

THE REALIZATION OF THE WORD IN CHURCH CATHECHISM

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ABSTRACT

The issue that is investigated concerns the dynamic realization processes which occur on the basis of the preaching of the Word of God in church catechism. The study is undertaken by means of a survey and evaluation of relevant data from Dutch, German, American and South African literature. Following that, with the Bible as the primary source, data with regard to the realization of the Bible in the concrete life of the congregation are surveyed and collated. From the analysis of relevant Biblical data the conclusion is reached that the realization, the making real, of the Word in everyday life and existence follows on the act of preaching. This brings us to the awareness that catechetical teaching (that is, preaching of the Word) should not stop at the dissemination of knowledge only, but the child should be guided to realise the Word in practical terms in everyday life. Lastly, attention is directed to methods of catechetical teaching, to demands for the construction of the lesson and to the person and the actions of the catechist, and how all these combine to serve the child in the process of realization of the Word in his life.

1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In the action of preaching the Word more than one face of the ministry of the Word can be distinguished. Fiset (1974:60-102) distinguishes three modes of ministry which are closely related to the fields of Homiletics, Pastoral Care and Catechetics. He calls these the three modes of the kerygma (1974:60-65), which essentially means an announcement of a new state of affairs. He also distinguishes the mode of the paraclesis (1974:91-102) which especially involves man in the here-and-now situation within the action of consolation, admonition and exhortation. In Koers 53(3) 1988

the last place he deals with the mode of the didache, and allocates to that mode the function of accompaniment along a way where the sense and meaning of the new state of affairs (salvational events) are indicated and applied. An objective with this indication and application is to bring catechumens to discipleship in the sense of following Christ (cf. Matthew 28:19-20) (Firet, 1974:68-90). The shared aspect in all actions of ministry is that man is exposed to the Word of God. It is precisely this statement which brings us to the problem that is dealt with in this article.

2. STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

In essence the statement of issue can be formulated as follows: What dynamic process occurs under the guidance of and through the power of the Holy Spirit in the action of exposing others to the Word of God through the preaching of the Word - in this case in the action of catechetical training? What should the method of instruction, the structure of the lesson and the practical actions of the catechist be like in order to be able to serve the realization of the Word in catechism?

Formulated in practical and wider terms:

What do ministers of God, as instruments of the Holy Spirit, wish to achieve by preaching each Sunday, by conducting pastoral dialogue, and by conducting catechism - and how do they wish to achieve whatever objective they have set for themselves?

3. SURVEY OF LITERATURE CENTRING ON THIS PROBLEM

3.1 Calvin

It is striking that Calvin seemingly did not make direct references to the effect of the Word specifically within the process of catechetical teaching. Van't Veer explains this fact as follows in his useful thesis (1942:316): "For the church instruction in the Holy Scriptures mostly coincided with preaching on a Sunday and in the week, while it was not excluded that attention was given to it during the catechism service"

(translation of Dutch quotation). From the above it is clear why Calvin did not concern himself primarily with the dynamic process of Word realization in the field of catechism.

3.2 Dutch literature on the subject

Bijlsma (1962:141-149) does deal with catechism as preaching under the heading of Bible and catechism, but he does not go into the dynamic processes resulting from the teaching and listening components of catechetical teaching.

Kuiper (1977:27) finds his starting point for the process, which occurs in catechetical teaching, in the science of Education. He describes it as a process which has as an objective a process of behavioral change. Kuiper (1977:41) also operates very strongly with the idea of Miskotte that preaching and teaching often constitute a process "which man himself does not know how it occurs ...".

Kuiper does not, however, call on Biblical data to attempt an explication of the process.

Firet (1974:127) states in this regard that when the Word in which God comes to man "happens" (as also during catechism) then there is a power at work which leads to understanding and this understanding is then conducive to change (1974:131). Apart from other points of criticism, one could well at this stage ask what change occurs, how it occurs, and what the process is that occurs through exposure to the Word.

