *quamprimum* baptism "sounds the death knell for the catechumenal process in relationship to baptism as a whole." Maxwell E. Johnson, The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation, rev. and expanded ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 215. See also Milton McC. Gatch, "Basic Education from the Decline of Catechesis to the Rise of the Catechisms," in *A Faithful Church: Issues in the History of Catechesis*, ed. John Westerhoff and O. C. Edwards (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1981), 79–108.

18 Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 216.

19 A. Jefferies Collins, ed., *Manuale ad usum Percelebris Ecclesie Sarisburiensis*, from the edition printed at Rouen in 1543 compared with those of 1506 (London), 1516 (Rouen), 1523 (Antwerp), and 1526 (Paris) (Chichester: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1960).

20 John Douglas Close Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West. A Study in the Disintegration of the Primitive Rite of Initiation* (London: SPCK, 1965), 126–27.

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Notably, even for babies, the seven scrutinies on certain weekdays of Lent were also practiced, as in the old catechumenate. These were also opportunities for adults to receive catechetical instruction. St. Caesarius,[21] the Archbishop of Arles, urged the mothers who brought their babies to the scrutinies not to miss these celebrations. In this way, the parents were also prepared for their babies' reception of baptism by making the same catechetical and liturgical journey together with their children.[22] In the case of adult candidates, St. Martin, Archbishop of Braga, Portugal, succeeded in having the Council of Braga (572) adopt a law requiring three weeks of preparation to give adult catechumens the time to be instructed in the Creed.[23] St. Boniface, who propagated Christianity in the Frankish Empire at the beginning of the eighth century, instructed his catechumens in Germany for at least two months, and even longer.[24] For Johnson, these efforts were attempts by Church leaders to restore some kind of minimal adult catechumenate for those asking for baptism.[25]

Elements of Post-Baptismal Catechesis

Medieval post-baptismal catechesis saw the more common use of preaching in the context of the liturgy as a form of

21 St. Caesarius of Arles was born at Châlons-sur-Saône in Burgundy around 470. Known to be a great and popular preacher, St. Caesarius died at Arles probably in 542. Herbert Beck and William E. Klingshirn, "Caesarius of Arles, St.," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Berard L. Marthaler, 2nd ed., vol. 2, (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 848–49.

22 Michel Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate: The First Six Centuries*, trans. Edward J. Haasl (New York: Sadlier, 1979), 133.

23 *Concilium Bracarense* III (Braga), *Regnante Domino*, can. 1 *ut episcopus ambulet per dioecesim suam, et ante triginta dies paschae catechumeni doceantur Symbolum*, in *Mansi* IX, 838-839.

24 Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate*, 134.

25 Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 215.

catechesis. Outside the setting of liturgical or catechetical preaching, however, the Christian environment of the period also served as a form of catechesis or a means of Christian socialization. Later in the period, the beginnings of formal children's catechesis outside the home emerged in the Church.

Liturgical Preaching

With the widespread practice of infant baptism and the disappearance of a form of formation that prepared catechumens for baptism, the catechesis that had not been provided to Christians prior to their baptism, when they were infants, was eventually imparted to them as adults through post-baptismal liturgical or catechetical preaching. These sermons were catechetical in that they expounded on the basic baptismal texts of the Symbol of the Faith and the Our Father, as well as common moral precepts. The content of this sort of teaching was closely parallel to the catechetical instructions given by bishops in the context of baptism. In fact, these catechetical sermons became the most recorded and documented means of teaching Christian doctrine during this period.[26]

St. Caesarius of Arles wrote in sixth-century Gaul about his high regard for this form of catechesis, declaring that the Word of God and its interpretation in the sermon were no less than the body of Christ in the Eucharist. He personally thwarted those who wanted to leave Mass early by keeping the church doors closed and not reopening them until after the blessing.[27] The *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua*, a collection of 105 canons compiled by Gennadius in France, threatened those

26 Fernández Magaz, "Historia de la catequesis medieval," 27. See also Robert N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe*, c. 1215-c. 1515 (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 66-67.

27 *Caesarius Arelatensis*, *Sermo* 78, in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, Tomus* CIII, 323-324.

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who went out during the bishop's sermon with excommunication: "If a priest is delivering the word in the church, let anyone who leaves the assembly be excommunicated."[28] In most cases, however, the sermons must have been very simple, either because the preachers had little education or because they intended to make themselves understood by all hearers.

The rise of the mendicant orders had a profound influence on medieval first proclamation of the gospel and catechetical preaching. The Dominicans and Franciscans embarked on remarkable efforts to adapt catechetical approaches to the needs of urban society.[29] Councils directed bishops to enlist their cooperation in ministering to the people, especially through preaching and instruction. For example, the Council of Rouen (1223) legislated that worthy candidates should also be ordained among the religious orders:

> In cathedrals as well as in convents, suitable men are to be ordained whom the bishops could have as helpers and collaborators in preaching, in hearing confessions, and in other things which pertain to the salvation of souls.[30]

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28 "*Sacerdote verbum in ecclesia faciente, qui egressus de auditorio fuerit, excommunicetur." Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua, anno Domini* 475, can. 31, in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, Concilia Galliae* A. 314 – A. 506, *cura et studio* C. Munier, *Tomus* CXLVIII (Turnholti Typographi Brepols Editores Pontifici MCMLXIII), 172.

29 Luciano Meddi, *Catechesi: Proposta e formazione della vita cristiana* (Padova: Edizioni Messaggero Padova, 2004), 28. See also Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe*, 70.

30 "*Tam in cathedralibus, quam in conventualibus ecclesiis viri idonei ordinentur, quos episcopi possint habere coadiutores et cooperatores in praedicationibus, et audiendis confessionibus, et in ceteris quae ad salutem pertinent animarum.*" The English translation is ours. *Concilium Rotomagense* (Rouen), Anno MCCXXIII, cap. 10, *Viri idonei ordinentur quos episcopi possint habere coadjutores, in Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio, Tomus vigesimus secundus* (Venetiis MDCCLXXVIII), 1199.

