

Walter Krieger

**Catechumenate in Europa
1997-2020**

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(SOUVENIRS 2)

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Contents

Introduction..... 3

Part 1 European Meetings 1997-2020 5

 Topics And Locations..... 5

 Overview 28

Part 2: The Setting Of The Development Of The Catechumenate In Europe 32

 History..... 32

 Prehistory Until 1968 32

 The Beginnings Of The European Meetings..... 33

 Organising EuroCat..... 35

 Perspectives 37

 Characteristics Of The European Meetings..... 37

 Inspiration And Challenges For The Church..... 38

 The Way Of Christian Initiation As A Dynamic Process..... 40

INTRODUCTION

I never would have thought that „catechumenate“ would one day become an important subject to me.

When I took part in a European Catechumenate meeting for the first time in 1997 in Berlin, Austria didn't have much to offer in that regard – one single initiative in Vienna and a course on faith in Linz spanning a few weeks. Only with time something began to develop slowly.

Personally, I was deeply impressed by the openness and warmth of the other participants, some of whom had known each other for a long time and had become friends (something I witnessed during my first EuroCat attendances). They were pioneers in their countries, moved and inspired by their direct experiences with adult candidates for baptism.

I was surprised to notice that the topics discussed at those European meetings were not just important for catechumenate, but, on closer inspection, always central to the whole pastoral work.

In the years to follow, I was a constant participant in all the major European meetings and the Bureau meetings in the years in between.

The generation of pioneers withdrew little by little; they grew older and their successors were anchored more firmly in central church institutions (pastoral, catechetical, liturgical). This meant continuity and stability, but also dependence on structural changes in individual countries. In addition, more and more people in charge had a variety of tasks to take care of – catechumenate was just one among many, although one of a special quality.

In any case, this international commitment was inspiring. Some impulses could be passed on to local churches. It was always a wonderful, ecumenical, encouraging experience of church. Over time, one went from being a learner to one who could be helpful to others.

So it is with much gratitude that I look back on this period of catechumenate from 1997 to 2020, of which I will offer an overview. Grateful for encounters, for inspiration, for sharing joy, hope and sorrow; grateful for getting to know a multifaceted church in different countries and denominations; grateful for the Holy Spirit, who is ultimately the one who moves catechumens and with them all those who accompany them in every way.

This first part of my book is a continuation of Jean-Pierre De Meulder und Jean-Bernard Dousse's SOUVENIRS – Renaissance du Catéchuménat en Europe. 30 années de rencontres internationales pour dégager les lignes de force d'une pastorale, Fribourg et Bruxelles 2003.

The second part will contain some fundamental observations.

PART 1

EUROPEAN MEETINGS 1997-2020

Topics And Locations

16th EuroCat Congress

Berlin, 9th-13th May 1997

Topic:

*Strive For The Welfare Of The City... For In Its Welfare Lies Your Welfare (Jer 29,7).
Perception Of Christian Traces In The Environment Of A De-christianised City – Steps
To Take Before The Catechumenate*

Among 55 participants from 11 countries, Austria was represented for the first time. In alphabetic order, the participants were from Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland; the Anglican and Swedish Lutheran Churches were represented, too.

In general, the aim of the European catechumenate meetings is the intensive exchange of experiences, the theological-pastoral deepening of catechumenate and related issues in ecumenical openness and cooperation, as well as offering mutual help and encouragement for the further development of the catechumenate in different countries and regions.

The thematic focus of the 16th European Catechumenate Meeting was the search for traces of Christianity in the secularised cosmopolitan city of Berlin – shortly after the „Wende“ in 1989 and in particular in some new approaches in selected places, e.g:

- in an ecumenical women's centre,
- in the Franciscan monastery in Pankow (soup kitchen, care of AIDS patients),
- in a parish in Berlin-Kreuzberg,
- in a Pallottine community and the parish of Berlin-Neukölln (which is their charge),
- in the new situation created by the Reunification in the Berlin-Marzahn prefabricated housing estate.

Getting to know committed Catholics, who represent an absolute minority in Berlin, talking about their projects and reflecting on them revealed realistic approaches to how living faith can serve a city. It remains to be seen how far the various social, liturgical, cultural and proclamatory initiatives are to be considered a kind of „pre-catechumenate“.

A lecture by Franz-Peter Tebartz van Elst, „Traces Of Christianity – Paths To The Church – Approaches And Criteria Of Pastoral Theological Evaluation“, developed perspectives for a transfer of the experiences brought up for discussion to other contexts in the sense of a theological reassurance and gave the theme of the catechumenate a specific place in contemporary pastoral theology.

An alternative city tour, which was only a few hundred metres long, was very impressive. The history of Germany over the last 200 years was told in a representative way using the history of the houses lined up there: the site of a former synagogue, a Gestapo quarter, a building of the Communist Party during the GDR era, the homes of well-known German families, some of whom had to flee, all the way to the Hackesche Höfe, where art studios and restaurants are now located.

EuroCat-Bureau

Vienna, 1st-3rd May 1998

With 17 participants from 12 countries, it was the most visited Bureau meeting so far and posed some challenges as opposed to standard procedure as it had rather extensive reports from the different countries.

The host of that meeting was Walter Krieger.

Some attended for the first time: a representative from Denmark, Charles McCarthy; Rolf Deen from the Netherlands; the new national representative from France, Dominique Sentucq; after having been absent for a long time, Jordi d'Arquer represented Spain again. For others, on the other hand, the end of their EuroCat era, which they had helped to shape as „pioneers“, was looming on the horizon: Jean-Bernard Dousse from Switzerland and Peter Ball from the Anglican Church in England. Other participants were from Belgium, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Sweden.

Firstly, the situation of the church (not just the catechumenate) in Austria was discussed. It was the time after the so-called „Kirchenvolksbegehren“ (referendum of the people in the church), which had called for radical reforms in the Catholic Church and had attracted attention beyond the borders. Back then, the big Austrian „Delegates' Day“, where as many people as possible who bore responsibility in their areas in the Catholic church should attend, was only in the preparational stage – it was to take place the following October.

This development was, on the one hand, of great interest to the participants in this Bureau meeting if reform initiatives were also underway in their countries, but on the other hand, it was completely incomprehensible if those did not exist (and if the church or those involved in the church were more affected by other issues).

This „secondary topic“, however, is an example of how current situations of different churches could also be communicated internationally at EuroCat meetings in a comprehensible way, thus promoting an understanding of specific church situations.

There was also a pleasant meeting with Cardinal Schönborn in the Archbishop's Palace.

17th EuroCat Congress **Paris, 12th-16th May 1999**

Topic:

History And Experiences Of The Catechumenate In France

At this congress, 14 countries were represented by 58 people (plus the team from France). The ecumenical dimension was underlined by the delegations from Great Britain (Anglican and Catholic) and Sweden (Swedish Lutheran and Catholic). The represented countries were: Austria, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. The invitation to this meeting came from the French Service National for the Catechumenate, led by Dominique Sentucq.

France can be considered the country of the rebirth of the catechumenate in Europe. It was the French experience that led to the Second Vatican Council recommending the worldwide re-establishment of catechumenate. The participants of this Congress should share in the underlying experiences, not only theoretically, but also in direct encounters with catechumens and in participation in catechumenal liturgies in various places in and near Paris.

Indeed, it was precisely this that made a lasting impression. Sitting in the front row, one was very close to the catechumens, could see their joy and apprehension, feel their seriousness and hope, and share their concerns. Questions on what had inspired the catechumens to take this step were answered in very personal ways. A young woman had made friends who were Christians. A mother of two elementary school children, who had been in the catechumenate for some time and who was experiencing a liturgical celebration planned for a later stage, told of the hope and encouragement she felt when she prayed and read the Holy Scripture and how much strength this has given her. And her husband was admitted to the catechumenate in this celebration; he said how pleasant, positive, friendly his wife was affecting him, especially ever since she had become interested in faith.

During the meetings with diocesan teams, much was shared about the development of catechumenate in France, about materials, training for companions and regular meetings at regional, diocesan and national level.

Catechumenate has become a part of theological research in France. This phenomenon has also been studied scientifically, which was illustrated by presentations from sociological, ecclesiological and pastoral points of view.

Above all, however, the pastoral impact of catechumenate was highlighted, especially in the contribution by Bishop Rouet and the evening talk with Cardinal Lustiger.

