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April 2025:

Persecution in the Christian life
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The Communion of Saints
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On Being Pastoral

BY JAMES PAULEY

“And so, accompaniment is never an indefinite walking with people as they move more and more deeply away from the Lord. For, as Cardinal Dolan continues, ‘if we only accompany but do not convert, then we simply walk beside people farther into the night.’”



CONVERSATION ABOUNDS among Catholic leaders today around the concept of pastoral accompaniment. During this month of October, the participants in the Synod on Synodality continue to discuss what it means to be a listening, synodal Church. Inside and outside the synodal context, many have argued that the Church needs to take a much more “pastoral” stance toward people. Often, however, what they mean is that the clear and unambiguous proclamation of truth must not be as central to the Church’s mission as it once was. Rather, it’s argued, the Church

must become more adept at listening, at dialoguing, at seeking to better understand.

It is true that personal accompaniment is necessary for Catholic evangelization and catechesis today. Effective evangelists know this. Indeed, magisterial teaching has proposed accompaniment for decades. The 1997 *General Directory for Catechesis* described “slow stages” of evangelization and insightfully points out that “dialog and presence in charity” *must precede* “the proclamation of the Gospel and the call to conversion.”¹ That is, before we proclaim Christ and call someone to change, if we wish to do so fruitfully, we will respectfully listen and come to know the person before us, remaining present in charity—no matter what. Such empathy and respect is due to every person. It is, in fact, an essential ingredient for anyone to freely become open to the Gospel and the challenging call to conversion—to change how one sees and lives. The 2020 directory goes a bit deeper:



The present understanding of the formative dynamics of the person requires that *intimate communion with Christ*, already indicated in the existing Magisterium as the ultimate end of the catechetical initiative, should not only be identified as a goal but also brought about through a process of accompaniment. In fact, the overall process of internalizing the Gospel involves the whole person in his unique experience of life. Only a catechesis that strives to help each individual to develop his own unique *response of faith* can reach the specified goal.²

1 Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997), no. 47.

2 Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, *Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2020), no. 3 (emphasis original).

Evangelization and catechesis are not merely about content delivery, though the content of Revelation is always central to this mission. Our hope is that a person becomes *interiorly responsive* to Jesus, choosing to freely step forward toward him. In our current day, such a movement is most likely to happen when a person hears the bold proposal of the Gospel and is also helped by another's witness and experience to form a personal response.

It is imperative to note, though, that "being pastoral" never involves a diminishment of the demands of the Gospel. Nothing is more pastoral and kind than speaking the truth in love to another person. Christianity is, in its essence, a proposal of the love of God that requires a radical turn, a deep conversion of life. For the Christian, our ways of thinking and living have to become more and more aligned with what Christ has revealed and the grace he has given. In this context, we can see that to merely accompany and *not propose conversion* to the fullness of life in Christ is not pastoral. It's neither loving nor kind. And it's certainly not Christian. Pastoral accompaniment doesn't mean that the truth of the Gospel should in any way be compromised, weakened, or abandoned. The key is knowing when to listen, when to seek understanding, and when it is important to speak.

The New Testament story most often drawn upon in describing accompaniment is the encounter of the disciples with Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13–35). We know the result of this conversation: their "hearts burn[ed] within" them and they recognized him "in the breaking of the bread" (vv. 32, 35). And then they turned around and went back to the Church that was bursting into life in Jerusalem. Cardinal Timothy Dolan suggests, when considering pastoral accompaniment, that we take in the *full* Emmaus account, each of the different initiatives the Lord undertook on behalf of these disciples who were leaving the Body of Christ. Cardinal Dolan suggests that our mission today is "to draw near, to accompany, to question, to listen" but also eventually "to rebuke the lack of faith, to teach the truth of the Gospel, to reveal Christ, to restore hope, to convert, to return to

the Church.”³ These are the various facets of how Jesus *pastored* those who were leaving the Church, each action undertaken out of profound love.

And so, accompaniment is never an indefinite walking with people as they move more and more deeply away from the Lord. For, as

Cardinal Dolan continues, “if we only accompany but do not convert, then we simply walk beside people farther into the night.”⁴ It is the catechist’s duty to propose light and

. . . to merely accompany and not propose conversion to the fullness of life in Christ is not pastoral. It’s neither loving nor kind. And it’s certainly not Christian.

truth, always from a place of love, in ways that each person can receive. In short, it is our task not only to walk beside others but also to hold high the lamp and illuminate the way.

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Art Credit: Don Bosco Hears Confession, 1880, Salesiani Don Bosco, Flickr.com.

3 Cardinal Timothy Dolan, “Lord, to Whom Shall We Go?: Report on the Synod,” *Catholic New York*, October 26, 2015.

4 Dolan, “Report on the Synod.”

Silence, Simplicity, and Slowing Down

BY BILL DILL

“As our culture gets louder and moves faster,
it seems often to move less thoughtfully, as well.
Our culture seems to continually diminish our space and
time to think . . . And if there is little time to think,
there is even less time to deeply reflect.”



“**T**HE HARVEST IS ABUNDANT but the laborers are few”
(Mt 9:37). As youth ministers, there is so much to do. Youth
group is on Wednesday, parent meeting on Thursday, parish
festival this weekend, the website needs an update, the copier is
jammed, the admin needs help with Canva, volunteer formation
night next week, and the liability forms for the retreat need to go
out. Collections are low, someone burned out and quit, and we
don’t have the finances to hire this year, so the staff will need to
work together to cover their responsibilities. Might this sound
familiar?

