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# **The Impact of "Catechetical Instructions" of St. Thomas Aquinas on the Development of Contemporary Catechetics**

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## *Abstract*

The social environment of the Medieval Period significantly influenced the Church's efforts in the spiritual formation of its congregants, which, unfortunately, exhibited limited progress. In response to this situation, St. Thomas Aquinas systematically articulated the concepts and truths of the Catholic faith through a series of sermons delivered during Lent. These sermons were later compiled into Catechetical Instructions, serving as a resource for clergy. Today, in the context of the post-Vatican II Church, the ongoing development of the concept of "Catechetics" underscores the enduring relevance of Aquinas' work. His "Catechetical Instructions" continues to play a vital role in shaping contemporary approaches to "Catechetics", reflecting the contributions of Aquinas within the framework of new ideas and generational shifts.

Keywords: Catholic Church, Catechesis, Catechetical Instruction, Vatican II, Medieval Period, Formation, Hierarchy of Truths, Social Religiousization

## ***Introduction***

Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) is recognized as a monumental figure in Medieval Italian theology, whose writings have profoundly and lasting impact on theological development both in his lifetime and in subsequent centuries. Despite his significant contributions, the Church's efforts toward for the spiritual formation of adult catechumens during the Middle Ages were markedly insufficient. This paper will first provide an overview of the ecclesiastical context of the Medieval Period and the ensuing challenges faced in the formation of the faithful. Subsequently, it will analyze the motivations behind the genesis of Aquinas' *Catechetical Instructions* and delve into its substantive contents. Finally, it will briefly examine the evolution of contemporary catechetics and the enduring influence of Aquinas within this broader trajectory.

### ***1. The Work of Catechesis in the Medieval Church Context***

As the Medieval Period progressed, the decline of the Roman Empire instigated significant transformations within the Church's catechetical initiatives. One prominent consequence of this transformation was the increasing prevalence of infant baptism, which signified a notable shift in ecclesiastical priorities. Simultaneously, there was a marked reduction in the emphasis placed on the thorough formation of adult catechumens, resulting in a troubling deficiency in robust catechesis for this demographic.

Moreover, the overall decline in cultural literacy among the populace during this period further compounded the challenges faced in catechetical efforts. This decline not only hindered individuals' capacities to engage with complex theological concepts but also contributed to a broader detachment from the faith. Collectively, these factors reveal a substantial shift in the practice and effectiveness of catechesis,

highlighting the pressing need for a renewed focus on adult formation to address the evolving ecclesiastical landscape.

### ***1.1 Challenges of the Work of Catechesis in the Context of the Medieval Church***

In the context of the Medieval Church, the practice of catechesis, as well as its integration with liturgical functions, faced two major challenges: the first one is “the disintegration of catechetical formation and Sacraments of Initiation”; and the second one is “socio-religious transformation leading to changes in faith perspectives”.

#### **1.1.1 The Disintegration of Catechetical Formation and Sacraments of Initiation**

Before the eighth century, catechesis served predominantly as a preparatory process for individuals seeking baptism, aimed at fostering genuine conversion and encouraging a virtuous life. However, from the eighth century onward, a confluence of political, cultural, doctrinal, and liturgical factors began to erode the system of Christian initiation for adults within the Western Church. The fragmentation of the Sacraments of Initiation and the decline in catechetical formation can be attributed to three primary factors:

##### **(1) The Rise of Infant Baptism**

In the fifth century, the theological controversy between Augustine and Pelagius regarding the "necessity of baptism for salvation" led the Church to adopt the view that baptism should not be postponed in the pursuit of salvation. This doctrinal shift significantly contributed to the burgeoning practice of infant baptism, establishing it as a common norm within the Church.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Augustinus, *De Peccatorum Meritis Et Remissione Et De Baptismo Parvulorum at Marcellinum*, II, 412.

(2) The Decline of Catechumenal Formation for Adults

The increasing prevalence of infant baptism resulted in a marked decrease in the number of adult catechumens, which in turn led to the gradual deterioration of the catechetical model that had been prominent during the patristic era.<sup>2</sup> This decline was compounded by the general low level of education among the populace, which hindered the effective transmission and absorption of faith education.<sup>3</sup>

(3) The Fragmentation of Rite of Christian Initiation

During this period, the Rite of Christian Initiation suffered from a lack of a comprehensive preparatory framework.<sup>4</sup> Although subsequent liturgical reforms sought to address these deficiencies, they often inadequately considered the preparatory needs of adult catechumens. This fragmentation further complicated the process of Christian Initiation, contributing to the overall decline in catechetical formation.<sup>5</sup>

In summary, the decline of adult initiation rites can be attributed to the growing division between liturgy and catechetical formation. During this period, the Rites for Christian Initiation for Adults were largely adapted from those designed for infants, often resulting in the incorporation of numerous additional rituals into the existing liturgical framework. This complexity ultimately sought to supplant authentic catechetical formation with elaborate ceremonial practices, thereby undermining the integral process of spiritual education and formation for adult catechumens.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph Martos, translated by Liu Guo Qing, *Sacred Threshold*, Hong Kong: Catholic Diocesan Liturgy Commission, 1997, p.28-29.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.30-32.