It was very interesting to see the different assessments of the importance of baptism for adults. This discussion focused on the question of what would happen if someone wants to be baptised but was already married, for example, to someone who was previously married in church and had a divorce? One answer was: That would be so complicated that one would have to advise against baptism, because this person could not even receive the Eucharist... Another answer was: Out of the conviction that baptism does indeed mark a new beginning, it should be left to the conscience of the person concerned to decide whether or not he or she should receive communion... This exchange made it clear that there are still some unsolved problems that catechumens and the diocesan decision-makers will have to face.

EuroCat-Bureau

Haarlem, 29th April – 1st May 2000

There is little to report about this Bureau, which was attended by 11 people from nine countries. The United Kingdom was represented by the Anglican and Catholic Churches. Other attendees were from Austria, Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Sweden (Swedish Lutheran) and Switzerland. Rolf Deen hosted the event at Haus de Tiltenberg-Vogelenzang near Haarlem, which was surrounded by many tulip fields in full bloom.

The focus of this meeting was the international exchange of knowledge with a focus on the development of the catechumenate in the Netherlands.

It is worth noting that in the Netherlands, as well as in some other countries, there are joint programmes/groups for catechumens, adult candidates for confirmation and re-entrants (recommençants).

18th EuroCat Congress
Leeds, 4th-8th May 2001

Topic:

The Thresholds That Someone Who Does Not Believe Or Is Distanced From The Church Must Cross If He Wants To Find The Christian Faith

This congress was organised cooperatively by the Catholic RCIA network and the Anglican Association for Catechumenate. The ones responsible for organising this event were Sandy and John Railton as well as a team led by David Roberts.

60 people from 14 countries (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States) and local bishops (Anglican bishops from Leeds, Bradford and Salisbury and Catholic bishops from Plymouth and Leeds) attended this congress. From an ecumenical perspective, the Baptist Church (England) and the Swedish Lutheran Church were also represented.

At the beginning of the conference the participants were invited to visualise their own experiences of thresholds in their lives. For this purpose, each participant had brought a symbol, which was first discussed in small groups and then given a place in the liturgical space. Based on the reflection on their own experiences, the attendees' horizon was expanded to include people still at the threshold, catechumens in particular.

This exchange as well as David Mc Grail's presentation revealed some very concrete consequences for several church issues:

- How do you help people to overcome thresholds towards the church, especially if the decisive factor is not the church itself, but the path to Jesus Christ?
- To what extent is the whole catechumenate a space filled with thresholds (i.e. people go from one place to another; they have set out but have not yet arrived)? The catechumenate is this space in between, this thoroughfare, this passage, this „limes“.
- Liturgy is a threshold that connects the space between heaven and earth. How can liturgy express this properly?

The image of the „threshold“ proved to be a lasting inspiration.

It was an ecumenically oriented meeting, where the Anglican and Catholic Churches worked together, which was, as we were told, supposedly a rare thing in the UK at that time. A memorable moment was the joint celebration of the Eucharist in a room around a very large round table. On one side of the table, the Anglican bishop first said the high prayer and the words of institution over bread and wine. Then the Catholic bishop did so on the other side of the table. For communion, the participants then went to that side of the table where the bishop of their denomination administered the sacrament.

EuroCat Bureau
Lisbon, 26th-28th April 2002

13 people from 12 countries (Austria, Belgium, England and Wales, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Lutheran and Catholic Sweden and Switzerland) met at the invitation of Querubim Pereira da Silva. (By the way, Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst, Professor of Pastoral Theology with a research focus on catechumenate, later Auxiliary Bishop of Münster, Bishop of Limburg and Delegate to the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation, was in attendance once again – as he always has been in recent years).

In Portugal, catechumenate is a small section within the large national directorate for catechesis, which is responsible for practically everything that has to do with teaching and communicating faith. There are only a few places in Portugal where catechumenate was practised at that time.

The meeting with Cardinal Polycarpo of Lisbon was very interesting, in part because he reported on the „city missions“ currently taking place in Vienna, Brussels, Paris and Lisbon; they were initiated by the respective local bishops (local cardinals). The expected result of those missions remained unclear except that the local churches should be encouraged to rethink missionary work.

A very memorable event was a dinner with a nice view over the Tejo and the illuminated bridge, where our host, Querubim da Silva, sang a fado.

19th EuroCat Congress
Barcelona, 30th April – 3rd May 2003

Topic:
The Transmission Of Faith In Modern Times

There were 59 participants from 16 countries: Austria, Belarus, Belgium, England and Wales, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Malta was represented for the first time. The team around our host, Jordi d'Arquer, included many impressions of the city of Barcelona in this year's topic. It was the theme of a guided tour of the Catalan National Museum, for example, as well as an introduction to the Sagrada Familia, where we were able to celebrate mass together with Cardinal Carles in the lower church.

In his speech, Auxiliary Bishop Joan Carrera from Barcelona identified four main problems for the transmission of the faith today:

- a bad public image and a loss of credibility of believers and the church as a whole;

- a society that is increasingly self-sufficient and to which the Gospel has become alien;
- growing discouragement or laziness among pastoral workers;
- and, as a result, sometimes even a hostile attitude towards „the world“.

In this situation, it is necessary for everyone to take Jesus himself as an example to become salt and light for the transmission of faith. We need more simplicity, more humility according to the message of the Gospel. This is true for the Church, which above all must radiate more and more the mercy of the Father and of Jesus: And that means: it is first and foremost a question of a pastoral conversion of the Church itself.

Excursions to different parishes in the Barcelona area where special initiatives („parish missions“ or similar efforts) had recently taken place were very enlightening. What remains of them? What is changing? These projects are an impulse that fades away after a climax, but it does resonate with people; more so with those who were committed, but also with some of the „distant“ people these efforts are aimed at.

For Spain, and especially for Catalonia, this congress was a strong impulse for the further development of catechumenate.

This congress also made time for a longer Bureau meeting. Due to the growth of EuroCat, an „official“ structure might be needed in future.

The ecumenical orientation of EuroCat has consequences for the status of the participants: To what extent are they official representatives of their bishops (which has consequences for common liturgical celebrations, for example)? Or is their presence of a more „informal“ nature?

However, no attendant is there in a „private“ capacity – which may have been the case in the past with participants „from the grass roots“.

Since participants from the USA and Canada have already attended EuroCat meetings several times, a more intercontinental conference was considered – however, with no results.

EuroCat Bureau

Budapest, 30th April – 3rd May 2004

Sister Judith Fogassy and Auxiliary Bishop György Udvardy (who was previously National Director for Catechesis and later became Bishop of the Diocese of Pecs, where the European Congress for Catechumenate 2017 took place) were the hosts of this Bureau.

There were 15 people present in addition to the team from Hungary. The other participants were: Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden (Catholic and Lutheran) and Switzerland – 12 countries in total.

This exchange of knowledge focused on the situation of the catechumenate in different countries, with a special emphasis on the host country Hungary.

Afterwards, the 2003 congress in Barcelona was evaluated, and some brainstorming done on the 2005 congress in Sweden.

Further consideration was given to how catechumenate in Europe and how the European offices should organise themselves in future.

20th EuroCat Congress **Vadstena, 4th-8th May 2005**

Topic:

Signs On The Path Of Faith

This ecumenically prepared and organised congress was attended by 68 people (including a large delegation from Sweden) from 18 countries, including representatives of the Anglican Church of Northern Ireland ; those being: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, England and Wales, Finland (Lutheran), France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

Particularly involved in the process of preparation and implementation were: Stefan Nordstroem, Elisabeth Lindow and Karl-Gunnar Ellverson.

This EuroCat Congress marked the regular participation of Russia, i.e. of Sr. Therese Kanacry (until 2017).

At the time of this meeting, pilgrimage became a big thing all across Europe and individual denominations. Of course, the traditional pilgrim routes (the Way of St. James or the traditional pilgrim routes to Rome) are a little far from Sweden. This is why local pilgrimage or reflection routes are being discovered or established. In Sweden, such routes are becoming part of religious education for adults, but also of confirmation preparation and youth pastoral work in general.

People go on pilgrimages to visit places that have/had ecclesiastical significance and it does not matter whether these places were established by members of the other denomination. However, there seem to be almost no issues between the Swedish Lutheran and Catholic Church: in pastoral care, in communication, in spirituality.

A pleasant experience – and in keeping with the theme and the congress – was the three-hour joint pilgrimage near Vadstena. (St. Bridget, who is venerated as a saint by both denominations, lived in Vadstena).