3.3 German literature on the subject

In the recent past German literature in the field of Practical Theology has been focused on the whole question of theory and praxis (Mette, 1978:163ff). This direction in the research also finds an echo in work on and about catechism. Attention is given to problems and deficiencies of a "Praxis theory" for ecclesiastical work among the young (Baumler, 1977:179ff); to ecclesiastical work among the young as "Interventionsfaktor" (Bukow, 1977:125ff); to the place of religion and church "in der Sozialisation von Lehrlingen" (Schöfthaler, 1977:82ff).

A special research field in German literature on catechism is the so-called "Religionspädagogik" and the relationship between this discipline and theology and education (Schmidt, 1987:21ff), as well as about the historical development which "Religionspädagogik" has undergone in the course of years (Rickers, 1987:63ff).

The dynamic process which follows on exposure to the Word in catechism does not come into the foreground in this reflection.

3.4 American literature in the field

Richards (1970:94) reasons about the problem issue (the result of exposure to the Word in the instructional process) from Scripture itself. He analyses Colossians 1:9-11 and indicates the process following on hearing the Word as: coming to knowledge through wisdom and insight; living (walking) with God; bearing fruit through good works; growing in knowledge of God.

It is to be welcomed that Richards works from the perspective of the Bible as primary source. The following question which are linked to his handling of Colossians 1:9-11 can be formulated: Why does he not persist in the process in order also to include perseverance (verse 11)? The fact that the pericope is dominated by Paul's prayer (Colossians 1:3) for the congregation is mentioned by Richards, but the intrinsic importance of prayer in the process of exposure to the Word is not stressed sufficiently by him.

3.5 South African literature in the field

Recent literature indicates that reflection is being directed anew in South Africa - as regards catechism - to curriculum (Beukes, 1985:154-170), about instructional material and about how the Bible should be offered as primary instructional material (Viljoen, 1985:209-243; Van Wyk, 1976:3-5; cf. also Beukes, n.d., 88-100 and Beukes et al., 1987:1-5; Venter et al., 1982:i-ii; as well as, for newer methods for church catechism, Nel, 1985:171-181).

Within the wider framework of reflection about the Bible as primary source for catechism it is accepted that "something" happens on the basis of the exposure to the Word in Catechism - without more serious reflection being given to it.

Before we go on to an independent survey of the Scriptural data about the process which occurs following the hearing of the Word, the purpose with the exposure to and instruction from the Word should first be indicated.

4. BIBLICAL OBJECTIVE WITH INSTRUCTION FROM THE WORD

4.1 Colossians 1:28 and 29 is most illuminating with a view to the discovery of the objective of instruction. In these verses we have to do with a direct linking of the concepts proclaim, and teaching with wisdom, "so that each individual can be brought to spiritual maturity in Christ". The aim with the preaching is therefore a change from immaturity to spiritual maturity. It is striking to note the way in which Paul approaches the teaching and instructional task (verse 19): "To this end I am toiling strenuously with all the energy and power of Christ at work in me".

4.2 Hebrews 5:11-6:3

This Scriptural passage almost offers an opposite to what is held up in Colossians 1:28 and 29. Here a situation of stagnation and deterioration is described as a state in which no change occurred through exposure to the Word of God (cf. Venter, 1986:14-17):

- the congregation cannot teach others;
- life is sustained by milk and not solid food;
- there is no insight tempered by experience;
- there is no distinction between good and evil;

- there is a stagnation around the initial things taught about Christ;
- sermons cannot deal with issues other than conversion, faith, baptismal doctrine, laying on of hands, resurrection from death and eternal judgment.

In recapitulation it can therefore be stated that the purpose of catechetical instruction is nothing other than change, growth from immaturity to maturity in faith, and nurturing.

5. SURVEY OF DATA FROM SCRIPTURE RELATING TO THE PROCESS THAT OCCURS ON THE ACTION OF THE PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

As an absolute point of departure it has to be stated here that the work of the Holy Spirit is the final determinative action. No catechist - however capable - can replace or do the work of the Holy Spirit. In catechism too the Spirit and the Word cannot be separated from each other.

