

THE CANON LAW AND CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: AN IGWEBUIKE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The Code of Canon Law and the Catechism of the Catholic Church are two very important documents in the Church. As important as each of these texts may be, they do not work in isolation. It is in this regard that this piece attends to the interdependent nature of CIC and CCC from an African lens via Igwebuike as an African complementary philosophy. It is employed as a transcendent complementary comprehensive systematic quest to penetrate the structure and dynamics of reality ultimately for the purpose of giving honest answers to fundamental questions or opinions to questions that arise within the arena of asking questions and questioning answers, and selfless enlightenment. In this search for truth, Igwebuike, is therefore, understood as an integrated systematic framework that strives beyond all forms of particularities, peculiarities, paradoxes and contradictions, and espouses the path of complementation, therefore, showing how realities can relate to one another in a mutually harmonized non-absolutistic mode. This piece discovers that there is a very strong connection between the Code of Canon Law and the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and that the two, when studied together, can be very enriching.

Keywords: Igwebuike, Catechism, Catholic Church, Code of Canon Law, Complementarity

Introduction

Every canonical norm is based on certain theological premise or doctrine. The search into the theological foundation of the canons in the 1983 code reveals theological presuppositions found in the official pronouncements of the Church on the matter. It takes into account the teaching documents of the Church, such as the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Papal Magisterium, etc. The code and Catechism do not contradict each other. Hence, there exists a level of solidarity which this work hopes to explore from the point of view of *Igwebuike* philosophy.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

The history of Catechisms in the Catholic Church goes back to the very earliest days of the Church. There is a document called the Didache, which sets out in a systematic way the beliefs, practices and moral imperatives of early Christians. The Didache dates from the end of the first century. It is an extraordinary ancient type of catechetical document. In 1566, the document commonly known as Roman Catechism was published in response to the request issued three years earlier before the Council of Trent (Bruskewitz, 1996). This was used until 1978; it inspired, as intended, the creation of many national catechisms.

In January 1985, Pope John Paul II convoked an extraordinary synod of the council of bishops to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. The synod expressed a general desire for a new catechism for the universal Church, and so the following year the Pope organized a commission to draft one. Thus, this was done in the light of the Second Vatican Council and the whole of the Church's tradition. The text was approved by John Paul II on 25 June, 1992 and promulgated by him on 11 October, 1992. On August 15, 1997, accompanied by the apostolic letter *Laetamur Magnopere*, Pope John Paul II promulgated the Latin typical edition (the "*editio typical*"). All other publications are derived from this edition (Bruskewitz, 1996).

The present Catechism of the Catholic Church follows the four-fold presentation structure which has been a tradition, since the earliest days of the Church. The first part sets forth the mystery of faith, that is, what Catholics believe. This is based on the creed. The second part is based on the celebration of faith, and the way in which the grace and salvation of Jesus is mediated to the world. This has to do with the sacraments. The third part of the catechism concerns the faith working through love as it is expressed in Christian life, that is, what we must not only believe and celebrate, but what we must do in order to be saved. The basis of this is the Ten Commandments. The final part of the Catechism's structure is about how we are related in our belief, our celebration and our action to God Himself, and this is based on prayer. Thirty-nine percent of the text of the Catechism of the Catholic Church is devoted to the creed; twenty-three percent is devoted to the Sacraments; twenty-seven percent to the commandments, and eleven percent to prayer.

The Code of Canon Law

The Code of Canon Law is specifically meant for Catholics, and more particularly for Catholics of the Latin rite. It is sometimes abbreviated as the *CIC*, an abbreviation of the Latin title, *Codex Iuris Canonici*. There is an analogous document, the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* or Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, applying to the other *sui juris* churches of the Catholic Church.

The *CIC* is a body of regulations, the oldest continuously functioning legal system in the Western world. It is the internal legal system of the Catholic Church. Internal means that canon law lies wholly within the Church's authority to compose and administer. This is in contrast to the wide variety of external (usually civil) laws to which the Church generally defers in the pursuit of her divine mission.

Canon law operates according to the principles of law chiefly as set out in Aristotelian-Thomistic legal philosophy. This is in contrast to suggestions that canon law is simply applied theology, morals, or the rules of religious cult. Canon law affects virtually every aspect of the faith life of Catholics all over the world. The code, in the words of Pope John Paul II, is in no way intended as a substitute for faith, grace, charisms, and especially charity in the life of the Church and of the faithful. On the contrary, its purpose is rather to create such an order in the ecclesial society that, while assigning the primacy to love, grace and charisms, it at the same time renders their organic development easier in the life of both the ecclesial society and the individual persons who belong to it (Peters, N.D).

The most recent edition of the Code of Canon Law was promulgated in 1983 also by Pope John Paul II, suspending the first and previous code, the compilation of which started under the pontificate of Benedict XV and ended under the pontificate of Pius XI in 1917, hence it is known as *Pio Benedictine Code*.