At the services, everyone was invited to come forward, even if it was held by a bishop/priest of another denomination: One crossed one's arms and received a blessing. The presence of bishops from both the Catholic Church and the Swedish Lutheran Church was a beautiful experience; it was gratifying to see how well they were in touch with each other.

EuroCat Bureau

Cracow, 28th April – 1st May 2006

16 people from 13 countries were present: Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden (Catholic and Lutheran) and Switzerland.

The topics discussed in this Bureau followed a well-established pattern: reports and exchanges on the situation in each country, review of the previous congress, reflections and forecasts for the next EuroCat Congress and other issues.

It was interesting to get to know the city of Cracow and to get more detailed information about the catechumenate in Poland, which is mainly a thing in the Archdiocese of Cracow thanks to Sr. Adelajda Sielepin. (However, she also has a mandate from the Polish Bishops' Conference.) This was a little surprising for us, since Poland is known as a „Catholic country“, where one would not really expect catechumens. However, it may be that in the earlier communist period a certain number of the population stayed away from the church because of ideological reasons.

It was also nice to meet with Archbishop Stanisław Dziwisz, the former secretary of Pope John Paul II.

21th EuroCat Congress

Florence, 2nd-6th May 2007

Topic:

Christum Narrare

49 participants from 16 countries (Austria, Belgium, England and Wales, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg – for the first time, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland) and a large team from Italy came together for this meeting.

The invitation was extended by Walter Ruspi, National Director for catechesis and catechumenate, with the support of a team from the National Directorate for Catechesis in Italy and the diocesan authorities in Florence.

The topic „Speaking of Christ“ referred mostly to the artistic ways of telling stories to convey faith – and how this can be helpful for catechumens. With this in mind, an excursion to the Brancacci Chapel with its famous baptistery and the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore took place. During the guided tour, we got a deeper understanding of the extent to which art (especially in relation to Florence and its humanist currents) can be helpful for the transmission and understanding of faith today.

Much time was dedicated to meditating on Bible passages in small groups and reflecting on the presentations (in language groups); reports from individual countries also got their fair share of time.

EuroCat-Bureau

Luxembourg, 25th-27th April 2008

Luis Martinez, the national responsible person, invited this EuroCat Bureau to Luxembourg rather spontaneously. 15 people from 14 countries were present: Austria, Belgium, England & Wales, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden (Catholic and Lutheran) and Switzerland.

Peter Humphrey from Great Britain (former member of the Liturgical Commission in England and Wales and a frequent participant in EuroCat meetings) reported that the Catholics have no-one who's responsible for catechumenate, and that in the Anglican Church, the proclamation of faith is now based to 100% on the Alpha courses.

With regard to the self-organisation of EuroCat, it was agreed that Walter Krieger (who would organise the EuroCat Congress planned for 2009 in Vienna) would take on the role of a sort-of secretary, whose task would be to help with communication and to keep the list of international officials as up-to-date as possible.

22nd EuroCat Congress

Vienna, 30th April-4th May 2009

Topic:

Integration – How „Newcomers“ Find Their Place In The Community

Number of participants: 82 (17 from Austria); 22 countries were represented: Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Czechia, England and Wales, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland; non-catholic denominations: Finnish Lutheran Church, Swedish Lutheran Church.

This congress was planned and organised by the Austrian Pastoral Institute (Walter Krieger, Barbara Kortus-Turski) in collaboration with the contact persons for catechumenate in the Austrian dioceses (especially with the team from Vienna), making use of the experience gathered at the European meetings for catechumenate since 1997.

All Austrian participants consciously saw themselves as „hosts“, meaning they were all prepared to be contact persons for the foreign participants. The „helping one another“ mentality in organisation and implementation worked very well.

The atmosphere of the conference was characterised by the openness of the host country right from the start. The visual and content-related layout of the first hours of this congress certainly contributed to this: greeting the participants on arrival; assisting them with transport from the airport (in case of „impossible“ arrival times) and with accommodation; posters saying „welcome“ in – almost – all European languages; pictures from different European countries; maps; marking the participating countries on a map of Europe to be designed during the introduction round; mixing the participants in groups for the welcome quiz evening (with European topics – implementation: Peter Allmaier); snacks, baked goods (sponsored by the Ströck bakery), coffee and other drinks; the design of the participant folders and signs.

A message from Cardinal Schönborn was read aloud, well-wishes of the Protestant bishop of Vienna were conveyed and additional greetings from other countries were communicated.

The programme was versatile.

- First order of business was a presentation of the programme in terms of time and content (a short play by the Catholic Youth Organisation), a presentation of the host country (characteristics of Austria, situation of the church, situation of the catechumenate).
- Presentations and experiences on the topic of integration
- Group discussions: The groups (two each in German, English and French) were as diverse as possible and were led by participants from the different countries (one German-speaking group e.g. by Stefan Schlager). A discussion guide was prepared.
- The Bible study (preparation: Friederike Dostal) was something entirely new for EuroCat members in this form – and was very well received.
- Excursions:
 - a voluntary evening walk in small language groups (English, French, German, Italian, Polish) – on May 1st;
 - visits to parishes that have experience with newly-baptised people and how to „integrate“ them – on May 2nd;
 - visits to „places of integration“ (in a broader sense), where we were given examples and efforts to make „new“ connections – on May 3rd;
 - dinner at a Heurigen (wine tavern), also on May 3rd.

The groups were accompanied by Austrian participants or volunteers.

- Liturgy: the liturgical celebrations (preparation: Markus Muth; musical support: Anton Zehetgruber) were aligned in their sequence to that of the rites in the catechumenate; e.g. „reception“, „handing over“, „renewal of baptism“ etc. The Eucharistic celebration was presided over by Auxiliary Bishop Helmut Krätzl, the concluding „celebration of mission into everyday life“ by bishop Alois Schwarz.
- Country reports: It was clear that with 22 participating countries, not all of them would be able to make an oral presentation. Thus, preference was given to those

who were either making a presentation for the first time (Moldova, Belarus, Lithuania, Slovakia) or for the first time in several years (England and Wales), or who were accentuating an ecumenical focus (Sweden). Many other country reports had been prepared in writing and reproduced, some participants had also prepared posters.

- Breaks were important for making connections, for viewing material on display, for relaxation.
- Conclusions: Closing remarks (what is my/our personal outcome) were made by those countries who hadn't been able to give a report earlier, giving them the chance to reflect on this meeting.

The topic of „integration“ should be experienced and reflected upon in the conference itself, and this was achieved. The connection between the topic and the catechumenate was made clear time and again. The importance of the topic for the whole pastoral work and the opportunity for church institutions to contribute to the welfare of society became obvious.

Translations: Despite the high cost, having simultaneous interpreters on site at times has proven to be beneficial. At other times, information was provided in three languages consecutively. Anything that could be prepared ahead of time was not an issue; whenever spontaneous translation questions arose, the conference participants stepped in to help, as is usually the case with EuroCat. This was especially important during excursions.

Website: A chapter named „EuroCat“ was added to the website www.katechese.at in the preparation phase. There, participants could find the programme of the conference, contributions on the topic, organisational information and an overview of EuroCat and its development. Over time, the reports from the individual countries may be collected there.

Public relations: Any relevant information had been sent to Kathpress (Catholic Press Agency) in advance. A press conference moderated by Prof. Roland Machatschke with bishop Alois Schwarz, Friederike Dostal and Walter Krieger took place on May 4th, attended by Kathpress, ORF Radio/Religion Department, Radio Stephansdom and the Carinthian Church Newspaper. The press release was also sent to the editorial offices of the major Austrian daily newspapers the following day.

Documentation: Reports in German were published in „Pastoraltheologische Informationen 2/2009“. The simultaneously translated presentations in English and French were sent to the participants on CD after the congress. Participants were invited to send in photos so that an overview of the meeting could be compiled. In addition, the magazine „Diakonia“ later on published a booklet on catechumenate at our suggestion.

Special consideration was needed regarding:

- financial support for participants from Eastern European countries (Renovabis supported the conference);
- ecumenical matters (in regards to participants from the Swedish Lutheran and Finnish Lutheran Churches) including the delicate question of receiving communion during the Eucharist: Here, the method seen at EuroCat 2005 in Sweden was adopted: Co-celebrates of another denomination received a blessing;
- some participants's desire for a daily Eucharistic celebration (at the Don Bosco Haus or Kardinal König Haus in the morning, outside the official programme)
- for individual participants due to „difficult“ arrival times at the airport or because of a special diet;
- it was also necessary to consider an opportunity where people could sing or where the participants could make a creative contribution (on the last evening).