We need Saints!

But what is our primary call? To know and love the Lord. What is the best thing we can do for our youth and our parish? Know and love the Lord. And yes, serve the Lord, but note: that does come third.

We need saints in our parishes and on our parish staff. We need authentic witnesses much more than we need great speakers, organizers, or teachers. Yes, these skills are important, but a holy disciple will usually be more effective than a skilled disciple—and far more effective than a burned-out disciple or a purely bureaucratic disciple. But effective at what?



What is our purpose at the parish? To balance the budget? To get a teacher for every class? To get the schedule completed? Those tasks are necessary. They need to be done. However, they are a means to an end. Our real purpose is to be authentic witnesses as holy, healthy, joyful disciples of Christ and to invite others to “come and see” as Jesus did.

But do we feel like disciples of Christ, or do we feel more like ecclesiastical bureaucrats? Do we really believe that by working more hours or more industriously or more efficiently that we’ll really get “everything done”? How much did Jesus cram into his work week? Did he meet all his deadlines?

When I was a teenager, I made a clear decision to give my life to help other teens experience the love of Jesus. Our teens today, just like then, are starving to experience his love. We have such a gift to give them! The temptation for me is thinking that if I work harder or longer I can help more teens encounter Christ. But what a tragedy to “save the world” and lose my own soul—or not care well for the souls of my wife or children. St. Thomas

Aquinas wrote that we do not have an equal responsibility to everyone on the planet. Rather, we have a greater responsibility to those in our immediate family and friend group.¹ For instance,

*A holy disciple will usually
be more effective than a
skilled disciple.*

no one else can be a husband to my wife or a father to my children. This is my primary vocation, but it is tempting to spend the best of myself at work caring for other people's children.

Our world is full of time-saving devices. We are always pushed—by ourselves or others—to accomplish “more.” While it is obviously true that “the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers few” (Mt 9:37), we are not called to accomplish all the work of all the missing laborers. Christ calls each of us to follow him—to live as he lives, to love as he loves. This takes time. It takes time to love. It takes presence. My wife and I often quote a friend who once said, “parenting is not efficient.” Many of us know from experience that getting multiple children to Sunday morning Mass on time with all their clothes on—in a kind, loving manner—is not efficient. The same can be said of our work. Good ministry is not time efficient.

Is Busy Better?

As our culture gets louder and moves faster, it seems often to move less thoughtfully, as well. Our culture seems to continually diminish our space and time to think. We can't even use a public bathroom without facing advertisements vying for our attention. And if there is little time to think, there is even less time to deeply reflect. With so few moments to reflect, how often do we really pray?

We are frequently frustrated by how busy our parish families are. They have sporting tournaments, school plays, and a myriad of other activities—so there just isn't time to come to faith

1 St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 26.

formation or retreats. We can't make them slow down or change their priorities. We can, however, make changes in our *own* life to model a slower pace, a healthy work-life balance, and prudent priorities. I often find myself joking about the importance of saying "no," but it's really no joke at all. We must say "no" frequently so that we can give a full "yes" to the Lord and what he is calling us to do. Christ calls us to serve and has put a desire to give of ourselves deep into our being. Perhaps, then, we should avail ourselves of a more positive approach to "no": "Yes, I can do X, Y, or Z, but I can't do that and my current work. What would you like me to drop?"

Let's consider a few things our youth formation leaders have actually been asked to do:

- Manage the website, social media pages, and the bulletin
- Pick up slack in the elementary and adult ministries
- Coordinate parish events, such as volunteer appreciations, staff birthdays, and teacher appreciation
- Help teach classes in the school
- Help in the school kitchen when they are short staffed
- Use their personal Sam's Club membership for church purchases
- Start Little Flowers and Blue Knights clubs
- Pick up furniture bought off of Facebook Marketplace for the church offices
- Solve tech issues, since they are typically the youngest people on staff, even though most parishes pay an outside company for tech support
- Substitute in the school or for the parish nurse
- Run a family ministry event, including scheduling planning meetings with volunteers, coordinating signups, and being on-site for the event
- Serve donuts on Donut Sundays
- Take the pastor's dogs out for a walk and potty break

Ecclesiastes teaches that there is a time for everything (Ecclesiastes 3:1). We have the wonderful gift of the liturgical seasons to make extra time to focus on certain parts of our life in Christ. We need to do the same each day and each week. Let's be sure to take time with Christ and his Word each morning. Let's be sure to take time to pray with our fellow disciples each day and each week. Let us work productively in a healthy environment for a healthy amount of time. Let us be peaceful and fully present to the Lord and our youth and families when it is time for ministry. No one would suggest that John Paul II or Mother Teresa didn't get much done. However, they both took a significant amount of time for prayer and were both very present to the person who was right in front of them.

In this noisy world, silence can be hard to find. But we must find it. Think of the "still, small voice" of God in Scripture.² How are we to hear this voice in our heart if our life is full of noise and our mind consumed with busyness? Yes, there is time for music and laughter and revelry, but we must pursue times of silence, as well.