<sup>4</sup> Milton McC. Gatch, "Basic Christian Education from the Decline of Catechesis to the Rise of the Catechisms", in *A Faithful Church: Issues in the History of Catechesis*, ed. John H. Westerhoff III and O.C Edwards, Jr., Connecticut: Morehouse-Barlow Co., 1981, p.82.

<sup>5</sup> Rev. Thomas Law Kwok-fai, "A Table of Roman Rites of Initiation Sacraments", in *Collectanea Theologica*, Taiwan: University Fu Jen, 1993, p.483-498.

<sup>6</sup> Rev. Thomas Law Kwok-fai, *Passover*, Hong Kong: Catholic Truth Society, 1988, p.9-12.

### 1.1.2 Socio-Religious Transformation Leading to Changes in Faith Perspectives

During the Medieval Period, the motivations for individuals seeking baptism transitioned from a genuine commitment to faith to a desire for social integration. The relationship between society and the Church during this era was intricate and intertwined, characterized by minimal distinction between the religious and political spheres. This convergence significantly influenced the dynamics of faith and community belonging, reshaping the understanding of baptism within the broader societal context.

In the context of baptismal preparation, earlier practices emphasized a phased catechetical formation aimed at fostering a profound understanding of the faith. However, by the Medieval Period, the cultural and educational deficiencies prevalent among the populace necessitated a reliance on the existing religious atmosphere and communal influences to nurture Christian faith. This shift reflects the challenges faced in maintaining robust catechetical practices amid changing societal dynamics.<sup>7</sup>

During the era of the early Church Fathers, catechetical formation was characterized by a comprehensive and systematic three-year catechumenate, firmly rooted in biblical and creedal contexts. In contrast, by the Medieval Period, this approach had devolved into a focus on rote memorization of prayers and an emphasis on the study of commandments and virtues, often accompanied by varying lengths of preparation time. The contexts for this formation transitioned from liturgical preaching and communal prayer to primarily Sunday sermons. Furthermore, the target audience expanded to include not only non-Christian adults but also infants receiving baptism, along with their parents, godparents, less educated congregants, and the presiding clergy. This evolution signifies a

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<sup>7</sup> Andrew Rickie Lam, *Twelve Lectures on Catechetics, Vol. I: Catechetical History and Traditions*, Taiwan: Kuangchi Cultural Group, 2019, p.113.

substantial transformation in the nature and purpose of catechetical formation during this period.<sup>8</sup>

### ***1.2 Characteristics of Catechetical Formation in the Medieval Church: A Social Religiousization Approach***

During the era of the Church Fathers, there was a strong emphasis on the preparation and conversion processes for catechumens. However, the political and religious contexts of the Medieval Period led to a religious life increasingly dominated by social institutions,<sup>9</sup> resulting in a model of catechetical formation characterized by what can be termed "social religiousization."

In this context, "social religiousization" refers to the cultivation of faith among the populace that relied heavily on various religious elements embedded within the social environment. These elements included church architecture, the veneration of icons, the deeds of saints, and expressions of popular piety. Such practices effectively supplanted formal catechetical instruction, marking this period as one characterized by a "catechetical vacuum."<sup>10</sup> This shift underscores the transformation in how faith was transmitted and understood during the Medieval Period, reflecting a significant departure from the systematic approaches of earlier centuries.

The characteristics of catechetical formation through "social religiousization" during the medieval period can be summarized in the following three points:

#### **(1) Promotion of the Virtues of Saints:**

The exaltation of the deeds of saints was a defining feature of catechetical

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<sup>8</sup> Michel Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate*, New York: Sadlier, 1979, p. 133-135.

<sup>9</sup> Josef A. Jungmann, "Religious Education in Late Medieval Times", in *Shaping the Christian Message: Essays in Religious Education*, ed. Gerald S. Sloyan, Washington DC: The Catholic University of America, 1958, p.46-69.

<sup>10</sup> Lin Shu li, *The stories of the Catechists*, Taiwan: Kuangchi Cultural Group, 2007, p.16-18.

formation during this time. Notably, Pope Gregory the Great compiled the "Dialogues"<sup>11</sup> (593-594), which primarily focused on the exemplary virtues of Italian saints, particularly those demonstrated in the face of adversity and calamity. This emphasis on saintly virtues served as a model for the faithful, fostering moral and spiritual development within the community.

(2) Atmosphere of Faith Life:

During the Medieval Period, the populace exhibited limited knowledge and cultural awareness, making the transmission of theological knowledge challenging; thus, the reliance on the communal experience of faith became paramount.

The detailed rituals surrounding the administration and celebration of sacraments played a crucial role in enabling Christians and Catholic families to recognize their identity as members of the faith community.

The conduct of liturgical ceremonies constituted a significant aspect of faith life, as societal celebrations were largely organized in accordance with the Church's liturgical calendar.