EuroCat Bureau

Vivamo, 7th-9th May 2010

It was probably a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for a EuroCat Bureau to be held in Finland. Sinikka Metsätähti and Maria Sten had extended the invitation, the remaining 14 participants came from Austria, Belgium, England and Wales, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Russia and Sweden. Finland itself was represented by Lutheran, Catholic and Orthodox members. This meeting was therefore very ecumenical. This was also underlined by the presence of Heikki Huttunen, the general secretary of the Ecumenical Council in Finland, Bishop Teemu Sippo (Catholic) and Bishop Kari Mäkinen (Lutheran).

In the large park on the grounds near the Vivamo Educational Centre, various stations from the life of Jesus are visualised, highlighting the biblical pastoral focus of this place. This was an interesting experience apart from the official programme.

The agenda of this Bureau followed the already well-established pattern: evaluation of the previous EuroCat Congress (Vienna 2009), thoughts on the following EuroCat Congress (Ghent 2011), exchange of experiences and observations concerning the catechumenate in different countries with the focus on the host country, Finland.

Based on the experience gained so far, Walter Krieger will continue to perform the role of a „secretary“.

23rd EuroCat Congress
Ghent, 5th-8th May 2011

Topic:

The Interaction Of Liturgy And Catechesis In The Catechumenal Process

65 participants came together from 18 countries: Albania, Austria, Belgium, England and Wales, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden (Lutheran), Switzerland.

The „Rite Of Integration Of Adults Into The Church“ suggests looking at different dimensions of church life as a whole:

Liturgy, especially liturgy and catechesis, and this against the backdrop of a pastoral approach. Liturgy as a whole, and especially the liturgical rites during the catechumenate, and what they mean for the catechumens, but also for the whole Church, were at the centre of the reflections.

A distinction nevertheless must be made: Although liturgy is catechesis in a certain sense, it has a different character. Liturgy initiates into the mystery of Christian faith and brings to life the essence of it, and does so in an assembled community. However, liturgy is not self-explanatory. Although it is an experience, an event that speaks to the person in a holistic way, it is not enough to answer questions about faith from catechumens. Liturgy has no school-like or didactic character. It is existential, but not systematic. Liturgy is oriented to reach the hearts of people, but without understanding the meaning behind it, it remains insubstantial. What is needed, therefore, is a mystagogical catechesis that is also reasonable and intellectually valid. Especially during the catechumenate, catechesis and liturgy should therefore go hand in hand, while preserving their respective characteristics. Liturgy makes experience possible, but the understanding of this experience is made accessible through catechesis.

The prayers spoken during the meeting were based on the Liturgy of the hours.

It was also possible to meet newly baptised people during this EuroCat Congress, who told us of their experiences. It was astonishing how many ecclesiastical difficulties they had to overcome to find a priest who actually knew what a catechumenate was all about, and what it means if an adult asks to be baptised.

A kind of mystagogical catechesis was used to introduce us to the famous work of art „The Adoration of the Lamb“ (Jan van Eyck) in the cathedral of Ghent.

Getting to know Belgian beer culture, especially the tasting of the beer of the year (Times Magazine) from Westvleteren Abbey will remain a memorable event forever.

The meeting was hosted by Stijn Van den Bossche, who had replaced Jean-Pierre De Meulder as head of the catechumenate throughout Belgium. We solemnly bid farewell to Jean-Pierre De Meulder, a pioneer of catechumenate in Europe, at this congress.

EuroCat Bureau

London, 27th-30th April 2012

Including a larger delegation from the host country 20 participants from 15 countries came together: Austria, Belgium, England and Wales, Finland (Lutheran), France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Russia, Spain, Sweden (Catholic and Lutheran), Switzerland, USA (Lutheran). Invitations were sent out by Caroline Dollard and Martin Foster.

Auxiliary Bishop Alan Hopes of Westminster also took part in this meeting and reported on the situation of the catechumenate in England and Wales.

A special highlight was attending Sunday mass in a nearby parish in the diocese of Southwark.

It was – in accordance with our decision at Ghent 2011 – a „Bureau A“, i.e. a meeting focusing on country reports and the issues arising directly from them.

Evaluating the EuroCat congress in Ghent was also an important topic. The following should be noted for further development: a successful first evening with a playful introduction to the topic; working on a spiritual theme in small groups; the connection of catechumenate/catechesis with art/culture through a special element during the conference and above all: hospitality.

Catechumenate is also affected by current church developments. Because of this, the results of the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelisation (autumn 2012) must be kept in mind. Also worth of note are the ecclesiological significance of catechumenate (for the community, for the renewal of the church); the gradual progression of the catechumens, especially the phase of beginning (pre-catechumenate); the topic catechumenate and migrants, and the catechumenate as an inspiration for all pastoral work.

Walter Krieger remains the „secretary“ for EuroCat. He now offers a space for EuroCat on a website via the Austrian Pastoral Institute: On www.katechese.at, there is a chapter called EuroCat. There, country reports and other information can be compiled.

EuroCat-Bureau

Delemont/Switzerland, 26th-28th April 2013

Topic:

Newly Baptised People: Burden Or Enrichment For The Communities?

In addition to the team from Switzerland (centred around Marie-Madeleine Beer) 15 people from a total of 12 countries took part in this meeting: Austria, Belgium, England and Wales, France, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Spain and Switzerland.

Since it was a „Bureau B“, there were no country reports, the focus lay on delving into a topic closely related to catechumenate. To this end, this Bureau was meant to provide a good opportunity for an international exchange of (pastoral-theological) observations and concrete experiences.

A special topic was the preparation of children and young people of school age for baptism.

A second topic was the question of whether the newly baptised are seen more as an enrichment or as a burden in the concrete pastoral situation of a community. And this is where the ideals of the concept actually differ from the banal reality. Newly baptised people seem to be more of an irritation, a challenge, a disturbance of the daily life (in a parish). In such a situation, however, the Christian community is challenged to see this as a „lovable burden“, to turn to these „newcomers“, to commit themselves to them and to question own habits.

24th EuroCat Congress

Paderborn/Germany, 18th-22nd May 2014

Topic:

From Individual Vocation To Communal Faith

60 participants from 16 countries met at this congress. Those were: Austria, Belgium, England and Wales, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, the Netherlands, Russia, Spain, Sweden (Lutheran), Switzerland and the USA. A representative of the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelisation attended as well. Regina Boerschel and her team were the hosts.

Several initiatives were presented, e.g. FIDES (Catholic Information on Faith). Within the frame-work of catholic faith information, there are a number of cities in the Archdiocese of Cologne where FIDES is based, most of which are closely linked to city

pastoral care. FIDES sees itself as a counselling organisation at city level which cooperates closely with parishes.

FIDES is there for people who want to come (back) into closer contact with the faith, with the church. The main focus are on issues like re-entry, conversion, adult baptism and confirmation of adults. Concrete support for individuals is arranged according to the situation.

For this purpose there is an annual cycle of discussion evenings, which take place every two weeks. They are well-designed both methodically and „holistically“. These events are freely accessible, but follow more or less the rhythm of the themes that become important at certain times during the catechumenate. Catechumens are supposed to participate in those, but they have other meetings (a religious weekend, the liturgical celebrations) planned in the catechumenate as well.

There is a special conversation evening course for adults preparing for confirmation. Faith talks for those re-entering the church are agreed upon individually, including their duration and frequency.

Converts are invited for one-on-one conversations and to participate in several faith talks.

Highlights from the presentation by Hans Hobelsberger: *Becoming A Christian From An Individual Perspective*:

- A concrete „community“ is not the aim of the catechumenate, but is rather to be understood as a framework, tool, instrument, sign.
- The task and mission of the church and of each individual is to show God's love for humanity; each Christian has his or her own share in this.
- In this sense, a pastoral care of mission is to be promoted: i.e. pastoral care is to be mission-oriented rather than social-form-oriented.
- This implies a focus on a pastoral care of vocation, which becomes concrete in its charismatic orientation.
- People of today choose where they belong. They live in a tension and complementarity between different possibilities. According to social trends, on the one hand, it is a matter of striving to exhaust all possibilities, to find something new, something more – and this at a high speed (acceleration). On the other hand, the desire for security, stability, lasting relationships remains.
- In order to build on this, attention needs to be paid to a pastoral care of opportunities, which is made concrete, for example, in special official acts (like weddings). A good experience is qualitatively sustainable; possibly more than a large sum of unimpressive experiences.
- The next step follows a pastoral of proposal (in the sense of „Proposer la foi...“). This is a process of getting to know the Gospel better, of grasping it more deeply and then proclaiming it more appropriately, in respect for each other's culture.