In fact, Bosch writes that monasticism was one of the main instruments in reforming European society during the Middle Ages.[31] Much of its influence on medieval society came from the high esteem the general populace had for monks and nuns, who, in their eyes, took the place once occupied by martyrs, now that the supreme sacrifice of martyrdom was no longer frequent. They provided, so to speak, a living catechesis to the people. In any case, one can surely claim that monasticism helped bring the Church a little closer to her ideals during the Middle Ages. From the fifth to the twelfth century, the monastery became not only a center of culture and civilization, but also of devotion, evangelization, and preaching.

Monastic preaching, and medieval preaching in general, consisted of doctrinal instruction and the teaching of the Church's moral precepts. These two components are explained below.

Doctrinal Instruction

The content of medieval liturgical preaching can be clearly seen through the local legislations and statutes of bishops and councils. Although the early and medieval church's approach to Christian initiation and education changed radically, one still notices a consistent continuity between the doctrinal content of catechesis in the catechumenate and that of the Middle Ages.

The medieval councils consistently stressed the learning of the formula prayers, which contained, in summary form, the basic truths of the faith. Ecclesiastical legislation made it clear that the minimum aimed for – though still achieved with much difficulty due to the little, if any, education of the people – was

31 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 231–32.

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the universal memorization of the Creed and the Our Father, together with a basic understanding of Christian morality. In so learning these prayers, the mystery of the Holy Trinity should occupy a central place in instruction.[32]

Since the Creed and the Our Father were the essentials of Christian doctrine, they also constituted the fundamental content of catechesis within the family. The adults passed on these truths and prayers to their children[33] and explained them in a way that was adapted to their capacities. In a real sense, therefore, catechesis during the Middle Ages was derived from the ancient praxis of the *traditio* and the *redditio Symboli,* and from the liturgy of Christian initiation.

Moral Instruction

Aside from preaching on the content of formulaic prayers, preachers in the early Middle Ages also preached on moral issues and the Ten Commandments. Both Caesarius of Arles and Martin of Braga tried to root out superstition and magic, which were practiced for the sake of cures and were vestiges of pagan practices. Caesarius of Arles taught that in order to be saved, it was not sufficient to pray the sign of the cross or all the other articles of the Symbol of faith. Good works, almsgiving, love, justice, and chastity were necessary because faith without

32 *Concilium Cloveshoviae* (Clovesho), Scriptum enim, can. 11 *ut omnes presbyteri uno modo sua ministeria peragant*, in *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio, Tomus duodecimus* (*Florentiae* MDCCLXVI), 399.

33 Matesanz Rodrigo, "*Historia general*," 1138.

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works was a dead faith.[34] The Councils of Orleans[35] (538), Braga[36] (573), Tours[37] (813), Paris[38] (829) and Aix-la-Chapelle[39] (836) warned the people against the errors of idols and sin (murder, adultery, perjury, false witnesses and mortal sins) and sought to instruct the people in living a true Christian life, i.e., fulfilling their Christian duties, living in virtue and avoiding vices and returning to the fold if they had fallen into sin.

Later in the twelfth century and the succeeding years, a new element in the content of catechesis emerged: the insertion of catechetical instruction within the medieval religious framework of the *via salutis* or the way of salvation. The knowledge of the Christian faith and morals became increasingly necessary to all Christians for their salvation[40]. The Council of Toledo (1473) utilized militaristic language in expressing the salvific importance of instruction in the faith:

> The arms of our militia against the workings of the evil spirit consist especially in the faith. This is the cornerstone and the foundation of our whole work. Thus, one who

34 *Caesarius Arelatensis, Sermo* 71, in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, 64-68.

35 *Concilium Aurelianense* III (Orleans), can. 31, *de haereticis, et Bonofiacis Sacerdotibus, qui rebaptizant*, in *Mansi* IX, 19.

36 *Concilium Bracarense* III, *Regnante Domino*, can. 1, *ut episcopus ambulet per dioecesim suam, et ante triginta dies paschae catechumeni doceantur Symbolum*, in *Mansi* IX, 838-839.

37 *Concilium Turonense* III (Tours), *Quantum piissimi*, can. 4, *ut episcopi gregem sibi commissum sacra praedicatione, vitaeque suae exemplo doceant*, in *Mansi* XIV, 84.

38 *Concilium Parisiense* VI (Paris), *Recordari* vos, liber 1, cap. 1, *Quid proprie ad religionem Christianam pertineat*, in *Mansi* XIV, 536-537.

39 *Concilium Aquisgranense* II (Aix-la-Chapelle), *In nomine*, cap. 2, can. 5 *de officio presbyterorum erga eos qui ad ipsorum ecclesias pertinent*, in *Mansi* XIV, 680-681.

40 Hubert Jedin and John P. Dolan, eds., *History of the Church*, Vol. IV (London: Burns & Oates, 1980–1981), originally *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte*, Vol. IV (Freiburg: Herder, 1965–1979), 87.

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> wishes to attain eternal salvation must be instructed in the faith and morals.[41]

The preaching of monks, canons, diocesan clerics, and bishops had aroused in the hearts of the laity the desire for the so-called *vita apostolica* or the apostolic life, a life of personal closeness to Jesus of Nazareth, "wandering, suffering, humanly close, redeeming, and not holding sway."[42] The knowledge of the person of Christ was precisely the path that led to one's salvation. It was not surprising, therefore, that the twofold theme of the acquisition of virtues and the avoidance of vices had become the basic framework for teaching Christian morality.[43] Many preachers lashed out against the vices and immorality of people as a direct contradiction to the Christian's closer imitation of Christ. Thus, it can be affirmed that late medieval Christianity, especially in the fifteenth century, was characterized also by its emphasis on action, as Swanson writes:

> The religion of the great majority was not one of consideration and comprehension of deep theological matters, but action and reaction to secure salvation. Agreed, there was intense devotion and a strong streak of contemplative religion, which could become mysticism, but the emphasis is on action, on living the Christian life.[44]

Jedin and Dolan assert that, in fact, the proclamation of the doctrines of the faith even took second place to moral teaching, a pattern generally characteristic of late medieval religious

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41 "*Arma militiae nostrae adversus spirituales nequitias maxime consistunt in fide. Haec enim lapis angularis est, et fundamentum totius nostri operis. Ideoque volentes aeternam salutem adipisci, oportet de fide et moribus esse eruditum.*" *Concilium Toletanum, Quoniam a nascentis*, cap. 2 *Quod rectores ecclesiarum habeant in scriptis articulos fidei et publicent populo*, in *Mansi* XXII, 385.