I often fall prey to the sin of greed—I want to do more, accomplish more, reach more, meet more. St. Francis of Assisi gets credit for saying, "Do few things and do them well." I need to remind myself of this often, and I suspect that many others may need to as well. There are good reasons to lean toward doing few things well over doing more things poorly. First of all, we have very few reports of Jesus, our model, doing things poorly. Second, we are called to love. Those we are serving are usually better served and thus, better loved, when we do things well—especially when doing things well includes doing things in a timely manner. Often, doing more causes me to be more harried, which quickly leads me to be less careful and less kind. I am greatly saddened when I realize I have not treated people—especially my family, my co-workers, or my volunteers—well, that I have not truly been present to them or taken the time to listen to them. "Much done" but not "much loved" is a net fail.

2 See, for example, 1 Kgs 19:12, Ex 3:2, Dt 4:11, Jb 4:16, Ez 1:4.

Whether it is a fault in our personality, our boss, our job description, or the structure of our church administration, I'm convinced we would all do well to simplify and slow down. Haste really can make waste: If I accomplish much but fail to love, I've wasted my day. If I do it enough, I've wasted my life.

*In this noisy world, silence
can be hard to find.
But we must find it.*

So what do I do?

Let me suggest a few practical steps:

1. Have a conversation with your supervisor and/or pastor to make sure you know what they really want you to accomplish. Sometimes we think they expect more or want different results than they actually do.
2. Weigh your job description against what you actually do. We all tend to add our own touches to our work that we think are very important and thus, sometimes, are responsible for our own busyness.
3. Weigh your goals against your work. Is this program or this task actually accomplishing your mission?
4. Prioritize. If you can't do it all (reminder: you can't), then do the tasks that are most in line with your mission.
5. With appropriate permission, cut the unnecessary.
6. Be a good, responsible, diligent servant. We are called to work hard. We have a sacred mission—arguably, the most important mission on earth.

Nothing I've said here should be misconstrued to suggest that our workday should be "easy." The ideals of working hard, being effective, being peaceful, and working reasonable hours are not incompatible. In fact, done right, they are mutually supportive.

Simplifying, slowing down, and finding silence is really hard to do in our culture. Hard, but not impossible. This only means that we must be very intentional. Fr. Jacques Philippe has some wisdom for us if we find it challenging to slow down:

If I am still not able to remain at peace when faced with difficult situations, then it is better that I should begin to strive to keep this peace in the easier situations of everyday life: to quietly and without irritability do my daily chores, to commit myself to doing each thing well in the present moment without preoccupying myself with what follows, to speak peacefully and with gentleness to those around me, to avoid excessive hurry in my gestures and in the way I climb the stairs! The first steps on the ladder of sanctity could very well be those of my own apartment! ³

Bill Dill is originally from St. Louis, Missouri. He is married to his wife, Tiffany. They have four children, are part of the Community of Christ the Redeemer, and reside in St. Paul, Minnesota. Bill graduated with an MPS from the University of Dallas in 2000. He has served two years with NET Ministries, four years in high school campus ministry, a year with St. Paul's Outreach, three years as a dorm chaplain, taught theology at both the high school and university level, and then served 22 years at the Archdiocese of St. Paul & Minneapolis in both marriage preparation and youth ministry.

Art Credit: Adobe Stock.

³ Fr. Jacques Philippe, *Searching for and Maintaining Peace: A Small Treatise on Peace of Heart*, trans. George Driscoll and Jannic Driscoll (Staten Island, NY: Society of St. Paul, 2002), 82.

Confident Trust

BY LANI BOGART

“We are called to an impossible mission.
We, who are prone to sin, we who constantly
fail to love, are called to the heights of holiness.
And we have no hope of reaching those heights except
by abandoning ourselves completely to God’s mercy.”



“**Y**ES, ‘TIS SWEET TO TRUST IN JESUS, / just from sin and self to
cease, / just from Jesus simply taking / life and rest, and joy
and peace.”¹ These lyrics, sung repeatedly in my youth, planted in
my heart seeds of longing to trust Jesus, to hear his voice, to take
him at his word, to be confident that he speaks to me. So far, the
journey has consisted of trudging through miles of the mud of
my doubts and renewed resolves, punctuated by joyful epiphanies
and triumphs. I also look back on humiliating defeats from
which, paradoxically, my trust in God’s love and mercy grew more
confident than I once imagined possible.

¹ “‘Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus,” Louisa M. R. Stead (1882), full lyrics and music available at https://hymnary.org/text/tis_so_sweet_to_trust_in_jesus_just_to.

I was still a child when I began to conceive of growth in holiness as something like a self-improvement project, with the



goal of eliminating vice and growing in virtue. If something went wrong, I'd ask myself where I messed up and make a resolve to do better next time. If I had a nightmare, I'd chastise myself for not praying before I went to sleep. This "be good, and God will bless you"

approach to my relationship with God kept me on the straight and narrow in my youth and followed me into adulthood.

Although I could quote Scripture, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast" (Eph 2:8–9), shadows obscured my view of the heart of the Father. So, I tried repeatedly to prove my love for him. I worried whether I was pleasing God rather than simply receiving his love for me. Thankfully, Jesus, our Good Shepherd, comes to our aid even when we've lost our way (see Lk 15:3–7).

Sacramental Graces Aid Trust

Soon after becoming Catholic, I discovered that God is a communion of persons who created man and woman to image him, the Holy Trinity. He always takes the initiative in our relationship with him. At our baptism, Christ pours into us the supernatural virtues of faith, hope, and love. With each Holy Communion we are fortified, especially in the virtue of charity, which is the very essence of the Trinity, for "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). Always ready to draw near, Jesus comes into our bodies and souls, strengthening our trust and confidence in him. "The principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion

is an intimate union with Christ Jesus” (CCC 1391). How could such intimacy not increase trust? We naturally trust those with whom we are most intimate.