From the presentation by Bernd Lutz:

Between Individualisation And The Desire For Community – Becoming Christian From A Community Perspective

- The church must learn to think from the individual towards the community and not – as has been the case up to now – from the community and its guidelines towards the individual.
- It is about the relationship with Christ. Relationships with church and congregation are to be designed in such a way that they help the individual to form his or her personal relationship with Christ.
- The community must form members who are willing to communicate and provide information, and who are willing to let themselves and their faith be questioned.
- The community should open up space to experience encounters with God, and it must offer open forms of communication that allow for controversial discussions.
- The community will build a culture of welcome and hospitality that acknowledges and invites strangers.
- The community will perceive that those interested in faith have different interests regarding community and integration, and will learn to adjust to them.
- The community will create its profile from the social environment and the church will support the congregations in their different profiles.
- The parishes need inspiring people who can bring the catechumenate as an attitude into the community.

From the lecture by Christian Hennecke: Christian Life As Catechumenal Life

- Being a Christian is always a work in progress. Growth of faith is a lifelong dynamic process.
- „The majority of the baptised in Europe are currently somewhere in the middle of the catechumenate... and we must finally take this seriously“.
- These days, new beginnings in faith are (mostly) of a charismatic nature.
- Impulses of the catechumenate:
- Becoming Christian as a collective path: biography-oriented, learning community, relationship orientation
- Differentiated approaches to the Gospel (from 7-second devotions to Bible sharing, preaching, catechesis)
- The power of the liturgy (ars celebrandi, aesthetics, mystagogy)
- Dedication: diaconal commitment, experiences of Sant'Egidio, „learning to give oneself“
- Catechumenal church development

Reflections on EuroCat in general:

- It is a good place to deepen a common concern.
- It is a place of inspiration for catechumenate and for many other pastoral and theological questions connected with it.

- It is a place where people can recharge their batteries for everyday life – despite life's many challenges.
- It is a place for conversations, for multilingualism, for communication across (language) borders, it is perhaps a „little Pentecost“.
- It is a place for talking and listening, for listening to each other.
- It is a good place to share faith and to reinforce each other's faith.
- It is a place where one experiences cordial, cross-border cooperation in Jesus Christ.

EuroCat Bureau

Salzburg, 4th-6th May 2015

This „Bureau A“, which focuses on country reports, was attended by 19 people from 13 countries: Austria, Belgium, England and Wales, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Moldova, Russia, Spain, Sweden (Lutheran) and Switzerland.

The country report from Austria had an additional focus: catechumenate for asylum seekers. Because of this complex of problems, the Austrian Bishops' Conference set up a „Coordination Office for Catechumenate and Asylum“ together with the Archdiocese of Vienna.

In addition, an excursion into the city of Salzburg to places of pastoral relevance took place: the University Church, which is also used as a space for art installations, the „InfoPoint Church“ as an institution of the „City Pastoral“ in the centre of the city, and a visit to the newly established Bible World in the redesigned Church of St. Elisabeth. Another highlight was the Eucharistic celebration and subsequent breakfast-talk with archbishop Franz Lackner.

EuroCat Bureau

Chichester/England, 18th-20th May 2016

Topic:

Catechumenate And Evangelisation

It was the second „Bureau B“, i.e. the focus was on a thematic exchange; country reports should only be submitted in writing.

In addition to the team from England and Wales, 20 people from 16 countries took part in this meeting: Austria, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Scotland, Spain, Sweden (Lutheran) and Switzerland. The delegation from France could not attend due to a train strike.

It was possible to intensify ecumenical perspectives with participants from the Anglican Church in England and Northern Ireland, but also with Catholic participants from Scotland.

Peter McGrail, Professor of Pastoral Theology from Liverpool, moderated this year's meeting. The invitation had been issued by Caroline Dollard and Martin Foster.

In addition to the discussion on the topic, the secular development using the example of the city of Chichester was interesting. Of the five Anglican churches in the city centre, only the cathedral (dating from the 11th century) is still used for worship services. The other churches became a gallery, a bookshop, a social meeting place and a pub. The evening visit to this pub provoked different reactions from the EuroCat participants: it was shocking to participants from countries where churches could not be built for centuries (because of the political climate), or where, due to alienation or pragmatic indifference, there have always been times when churches have disappeared or been rededicated – which was (and still is) the case not only for churches but also for temples, mosques, synagogues and other religious buildings all over the world.

25th EuroCat Congress **Pecs, 18th-22nd May 2017**

Topic:

Catechumenate At The Crossways Of Cultures

For the first time, a EuroCat Congress was held in a former communist country: Hungary. Bosnia and Herzegovina attended for the first time; also represented were Austria, Belgium, France, England and Wales, Germany, Italy, Malta, Russia, Spain, Sweden (Lutheran) and Switzerland.

Unfortunately, several events were taking place simultaneously in different countries, which prevented some leaders of catechumenate to participate in EuroCat.

CCEE was represented for the first time by its Vice-Secretary Michel Remery and by the President for Catechesis, Archbishop Đuro Hranić/Croatia, who celebrated Mass with us.

The topic „Catechumenate At The Crossways Of Cultures” was brought to life in many ways.

- Historically: Remnants of the Roman period were clearly visible in town and we were told that the first Christians were already living here during the Roman period. The time of the Ottomans was preserved in the architectural style. Particularly worth mentioning is the so-called Mosque-Church, which was once a church, then a mosque and is now a church again.

- Ecumenically: Living together with the Greek-Catholic Church was not just talked about, but also had its own place at the conference.
- Psychological: Of particular interest was a presentation by Csaba Orova on conversion, initiation and baptism in ecumenical dialogue, in which various conversion typologies were highlighted, i.e.: Which motives and implications urge someone to decide that a new orientation in life is needed?

With regard to the conference programme, group activities with their precise and appropriate questions were particularly successful. Also interesting were the workshops on catechumenate-related topics, which were not organised by the host country alone, but with the help of some other countries, which suggests that Europe-wide networking is taking place.

Many thanks to the person in charge of the catechumenate in Hungary, Sr. Rita Vizvady, and the host bishop of the diocese of Pecs, György Udvardy.

EuroCat Bureau

Rome, 29th April – 1st May 2018

This Bureau was preceded by the Italian national meeting on catechumenate, with a concluding round table on the relations and the importance of EuroCat for the catechumenate in Italy. Some EuroCat participants were already present at this last part of this Italian catechumenate meeting.

Our Italian hosts were Jourdan Pinheiro, Filippo Margheri and Marco Gallo.

- The official start of this EuroCat Bureau was in the late afternoon on 29th April. There were 20 participants from 12 countries, including an Italian team: Austria, Belgium, England, Germany, Hungary, Malta, Portugal, Russia, Switzerland and, for the first time officially, Lithuania; the CCEE Vice-President was also present.
- Delegations from Spain and Luxembourg were unable to attend due to air traffic problems.
- An important point was the review of the EuroCat 2017 congress in Pecs, which was considered very inspiring and successful. It was a pity that fewer participants than expected had come.
- However, the focus of this EuroCat Bureau was (according to the characteristics of „Office A“) on the reports from the different countries. There were repeated discussions and an exchange of perspectives and experiences.

- Another point was the question of how (and where) to proceed with EuroCat, because there are several catechetical meetings at international level where the same people meet regularly. These are EuroCat (Congress and Bureau A or B), European Equipe for Catechesis, European National Directors for Catechesis, CCEE Congress (and preparation) and Congresses of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation.
- The vote to continue EuroCat was unanimous.

In addition to the necessary continuity, the building of a pastoral network, the international exchange of experiences, in-depth discussions, the diverse treatment of individual topics, inspiration, contacts and generally good experiences were considered invaluable.