42 Jedin and Dolan, *History of the Church*, IV, 87.

43 Gatch, "From the Decline of Catechesis," 102.

44 Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe*, 26.

instruction.[45] Thus, apart from the prayers, they strongly emphasized penance, the Ten Commandments, the seven capital sins, and all the virtues and vices. Together, however, with the widespread teaching of moral precepts, the councils also never failed to stress going back to the basics of doctrine, as evidenced in const. 1 of the Council of Sevilla (1512):

> Since we have been informed that many of our subjects, having reached the age of discretion, are ignorant of the prayers required by the Church [...], we therefore command that the above-mentioned parish priests and confessors are to admonish them that they may learn the general confession, the Sunday Prayer, *Ave Maria*, the Creed, and the *Salve Regina*.[46]

Nevertheless, they recognized the need to teach both morals and doctrine, since they complemented each other. The Council of Avignon (1209) admitted that where the preaching of evangelical morals and discipline was lacking due to the negligence of the priests, one frequently also encountered numerous and dangerous heresies.[47]

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45 Jedin and Dolan, *History of the Church*, IV, 577.

46 "*Et quia sumus informati, quod plures ex nostris subditis, habentes aetatem discretionis nesciunt Orationes ab Ecclesia institutas [...] ideo mandamus, ut praefati parochi, et confessores, illos moneant pariter, ut procurent scire confessionem generalem, et Orationem Dominicam, Ave Maria, et Credo, ac Salve Regina.*" The English translation is ours. *Concilio Provincial de Sevilla, In nomine, año* 1512, const. 1, *Quod parochi doceant suos parochianos Mysteria nostrae Sanctae Fidei Catholicae, et quod in qualibet Ecclesia adsit tabula, in qua contineantur omnia, quae illos docere debent,* in *Colección de cánones y de todos los concilios de la Iglesia de España y de America*. Por D. Juan Tejada y Ramiro, *Tomo* V (Madrid: Imprenta de D. Pedro Montero, 1861), 69-70.

47 *Concilium Avenionense* (Avignon), *In nomine*, cap. 1, can. 1 *Ut episcopi frequentius vel praedicent, vel faciant praedicari, in Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio, Tomus vigesimus secundus* (Venetiis MDCCLXXVIII), 783.

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The Christian Environment

The bulk of formal doctrinal and moral instruction was given to Christians in the Middle Ages through catechetical sermons of bishops, parish priests and monks. But informally, Christians were able to learn the Christian faith through their lives and experiences in a Christian environment. The Christian culture in which they lived served a catechetical purpose – the great feasts attended by masses of people, works of art, paintings, music, processions, etc. The very explicitness of all that was Christian both in the family and society served, in the words of Gianetto, "as a new form of a catechumenate, not anymore of the personal kind, but one that was more social. The educator now was the Christian environment, with a minimum of formality."[48] For Meddi, one cannot speak of the absence of catechesis in the Middle Ages but rather of "a transformation of catechesis itself and its functioning educative structure. The environment took the place of the catechumenate: the new educative structure had now become 'the Christian society.'"[49]

One interesting and artistic means employed in catechesis during this period of the Middle Ages was the *bibbia pauperorum* or Bible of the Poor. It consisted of various forms of art that adorned churches and public places – paintings, murals, frescoes, stained-glass windows, statues, sculptures, wood

48 "[...] *un 'catecumenato' di nuovo tipo, non più personale ma sociale. L'educatore è ora l'ambiente cristiano, con un minimo di formalità.*" Ubaldo Gianetto, "*La catechesi nella storia: Dagli inizi fino al rinnovamento conciliare*," in *Andate e insegnate: Manuale di catechetica*, ed. Emilio Alberich and Ubaldo Gianetto (Leumann: Elledici, 2002), 63.

49 "[...] *una trasformazione della stessa e della struttura educativa ad essa funzionale. Al catecumenato si sostituì l'ambiente: la nuova struttura educativa fu la 'società cristiana*.'" Meddi, Catechesi, 30. Cf. Emilio Alberich, "*La catequesis en el contexto del Concilio Vaticano II y el posconcilio*," *Teología y Catequesis* 45–48 (1993): 289.

carvings, etc. - depicting religious themes, biblical scenes, and personalities, all serving a catechetical purpose.[50] Preachers used these artistic expressions to educate, especially the poor and the illiterate, in the tenets of the Christian religion. Through these forms of art, used as powerful means of catechesis, parents were also able to communicate the faith to their children in a way that enabled them to easily remember the content of the history of salvation and the elements of Christian doctrine.

Children's Catechesis

This paper has discussed post-baptismal catechesis in the form of liturgical preaching addressed primarily to adult Christians. With regard to the catechesis of children during the early Middle Ages, it must be noted that no official post-baptismal instruction was provided to children baptized as infants. Instead, the task was entrusted to parents and godparents, "[...] the former, because they have begotten their children, given to them by the Lord; the latter, because they are their guarantors in the faith."[51] The religious initiation of the young took place substantially in the setting of the family and likewise, by custom.