Conversely, when intimacy wanes, doubts and fears find a way into our minds and hearts, weakening our trust. The same is true in our relationship with God. We may withdraw from intimacy with him, perhaps by prioritizing other interests over Mass or adoration. Or maybe it’s more subtle. Where once we were quick to obey every little prompting of the Holy Spirit, we may ignore the “still small voice” (1 Kgs 19:12). Each little withdrawal erodes intimacy, damaging trust until we wonder if God really hears our prayers. The flame of intimacy that once burned strong is diminished.

But Christ gives us a sure remedy to rekindle our flame of intimacy, renewing

our trust. Along with the Eucharist, the healing sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick

We naturally trust those with whom we are most intimate.

are guaranteed encounters with Christ in which trust is restored. As the words of absolution ring in our ears, we know Christ’s love anew and begin again on the path to holiness.

St. Thérèse’s Theology of Childlike Confidence

In his book *I Believe in Love*, Fr. Jean D’Elbée writes of St. Thérèse of Lisieux’s teaching that when we humbly turn to Jesus in our misery, weakness, and littleness, he cannot resist coming to our aid. “The elevator which must raise me to the heavens is Your arms, O Jesus! For that I do not need to grow; on the contrary I must necessarily remain small, become smaller and smaller.”² After extolling St. Thérèse’s theology, Fr. Jean adds, “What I cannot do myself Jesus will do. He will take me and lift me up to

2 St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *Manuscrits autobiographiques*, 244, quoted in Jean C. J. D’Elbée, *I Believe in Love: A Personal Retreat Based on the Teaching of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. Marilyn Teichert and Madeleine Stebbins (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2001), 28.

the summit of the mountain of perfection, to the summit of the mountain of love.”³ That is amazing trust! Thérèse believed God would make her a saint, and he did!

Having heard St. Thérèse’s elevator analogy before, it may be tempting to dismiss it with a cursory glance. “I know, I know,” we might say, “we must humble ourselves and ask for God’s help.” But this misses the point of what our saint friend, fondly known as the Little Flower, wants us to grasp. We are called to an impossible mission. We, who are prone to sin, we who constantly fail to love, are called to the heights of holiness. And we have no hope of reaching those heights except by abandoning ourselves completely to God’s mercy.

What if we go to Confession, yet return to the same sin again and again? What if we repeatedly fail to act on our resolutions? What if our will is weak or we’re not sure what we want? Maybe the struggle has not been weeks or months, but years or decades. We can be assured, even if hopelessness threatens, that God has not abandoned us. We can boldly trust that, if we confide in Christ, he will make us holy. There is no such thing as too much confidence in God’s love. Aware of the gravity of sins committed, along with the fact that St. Thérèse lived a life of exemplary holiness, some might object that God’s mercy was for her, but not for them. She foresaw such objections when she compared the worst possible sins to a drop of water in the furnace of God’s merciful love.⁴

Another Saint’s Insistence on Trust

Author Brennan Manning recounts the story of ethicist John Kavanaugh, who volunteered in Calcutta at the “house of the dying.” While he was there, he met Mother Teresa, who asked him what he would like her to pray for. When he said he wanted her prayers for clarity, she refused—saying his insistence on clarity

3 D’Elbée, *I Believe in Love*, 28.

4 Ibid.

was what he most needed to let go. Instead, she promised to pray for him to trust.⁵

Could God be Less Trustworthy than Earthly Parents?

When our 18-month-old granddaughter falls, her cries and outstretched arms melt the heart of her father, who rushes to her aid. If she refuses her father's consolations in favor of her mother, he is not offended in the slightest and places her safely and tenderly into her mother's arms. If, in another scenario, she cannot have what she wants and her cries escalate to a tantrum, one or both of her parents remain with her until she is calm and

There is no such thing as too much confidence in God's love.

ready to receive their love. It's unthinkable that God is less patient, kind, and loving toward us than a mother and

father are toward a small child. He will do whatever it takes to come to our aid and to provide everything we need to become the saints he created us to be. How he longs for us to trust him!

Acknowledging God's Indwelling Presence

We tend to forget that God is not far off but dwells inside us. A simple but powerful practice to strengthen our trust in God is to frequently call to mind that he is here with us. Our bodies are, according to St. Paul, temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). Why is it that we are more likely to remember this when we feel ashamed of actions that may defile the temple? While admitting and confessing our sins is necessary, it's salutary to shift the focus away from a host of temptations and possible failures toward the truth that God himself is within us, empowering us to reject the bad and choose the good. We are not alone. He is with us.

5 Brennan Manning, *Ruthless Trust: The Ragamuffin's Path to God* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2000), 5.

What's more, "we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16). When we remember this, we can confidently go forward, completely overcoming the lie that we are alone, unwanted, or estranged. A quick and easy way to acknowledge God's presence is to make a reverent Sign of the Cross, remembering that it's a sign of God's love for us. This practice has given me courage in some of life's most difficult situations. It's a practice worth cultivating.

Confident trust in Jesus frees us to be more fully present to those God sends our way. It allows us to detach from our own expectations and make space for the Holy Spirit to work in and through us moment by moment.

Lani Bogart (M.A. Theology) writes from Houston, TX, where she and her deacon/carpenter husband daily practice trusting Jesus with everything.

Art Credit: Pixabay.com by Andi Graf.