1983 Code and CCC: An Igwebuike Perspective

Igwebuike is the heart of African thought, and in fact, the modality of being in African philosophy. The underlying principle of *Igwebuike* philosophy is the principle of complementarity (Kanu, 2017). In consonance with the universal appeal of *Igwebuike*, the connection between the code and the CCC should not be a case of Canon Law or Catechism. If you ask a question starting with "Do Catholics believe in...?", you will probably find the answer in the Catechism. If you ask a question starting with "Are Catholics allowed, obliged or forbidden to...?" or "What happens if Catholics disobey...?", then the answer is probably in

the Code of Canon Law. The foregoing, however, does not raise walls that exclude complementarity. For example, canon 1184 gives a list of those to be deprived of a Christian burial; to the surprise of many it does not mention suicide victims, meaning that they can receive Christian burial. The reason for the exclusion is found in the CCC 2280-2283. In line with most customs, the Catechism describes suicide as “Gravely contrary to the just love of self....” In the minds of many, those who die of suicide are hell-bound due to mortal sin. For a sin to be mortal or the sinner culpable, the following three criteria must be met: grave matter, knowledge that it is wrong and consent of free will. No doubt, suicide as an act constitutes a grave matter, but are all those who carry out the act in the proper frame of mind for all criteria to be met? The answer is for sure, no, because, “Grave psychological disturbances, anguish, or grave fear of hardship, suffering, or torture can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide” CCC2282).

The name catechesis, according to CCC 4, has to do with the “...totality of the Church’s efforts to make disciples... to educate and instruct them in this life, thus building up the body of Christ.” The CCC is, therefore, a teaching tool for bishops and various catechists; no wonder then, Chapter II of Book III in the 1983 Code dedicates Canons 773 – 780 to the second form of the ministry of the word, that is, catechetical formation.

The rule in Canon 773 states that it is a serious duty of pastors to catechize. It lays down in a general way the duties already mentioned with regard to catechesis by Canon 386 § 1 for the diocesan bishop and by Canon 528 § 1 for the parish priest (Sheehy, 1999). Under the new code, all the faithful have some responsibility for teaching catechesis but pastors and sacred ministers have the primary duty to supervise catechesis. Pastors of souls are to encourage and protect the faithful’s multiform catechetical activity, supplementing their efforts whenever their initiatives are insufficient and assigning certain catechesis to be taught and directed by the faithful.

Canon 774 stipulates that the duty of catechesis belongs to all members of the Church. This canon, no doubt, emphasizes the priority of the parental role, but it also adds that those who take the place of parents, like guardians, foster parents, or godparents, also share in this solemn duty (Beal, 2013). As far as godparents are concerned, this obligation is to be understood, according to this canon, not as secondary to the parents’ duty, but is an addition. Family catechesis is to be encouraged and fostered by ministers.

Canon 775 distinguishes among the nominative competence of the Apostolic See, the diocesan bishops, and the bishops' conferences over catechetical formation, particularly the approval and use of catechisms.

Canon 776 lists the duties of a parish priest in relation to catechetical instruction. He is to lead the catechetical formation of the local church. The catechetical responsibility of a parish priest is of extreme importance (Cann 528 § 1, 761, 733). He is to ensure that catechesis is taught in the local church placed under his care.

Canon 777 throws up a list of different types of catechesis entrusted in a special manner to the parish priest and his duty to attend to them. The use of the words, "the parish priest is to ensure" indicates that the parish priest does not necessarily have to carry out these catechetical activities all by himself but to see that these things are done. The canon also encourages diocesan bishops to draw up a guideline for catechesis, according to their unique sociological data.

Canon 778 puts forth the duty of religious superiors and superiors of societies of apostolic life (both local and major) with regard to catechesis, with specific reference to the catechesis which they should teach in their churches and place of apostolic work. Religious orders and congregation of men and women, though subject to their charisms and their obligation, are called to help with the catechetical task. To the extent they can, they should teach catechesis. This they may do at times at their own initiative as an institute or at other times at the bishop's request (Fuentes, 2004).

The key catechetical tool is the catechism (Canon 775). However, Canon 779 encourages the use of other tools and means to teach catechesis. The tools are to be selected bearing in mind sociological data, age and the capabilities of the catechists. In choosing catechetical methods, care must be taken to consider pastoral needs, the range of instructional materials and the need for pastors to encourage the highly varied initiatives that will be proposed by the faithful. The code does not state categorically the tools "out of respect for the authority, which is above all to proclaim magisterially and generally coordinate and supervise the various initiatives" (Fuentes, 2004).

The need for catechists to be properly trained is addressed by Canon 780. According to Jose Fuentes, a catechist is one of the faithful who directly provides catechetical instruction. Preparation is key for anyone working in evangelism. Local ordinaries (vicars general, Episcopal vicars, diocesan bishops) are encouraged to ensure proper formation for catechists. Canon 780 speaks of

doctrinal formation and general formation in the discipline of pedagogy. This formation is to be continuous so that they are kept abreast of the magisterial teachings and methods of instruction. To achieve the goal of ongoing formation for catechists, it is advisable to have catechetical schools and institutes. It is also advised that catechetical formation be given in seminaries.

Conclusion

They, CIC and CCC, are two separate documents, with separate purposes but one goal, which is the salvation of souls. Thus, in the pursuit of this one goal, the essential principle of *Igwebuike* – complementarity – comes to play. The CIC quotes the CCC for explanation and clarification, and vice versa. Thus, this helps to foster a good relationship between the legal and teaching documents of the Church. Experience and study show that some canonical norms are better interpreted, applied and fully comprehended only from the background of their theological relevance, in so far as they articulate the doctrines of the Church, which have been translated into norms of action for practical life.

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