The manifestations of religious devotion and popular piety served as vital expressions of Christian faith, with various forms of pilgrimage and communal activities emerging as common spiritual practices during this period.<sup>12</sup>

(3) Religious Environment of Society:

The emergence of Gothic architecture in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, characterized by intricate designs and configurations—including stained-glass windows, murals, and icons—alongside liturgical processions and festive hymns, played a pivotal role in conveying religious messages within the community. This architectural and artistic development not only enhanced the worship experience but also facilitated a deeper connection between the faithful and their spiritual heritage. Through these visual and auditory elements, Gothic architecture served as

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<sup>11</sup> Gregorius, *Dialogi de Vita et Miraculis Patrum Italicorum*, p.594.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas D. McGonigle and James F. Quigley, *A History of the Christian Tradition, Vol. I: From its Jewish Origin to the Reformation*, Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, p.148-149.

a medium for expressing and reinforcing the religious narratives that defined the spiritual landscape of the period.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Liu De Shun, *A Brief History of Catechesis*, Taiwan: Kuangchi Cultural Group, 1967, p.51-52, 249-153.

## **2. Catechetical Instructions by Thomas Aquinas**

The catechetical formation with social religiousization approach in the medieval Church, which relied heavily on environmental and liturgical elements, enabled the faithful to participate in a religious atmosphere. However, this approach often fell short of fostering a genuine deepening of their faith. In this context, Thomas Aquina made concerted efforts to impart a more profound understanding of the faith to the faithful, seeking to transcend the limitations of superficial religious engagement. His initiatives aimed to cultivate a deeper theological comprehension and spiritual enrichment among the community.

### **2.1 The Catalyst for the Shift in Formation Models—The Fourth Lateran Council**

In 1215, Pope Innocent III<sup>14</sup> convened the Fourth Lateran Council to address several pressing issues, including the recovery of the Holy Land following the Crusades, the reform of Christian ethical conduct, and the heretical threats posed by the Albigensian heresy to orthodox Christian doctrine. Consequently, this council sought not only to resolve the issue of heresy but also to reaffirm the tenets of authentic Christian faith and to rigorously address the corrupt practices among clergy. Additionally, particular attention was given to the lives and formation of clergy.<sup>15</sup> Canon 10 of the council stipulated that "bishops provide suitable men, powerful in work and word, to exercise with fruitful result the office of preaching" and "bishops may use as coadjutors and assistants, not only in the office of preaching but also in hearing confessions, imposing penances, and in other matters that pertain to the salvation of souls".<sup>16</sup> Canon 11 further specified

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<sup>14</sup> The Fourth Lateran Council is regarded as the most significant ecumenical council in the history of the Church prior to the Council of Trent (*Concilium Tridentinum*, 1545-1563). The decrees established by this council, encapsulated in the Catholic Codex, contain numerous provisions that remain in effect to this day.

<sup>15</sup> Ed by Fu Jen Theological Publications Association, *Theological Dictionary*, Taiwan: Kuangchi Cultural Group, 2010, p.235-236.

<sup>16</sup> *Le Constitutiones Concilii Lateranensis*, Città del Vaticano, 2007, no. 10.

that " In addition to a master, let the metropolitan church have also a theologian, who shall instruct the priests and others in the Sacred Scriptures and in those things especially that pertain to the *cura animarum*." <sup>17</sup>

## ***2.2 The Birth of Thomas Aquinas' Catechetical Instructions***

Thomas Aquinas, a 13th century Dominican Friar, studied Aristotle's philosophy at the University of Paris and synthesized the ideas of the Scholastic tradition, systematically articulating Christian doctrine through the methodologies of scholastic philosophy. His monumental work, the *Summa Theologiae*, has remained profoundly influential from the medieval period to the present day. <sup>18</sup>

During the years 1272-1273, while teaching at the University of Naples, Thomas Aquinas completed the third part of the *Summa Theologiae*. <sup>19</sup> In response to the inadequate catechetical formation of the time, he took the initiative to provide catechetical instruction to the friars and the people of Naples throughout the Lenten season of 1273 at the Church of *San Domenico Maggiore*. <sup>20</sup> The content of these sermons was later collected and organized into four booklets, which document a total of 58 sermons. The titles of these booklets are as follows:

- (1) Exposition on the Apostles' Creed (In symbolum apostolorum, scil. "Credo in Deum", expositio.)
- (2) Exposition on the Lord's Prayer (In orationem dominicam, videlicet "Pater noster", expositio.)

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, no. 11.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas D. McGonigle and James F. Quigley, *A History of the Christian Tradition, Vol. I: From its Jewish Origin to the Reformation*, p.162-169.

<sup>19</sup> Zhou Xiao Hui, "The Doctor Ecclesiae St. Thomas Aquina his Masterpiece *Summa Theologiae*", in *Summa Theologiae* (Chinese version), Tainan: Catholic Studim S. Pius X, p.xii.

<sup>20</sup> Benedetto XVI, Udienza Generale, 23 giugno 2010.

(3) Exposition on the Two Commandments of Charity and the Ten Commandments (*In duo praecepta caritatis et in decem legis praecepta expositio.*)

(4) Exposition on the Hail Mary (In salutationem angelicam, vulgo "Ave Maria", expositio.)