Why It Is Important to Teach Clearly about Hell

BY RALPH MARTIN

“How clear it is from numerous Scriptures that Jesus is a sign of contradiction! He will reveal the secrets of hearts and be the cause for the rise and fall of many; he will seriously divide families; he will be loved by some and hated by many.”



FOR A LONG TIME NOW, there has been a growing sympathy in the Catholic Church, on both theological and popular levels, for the doctrine of universalism: the belief that no one or perhaps very few will actually find themselves in hell. Whether the ideas come from esteemed theologians, well-known bishops, or even comments and documents from Rome that seem to be sympathetic to universalism, I think it is likely that perhaps the majority of Catholics have come to assume this belief.

Many people subscribe to the view that God is so merciful that perhaps nobody will be lost, or, if so, only a particularly

evil few. For example, the ambiguity that is characteristic of *Amoris Laetitia* (“On Love in the Family”) on this issue, not to mention other similar comments by high-ranking Church leaders, seems to inculcate doubt about whether hell is really a relevant



consideration for most people today. In *Amoris Laetitia*, there is the startling but vague statement that “No one can be condemned forever, because that is not the logic of the Gospel! Here I am not speaking only of the divorced and remarried, but of everyone, in

whatever situation they find themselves” (no. 297).

Whether the document is addressing Church penalties or the ultimate penalty of hell is not clear. Even with ecclesiastical penalties, such as excommunication, it is entirely possible that if the person does not repent before he dies, what is bound on earth will be bound in heaven, with “forever” consequences. Whatever is meant by the “logic of the Gospel,” it certainly can’t mean that those who reject faith or die in unrepentant grave sin will be saved, which would be clearly contrary to the “logic of the Gospel.”

The Testimony of Scripture

All of this has insinuated doubt and then presumption into the hearts and minds of many Catholics today. If I were to describe how very many of our fellow Catholics think about the world today, I would say this: Broad and wide is the way that leads to heaven and almost everybody is heading that way. But narrow is the way and difficult the path that leads to hell and hardly anybody is going that way.

This, of course, is the exact opposite of how Jesus describes the situation in Matthew 7:13–14: “Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

How clear it is from numerous Scriptures that Jesus is a sign of contradiction! He will reveal the secrets of hearts and be the cause for the rise and fall of many; he will seriously divide families; he will be loved by some and hated by many. This will result in a final separation of the just and the unjust on the day of judgment, when the believers and unbelievers—the good grain and the weeds, the good fish and the bad fish, the sheep and the goats—will be definitively separated: the unjust into eternal fire and the just to eternal life.¹

Of course, not being fundamentalists, we need to consider the whole scriptural

testimony concerning salvation. And we know certainly that God wills the salvation of the whole human race (see 1 Tim 2:4). We also know, though, that the freedom given to humans to accept or reject salvation is very real. And the testimony

“The prevailing theological consensus was that more were lost than were saved, a view held by both Augustine and Aquinas.”

of Scripture seems to overwhelmingly witness to the fact that there will be a significant division in the human race over Jesus, and that many will be lost and many will be saved in proportions known only to God.

This has been the unbroken belief of the Church through most of her history. It has not been seriously challenged, except by occasional theologians who, if they gained any credence, were

¹ Cf. the Parable of the Sower (Mt 13:18–23); the Parable of the Net (Mt 13:47–50); and Jesus’ description of the Final Judgment (Mt 25:31–33).

condemned for views to the contrary. As Cardinal Avery Dulles sums up his reading of Church history, it was not until the middle of the 20th century that sympathy to universalism began to spread. Until that time, he asserts, there were no significant challenges to the traditional two-outcome views of the Catholic Church. The prevailing theological consensus was that more were lost than were saved, a view held by both Augustine and Aquinas. “As we know from the gospels, Jesus spoke many times about hell. Throughout his preaching, he holds forth two and only two final possibilities for human existence: the one being everlasting happiness in the presence of God, the other everlasting torment in the absence of God. . . . Taken in their obvious meaning, passages

“ . . . *hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs.*”

such as these give the impression that there is a hell, and that many go there; more, in fact, than are saved.”²

For our catechetical purposes, it is absolutely essential to know what God has revealed to us about the reality of hell, starting with Sacred

Scripture, which has a power and clarity in its expression that nothing else can equal. Then, we need to see what the Church has said to us about this reality over the centuries, especially how the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* expresses these truths today. And this is not abstract, “ivory tower” theology: these are urgent words of warning trying to save us from eternal destruction. If we really love people, we need to tell them these most important truths—or we will be held accountable.

Unfortunately, such widespread universalist sympathies, even though they do not rise to the level of heresy, certainly

2 Avery Cardinal Dulles, “The Population of Hell,” *First Things*, May 2003, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2003/05/the-population-of-hell>.

influence teaching and pastoral approach. If hell is empty, there is a natural tendency to pay more attention to “improving the world” and to sympathize with the world’s causes than to focus on the bold proclamation that the name of Jesus is the only name that can save anyone (see Acts 4:12). Or that people need to “save themselves from this wicked generation” through repentance, faith, and baptism (Acts 2:40). Or that in order to escape the wrath that is coming—the final judgment—they need to join themselves to Jesus and the Church and obey his commands (1 Thes 1:10). If hell is empty (or nearly so), do we really need to insist that what Jesus and the apostles teach on the purpose of human sexuality and marriage must be obeyed in order to be saved? Or could we fudge it a little to better align ourselves with the spirit of the age? This is clearly the pastoral approach of many in the Church today, and it is, unfortunately, seriously imbalanced.