However, catechesis and catechumenate should be seen as more closely connected – without overlooking their respective „specific“ characteristics, both in terms of the themes and the place in the dynamic processes of becoming a Christian (catechumenate helps with preparing to enter into the Church, catechesis is accompaniment for the deepening of faith; but the dynamics of the catechumenate is an inspiration for every form of catechesis).

The future of catechumenate and the future of the church are closely interconnected; specific topics of the catechumenate are also central themes for pastoral work, at least at a second glance.

Finally, Belgium and Italy presented their perspectives on the organisation of a catechumenate in their countries and on proposals for dioceses respectively, developed in accordance with the CIC.

EuroCat Bureau

Vienna, 29th April – 1st May 2019

Topics:

Welcome And Mystagogy

Together with the team from Austria, 27 people from 12 countries were present: Bosnia, England and Wales, Finland (Lutheran), France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Spain, Switzerland and Sweden (Lutheran). This meeting was organised and prepared by the Austrian Pastoral Institute (Walter Krieger) with a team of people responsible for the catechumenate in Austrian dioceses (Friederike Dostal, Anna Maria Jalalifar, Daniel Vyhytil, Doris Kloimstein).

The first evening was dedicated to the topic „Welcome“. A phenomenological deepening of individual aspects illustrated the dynamic process that helps people gradually

feel more welcome – until the moment where they feel that they belong. The personal testimony of Anna Maria Jalalifar about her journey towards faith and into the community of the church illustrated this well.

The thematic focus „Mystagogy“ was discussed and deepened the next day with two impulses by Friederike Dostal and afterwards in discussion groups. The participants were invited to contribute their own observations to this international exchange of experiences.

In the afternoon, an excursion to a Viennese parish took place, where – moderated by Daniel Vychytil – people could talk to newly baptised Christians who originally came to Austria from Iran, but had already lived in Austria for several years.

This event was concluded together with Bishop Alois Schwarz, Bishop for Pastoral Care, Catechesis and Evangelisation in the Austrian Bishops' Conference, who celebrated Eucharist with the participants.

2020

A EuroCat meeting with the topic „Welcoming And Accompanying Catechumens In A Church In Crisis“ was to take place in Paris – together with the worldwide meeting of French-speaking countries on the catechumenate („Assises“).

It was, in fact, another crisis, namely the worldwide spread of the Corona virus, that led to the cancellation of EuroCat 2020.

Preview for 2021

The EuroCat Bureau planned in Malta has been re-scheduled to autumn.

OVERVIEW

1st EuroCat Congress, Geneva, 14th-17th February 1969

The Journey Of Catechumens And Their Experience With The Church

2nd EuroCat Congress, Brussels, 1st-3rd May 1970

Catechumenate And Mission In A „New“ Church

3rd EuroCat Congress, Madrid, 1st-3rd May 1971

Catechumenate And „New Communities“

Bureau: Paris, 1972

4th EuroCat Congress, Strasbourg, 28th April – 1st May 1973

How Does The Conversion Of A Person, His Or Her Transition From Faithlessness To Faith Take Place In Secularised Europe Today?

Where does it happen, in which places, in what groups? How is it celebrated in this group, in this place?

Bureau: Paris, 1974

5th EuroCat Congress Amsterdam, 2nd-5th May 1975

How To Proclaim Jesus Christ To The People Of Today:

In a troubled world with its violence and class relations, in its country-specific socio-economic, political and cultural contexts, with a local church that is what it is. How can we „effectively“ proclaim Jesus Christ to people who are searching, who might live in a kind of religious turmoil?

Bureau: Cologne, 1976

6th EuroCat Congress, Lyon, 6th-9th May 1977

Signs Of The Times And The Word Of God. The Challenges Of Conversion Today

Bureau: London, 1978

7th EuroCat Congress, Antwerp, 5th-7th May 1979

There Are Catechumenate Communities. We Speak Of A „Catechumenal Movement“. To what extent is this commitment a sign for non-believers? To what extent is this a challenge for the church?

Bureau: Amsterdam, 1980

8th EuroCat Congress, Madrid, 1st-4th May 1981

In A Climate Of Secularisation, The Catechumenate Proves To Be Both A Necessity And An Opportunity.

How can it enable fraternal life, and visualise openness and links with other areas of the Church? How can it encourage those at a distance to come closer?

Bureau: 1982, Rome

9th EuroCat Congress, London, 6th-9th May 1983

Can One Grow In Faith Without Celebrating It?

Bureau: Bonn, 1984

10th EuroCat Congress, Geneva-Annecy, 10th-13th May 1985

Guiding Someone Towards Faith – Respecting Humans

Bureau: Marseilles 1986

11th EuroCat Congress, Gazzada (Italy), 8th-11th May 1987

Catechumenate And Baptism As The Foundation Of The Church

Bureau: Lisbon, 1988

12th EuroCat Congress Augsburg-Leitershofen, 5th-8th May 1989

Initiation, Re-initiation And Christian Community

Bureau: Kalmar (Sweden), 1990

13th EuroCat Congress, Bayonne, 3rd-6th May 1991

Community – Path And Goal Of Christian Congregations

Bureau: Salisbury, 1992

14th EuroCat Congress, Rome, 7th-11th May 1993

The Same Catechumenate For Tomorrow?

Bureau: Brussels, 1994

15th EuroCat Congress, Saint Maurice (Switzerland), 5th-9th May 1995

Newly baptised people in the parish

Bureau: Uppsala, 1996

16th EuroCat Congress, Berlin, 9th-13th May 1997

Strive For The Welfare Of The City... For In Its Welfare Lies Your Welfare (Jer 29,7).

Perception Of Christian Traces In The Environment Of A De-christianised City – Steps To Take Before The Catechumenate

Bureau: Vienna, 1998

17th EuroCat Congress, Paris, 12th-16th May 1999
History And Experiences Of The Catechumenate In France

Bureau: Haarlem (Netherlands), 2000

18th EuroCat Congress, Leeds, 4th-8th May 2001
The Thresholds That Someone Who Does Not Believe Or Is Distanced From The Church Must Cross If He Wants To Find The Christian Faith

Bureau: Lisbon, 2002

19th EuroCat Congress, Barcelona, 30th April – 3rd May 2003
The Transmission Of Faith In Modern Times

Bureau: Budapest, 2004

20th EuroCat Congress, Vadstena (Sweden), 4th-8th May 2005
Signs On The Path Of Faith

Bureau: Cracow, 2006

21st EuroCat Congress, Florence, 2nd-6th May 2007
Christum narrare

Bureau: Luxembourg, 2008

22nd EuroCat Congress, Vienna, 30th April – 4th May 2009
Integration – How „Newcomers“ Find Their Place In The Community

Bureau: Vivamo (Finland), 2010

23rd EuroCat Congress, Ghent, 5th-9th May 2011
The Interaction Of Liturgy And Catechesis In The Catechumenal Process

Bureau A: London, 2012

Bureau B: Delemont (Switzerland), 2013
Newly Baptised People: Burden Or Enrichment For The Communities?

24th EuroCat Congress Paderborn, 8th-12th May 2014
From Individual Vocation To Communal Faith

Bureau A: Salzburg (Austria), 2015

Bureau B: Chichester, 2016
Catechumenate And Evangelisation

25th EuroCat Congress, Pecs, 18th-22nd May 2017
Catechumenate At The Crossways Of Cultures

Bureau A: , Rome, 2018

Bureau B: Vienna, 2019
Welcome And Mystagogy

2020: Cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic

PART 2:

THE SETTING OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CATECHUMENATE IN EUROPE

HISTORY

Prehistory Until 1968

The path of the catechumenate is for adults who want to learn about the Christian faith. It has been documented since the 2nd century. It subsequently spread to all local churches and was supplemented in content by catechetical, liturgical and instructions for an ascetic way of life. All those who wished to follow Christianity were included as elect in the group of catechumens. They stayed on this path, which lasted several years, learning more and more about the Word of God, deepening their faith and experiencing conversion by participating in and being supported by the communal life of a Christian community.

The catechumenate was a fundamental stage in the process of Christian initiation, with different signs and stages. The beginning of this journey led from the first steps of faith to the celebration of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil and concluded with a period of mystagogy.

Through this process of Christian initiation, the Church realised a living side of its pastoral ministry, i.e. its missionary and evangelising commitment, and it fulfilled, as it were, its maternal function by winning sons and daughters for the People of God of the New Covenant.