### ***2.3 Distinctive Features of Thomas Aquinas' Sermons***

The series of catechetical sermons delivered by Thomas Aquinas during Lent in 1273 stands out as one of the most unique periods in the history of catechesis. This distinction arises from Aquinas's ability to present his systematic theological research in a dynamic, interactive manner before the friars and the public. His preaching style is characterized by the following features:

#### 2.3.1 Content Overview

The *Catechetical Instruction* outlines Thomas Aquinas's coherent theological trajectory: it begins by affirming the nature of God's love, from which all creation emanates. This foundation posits that humanity possesses the capacity to seek and understand God through natural reason. Subsequently, through transcendent revelation, God invites individuals to embrace faith in Him. The Incarnate Christ facilitates humanity's reception of the Word, faith, and sacraments within the Church, enabling the practice of Christian living and ultimately fostering communion with the Lord, which culminates in the experience of eternal love.<sup>21</sup>

Thomas Aquinas utilizes this theological framework, in conjunction with biblical application, to present the principles of the "Hierarchy of Truths" (*gerarchia delle verità*), emphasizing that "to distinguish what is essential from what is less important in its teaching " and addressing

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas D. McGonigle and James F. Quigley, *A History of the Christian Tradition, Vol. I: From its Jewish Origin to the Reformation*, p.162-169.

"matters related to the essentials of faith."<sup>22</sup> This approach delineates three essential elements of human salvation, which become the three themes of his catechetical instruction: the articles of faith contained in the Creed, the petitions of the Lord's Prayer, and the law of charity governing all actions.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, he includes an exposition of the Hail Mary to clarify that by seeking the intercession of the Mother of God, we may be reconciled with God and receive the blessings necessary for both this life and the life to come.<sup>24</sup>

This series of sermons constitutes a systematic body of "a form of organic catechesis" (*una forma di catechesi organica*),<sup>25</sup> exerting a direct and significant influence on subsequent catechetical texts. The Council of Trent, convened in the sixteenth century, mandated the compilation of a catechism, culminating in the publication of the *Roman Catechism* (*Catechismo Romano*) or named *Catechism of the Council of Trent* (*Catechismo del concilio di Trento*) by Pope Pius V in 1566, which closely mirrors the context, content, and structure of Aquinas's *Catechetical Instruction*.<sup>26</sup>

### 2.3.2 Methodology

In terms of preaching methods, Thomas Aquinas deliberately set aside the theological language of his time—Latin—and instead utilized the dialect of his childhood in *Roccasecca*. Additionally, he consciously avoided the use of overly complex vocabulary and ornate rhetoric, as well as excessive or peculiar rhetorical techniques. Instead, he employed clear

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<sup>22</sup> Ed by Fu Jen Theological Publications Association, *Theological Dictionary*, Taiwan: Kuangchi Cultural Group, 2010, p.634.

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Rickie Lam, *Twelve Lectures on Catechetics, Vol. I: Catechetical History and Traditions*, Taiwan: Kuangchi Cultural Group, 2019, p.114.

<sup>24</sup> Pio V, *Il Catechismo Romano*, 1566, Capitolo V, no.8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Translated by Rev. Joseph B. Collins, S.S., D.D., *The Catechetical Instructions of St. Thomas Aquinas*, New York: Joseph F. Wagner, Inc, 1939, p. xi-xiii.

and accessible language to convey fundamental truths,<sup>27</sup> facilitating the understanding and memorization of theological mysteries for his audience.

For instance, when describing the state of resurrected bodies, he used terms such as "divine light, divine swiftness, divine clarity, and divine strength,"<sup>28</sup> emphasizing their transcendence beyond the constraints of time and space. This approach not only reflected Aquinas's fidelity to the Church's faith tradition but also demonstrated his personal engagement with the mysteries he addressed. By prioritizing clarity and simplicity in his discourse, Aquinas effectively communicated profound theological concepts to a diverse audience.<sup>29</sup>

### 2.3.3 Audience

In terms of the audience for his sermons, Thomas Aquinas extended the reach of his sermons beyond the confines of the classroom, addressing not only the friars studying at the seminary but also the lay faithful entering the church, thereby actively engaging in their faith formation. His sermons were structured around the questions posed by the audience, allowing him to respond and elucidate using the sources of faith as a foundation. As a result, he carefully integrated the sources of faith with the understanding of faith that the faithful had in their everyday lives.<sup>30</sup>

The catechesis presented in a question-and-answer format only became widely established during the Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the medieval period, "catechesis" primarily referred to the oral instruction of Christian doctrine. St. Augustine, often referred to as the "Doctor of Grace," published the classic work *De*

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<sup>27</sup> Pietro da Andria, Reginaldo da Priverno, *Il Catechismo di San Tommaso*, Torino: San Paolo, 1998.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra gentiles*, IV, no.86.

<sup>29</sup> Alfred Läßle, a cura di Flavio Pajer, *Breve storia della catechesi*, Brescia: Queriniana, 1985, p. 95.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

*rudibus catechizandis* in 403, which employed direct exposition rather than a question-and-answer format. Thus, Thomas Aquinas' approach, which focused on addressing the questions and confusions of the faithful regarding their faith and daily lives, culminated in the form of catechesis that he compiled into the *Catechetical Instructions*. This approach holds a significant place in the historical development of catechesis, reflecting a responsive and accessible approach to theological education.<sup>31</sup>

#### 2.3.4 Teaching and Preaching Ministry

The Fourth Lateran Council issued clear directives emphasizing that bishops are responsible for appointing priests to undertake catechetical works and that the Church should provide appropriate formation for these priests and friars. As both a priest and a theology professor, Thomas Aquinas exemplified the role of the preacher by delivering sermons to the lay faithful, thereby fulfilling the mandates of the council.