So, let’s consider: what does the Church teach about the reality of hell and the likelihood of going there? As we do so, let’s remember what Vatican II taught about how we as Catholics should approach the Sacred Scriptures.

Dei verbum, Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, clearly states how the Church has always understood Sacred Scripture. The primary author of Sacred Scripture is God. He works through human authors and their mentalities and cultures, but “everything asserted by the sacred authors should be considered to be asserted by God.” Indeed, the Scriptures “teach faithfully, firmly and without error those truths God wished to consign to the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation.”³

What Does the *Catechism* Teach about Hell?

Basing itself on Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, the *Catechism* clearly teaches that anyone who dies unrepentant in serious sin will go directly to hell, defining it as the “state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed,” reserved for those who by their own free choice “refuse to

3 Second Vatican Council, *Dei verbum*, no. 11.

believe and be converted” from sin, even to the end of their lives (CCC 1033–34).

The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, “eternal fire.” The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs (CCC 1035).⁴

The traditional teaching based on Scripture is that, since we are bodily creatures, our resurrected bodies will participate in the eternal joys or eternal horrors of our ultimate destinies.



In 1979, under Pope John Paul II, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith responded to some questions on eschatology. It made this statement: “In fidelity to the New Testament and tradition, the Church believes in the happiness of the just who will one day be with Christ. She believes that there will be eternal punishment [*poena aeterna*] for the sinner who will be deprived of the

sight of God, and that this punishment will have a repercussion on the whole being of the sinner.”⁵

This is not just an esoteric discussion on “dogma.” The truths concerning the ultimate destinies of human beings are the

4 See also CCC 1038.

5 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Letter on Certain Questions concerning Eschatology,” May 17, 1979.

most important truths for people to know, and unfortunately, they are seldom spoken about anymore. Most frequently they are publicly doubted, or simply ignored, which, after a period of time, casts doubt concerning their importance or truthfulness.

I cannot emphasize enough how serious the situation is when the prevailing mentality is in direct contradiction to the words of Jesus and the whole picture of reality gifted to us in divine Revelation. The *Catechism* calls each Catholic to live their lives in the light of eternity with the biblical worldview controlling their understanding and decisions:

The affirmations of Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church on the subject of hell are a *call to the responsibility* incumbent upon man to make use of his freedom in view of his eternal destiny. They are at the same time an urgent *call to conversion*: “Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

Since we know neither the day nor the hour, we should follow the advice of the Lord and watch constantly so that, when the single course of our earthly life is completed, we may merit to enter with him into the marriage feast and be numbered among the blessed, and not, like the wicked and slothful servants, be ordered to depart into the eternal fire, into the outer darkness where “men will weep and gnash their teeth.” (1036, emphasis added)

Sometimes people say we should not scare people into conversion. But fear of hell and the consequences of sin is an excellent start for the spiritual journey because it does not end there. It leads to “perfect love cast[ing] out fear” of punishment—

which is the journey of a lifetime (1 Jn 4:18). The reality is that hell exists, that it is very likely that many people go there, and that knowing about it is so important that Jesus and the apostles often warned about it. In parable after parable and in apostolic writing after apostolic writing, God is revealing to us that there will be a final separation of the human race at the end of time. The weeds will be thrown into the fire and burned; the wheat brought into the barn (Mt 13:30). The wise virgins will enter the wedding feast; the foolish virgins will not (Mt 25:1–13). The good fish will be kept and the bad thrown away (Mt 13:48). The sons of the devil will be excluded from the kingdom; the sons of God will enter (Mt 13:36–42).

Contemporary Saints: Two Examples

It is important also to note that both in the messages given by Our Lady of Fatima and in those given to St. Faustina there was presented a strong reaffirmation of the reality of hell. In the case of Fatima, the vision of hell given to Jacinta, Francisco, and Lucia, ages seven, nine, and ten, made a profound impression on them and led them to a life of prayer and fasting for the conversion of sinners and reparation for sin. Today, of course, if Mary were teaching similarly aged children in many of our Catholic schools she would be summarily fired. This should give pause to some serious reflection on how deeply we have been affected by “another gospel.”

In the case of St. Faustina, the main message of Divine Mercy is that the greatest of sinners are most entitled to mercy and that no one should hesitate to come to the Lord to receive that mercy. Unfortunately, what are often neglected are the frequent warnings given that indicate that those who don't respond to God's mercy will indeed experience God's judgment, which includes the reality of hell. St. Faustina recounts how an angel was sent by God to show her the reality of hell, which she describes in some detail in entry 741 of her *Diary*.⁶ Did the

6 St. Faustina Kowalska, *Diary: Divine Mercy in My Soul* (Kraków: Misericordia, 2019), 2nd notebook, no. 741, pp. 387–88.

Lord through Mary at Fatima and through St. Faustina remind us of the reality of hell in anticipation of the future wave of universalism that would infiltrate the Church?

There are numerous attempts to explain away the plain meaning of Scripture and its constant interpretation by the Church. Sometimes by sophisticated theological speculation,⁷ sometimes by just wishful thinking and foolish presumption, the result of darkened minds. One of the most common rejections of this hard but merciful teaching is found among those who speak of the “salvation optimism” of Vatican II and a supposed development of doctrine that leads in a universalist direction.