50 Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe*, 86-87. See also Dante Balboni, "*Arte cristiana*," in *Dizionario di catechetica*, ed. Joseph Gevaert (Leumann: Elledici, 1986), 50.

51 "[...] *illi, quia eos genuerunt, et eis a domino dati sunt: isti, quia pro eis fidejussores existunt." Concilium Arelatense* VI (Arles), *Dum anno* XLV, can. 19 *ut parentes filios, et patrini filiolos erudire studeant*, in Mansi XIV, 62.

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The Councils of Clovesho[52] (747), Arles[53] (813), Mayence[54] (813) and Paris[55] (829) legislated that parents themselves should be instructed in Christian doctrine and morals in order for them to fulfill their duty to instruct their own children in the first place. There were also references in the eleventh and twelfth centuries concerning the duty of parents and sponsors to have a deeper understanding of the faith in order to equip themselves to teach their children. On this account, pastors of souls were enjoined to instruct their parishioners every Sunday so that, in turn, parents among them should be able to instruct their children. Such a reference can be found in the Sarum Rite, an important early eleventh century rubric:

> The godmothers should be enjoined to teach the infant Our Father, and Hail Mary, and I believe in God [...]. Wherefore, persons are not to be received nor admitted as godparents except those who know the aforesaid things, because godparents must instruct their spiritual children in the faith, which they cannot do unless they themselves have first been instructed in the faith.[56]

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52 *Concilium Cloveshoviae* (Clovesho), *Regnante Domino*, can. 11, *ut omnes presbyteri uno modo sua ministeria peragant*, in *Mansi* XII, 398-399.

53 *Concilium Arelatense* VI, *Dum anno* XLV, can. 19, *ut parentes filios, et patrini filiolos erudire studeant*, in Mansi XIV, 62.

54 *Concilium Moguntiacum* (Mayence), *Glorisissimo et Christianissimo*, can. 45, ut *Symbolum et orationem dominicam omnes discant*, in *Mansi* XIV, 74.

55 *Concilium Parisiense* VI (Paris), *Recordari vos, liber* 1, cap. 7, *Quod tempus baptismatis a nonnullis non ita ut canonicus ordo edocet observetur*, in *Mansi* XIV, 541-542.

56 "*Item et commatribus iniungatur ut doceant infantem Pater noster et Ave Maria et credo in Deum* [...]. *Unde non debent recipi in patrinos nec admittantur nisi qui sciunt predicta: quia patrini debent instruere filios suos spirituales in fide quod facere non possunt nisi ipsimet in fide prius instruerentur.*" A. Jefferies Collins, ed., *Manuale ad usum Percelebris Ecclesie Sarisburiensis* (Chichester: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1960), 37, 42; English translation in John Douglas Close Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 195–198.

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It appears to be the case that children's catechesis had become limited to the mere memorization of three key texts: the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the Creed.[57] Parents and sponsors initially took up this instruction of children concerning these prayers. However, some councils began to exhort parents and godparents to bring their children to church as well, where they might be able to learn their prayers and some simple points of doctrine. The Councils of Bezier[58] (1246) and Albi[59] (1254) specified that children be given religious instruction in the church on Sundays and feast days, beginning at age 7. The Council of Leon[60] also encouraged employers to send their household helpers or *criados*, especially the young, to church on Sundays and feasts of precept in order that they might learn Christian doctrine.

In his study of the catechetical efforts of the Spanish church, Sanchez Herrero found that several local councils began issuing decrees in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries concerning catechesis, in the sense of gathering children specifically to teach Christian doctrine. The Council of Toledo (1497) decreed that every Sunday, before nightfall and after the singing of the *Salve Regina*, the catechist should gather the children and teach them Christian doctrine publicly. He should engage them in dialogue, speaking and asking questions while

57 Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 232-233.

58 Concilium Biterrense Provinciale (Beziers), *Rectitudo conditionis*, cap. 7, *Ut parochiales sacerdotes articulos fidei simpliciter doceant diebus Dominicis*, in Mansi XXIII, 693.

59 *Concilium Albiense* (Albi), *Multis episcopis*, cap. 18, *Ut pueri instruantur in fide*, in *Mansi* XXIII, 836-837.

60 *Concilio de Leon, Anno Domini* MCCLXVII, in *Colección de cánones y de todos los concilios de la Iglesia de España y de America, Por D. Juan Tejada y Ramiro, Tomo* III (Madrid 1861), 393.

https://publications.lst.edu/

the children respond.[61] It was not until the Council of Trent that the universal Church officially legislated catechesis for children.

Specific Tools and Methods for Catechesis

The medieval church used three important tools to catechize the Christian faithful. First, clerics and preachers used confessional handbooks and homiletical collections as aids in their work. The confessional handbooks eventually also reached the laity. Second, these clerics and preachers preached and taught the faith in the vernacular. Third, the faithful were made to memorize catechetical texts.

Confessional Handbooks and Homiletical Collections

Aside from preaching during the liturgy, the Sacrament of Penance was another important means by which the clergy instructed the people in medieval times. As the practice of individual or private confession spread in the West between the sixth and tenth centuries, it took on some of the formative functions once provided by the ancient catechumenate. The Sacrament of Penance provided penitents with some approximation of the catechumenal experience of conversion, receiving God's forgiveness, catechesis, and moral instruction. They were able to learn a minimum of religious knowledge also, since the priest had to test and augment the penitent's religious knowledge through the recitation of the Creed, the Our Father, and other prayers.[62] For Bourgeois, "sacramental penance,

61 Jose Sanchez Herrero, "*La legislación conciliar y sinodal hispana de los siglos XIII a mediados del XVI y su influencia en la enseñanza de la doctrina cristiana. Los tratados de doctrina cristiana*," in *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Medieval Canon Law*, Cambridge, England, 23-27 July 1984, edited by Peter Linehan (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1988), 369.