In addition to his preaching, Thomas Aquinas offered practical and exemplary guidance to priests and friars regarding content, methodology, audience, and catechetical ministry. Through this multifaceted approach, he not only fulfilled his responsibilities as a preacher but also engaged in the critical task of catechetical formation. His *Catechetical Instructions* became widely utilized throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as a manual and textbook for priests and religious educators, reflecting his

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<sup>31</sup> Translated by Rev. Joseph B. Collins, S.S., D.D., *The Catechetical Instructions of St. Thomas Aquinas*, New York: Joseph F. Wagner, Inc, 1939, p. xii-xiii.

significant contribution to the development of catechesis within the Church.<sup>32</sup>

### ***3. Impact and Position of Thomas Aquinas's Catechetical Instruction in the Development of Contemporary Catechesis***

Although Thomas Aquinas lived eight centuries ago, the patterns and content of his sermons still retain significance in the current context of catechesis.

The following section provides a brief overview of the development of catechesis over the past half-century, followed by an analysis of the influence and importance of the *Catechetical Instructions* within that framework.

#### ***3.1 Development of the Concept of Catechesis Post-Vatican II***

The Second Vatican Council, which lasted four years, is a profoundly significant event in contemporary Church history. Unlike previous ecumenical councils, which primarily focused on defending the Church and refuting heresies, this council served as a refreshing breeze that invigorated the Church and propelled it toward renewal. The Church underwent a reevaluation of its identity, leading to a reconfiguration of its mission and role. During this period, the Church's mission of evangelization regained emphasis and restructuring, and in the subsequent half-century, catechesis has also evolved alongside the development of the concept of evangelization.

The following section will explore the advancements in catechesis as promulgated by the Church following Vatican II, and will analyze the

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<sup>32</sup> Spirago-Mesmer, *Spirago's Method of Christian Doctrine*, New Yor: Benziger Brothers, 1901, p.513-514.

four pillars of catechesis—content, methodology, target audiences, and teaching ministry—examining the influence and importance of the *Catechetical Instruction* in contemporary practice.

### 3.1.1 Documents from Vatican II

While the Second Vatican Council did not explicitly address a particular topic of catechesis, it placed considerable emphasis on evangelization and catechetical work. More importantly, the Council established numerous pastoral programs that served as platforms for the implementation of catechesis.

The four major constitutions<sup>33</sup> of Vatican II provided essential guidance for the content and foundation of post-Vatican II catechesis, emphasizing that catechetical content must be rooted in divine revelation and the teachings of the Church. Additionally, the Christian life is expressed through liturgical practices and ethical living, reflecting the structural principles found in Thomas Aquinas's *Catechetical Instruction*, as well as the framework of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, published two decades later.

Notably, the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (Nos. 64 and 65) and the *Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church* (No. 14) clearly indicated the need to restore a systematic approach to catechetical formation and the unity of initiation sacraments. The *Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops* (No. 14) underscored the necessity for adults to engage in the study of doctrine, while No. 44 proposed the creation of catechetical guidelines. These directives directly influenced the subsequent development of related documents.

### 3.1.2 General Catechetical Directory 1971

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<sup>33</sup> The four Constitutions of Vatican II: *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Lumen Gentium*, *Dei Verbum*, *Gaudium et Spes*.

The *General Catechetical Directory*, published in 1971 by the Vatican's Congregation for the Clergy, primarily aimed to implement the directives of Vatican II regarding the office of teaching of bishops.<sup>34</sup> Simultaneously, it addressed the pastoral realities of the time, providing theological principles related to the preaching Ministry and the principles of pastoral theology.

According to the directives in Vatican II's *Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops* (No. 14), the guidelines outlined the four pillars of catechesis<sup>35</sup>—content, methodology, target audiences, and preaching Ministry. These four pillars formed the structural framework of the 1971 *General Catechetical Directory*.

Regarding catechetical content, the directories stipulated adherence to three criteria, organized according to the "Hierarchy of Truths" (*gerarchia delle verità*):<sup>36</sup>

- (1) The entire content of the message of salvation<sup>37</sup>
- (2) A certain organic and living body<sup>38</sup>
- (3) Christocentric of Catechesis<sup>39</sup>

The 1971 directory provided methodologies while emphasizing the importance of adapting these methods based on age, social context, and the psychological state of the audience.<sup>40</sup> They categorized catechetical

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<sup>34</sup> Vatican II, *Decree Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishop in the Church "Christus Dominus"*, 1965, #12.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, #14.

<sup>36</sup> Congregazione per il Clero, *Direttorio Catechistico Generale*, Roma, 1971, no. 27.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, no.38.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, no.39.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, no.40.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, no.70.

audiences by age and offered points of focus for catechesis tailored to each group.<sup>41</sup>

The directory also assigned the Ministry of the Word and Revelation<sup>42</sup> primarily to bishops, indicating that bishops should establish catechetical institutions to consistently carry out catechetical activities that serve the local Church effectively.<sup>43</sup>

### 3.1.3 Catechism of the Catholic Church 1992

The formal publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* serves to respond to the Council's objective of guard and presenting better the precious deposit of Christian doctrine in order to make it more accessible to the Christian faithful and to all people of good will. It also reflects the collective desire expressed by bishops during the 1985 extraordinary assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the close of the Council, aimed at providing an integral catechism or compendium of all Catholic doctrine regarding both faith and morals, for particular Churches as they compile their own catechisms. This initiative seeks to maintain the consistency of the universal faith and promote ecclesial communion among diverse communities.<sup>44</sup>

The four parts of the *Catechism*—the Profession of Faith, the Celebration of the Christian Mystery, Life in Christ, and Christian Prayer<sup>45</sup>—present a cohesive understanding of God's mysteries and His plan of salvation. Furthermore, it effectively articulates the essential

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, no.77-97.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, no.10.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, no.98, 126.