When our seminary, Sacred Heart Major Seminary in the Archdiocese of Detroit, wanted to increase the number of faculty who had pontifical doctorates, they asked me if I would be willing to go to Rome to get one. I told them I would if the Angelicum would allow me to work on a topic for my dissertation that would be useful for the Church. They agreed, and I was allowed to examine what exactly the Church teaches about the possibility of being saved without hearing the Gospel. It was published in 2012 under the title *Will Many Be Saved: What Vatican II Actually Teaches and Its Implications for the New Evangelization*.

It is in section 16 of *Lumen Gentium* (Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) that this teaching is most fully developed. In summary: It is possible for people to be saved without hearing the Gospel, under certain conditions:

1. The ignorance of the Gospel must not be culpable.
2. There is a sincere seeking of God.
3. There is a sincere attempt to live according to the light of conscience assisted by grace.

These conditions are cited as evidence for the “salvation optimism” of Vatican II. However, in almost every case where this

7 My book on the question of universalism has lengthy chapters examining the speculations of Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar on this topic. See chapter 5, “Rahner and ‘Anonymous Christians,’” and chapter 6, “Balthasar: Dare We Hope That All Be Saved?,” in *Will Many Be Saved?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012).

topic is treated, the last three sentences of *LG* §16 are ignored. In summary, they state: yes it is possible under certain very definite conditions for people who have heard the Gospel to be saved, but it is very difficult, and very often people do not fulfill the conditions.

But very often, deceived by the Evil One, men have become vain in their reasonings, have exchanged the truth of God for a lie and served the world rather than the Creator (cf. Rom. 1:21, 25). Or else, living and dying in this world without God, they are exposed to ultimate despair. Hence to procure the glory of God and the salvation of all these, the Church, mindful of the Lord's command, "preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:16) takes zealous care to foster the missions. (*LG* §16)

There is a worse virus in the world and Church today than Covid. It is the virus of universalism, which undermines holiness, true worship, vocations, and evangelization. Let us be clear and confident in our teaching and preaching that to transmit the teaching of the apostles and the Church on earth is to show the greatest mercy to souls—all of us—that really are in danger of damnation.

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Art Credit: Woodcut for "Die Bibel in Bildern," 1860. Wikimedia Commons; Chapel of the miraculous image of the Merciful Jesus and the tomb of St. Faustina, Flickr.com, CC.

Evangelization Today, Old and New: Practical Suggestions to Help the Unchurched

BY FR. TYRON TOMSON

“To be a mentor in the ways of holiness,
mind your own house first. Vocations in family life
and religious life lived faithfully attract others like
the stories of the saints—because that’s exactly what they are.”



MY FIRST CHRISTMAS EVE AS A PRIEST, while I was putting the finishing touches on my Midnight Mass sermon, the rectory office doorbell rang continuously with devoted parishioners dropping off many gracious gifts. I opened the door for the umpteenth time, and there appeared before me, a college-aged guy . . . without a present or card. “Are you a priest?” he asked. My collar was apparently not tipping him off. “Yes,” I confirmed. “I want to be Catholic!” he eagerly rejoined. It was a far better Christmas present than any other I would receive.

The technical term “care of souls” sadly remains almost unknown outside of clerical training. The concept encompasses



servicing the spiritual needs of all: reconciling the wayward, evangelizing the unchurched, serving the suffering, challenging the staunch—in short, everything that makes the life of the Church fruitful from the parochial level on

up. An older translation renders it “cure of souls,” highlighting the hope of health for the spirit from the disease of sin with which we are plagued. For that reason, it applies specifically to the responsibilities of bishops and parish priests, the holy doctors of human hearts, but all the faithful have a share in its spirit of pursuing the salvation and sanctification of souls. No devout Catholic can be without a long prayer list for special cases in need of conversion or reversion. Imagine including the ones we’ve not even encountered yet!

The Case of Karl

That young man, we’ll call him “Karl,”¹ had been raised by once-active Catholic parents in a very intentionally nonreligious home. He had briefly encountered Christianity in history class at his suburban public school and then read enough online to recognize the truth of Catholicism, even before he learned of his deep German Catholic family heritage. His mother had been raised in an orphanage run by nuns and adopted into a pious family, but she had rejected the faith and its practice in favor of the collapsed

1 Some extraneous details of Karl’s story have been modified to preserve his anonymity.

culture's prosperity, pleasure, and permissiveness. Her children, along with most of their generation, consequently were deprived of their ecclesial heritage. It was therefore even more devastating for Karl after he realized what he had missed and who had failed him in their formative responsibilities, and why.

The spiritual upheaval of the 1970s resulted in innumerable such cases, as painful as any of history. As many have observed, that provides us with a huge opportunity for re-evangelizing. However, fewer have noted how that window is closing in many ways, and quickly. Outside of the significant immigrant community (whose impact on data remains poorly understood), the last vestiges of cultural Catholicism's expectations and benefits have now dissipated. Sacramental statistics among the present demographic swath are plummeting at freefall rates with no nadir in view. Soon, no one will have living halcyon memories of crowded schools fully staffed by religious sisters at bursting ethnic parishes on every city block. The New Evangelization ages very rapidly in this implosion scenario, basically leaving us with the Old Evangelization again: we will be sharing the *kerygma* with those who have heard rumblings about it more than had deep or complicated histories with it, very much as in the days of the Apostles.