62 Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe*, 26.

once considered to be a kind of 'second baptism,' became one of the major practical forms of baptismal remembrance."[63] An important legislation in this regard was the decree *Omnis utriusque sexus* of the Lateran Council IV[64] (1215), which required annual confession and communion, thereby intensifying also the priest's contact with the laity through the confessional.

To assist priests in confessions, the more widespread use of confessional booklets, or penitentials, arose, already in use even before Lateran IV. Some examples of these penitentials are Alan of Lille's *Liber Poenitentialis sive methodus digne administrandi et suscipiendi sacramentum poenitentiae* (ca.1200)[65] and Robert of Flamborough's *Liber Poenitentialis* (1208).[66] Eventually, the laity, for their private devotion, began to use similar penitentials of the confessors written in the vernacular. For example, a French manual was prepared by Lorens d'Orleans entitled *Somme le Roi*, also known as *Le Somme des Vices et des Virtues, Li Libres Roiaux de Vices et de Vertues, Le Livre des Commandmens, Le Miroir du Monde* (1279), which eventually found itself translated into English entitled *The Book of Vices and Virtues.*[67] Another handbook in

63 "[...] *la pénitence sacramentelle, appelée autrefois une sorte de 'second baptême' devint l'une des grandes formes pratiques de la mémoire baptismale*." Bourgeois, *L'initiation chrétiénne*, 74.

64 *Concilium Lateranense* IV (Lateran), *Firmiter credimus*, can. 21 *De confessione facienda et non revelanda a sacerdote et saltem in pascha communicando*, in G. Alberigo, ed., *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, Bologna, 1991, 245.

65 *Magistri Alani ab Insulis, Liber Poenitentialis sive methodus digne administrandi et suscipiendi sacramentum poenitentiae*, in *Patrologia Latina* CCX, 279-505.

66 Robert of Flamborough, *Liber Poenitentialis (1208): A Critical Edition with Introduction and Notes* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1971).

67 Lorens d'Orléans, *The Book of Vices and Virtues: A Fourteenth-Century English Translation of the Somme le Roi of Lorens d'Orléans. From the Three Extant Manuscripts*, ed. W. Nelson Francis (London: Early English Text Society, 1942).

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English was Robert Manning of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne* (1303), which was based on William of Waddington's *Manuel des Pechiez* (1250).[68] With the great facility for reproducing reading materials after the invention of printing by Johannes Gutenberg in 1447, these manuals became even more widely available to the laity. Jungmann writes that these confessional booklets served as "the forerunners of the catechism, except that the section devoted to the commandments dominated all others."[69]

Medieval homiletical collections also served as forerunners of the catechism. In the light of the low level of education of the clergy and their relative incapacity to preach and instruct the people on their own,[70] the early seventh century saw a gradual diffusion of these homiletical collections that became a practical necessity for the use of priests. These were series of oral instructions, usually in some form of sermon, given at set times during the liturgical year. One example is the work of St. Ildefonsus of Toledo, *Admonitiones de cognitione Baptismi,* in which he explains the Creed, the Our Father and the sacraments of initiation to those recently baptized.[71] In the eighth century, the most prominent homiletical collections were

68 Manning, Robert. *Handlyng Synne, A.D. 1303: With Those Parts of the Anglo-French Treatise on Which It Was Founded, William of Waddington's Manuel des Pechiez (1250). From Manuscripts in the British Museum and Bodleian Library*, ed. F. J. Furnivall (London: Early English Text Society, vols. 119 and 123, 1901–1903).

69 Josef Andreas Jungmann. *Handing on the Faith: A Manual of Catechetics* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1959), 17.

70 Jedin and Dolan, *History of the Church*, IV, 575. See also Le Bras, "*La Iglesia medieval*," 166-167.

71 *Hildefonsus Toletani, Admonitiones De cognitione Baptismi, in Patrologia Latina* XCVI, 111-172. St. Ildefonsus was archbishop of Toledo, Spain. He was born probably in 610, and died in 667. Cf. S. J. McKenna, "Ildefonsus of Toledo, St.," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Berard Marthaler, vol. 7 (Washington, DC, 2003), 316.

Rabanus Maurus' *Homiliae de festis praecipuis item de virtutibus*[72] and his *Homiliae in evangelia et epistolas.*[73] In the late tenth and early eleventh century, Anglo-Saxon England, there emerged a large body of sermons and other materials in Old English for the use of preachers. They were probably written in the vernacular for use in the Latin Mass just after the reading of the gospel. Called the "Prone" in later times, they included a translation or paraphrase of the gospel, and occasionally with some explanation, moral instruction, and prayer.[74] AElfric was the greatest of the Anglo-Saxon sermon writers and worked chiefly in the last decade of the tenth and first decade of the eleventh century. His works included the *Catholicae Homiliae Serie Prima*[75], *Catholicae Homiliae Serie Altera,*[76] *Homiliae Supplementariae*[77] and *De temporibus anni.*[78]

By the end of the thirteenth century, there was a felt need for some kind of a compendium or handbook of Christian

72 Rabanus Magnentius Maurus, *Homiliae de festis praecipuis item de virtutibus*, in *Patrologia Latina* CX, 10-134. Rabanus Maurus was a Benedictine theologian, Abbot of Fulda and Archbishop of Mainz. He was born probably in 776 in Mainz and died in 856. His writings contributed to the Carolingian renaissance and the growth of learning in Germany. Cf. M. F. McCarthy, "Rabanus Maurus, Bl.," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 11, ed. Berard Marthaler (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 881-882.

73 Rabanus Magnentius Maurus, *Homiliae in evangelia et epistolas*, in *Patrologia Latina* CX, 135-466.

74 Gatch, "From the Decline of Catechesis", 92-93.

75 *Catholicae Homiliae: Serie Prima*, ed. Benjamin Thorpe (London: 1844).

76 *Catholicae Homiliae: Serie Altera*, ed. Malcolm Godden (London: Oxford University Press, 1979).