<sup>44</sup> John Paul II, *Apostolic Constitution Fidei Depositum*, 1992.

<sup>45</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Ireland: Veritas, 1994.

doctrines of the faith in an organic and synthetic exposition (*una esposizione organica e sintetica*).<sup>46</sup>

### 3.1.4 General Directory for Catechesis 1997

The *General Directory for Catechesis*, published by the Vatican's Congregation for the Clergy in 1997, serves as an application guide for the newly released *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It is a revision of the 1971 version, integrating the liturgical and formative directives from the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* promulgated in 1972. Additionally, it references the analyses presented in Pope Paul VI's 1975 *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and Pope John Paul II's 1979 *Catechesi Tradendae*, offering a fresh catechetical framework in light of contemporary circumstances.

In terms of catechetical content, the 1997 guidelines particularly endorse the use of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, as it presents the content of the faith in an organic and synthetic exposition.<sup>47</sup>

Regarding methodology, similar to the 1971 version, the 1997 edition enumerates various pedagogical approaches. However, it emphasizes the necessity of transforming the message of salvation into culturally relevant language; otherwise, evangelization risks losing its power and effectiveness.<sup>48</sup>

While the 1971 guidelines categorized catechetical audiences by age, the 1997 edition expands this categorization to include age, formative contexts, social situations, and cultural environments, employing appropriate methods. It also introduces the concept of "occasional catechesis".<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, no.11.

<sup>47</sup> Congregazione per il Clero, *Direttorio Generale per la Catechesi*, 1997, no. 118.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, no.112.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, no.71, 231, 255.

In terms of teaching and preaching ministry, the focus of the 1971 directory was primarily on bishops and priests. In contrast, the *General Directory for Catechesis* 1997 shift attention to the local church, where bishops still bear primary responsibility, but the role of catechesis is shared by priests, ecclesial communities and organizations, parents, and religious congregations. Notably, it emphasizes the need for pastoral formation for the catechists.<sup>50</sup>

### 3.1.5 Directory for Catechesis 2020

In the year of 2010, the responsibility for catechesis by the universal Church has been entrusted to the "Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization," established by Pope Benedict XVI. This underscores the explicit connection between catechesis and the mission of evangelization. The *Directory for Catechesis* issued in 2020 synthesize the developments and measures adopted by the Church over the years, affirming the significant role of catechesis within the framework of the "New Evangelization."

Regarding catechetical content, the 2020 directory reaffirm the prominent status of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which reflects the positive trends in catechetical renewal of the twentieth century. It encompasses all the essential criteria necessary for effective evangelization: Christocentric, the economy of salvation, the good news, the hierarchy of truths, and beauty.<sup>51</sup>

In terms of methodology, responding to societal advancements, the 2020 directory proposes a broader array of approaches. They particularly emphasize the need for catechesis to incorporate the languages of various cultures, articulating faith in distinctive ways that assist ecclesial communities in discovering innovative and suitable expressions for their

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, no.217-252.

<sup>51</sup> Pontificio Consiglio Per la Promozione della Nuova Evangelizzazione, *Direttorio per la Catechesi*, Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020, no.192.

audiences. Thus, catechesis serves as a venue for the localization of faith.<sup>52</sup>

The latest guidelines adopt contextualization as the principle for categorizing catechetical audiences, adapting to specific environmental conditions and limitations, and delivering the message of salvation appropriately and sensitively.

Furthermore, the 2020 directory reaffirm that bishops are the primary catechetical ministers, while priests and laypeople are called to collaborate in sharing this responsibility.<sup>53</sup> However, the new directory place significant emphasis on the formation of catechists, particularly with respect to laypersons.<sup>54</sup>

### ***3.2 The Impact and Significance of Thomas Aquinas's Catechetical Instructions in Contemporary Catechesis***

The four pillars of catechesis—content, methodology, target audiences, and preaching ministry—have evolved in accordance with the times, and within each developmental stride, traces of Thomas Aquinas' contributions from eight centuries ago can be discerned.