A detailed and clearly defined path was deemed necessary at a time when becoming a Christian also meant opposing an association with official pagan culture. It made enabled people to know the faith in its depth in the process of Christian initiation, also thanks to the witness of the writings of the Fathers, with which the ecclesial experience was enriched with writings and catechesis.

The process of Christian initiation received less and less attention from the end of the 6th century onwards. The Church no longer emphasised the evangelisation of adults, as it had in the past, as preparation for baptism. Being a Christian had increasingly become a prerequisite for being a fully recognised member of society since the 4th century. In the High Middle Ages, in a situation of ecclesial stability, the practice of infant baptism was consolidated. Once this had been established, the process of an adult catechumenate seemed more and more unnecessary and came to an end. However, the rites of the catechumenate for the reception of adults into the Church were never forgotten, not even in the following centuries. Around the beginning of the 17th century, all the rites of the catechumenate were integrated into the celebration of baptism by Paul V in a single baptismal rite.

The Church experienced a revival of the catechumenal process in the 18th/19th century as its missionary activity spread and took root on different continents. Several religious communities became active in re-introducing the catechumenal process. This began first in Africa and then continued in Asia and Oceania. It took some time for the proposal of a catechumenate to be accepted in the churches of Europe and the Americas, since on these continents almost the entire population belonged to the Christian faith and de-Christianisation was only a marginal phenomenon. However, during the last 50 years, people in these countries have become more attentive again. Awareness has grown in the face of changes in the various societies which have made it clear that there is a need for a renewal of the catechumenate in pastoral practice.

The recent history of the catechumenate in Europe began in 1950. Since that time, it has been mostly individuals who discovered and promoted it. In some countries (e.g. France and Belgium), religious communities were the driving force. Elsewhere, decisive impulses were given by bishops' conferences or episcopal initiatives. In the United Kingdom, the catechumenate was initiated by an Anglican priest inspired by the French. Thus, developments in the various countries, even in individual regions, varied greatly.

In 1963, the Second Vatican Council reintroduced the institution of the catechumenate (Sacrosanctum Concilium 64) and subsequently there is a substantial description of it (cf. Ad Gentes 14). With the inspiration of this ancient tradition of the Church, the Council Fathers proposed a living process of introduction to the faith and to the life of the Church with the aim of making possible a real conversion for the journey of adults who ask for Baptism: this with several steps entrusted not only to catechists and priests, but to the whole community of the faithful. In connection with the introduction to the whole Christian life, the catechumens learn about the religious, liturgical, diaconal life of the People of God, accompanied by catechesis and sacred rites. The decision of the Council was quasi ratified by the „Rite of Incorporation of Adults into the Church“ (1972). This is a liturgical and dogmatic text which is also the first instrument for pastoral activities.

The Beginnings Of The European Meetings

How It Began

A national conference in Peyruis, France in 1968 brought together some delegates representing the catechumenate in five European countries (Belgium, France, Switzerland, Spain and Portugal). Without an official mandate, they decided to initiate a European meeting. There were a number of reasons which encouraged them to reflect on catechumenal pastoral care: the influence of the Second Vatican Council's

texts on evangelisation and catechumenate, the growing number of people in many countries who wanted to become Christians as adults, and the challenge of creating spaces and communities which could welcome „newcomers“ to the Church. These initiators found themselves „on the same wavelength“. This made it easier to understand each other despite language barriers and created a warm, human bond, which should still prove useful for further development even to this day.

This first European meeting took place in Geneva on 15th and 16th February 1969. Five delegates from Belgium, four from France, two each from Spain and Portugal and one from Switzerland were present. The organisers of this meeting had not chosen any particular topic. On the basis of reports on the situation of the catechumenate in each country, the delegates discussed the current framework of the catechumenate and how pastoral work as a whole integrated catechumenal elements. Some common and fundamental considerations emerged from these discussions.

Those common considerations were:

- A „conversion“ of Christians occurs through the preaching of the Gospel.
- The catechumenal dimension is a sign of the Holy Spirit and the missionary activity of the churches.
- The sacraments of Christian initiation are privileged signs of the encounter of the faithful with God.
- Faith must be „at the center of people’s lives“.

Fundamentally, however, it is about the relationship of „today’s people“ with Jesus Christ. This raises decisive questions that apply to the whole pastoral ministry:

- How can people talk about Jesus today?
- What are the links between involvement in society and the encounter with Jesus Christ?

From this, three perspectives which are still significant today – both for catechumenate meetings and for pastoral work as a whole – emerged:

1. Every encounter with Jesus Christ takes place in a concrete situation, i.e. with men and women who have a history and who have responsibilities or obligations in society; faith gives meaning and purpose to this commitment.
2. The bonds between Christian communities and the catechumenate must be strengthened so that some of them integrate the catechumenal dimension into their pastoral work and the catechumens do not live in isolation from the Christian communities. (For the majority of catechumens, the Church had the face of the Christians with whom they came together and were friends with. The rest of the church with its organisation was not attractive to them; they rather perceived its shortcomings).

3. The meaning of the vocabulary used should be specified. What do terms like „faith content“, „existential theology“, „catechumenal catechesis“ and „catechumenal dimension“ mean?

After this meeting, the delegates decided to hold further meetings, initially every year (1969, 1970, 1971), later every two years, with the meeting of a so-called „Bureau“ (with one delegate from each country) taking place in the years in between. The delegate of the country organising the meeting would also be responsible for the selected topics and organisation.

Organising EuroCat

From Initiatives To Structures

The structural organisation of the catechumenate has varied greatly in different countries from the beginning. For a long time, France had autonomous, diocesan, regional and national organisations; the catechumenate is less structured in Belgium and Switzerland, where individual centres (Brussels and Geneva respectively) have emerged. Elsewhere the catechumenate is closely linked to catechetical institutions (Spain), liturgical institutions (Belgium) or pastoral institutions (Austria, Germany).¹

The „European Meetings“ And The „European Bureau“

The history of the catechumenate in Europe can be traced through the European „congresses“. Since 1971, there has been a „meeting“ („EuroCat“) every two years, i.e. a kind of „general assembly“, in which up to five delegates of the churches from each country may take part. Great Britain has always sent both a Catholic and an Anglican

¹ And this is how the catechumenate finally came to Austria: In early 1995, the former Swiss person responsible, Jean Bernard Dousse, asked his Dominican „brother“, the then Auxiliary Bishop of Vienna, Christoph Schönborn, whether it would be possible to send someone from Austria to the upcoming EuroCat meeting in Saint Maurice. Bishop Schönborn addressed this request to the Secretary General of the Austrian Pastoral Institute, Walter Krieger, who, in agreement with the executive board of the Austrian Pastoral Institute, agreed to take it. This led to a search for people and institutions in the various Austrian dioceses that were concerned with or open to this topic. Thus, an Austrian delegation was able to participate in the EuroCat meeting in Berlin for the first time in 1997, followed by the Vienna Bureau in 1998.

Subsequently, a „Guide for Adult Catechumenate“ was drawn up by Austrian Pastoral Institute in 2000, and over time, official „contact persons“ were appointed in all the Austrian dioceses, who have been meeting annually since 2001. At the same time, the Austrian Pastoral Institute took over the task of further coordination and international representation.

delegation, and similarly Sweden has sent a Catholic and a Swedish Lutheran delegation.

In the years between EuroCat conferences, a meeting of the „European Bureau“ is held. It is a meeting of those responsible for the catechumenate or contact persons of the individual countries or denominations. The main purpose of this meeting is an international exchange of experience, and there is more time available for that here than during the EuroCat meetings.

Furthermore, the previous EuroCat meeting would be discussed and thoughts would be given to the next one, which would be prepared by the respective host country. A meeting of the European Bureau is also held during a EuroCat meeting to determine or confirm the locations for the next meetings. In order to promote international communication – especially in the preparation and implementation of EuroCat and EuroCat Bureau meetings – Dr. Walter Krieger (Austria) was appointed as secretary ad experimentum in 2008. His task is to request and pass on information and to keep a list of those responsible for the countries and denominations up to date. The existing website www.katechese.at/EuroCat can be used for this purpose. Interesting information concerning the next meetings and country reports can be posted there.

Since 2012, there have been two different kinds of Bureau meetings:

Bureau A is about evaluating the previous congress and the reports from the countries with an exchange of experiences on current topics, in continuation of previous Bureaus.