77 *Homiliae Supplementariae*, vols. 1–2, ed. John C. Pope (London: Oxford University Press, 1967–68).

78 *De temporibus anni*, ed. Heinrich Henel (London: Oxford University Press, 1942).

https://publications.lst.edu/

doctrine. The Councils of Albi[79] (1255) and Lavaur[80] (1368) required parish priests to use this for the instruction of unlearned people. These handbooks presented in a clear and simple way the articles of the faith, the prayers, their Christian obligations and the Sacred Scriptures. The Council of Scotland (1225) specifically imposed on archdeacons the task of preparing this compendium.[81] At the Council of Lambeth (1281), Archbishop John Pecham of Canterbury promulgated can. 10 entitled *Ignorantia sacerdotum,*[82] a foundational document for all later medieval legislation in England on the subject of catechetical instruction. It contained a summary exposition of those things that every minister of the Church should know concerning doctrine and morals, including the impediments to marriage and the offenses that entailed excommunication.[83]

The first time, however, that the term "catechism" was used to describe a book of instruction on Christian doctrine was in 1357. The Convocation of York approved a text containing the basic contents of catechetical instruction for the faithful, mostly based on the contents of *Ignorantia sacerdotum* prepared at the Council of Lambeth in 1281. Archbishop Thoresby of

79 *Concilium Albiense* (Albi), *Multis episcopis*, cap. 17, *Ut parochi et episcopi articulos fidei populo explicent*, in *Mansi* XXIII, 836-837.

80 *Concilium Vaurense* (Lavaur), *Sacrorum canonum*, cap. 1, *de fide catolica, et ut laici de articulis fidei, et aliis ad capessendam aeternam salutem necessariis, cum diligentia informentur*, in *Mansi* XXVI, 485.

81 *Concilium Provinciale Scoticum* (Scotland), *Concilium Provinciale Scoticum, Honorius episcopus*, can. 3, *de fide catholica*, in *Mansi* XXII, 1223.

82 *Concilium Lambethense* (Lambeth), *Ab exordio*, cap. 10, *Ignorantia sacerdotum*, in Mansi XXIV, 410-413.

83 Gatch, "From the Decline of Catechesis," 99.

York had the Latin text translated into English for the use of the clergy and called it the *Lay Folks' Catechism.*[84]

Another example of this compendium in the context of France was Jean Gerson's *Opus tripartitum de praeceptis decalogi, de confessione et de arte moriendi.*[85] Born in 1363 in Champagne and died in 1429, Gerson was appointed Chancellor of the University of Paris in 1395. He was among those who had the most lasting influence in the history of catechesis. Priests used to read his *Opus tripartitum* on Sundays in church until the Roman Catechism superseded it.[86] The work of Gerson reflected a fresh concern and solicitude for the education of children that began to appear in the fifteenth century. Even during his term as university chancellor, he took time out to catechize children. In a small treatise, *De parvulis ad Christum trahendis,*[87] he emphasized the need to teach children in terms they understood. For the mass diffusion of catechesis, he proposed that simple summaries of doctrine be made in the form of posters or wall charts to be displayed in public places where people could read them.[88]

As early as 1322, the Spanish Church had been using these posters on Christian doctrine to instruct the people. The

84 The original Latin version of the Lay Folks' Catechism and its English translation are found in T. F. Simmons and H. E. Nolloth, eds., *The Lay Folks' Catechism, or the English and Latin Versions of Archbishop Thoresby's Instruction for the People* (London: Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society, vol. 118, 1901); cf. Berard Marthaler, The Catechism Yesterday and Today: The Evolution of a Genre (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 12–13.

85 The original Latin texts of this work are found in *Joannis Gersonii, Opera Omnia, tomus* 1, ed. Louis Ellies Du Pin (Antwerp, 1706), 426–50.

86 Marthaler, *The Catechism*, 14.

87 Giovanni Gersone, *Del dovere di attrarre i fanciulli a Gesù*, trans. L. Locatelli and G. Allegranza (Milano, 1946).

88 Marthaler, *The Catechism*, 15-16.

https://publications.lst.edu/

Councils of Valladolid[89] (1322), Toledo[90] (1473) and Sevilla[91] (1512) obliged parishes to set up in Latin and the vernacular posters containing the articles of the faith, prayers, precepts of the Decalogue, sacraments of the Church, and the kinds of vices and virtues. But aside from these posters, some councils, like the Council of Tortosa (1429), decreed that parish priests themselves be given a compendium of Christian doctrine for their use in catechizing the people. The decree reads: "We order that a brief compendium be composed and written by some educated and approved men, in which is to be contained in a clear and succinct manner all those necessary things which the people should know."[92]

Preaching and Catechesis in the Vernacular

The Church had always insisted, in her catechumenal formation during the early church and in liturgical preaching during the Middle Ages, that Christian formation aimed at a continuing conversion of one's life to Jesus Christ, manifested in assent of faith and in good works. However, in order to have

89 *Concilium apud Vallemoleti a Valladolid, Iniunctum nobis, cap. 2, De officio ordinarii*, in *Mansi* XXV, 698.

90 *Concilium Toletanum* (Toledo), *Quoniam a nascentis*, cap. 2, *Quod rectores ecclesiarum habeant in scriptis articulos fidei et publicent populo*, in *Mansi* XXXII, 385.

91 *Concilio Provincial de Sevilla, In nomine*, const. 1, *Quod parochi doceant suos parochianos Mysteria nostrae Sanctae Fidei Catholicae, et quod in qualibet Ecclesia adsit tabula, in qua contineantur omnia, quae illos docere debent*, Tejada, *Colección de cánones*, V, 69-70.