We cannot here enter more fully into the workings of the Holy Spirit in the action of the proclamation of the Word. Our attention is directed first of all to the dynamic process which follows on instruction in Scripture during catechism. For reflection on the workings of Spirit and Word, the reader is referred to Floor (1979:120-122); Versteeg (1976:19ff); Floor (1982:47-50) and Coetzee (1984:234-255).

The process which occurs as a result of the hearing of the Word emerges often in Scripture. In this regard special attention will be directed to five passages from the New Testament.

5.1 The encompassing process of acceptance or rejection of the Word

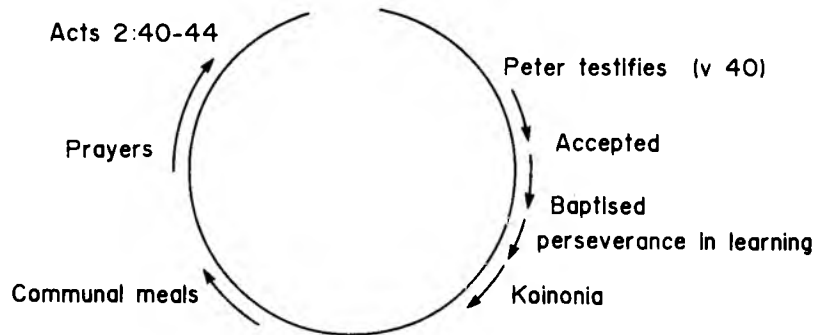
In Paul's preaching the primary dimension of acceptance or rejection clearly emerges. Here one can refer to the pericope Acts 13:44-48. What is striking is that certain reactions are juxtaposed on the basis of exposure to the Word:

Jews (verse 45)	heathens (verse 48)
Word of God	Word of God
rejected	acclaimed
eternal life rejected	those intended for eternal life
	gained faith
Jews incite people against Paul	The Word of God disseminated
and Barnabas	

(Cf. also Acts 14:2 and 2 Corinthians 18:5.)

Here the pattern of preaching and hearing on the one hand and acceptance or rejection is very clearly indicated as a reaction to the Word.

5.2 The realization, making real, of the Word in the first congregation

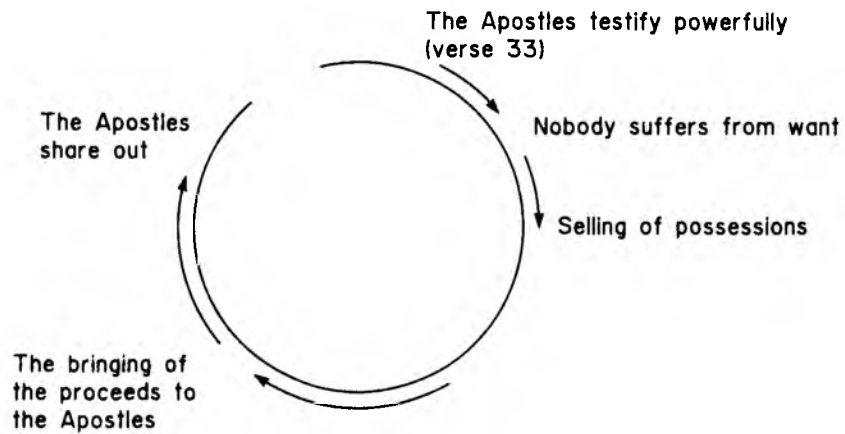


It is especially striking to note in what a practical way the Holy Spirit made real the Word in the first congregation. On the basis of testimony (preaching) of Peter (verse 40) the Word is accepted, the faithful baptised and after that the Word works within the concrete reality of the everyday life of the congregation. We have to do in Acts 2:42 with a chastic construction which can be represented as follows:

Perseverance in learning	}
Mutual communion	
Communal meals	
Prayers	

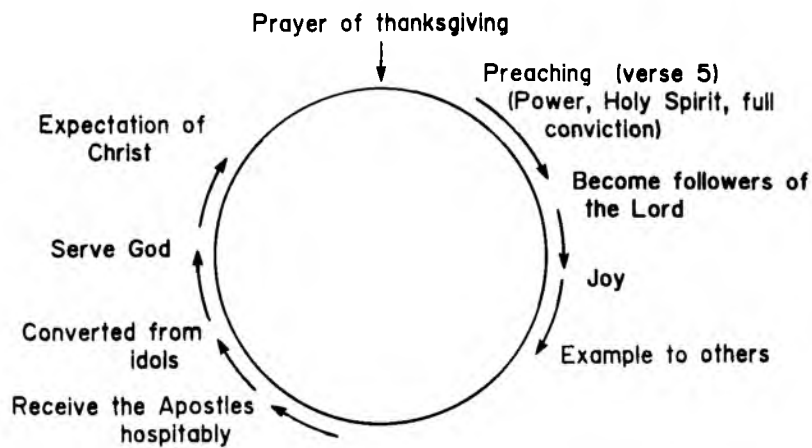
According to this construction perseverance in doctrine and prayer should go together, but then, with the inevitable realization of the perseverance in learning and prayer, the concomitant communal life with each other, the sharing in the joys and grief of others, but also the sharing of meals.

In Acts 4:33-35 we have something of a continuation of the process in Acts 2:40-44 in the realization of the Word.



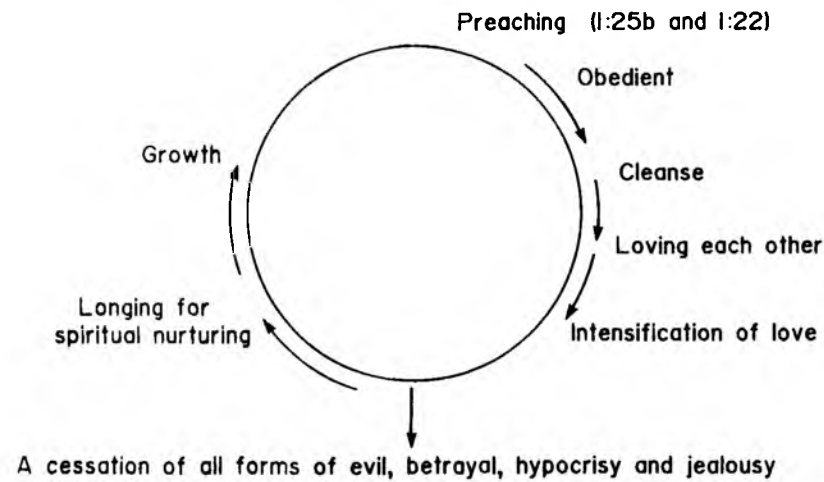
Here we once again have a proof of the concrete realization of the Word in the sharing of each other's possessions and means.

5.3 The realization of the Word in 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10



In this pericope it is most striking that it is the Holy Spirit who makes the difference between (mere) words which come to the congregation in the course of the sermon, and words which have power, "through the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" (verse 5). This cannot be anybody other than the Holy Spirit which realizes the Word thus (cf. schema) in the life of the congregation. As in Colossians 1:9-11 the pericope 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10 is also dominated by Paul's prayer for the congregation. Realization of the Word cannot take place without prior and accompanying prayer.

5.4 The realization of the Word in 1 Peter 1:22-2:3



5.5 Recapitulation following the survey of Scriptural data

The process which occurs in the realization of the Word can only take place under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and with prior and accompanying prayer.

The result of preaching/instruction is that the Word is realized in the concrete life of the congregation, whether in concrete manifestations of love and communion with each other, or as examples for each other in the service of God and in the expectation of the advent of Christ, or in the rejection of sin, or in the growth of faith.

From this follows the important consequence that in the catechetical learning process as preaching one cannot stop at the basic offering and acquisition of knowledge - that knowledge has to be applied and realised in the concrete reality of life of the catechumen, and the catechumen has to justify himself openly in terms of how he is going to deal with a specific revelational truth in the context of his own practical life.

6. THE QUEST FOR INSTRUCTIONAL MODES WHICH CAN SERVE THE REALIZATION OF THE WORD THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

6.1 The method

As a point of departure for this sub-section it has to be stated that no method as such is the guarantee or can be the guarantee that the Holy Spirit will realize/make real the Word in the lives of people. The Holy Spirit cannot be bound by a method, but also does not work without any method at all.