Bureau B deepens a topic that is important for the catechumenate. There is usually a speaker's impulse for this, later there is ample time for an in-depth discussion, in which the different situations, observations, experiences and reflections of the individual participants are brought into relation with each other. The topic is prepared by the host country.

PERSPECTIVES

Characteristics Of The European Meetings

Catechumenate and evangelisation²

The catechumenate is developing in Europe because there is a search for the meaning of life, because people of today all across Europe are rediscovering an interest in religion. However, in order to reach the person who is searching for spirituality and faith, someone must be filled with passion and longing to proclaim the Gospel.

Here we discover a highly contemporary dimension of the catechumenate. It is about an individual and community accompaniment of people who want to become Christians. Experienced companions affirm that the catechumenate is enriching and inspiring, even for one's own faith. One gives much, but one also receives much.

Contrary to a one-sided emphasis on the intellectual and cognitive dimension of faith, the catechumenate is about life as a whole. This includes prayer, celebration and the readiness to give witness. The evangelisation in Europe needs this holistic inspiration. Therefore, the catechumenate is closely related to the whole pastoral and catechetical work. This is also indicated by the respective topics of the European meetings, which are always significant for the whole pastoral and catechetical commitment of the church, beyond the catechumenate in the narrower sense.

Enrichment and openness

The catechumenate in Europe is very enriching with its meetings and discussions. In the catechumenate, there is neither a burdensome tradition nor a boring everyday life. We rediscover an established institution of the old church, which is highly topical for our present situation.

But this requires mutual support. I am convinced that each of the EuroCat meetings provide ideas and experiences which everyone can adapt according to the situation in their own church, in their own country.

One could say that all catechumenates in Europe have a lot in common. That is why it sometimes feels like one big family, in which we share what we experience and what we are. This is a fundamental characteristic of the European catechumenate.

² This article is a summary and supplement to the contribution of Philippe Gueneley, *Die europäischen Katechumenatstreffen*, in: Matthias Ball / Ernst Werner (eds.), *Wege zum Christwerden. Der Erwachsenenkatechumenat in Europa*, Ostfildern 1994.

What would happen to the catechumenate in Austria or Spain if these European meetings didn't exist? Would it and the development it would bring about exist at all? Would many a seeker, who discovered Christ by the way of a catechumenate, have „found nothing” appealing in the church?

Ecumenical aspects

One of the most interesting points in the history of the catechumenate in Europe is the ecumenical aspect. This is underlined by the presence of delegations from the Anglican or Swedish Lutheran Church (and sometimes from other denominations) at the meetings.

Another aspect is the way in which, for example, the 1983 London meeting at Lambeth Palace, organised by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Runcie, or the Lima paper presented by Pastor Max Thurian at the World Council of Churches in Geneva in 1985 were received.

The catechumenate itself has developed somewhat in the direction of ecumenism: the awareness of baptism as the common, unifying foundation of all Christians. And that should not surprise us! For there is only one baptism and therefore baptism is the fundamental source of communion and relationship between the Christian churches. The catechumenate in Europe thus strengthens the ecumenical process.

At these European meetings, we prayed together and exchanged experiences. We listened to each other. And all this has allowed us to see that there are many common aspects and dimensions which unite us, although we remain aware of the differences between our churches.

Inspiration And Challenges For The Church

The changes in the character and values of societies in this world have done much to bring the Church's awareness of its own identity into sharper focus. The Church is present in a humble way in this society like leaven. It knows that it is often far away from the centre of social developments.

The Church has entered a new phase of dialogue with society and at the same time has become more attentive to social problems. Through the Holy Spirit, the Church's awareness and sensitivity to its vocation to evangelise has grown. Today's Church lives again increasingly in the spirit of the catechumenate and undertakes clearer actions with regard to the proclamation of the Gospel.

The process of the catechumenate revives not only the personal dimension of faith, but also that of community; not only of an individual community, but of the whole Christian community. However, this process of revitalisation, awareness and rediscovery of Christian initiation in the Christian community will take time. It is important not to rush things.

This process of the catechumenate realises a living aspect of the pastoral ministry of the Church. Indeed, its importance is underlined by the General Directory for Catechesis (1997), which identifies the journey of the catechumenate as a model for all catechesis.³

Through the process of Christian initiation, our longing for God reawakens to the extent that we become aware that he is a personal God: he is present, he loves us, he has a plan for the life of each and everyone of us. The longing for this plan of God guides the catechumens and introduces them more deeply into a Christian way of life as baptised people. This involves a lifelong process of conversion, a process that deepens more and more, that brings joy, lets us experience freedom of faith and leads to salvation.

The catechumenate is the path of conversion and practice in the faith of the Church, addressing in particular adults preparing to receive Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist.

By seizing the opportunity to offer an initial proclamation and basic understanding of the essential elements of the catechumenate (catechesis, liturgy, accompaniment), the catechumenate encourages Christian communities to welcome people. And believers are encouraged to accompany catechumens or to discover the faith themselves in a new way, especially if they were baptised as a child and have come to know the Gospel out of habit but never existentially.

In this sense, similar catechumenal paths can also be recommended to young believers, who are thus accompanied step by step towards an encounter with Christ and towards Christian fraternity.

With regard to the community, the catechumenate can become a pathway towards a more intense ecumenical dialogue and prepare the church for an inter-religious exchange in the spirit of respect and truth. The catechumenate has always been a pedagogy of faith that leads to Christ, who is the way for all humanity. In leading to Christ, it also leads to the foundation of every Christian denomination. It is no coincidence that ecumenical cooperation in the area of the initial proclamation of the Gospel and the catechumenate has been working well for some years now in some countries in Europe and America.

Some regions faced an unexpected challenge in the form of the sudden interest refugees showed in the Christian faith. Not only did they have to deal with language barriers, but also cultural differences and mentalities. In addition, the topic of conversion became topical for some asylum seekers – and suddenly the catechumen-

³ cf. General Directory for Catechesis 1997, Nr. 90; Directory for Catechesis) 2020, Nr. 61-66

nate became a place with legal significance. Asylum seekers from most Muslim countries feel that their very existence would be threatened if they had to return to their home country as baptised Christians. However, with this argument, someone could ask to be baptised while only pretending to have a religious interest. Therefore, the legal authorities question them: Is the person credible? Is the interest in the Christian faith genuine? How can this be „proven“?

In light of this situation, the Austrian Bishops' Conference set up the Coordination Office for Catechumenate and Asylum to assist the catechumens in question in their interactions with the church and legal institutions.

The Way Of Christian Initiation As A Dynamic Process

The individual begins to progressively discover and develop their own identity during catechumenal initiation by living within the community of the Church. With this identity they persistently give witness in the midst of a postmodern society.

The evolution of our society and the signs of the times on the one hand and the attention to the witness of the Church on the other challenge the rediscovery of the catechumenal initiation process. The Holy Spirit, who is constantly at work in the Church, helps with walking this path of faith and understanding the Gospel, which is the cornerstone of our faith. Throughout whole process of initiation into the Christian faith, this leads to new Christians becoming rooted in the Gospel and embracing this as their spiritual home. They are inspired by the words of the gospel they have received and feel encouraged by the promise of salvation and happiness.

This process involves a preparatory phase of initiation, in which the heart of the individual seeker finds the centre of the Christian message, but above all, they find Christ, who reveals the Father, who is the source and goal of the message. In this process, the message of the Gospel, which now accompanies life, is discovered. The catechumen then has the opportunity to encounter the Gospel in a living form: in a community that lives according to the Gospel and gives witness to its effectiveness. In this encounter, Jesus Christ becomes the centre of faith. Through him the catechumen begins to understand, to seek and to long for all that God offers to this world through his Church.

The role of the local community of faith becomes more and more concrete and alive in this process and on this journey of faith. Christian initiation in this way becomes a stage of introduction and a new way of life built entirely on the Gospel, the good news of Jesus for the lives of people in every time and place.

At the same time, the introduction of the catechumenate challenges the ecclesial community to renew its life and testimony. This is a special opportunity to fill pastoral

ministry with a new missionary, evangelising dimension in fruitful and real collaboration between priests, deacons, monks and nuns, couples and laity.

Catechumenal development leads to a decisive following of Jesus Christ in an experience of faith which leads increasingly to greater participation in the life of the Christian community. The fruits of this process for the individual are seen in the building of a deep and personal relationship with God in prayer, in union with brothers and sisters in common faith, and in service to this world by taking responsibility for all that God has entrusted to the family of humanity.