#### **3.2.1 Catechetical Content**

The content of the *Catechetical Instructions* remains an essential reference for us today. It is grounded in the theological studies of Thomas Aquinas, who explored the mysteries of God and the salvation he offers

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, no.204-206.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, no.114-129.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, no.130-156.

through human reason. This exploration aligns with the central themes that have characterized the Christian faith throughout history. The catechetical content derived from his theological method serves as a valuable resource for all contemporary catechetical texts. Pope Benedict XVI highly praised Aquinas' contributions to catechetical content, noting that Thomas is cited as many as 61 times in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.<sup>55</sup>

The structure of the *Catechetical Instructions* is organized according to the principle of the "hierarchy of truths", which Aquinas explicated as pertaining to "to distinguish what is essential from what is less important in its teaching " and addressing "matters related to the essentials of faith."<sup>56</sup> This principle was emphasized again during the Second Vatican Council, facilitating a deeper understanding and clearer expression of divine mysteries among Christians of different denominations.<sup>57</sup>

In the post-Vatican II era, various catechetical texts produced by the Church have continued to adhere to this principle. The truths proclaimed by the Church, inherited from the Apostles, are drawn from divine revelation. This context allows the truths of revelation to be presented in a systematic and logically coherent manner, outlining the priorities and sequence of formation through accessible language. Consequently, this approach remains evident in each generation's catechetical directories, reflecting "a form of organic catechesis" (*una forma di catechesi organica*).<sup>58</sup> The structure of the four parts of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, published in 1992, significantly benefits from the framework established by Thomas Aquinas.

### 3.2.2 Methodology

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<sup>55</sup> Benedetto XVI, Udienza Generale, 2 giugno 2010.

<sup>56</sup> Ed by Fu Jen Theological Publications Association, *Theological Dictionary*, Taiwan: Kuangchi Cultural Group, 2010, p.634.

<sup>57</sup> Vatican II, *Decree on Ecumenism "Unitatis Redintegratio"*, 1964, no.11.

<sup>58</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Ireland: Veritas, 1994.

Thomas Aquina did not employ the theological language of Latin; rather, he preached in the vernacular within parishes, intentionally avoiding complex theological jargon in favor of simple and relatable language. This approach aimed at facilitating comprehension and absorption of the faith, thereby integrating it into daily life. Such an initiative was particularly noteworthy in the context of the medieval Church in Italy, addressing the inadequacies in the formation of the faithful at that time.

The latest *Directory for Catechesis 2020* clearly states that *Catechetical Instructions* must be conducted as an educational action tailored to the different linguistic expressions of the audience. This requires adaptation to the diverse cultures, histories, and circumstances of individuals, as well as their capacity to understand. The goal is to help contemporary individuals grasp the gospel while enabling Catholic tradition to engage in dialogue with the cultural milieu of today, thereby fostering openness to the eternal fruits of Christ's message.<sup>59</sup> Thomas Aquinas' efforts in this regard, made eight centuries ago, serve as a significant reference point for both historical and modern studies in catechetical methodology.

### ***2.3 Catechetical Audiences***

Despite the nearly universal adherence to Christianity in medieval Europe, Thomas Aquinas dedicated himself to the catechetical formation of baptized Christians, an endeavor that was notably innovative for his time. In 2013, Pope Francis outlined three primary audiences for evangelization in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, identifying

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<sup>59</sup> Pontificio Consiglio Per la Promozione della Nuova Evangelizzazione, *Direttorio per la Catechesi*, Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020, no.204,206.

the ecclesial community as the first target for evangelistic efforts.<sup>60</sup> The *Directory for Catechesis* issued in 2020 reaffirm this prioritization.

Consequently, the Church's proactive approach to catechetical formation for the faithful can be traced back to Aquinas, who may be regarded as a pioneer in this regard. His comprehensive approach to catechesis—including content, models, methods, relationship building, scheduling, liturgical preparation, and sacramental formation—serves as an effective reference for contemporary practices.

## ***2.4 Catechetical Ministry***

In terms of catechetical ministry, Thomas Aquinas, as a theological professor, extended his work beyond the seminary to the parish, becoming a catechist who preached to the public. Throughout the three different editions of the directories for catechesis, the responsibility of preaching has evolved from being primarily held by bishops to include priests and, more recently, laypeople. The latest *Directory for Catechesis 2020* place particular emphasis on the formation of laypersons to enable them to become effective proclaimers of the faith.

Aquinas's contributions to the preaching ministry are noteworthy. He served as a model for the monks in his homiletic practices, providing a reference for both the content and methodology of preaching. Additionally, his efforts in the formation of laypeople in their ministerial roles can be regarded as a significant contribution to the broader catechetical mission.

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<sup>60</sup> Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii Gaudium"*, 2013, no.14-15 states that three places for doing the new evangelization: (1) ordinary pastoral ministry, which is animated the fire of the Spirit, so as to inflame the hearts of the faithful who regularly take part in community worship and gather on the Lord's day to be nourished by his word and by the bread of eternal life. (2) the baptized whose lives do not reflect the demands of Baptism, who lack a meaningful relationship to the Church and no longer experience the consolation born of faith. (3) those who do not know Jesus Christ or who have always rejected him.

## *Conclusion*

As we commemorate the 800th anniversary of Thomas Aquinas's birth, it is essential to recognize his profound contributions to catechesis within the medieval Church and to acknowledge the enduring benefits of his work in contemporary times. A thorough examination of Aquinas's *Catechetical Instructions* and his catechetical initiatives reveals a remarkable alignment between his approaches—catechetical content, methodology, audience, and catechetical ministry—and the current trajectory of the Church in catechesis.

Aquinas's legacy continues to provide a foundational reference for successive generations. His teachings not only shaped the understanding of catechetical content but also established effective methods for engaging diverse audiences in the faith.