In the same spirit it has to be stressed that catechism, as a mode of ministering the Word, is far more than a mere clinical application of an instructional method or mode. Catechists may not go up in educational methods, although they might learn a great deal from these in terms of the effective dissemination of material.

Nel (1985:171-181) points out that in present research men, as it were, reflect completely anew on modes of catechetical teaching. Apart from the basic methods, such as direct address, discussion, self-activity, textbook and groupwork, stress has to be put on ways which will promote communication in the interactive situation (Nel, 1985:176-177).

Van Wyk (1976:32-33) distinguishes four modes of approach in catechetical teaching, viz. induction, where there is a movement from the known to the unknown; deduction, where one works from the general to the particular and then returns to the general; analysis (the material is broken up into sub-sections); and synthesis (following explication of the parts, they are put together again into a whole). Van Wyk (1976:33-37) mentions special methods which can be applied in catechetical teaching, including the story (=narration), the question and answer method; the discussion, including the learning and the class discussion; the textbook method; project-based instruction; drill and self-study. The mere occurrence of a variety of methods stresses the fact that not only one method of instruction should be singled out.

In this regard it is important to note Richards's five levels of learning (1970:69-73). With these levels there is a movement from mechanical

reproduction to realization of the material - in this case, the revelational truths of the Bible - in the practical, everyday life of the catechumen. Richards distinguishes the following:

- Learning simply on the basis of hearing, through mechanical repetition without a concept of meaning. For the realization, the making real, of the Word in the concrete life of the individual, this method offers little of value.
- Learning at the level of recognition means that it is only expected of the catechumen to recognize a fact: For example, was David a king, a slave or a farmer? This method, although useful for inculcating rote knowledge, does not induce the level that is needed for full understanding.
- Learning through making connections. This means - and here we find the beginning of learning with insight - connecting facts with each other. The catechumen, for example, has to know how predestination is brought into relation with faith and perseverance. (In this regard, one should ask what this Biblical truth means).
- Learning at the relational level. The crucial question here is: What does this specific Biblical truth mean for me? Thus: the Word of God is not far away, ephemeral - it has something to say to me.
- Learning at the level of realization. This is the highest level of learning and implies that the catechumen should be able to realize that which he had learnt in his concrete, everyday life. (The crucial question here is: How do you deal with this Biblical truth when you are sitting in a class, when you are playing netball or rugby - say how you will apply this.)

The realizational level therefore begins - methodologically speaking - from level three onwards (the connective level) and reaches a climax where the catechumen is able to apply the Biblical (=revelational) truth in his concrete, everyday life.

6.2 Requirements for the compilation of the lesson which can serve the realization of the Word.

6.2.1 One may not simply stop at Biblical facts. Although these are fundamental, they bring the catechumen only to the level of knowledge, while the purpose is, after all, to realize the Word in the concrete life of every day. The focus therefore has to be directed - in a very simple manner - to facts plus significance. In other words, it is a question of revelational history in which the revelation of God is centrally placed.

6.2.2 The revelational history has to be offered within a specific lesson structure. In such a lesson the theme, as the core of the revelation of God, should be pertinently underlined. In a lesson on Genesis 1, for example, a formulation such as Creation of heaven and earth would be unacceptable as theme. In contrast, a theme such as God creates heaven and earth will underline the centrality of the revelation of God.

Together with this one should emphasize the importance of the correct formulation of lesson objectives (cf. Nel, 1985:178). With a specific lesson one wishes to attain a specific ministering objective (a realization). Therefore the formulation of the lesson objectives have to answer to specifically three crucial requirements. An objective should be formulated from the viewpoint of the catechumen being instructed, and should be formulated in a way that demands and promotes insight. Subsequently the lesson objective should also integrally contain the realizational aspect in the sense that the catechumen should of himself be able to apply the revelational truth in his life and also be able to state how he is going to apply it.