92 "*Mandamus, et per viros literatos, et probos dictari, et scribi faciant aliquod breve compendium, in quo praedicta omnia, quantum populares est scire necesse, districate comprehendantur, et clare*." *Concilium Dertusae* (Tortosa), *Faustissimus omnium, const.* 6, *de modo instruendi populum circa fidem necessaria*, in *Mansi* 28, 1147-1148. Nevertheless, Etchegaray Cruz takes note of the opinion of Llorente that this compendium or catechism might not have been written at all. Cf. Adolfo Etchegaray Cruz, *Storia della catechesi*, trans. L. M. Rolfo (Rome, 1983), originally published as *Historia de la catequesis* (Santiago de Chile, 1962), 215–16.

an intellectual grasp both of doctrine and moral demands that would guide one to action, the message had to be understood by presenting it in a language intelligible to the hearers. Only thus would the message sustain one's initial conversion and truly impact one's life.

There was a serious language problem during the Middle Ages. Communal worship, including preaching, was held in Latin. Because of the unintelligibility of Latin to the majority of the Christian population, people's participation in public worship – both in terms of numbers and the quality of involvement – diminished considerably from what it had been in the days of primitive Christianity. This situation was detrimental to catechesis.[93] Nevertheless, some councils like the Councils of Clovesho[94] (747) and Arles[95] (813), and clerics worked out ways to provide religious instruction in the vernacular. St. Bede or Venerable Bede, a Benedictine monk who lived around 672-735 in Durham, England, wrote that Christians who understood only their native tongue should be taught the Creed and the Our Father in that language. At the same time, he insisted on Latin for those who understood it.[96] But the singular instance during this period of a policy of complete adaptation to the

93 Mary Jegen, "Catechesis II (Medieval and Modern)," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. William J. McDonald, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1967), 210. See also Gianetto, "*La catechesi nella storia*," 63.

94 *Concilium Cloveshoviae, Regnante Domino*, can. 10, *ut presbyteri baptizent, et in suos Evangelii officium diligenter exerceant*, in *Mansi* XII, 398-399.

95 *Concilium Arelatense* VI, *Dum anno* XLV, can. 3, *ut episcopi presbyteros de baptismo doceant, sanctaeque Scripturae, et canonum lectioni insistant*, in *Mansi* XIV, 59.

96 *Beda Venerabilis, Epistola II ad Ecgberctum antistitem, Paraeneticorum Venerabilis Bedae operum. Sectio Quarta in qua continentur ejus epistolae*, in PL XCIV, 659.

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vernacular was the efforts of Saints Cyril (+ 869) and Methodius (+ 885) among the Slavs.[97]

The mandate of some councils to translate homilies from Latin into the vernacular was a special help to priests in preaching in the vernacular. The homilies of the early Fathers were translated into the tudesque language, i.e., Frankish language understood by the common folk, or to the rural Roman language, which was a corrupted version of Latin from which the current French was formed. The homilies were then made available to priests, who simply read them to the people. Canon 17 of the Council of Tours (813) was most representative of this concern:

> It is our unanimous opinion that each bishop should have homilies containing needful admonitions by which his subjects may be taught [...]. In addition, each should be diligent to translate clearly the same homilies into the rustic roman language or tudesque, so that all may more easily understand the things that are being said.[98]

The Lateran Council (1215) left its mark on the Church's pastoral adaptation efforts, as it did on other concerns. In considering the pastoral care of Christians from different language groups living in the same locality, the council also promoted religious instruction in the vernacular. The Council's constitution 9 stated:

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97 Jegen, "Catechesis II," 210. For a historical survey concerning efforts at liturgical adaptation through translations of liturgical texts, see A. G. Martimort, "*Essai historique sur les traductions liturgiques*," *Maison-Dieu* 85 (1966): 75–105.

98 "*Visum est unanimitati nostrae, ut quilibet episcopus habeat homilias continentes necessarias admonitiones, quibus subjecti erudiantur* [...]. *Et ut easdem homilias quisque aperte transferre studeat in rusticam Romanam linguam, aut Theotiscam, quo facilius cuncti possint intelligere quae dicuntur.*" *Concilium Turonense* III, *Quantum piissimi*, can. 17, in *Mansi* XIV, 85. The English translation is mine.

> Since in many places people of different languages live within the same city or diocese, having one faith but different rites and customs, we therefore strictly order bishops of such cities and dioceses to provide suitable men who will [...] instruct them by word and example.[99]

One must observe that adaptation in preaching did not only entail an adjustment to language needs. Pastoral concern also necessitated different catechetical approaches for those living in the cities and those in the countryside. The Synod of Gran[100] (1114) and the Council of Albi[101] (1255) provided for the Sunday explanation of the gospels and letters of St. Paul in big churches usually situated in the urban areas. In more remote rural communities, the articles of the faith and prayers should instead be taught clearly and simply, at least for the time being, until the people are ready for other points of the faith.

Memorization of Doctrines and Prayers

Memorization of doctrine had always been a constant feature of catechesis. Since the study of the two formulas of the Creed and the Our Father developed a fuller understanding of Christian life, children and adults were invited to memorize these prayers and were later instructed by their pastors in

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99 "*Quoniam in plerisque patribus intra eandem civitatem atque dioecesim permixti sunt populi diversarum linguarum, habentes sub una fide varios ritus et mores, districte praecipimus ut pontifices huiusmodi civitatum sive dioecesum, provideant viros idoneos*, [...] *instruendo eos verbo pariter et exemplo.*" *Concilium Lateranense* IV, *Firmiter credimus*, const. 9, *De diversis ritibus in eadem fide*, in COD, 239. The English version is found in: Fourth Lateran Council, const. 9, On different rites within the same faith, in Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1 (London and Washington, D.C.: Sheed & Ward / Georgetown University Press, 1990), 239.

100 *Synodus Strigoniensis Nationalis* (Gran), *Saeviente in fratrem*, cap. 2, *de Sermone ad populum*, in *Mansi* XXI, 100.

101 *Concilium Albiense, Multis episcopis*, cap. 17, *Ut parochi et episcopi articulos fidei populo explicent*, in *Mansi* XXIII, 836-837.

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them. Confessors also required their penitents to recite their prayers from memory.