As Pope Benedict XVI articulated, in this renewed era of commitment to evangelization, the insights and virtues encapsulated in Aquinas's work serve as a rich interpretation of the practice of love within the contexts of catechesis and preaching. His enduring influence emphasizes the importance of integrating faith into daily life, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of the Gospel in today's world.<sup>61</sup>

¶ Augustinus, *De Peccatorum Meritis Et Remissione Et De Baptismo Parvulorum at Marcellinum*, II, 412.

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<sup>61</sup> Benedetto XVI, Udienza Generale, 23 giugno 2010.

[2] Joseph Martos, translated by Liu Guo Qing, *Sacred Threshold, Hong Kong: Catholic Diocesan Liturgy Commission, 1997, p.28-29.*

[3] *Ibid.*, p.30-32.

[4] Milton McC. Gatch, "Basic Christian Education from the Decline of Catechesis to the Rise of the Catechisms", in *A Faithful Church: Issues in the History of Catechesis*, ed. John H. Westerhoff III and O.C Edwards, Jr., Connecticut: Morehouse-Barlow Co., 1981, p.82.

[5] Rev. Thomas Law Kwok-fai, "A Table of Roman Rites of Initiation Sacraments", in *Collectanea Theologica*, Taiwan: University Fu Jen, 1993, p.483-498.

[6] Rev. Thomas Law Kwok-fai, *Passover*, Hong Kong: Catholic Truth Society, 1988, p.9-12.

[7] Andrew Rickie Lam, *Twelve Lectures on Catechetics, Vol. I: Catechetical History and Traditions*, Taiwan: Kuangchi Cultural Group, 2019, p.113.

[8] Michel Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate*, New York: Sadlier, 1979, p. 133-135.

[9] Josef A. Jungmann, "Religious Education in Late Medieval Times", in *Shaping the Christian Message: Essays in Religious Education*, ed. Gerald S. Sloyan, Washington DC: The Catholic University of America, 1958, p.46-69.

[10] Lin Shu li, *The stories of the Catechists*, Taiwan: Kuangchi Cultural Group, 2007, p.16-18.

[11] Gregorius, *Dialogi de Vita et Miraculis Patrum Italicorum*, p.594.

[12] Thomas D. McGonigle and James F. Quigley, *A History of the Christian Tradition, Vol. I: From its Jewish*

*Origin to the Reformation*, Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, p.148-149.

[13] Liu De Shun, *A Brief History of Catechesis, Taiwan: Kuangchi Cultural Group, 1967, p.51-52, 249-153.*

[14] *The Fourth Lateran Council is regarded as the most significant ecumenical council in the history of the Church prior to the Council of Trent (Concilium Tridentinum, 1545-1563). The decrees established by this council, encapsulated in the Catholic Codex, contain numerous provisions that remain in effect to this day.*

[15] Ed by Fu Jen Theological Publications Association, *Theological Dictionary, Taiwan: Kuangchi Cultural Group, 2010, p.235-236.*

[16] *Le Constitutiones Concilii Lateranensis*, Città del Vaticano, 2007, no. 10.

[17] *Ibid*, no. 11.

[18] Thomas D. McGonigle and James F. Quigley, *A History of the Christian Tradition, Vol. I: From its Jewish Origin to the Reformation*, p.162-169.

[19] Zhou Xiao Hui, “The Doctor Ecclesiae St. Thomas Aquina his Masterpiece *Summa Theologiae*”, in *Summa Theologiae (Chinese version)*, Tainan: Catholic Studim S. Pius X, p.xii.

[20] *Benedetto XVI, Udienza Generale, 23 giugno 2010.*

[21] Thomas D. McGonigle and James F. Quigley, *A History of the Christian Tradition, Vol. I: From its Jewish Origin to the Reformation*, p.162-169.

[22] Ed by Fu Jen Theological Publications Association, *Theological Dictionary, Taiwan: Kuangchi Cultural Group, 2010, p.634.*

[23] Andrew Rickie Lam, *Twelve Lectures on Catechetics, Vol. I: Catechetical History and Traditions*, Taiwan: Kuangchi Cultural Group, 2019, p.114.

[24] Pio V, *Il Catechismo Romano, 1566, Capitolo V*, no.8.

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] *Translated by Rev. Joseph B. Collins, S.S., D.D., The Catechetical Instructions of St. Thomas Aquinas*, New York: Joseph F. Wagner, Inc, 1939, p. xi-xiii.

[27] Pietro da Andria, Reginaldo da Priverno, *Il Catechismo di San Tommaso*, Torino: San Paolo, 1998.

[28] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra gentiles, IV*, no.86.

[29] Alfred Läßle, *a cura di Flavio Pajer, Breve storia della catechesi*, Brescia: Queriniana, 1985, p. 95.

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] *Translated by Rev. Joseph B. Collins, S.S., D.D., The Catechetical Instructions of St. Thomas Aquinas*, New York: Joseph F. Wagner, Inc, 1939, p. xii-xiii.

[32] Spirago-Mesmer, *Spirago's Method of Christian Doctrine*, New Yor: Benziger Brothers, 1901, p.513-514.

[33] *The four Constitutions of Vatican II: Sacrosanctum Concilium, Lumen Gentium, Dei Verbum, Gaudium et Spes.*