An example of a lesson objective - for the treatment of Exodus 2:1-10 - which does not comply with the above requirements, would be:

- At the end of the lesson the children should know that Moses's parents placed him in a basket in the Nile.

In the first place this lesson objective has been formulated from the viewpoint of the catechist.

In the second place he remains stuck at facts and does not go on to divine revelation in this section.

In the third place the lesson objective as formulated here does not promote insight in revelation with a view to realization because the formulated objective rests on a that and not a how or a why.

An example of the formulation of a lesson objective - in the treatment of Exodus 2:1-10 - which would comply with the set requirements could be:

At the end of the lesson, I, as catechumen, should be able to say and to practically apply in my life:

- How or why God protects the leader of his nation.
- And be able to mention examples from my own life of God's protection and care.

Not only through the correct formulation of lesson objectives but also in the evaluation at the end of the lesson the realization aspects have to emerge and be tested. Evaluation of a lesson presentation, after all, implies the question as to how, as catechist, I reached the children, not only for the attainment of the set lesson objectives, but also in the accompaniment of the children in their application of the acquired revelational truth in their practical everyday lives.

6.3 The actions of the catechist and the realization of the Word

In Education and in Psychology the acceptance and following of an example set by the teacher is called identification of the pupil with the teacher (cf. about this issue Van der Lans, 1987:24ff; Berger, 1987:16-23).

In catechetical teaching aimed at the realization of the Word in the life of the catechumen the catechist plays a central role. In him the child is presented with a model of an adult involved in God's work in the church and who devotes himself to God (cf. Nel, 1985:176).

This thought, the idea of the following of a precept set by a master, is not alien to the Bible. Christ's disciples were present, with Him, to learn from Him for three years during his Ministry - and to emulate Him in his ministry and teaching.

In regard to the actions of the catechist in formal catechism, we have guiding principles in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. The following are pointed out here:

- The commandments which God gives "are to be kept in your heart" (New English Bible). Thus, the Word should not only be realized by the Spirit in what the catechist says, but in what he is too. Concretely: Does the Word, which he holds up to us, live in his heart? Does he himself do what he preaches to others? How do his actions towards us show that the Word which is in his heart is a reality in his life?
- The commandments have to be "fixed", and for this to happen they have to be constantly repeated. And the Word should not only be repeated orally. In each "action" by the catechist the Word also "happens". Concretely: Does the catechist's consistent, repetitive and correct behaviour with regard to his class indicate that this process of fixing takes place every day in his own life too?
- Finally: the Word has to be fixed in the hearts and minds of your children. This statement presupposes an attitude. Catechumens, after all, are not numbers or stones. They are children of the covenant with whom the catechist enters into a living relationship. They are: Your children. Concretely: How does the catechist create relationships in class? By radiating accessibility, by not only teaching with close attention, but also by listening carefully; by accepting children as they are; by calling them by their names.

Relationships are easier to create when catechumens realise that the teaching and the catechist are securely located within life itself. "Teacher and learner share life's experiences together. Here in life itself the Word is taught and talked about" (Richards, 1975:36).

7. RECAPITULATION

- The Holy Spirit is centrally located in the realization of the Word in catechism. For that reason prayer is a prerequisite for the realization of the Word in practice.
- An objective with teaching from the Word is change or growth towards maturity in faith. A condition for this is that the Word has to be realized in the concrete everyday life of the catechist within the congregation, to the outside world and in his personal life.
- The realization of the Word in church catechism implies that there is a movement from knowledge to insight and from there to a full appropriation, concretization and application of the Word in practical life. With a view to this there should be a movement in teaching from Biblical facts to revelational history and in this the revelation of God should be central.
- In the process of realization of the Word effective methods of catechetical teaching and a logical lesson structure in which theme, lesson objectives and evaluation are central components can serve the realization of the Word. The catechist in whose personal life the Word has been realized, who shows that the Word has been fixed in his own heart and in his actions, and who stands in a living dynamic relationship with his catechumens and offers them teaching located in the reality of their lives can serve the realization of the Word through the Holy Spirit in their lives.

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