Certain help was utilized for memorization. The Council of Sevilla (1512) allowed priests during Sunday Mass to ask the people to recite – instead of the penitential prayer – the Our Father, Hail Mary, *Salve Regina,* and/or the *Credo* in order to facilitate the continuous learning of these prayers, including their correct pronunciation.[102] Moreover, the Middle Ages saw the use of lists, word associations, and other aids to memorization.[103] The *septenarium*, for example, organized doctrines and other elements of Christian life in groups of seven. In his *Enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide et spe et caritate*[104], Augustine identified seven petitions in the Lord's Prayer. Hugh of St.Victor, an Augustinian canon regular who lived around 1096-1141, wrote his *De quinque septenis seu septenariis*[105] or "the five groups of seven": the seven deadly sins, seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer, seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, seven virtues and the seven Beatitudes.

In line with the genre of the *septenarium*, the Council of Toledo (1323) outlined the articles of the faith into fourteen, the first seven corresponded to the divinity, and the other seven to

102 *Concilio Provincial de Sevilla*, *in nomine*, const. 1, *Quod parochi doceant suos parochianos Mysteria nostrae Sanctae Fidei Catholicae, et quod in qualibet Ecclesia adsit tabula, in qua contineantur omnia, quae illos docere debent*, Tejada, *Colección de cánones*, V, 69.

103 Marthaler, *The Catechism*, 10-11.

104 *Augustinus Aurelius, Enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide et spe et caritate, Sermo de Simbolo, in Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, CCL XLVI, 23-114.

105 *Hugo de S. Victore, De quinque septenis seu septenariis, in Patrologia Latina* CLXXV, 406-414.

the humanity of Christ.[106] Other councils like Beziers[107] (1246), London[108] (1237), Lambeth[109] (1281), Lavaur[110] (1368), Tortosa[111] (1429) and York[112] (1466) listed the seven sacraments, seven principal virtues, seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, seven petitions of the Our Father, seven beatitudes, seven fruits of the Holy Spirit, seven corporal works of mercy, seven spiritual works of mercy and seven capital sins.

Conclusion

This reconstruction of medieval legislation on catechesis presents a distinct field of research within the Church's canonical system, one that has long been overlooked in canonical historical studies, which have always focused on sacramental (especially matrimonial), liturgical, or disciplinary norms. This research has revealed how catechesis, as a primordial institution in the Church, gradually acquired a distinct juridical form and canonical status from moral exhortation in the early councils to explicit legal prescriptions in later medieval legislation. The collection of decrees from local synods,

106 *Concilio de Toledo, Joannes miseratione*, const. 1 *Instructio articulorum fidei, sacramentorum Ecclesiae praeceptorum Decalogi, virtutum, et vitiorum*, Tejada, *Colección de cánones*, III, 506.

107 *Concilium Biterrense Provinciale* (Beziers), *Rectitudo conditionis*, cap. 7, *Ut parochiales sacerdotes articulos fidei simpliciter doceant diebus Dominicis*, in *Mansi* XXIII, 693.

108 *Concilium Londoniense* (London), *Eodem iniquit*, cap. 2, *de sacramentis ecclesiasticis*, in *Mansi* XXIII, 448.

109 *Concilium Lambethense* (Lambeth), *Ab exordio*, cap. 10 *Ignorantia sacerdotum*, in Mansi XXIV, 410.

110 *Concilium Vaurense, Sacrorum canonum*, cap. 1, *de fide catolica, et ut laici de articulis fidei, et aliis ad capessendam aeternam salutem necessariis, cum diligentia informentur*, in *Mansi* XXVI, 485.

111 *Concilium Dertusae* (Tortosa), *Faustissimus omnium*, const. 6, *de modo instruendi populum circa fidem necessaria*, in Mansi 28, 1147-1148.

112 *Synodus Provincialis Eborum* (York), *Georgius permissione,* can. 1, in *Mansi* XXXII, 275.

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individual bishops, and ecumenical councils, along with their interpretations, has demonstrated that the medieval Church was already systematically legislating on catechesis well before the Council of Trent, in response to various pastoral and liturgical contexts.

In the wake of the mass conversions after the peace of Constantine in the fourth century and despite all its problems, the Church still sought to achieve its *objective* of continual personal conversion to Christ. However, the *means* used was no longer the catechumenate, but rather an abbreviated form of baptismal preparation and intensified catechetical preaching. This new approach still followed the lines of doctrinal and moral instruction, but now in the context of the Sunday liturgy. Thus, during the Middle Ages, from the fifth to the late fifteenth centuries, in response to the needs of the times, catechetical preaching flourished as the new way to educate Christians in the faith. Meanwhile, children's catechesis took place in the family setting, under the guidance of their parents. By the thirteenth century, a new form of catechesis arose as some local councils began requiring that children be brought to the church for catechesis, which consisted primarily of memorizing prayers, the Ten Commandments, and the most basic truths of Christianity.

Through the legislation of medieval councils and synods, local churches provided useful *tools* and required specific methods for equipping pastors to teach and preach to the people. This legislation included handbooks on doctrine for educating pastors and laity, vernacular translations of homilies that priests read to the people, and a general push toward memorizing catechetical texts. But one aspect of medieval Christianity could perhaps be considered as another "tool" for catechesis: the Christian environment. People simply lived in

an environment that, to a certain extent, provided a kind of catechesis.

However, the legislation of local churches aimed at educating the people was insufficient to arrest the tide of religious decay and ignorance. The overwhelmingly Christian setting itself became a breeding ground for a certain kind of religious culture of maintenance and preservation that, unwittingly, tended to overlook the importance of intensive, missionary-style Christian initiation and formation in the spirit of the early Church. If such a Christian environment could be loosely considered a "tool" or a "means" of Christian formation, then it was clearly insufficient to form Christians in a mature faith, precisely because it lacked the in-depth religious formation provided by the ancient catechumenate.

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