A Whole Generation of Karls

As I worked with him, Karl embodied for me the trademarks of his admittedly overanalyzed generation: idealism devoid of effort, intelligence without wisdom, sincerity lacking guile, sickness at their own weakness. Equal parts edifying and saddening. Untangling his sacramental records, family religious history, developmental baggage, internet-fueled hangups, moral battles, and ideologically charged misinformation took a multidisciplinary pastoral approach. Whether his grandparents had insisted upon his baptism or if he had been slogged through some First Communion classes mattered so little as to be essentially immemorable. His case became overwhelming in its complexity

for both of us at first. That’s just one soul; consider a whole generation’s worth.

Thankfully, the faith remains as unchanged and unchanging as its Lord, and the human nature he created possesses constancy as well. So the strategies of evangelization, old and new, should not vary wildly as we announce the Gospel of our salvation to people of each time and place. Younger generations now have an innate, magnetic draw to the original, the

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Younger generations now have an innate, magnetic draw to the original, the unadulterated, the genuine.</i></p>	<p>unadulterated, the genuine. The digital era’s overstimulation has finally begun not just to dull and lull them</p>
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but to turn off and unplug them to pursue the real instead. We have the occasion and duty to connect them to the fullness of that truly true metaphysical realm.

Karl’s Complications

At one point, Karl and I were meeting in my office every single day for weeks on end. Endless internet message boards and catechetical apologetics videos could not replace the personal contact for which he was starved. His home life provided great family support humanly—in fact, too much comfort and convenience, and certainly no challenge in the order of virtue. He did not have healthy, developed friendships. High anxiety and a lack of self-confidence crippled him. Finding a confidant who welcomed him with discretion and attention proved to be pivotal.

I found out later that some very fine mentor figures had attempted to assist him, but the connection never clicked quite right. Waiting patiently for the right timing of each next step could be grueling as he consecutively experienced over the course of some months the dramatic deathbed reversion of his grandmother, the suicide of a childhood friend, the serious

disintegration of his brother's mental health, and other significant obstacles that he navigated through, by God's providence.

Juxtaposed with this, it is patently clear that specialty espresso machines and sound mixer boards in churches are hardly *accoutrement de rigueur* of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Such well-intentioned initiatives can backfire when the prospective beneficiaries realize they have been duped—and not in the biblical sense. These patronizing strategies bear fruit that soon sours. The high mortality rate of pop-up Protestant communities typified by them demonstrates as much. Many souls are attracted by the ephemeral and then brought to the more substantial, and praise God for that. We don't sufficiently appreciate all those searching for seriousness who simply never return after they encounter the Faith in such an enervated presentation.

The Appeal of the Authentic to Karl

Once, Karl and I visited a cloistered monastery for a day of recollection. I took pains to show him important dimensions of the Church that few in the ordinary RCIA/OCIA process might ever see: our soup kitchens, support group meetings, overnight adoration vigils, daily Masses, the Divine Office, and the like. Stories of distant saints in columns of textbooks paled in contrast with immediate immersion into the atmosphere of contemplative prayer and apostolic work in real time. He was enraptured by taking part in what we take for granted or forget about completely: the quiet, everyday activity of the Church.

Authenticity-based spirituality explains the growing appeal of homeschooling, homesteading, and even home births. These sorts are not driven by the cliché consumerist culture (even sometimes to a fault and beyond). Simple living suits them fine. They inhabit an ironic place, where futuristic technology acquiesces to retro values rather seamlessly. For some, the oversaturation of texting and tweeting and far worse has left them disillusioned and reverting to flip phones or “dumb” phones. Not too long ago, a famous Catholic media personality released

a podcast episode after having given up all screens, devices, and media himself, encouraging everyone else to do the same. He gladly acknowledged that it could put him out of business!

Surprising Strategies for Karl

I learned a great deal from ministering to Karl and others similarly. I was surprised to find a fundamental disposition of trust, even a nascent sense of transcendent reverence that had pooled in the void where the ubiquitous teenage “meh” had driven away everything deemed unworthy of attention. The usual, tired arguments failed to capture Karl’s interest for long; we need to be equipped for some of the most profound existential questions. Contending with vice can serve as an ongoing catalyst for ongoing conversion, but that alone does not ultimately constitute the substance of their faith struggle. Prayer, both personal and communal, proved so foreign as to be a long-term area of growth for Karl; the most ground can be gained there (in fact for most of us). Beautifully sublime worship elevated his heart in its search for the mystical like nothing else. These are refreshing spiritual lessons for even well-seasoned members of the faithful.

Young people now don’t fret about understanding every detail, so arcane chant, language, and ritual do not disturb but rather intrigue them. Clarity of teaching with convicted authenticity commands their allegiance. Hypocrisy and scandal remain just as repugnant as ever, thankfully. Overly technical jargon and shallow churchy goofiness are off-putting. Raw charity and extreme mercy speak to them potently. They love tangible sacramentals that are high-quality and meaningful. It is refreshing to see young minds disinterested in, if not disgusted by, the ideological bickering in the Church and the world alike.

Ecclesiastical hierarchs, pastors, evangelists, authors, teachers, and the baptized in general have often pursued the opposite of the Church’s stated goals to bring about the salvation of souls, both with their obvious scandalous moral failings and heterodoxy in teaching and practice. Instead of dynamically

grappling with our disintegrating society's failed value systems, Catholics have become statistically nearly indistinguishable from it. Far from welcoming myriads of new converts, pews and parishes have emptied out. No longer the culture's acknowledged spiritual and moral compass, we bewilderingly still attempt to

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and inviting them to *metanoia*. Fighting more among ourselves has consumed the energy that needs to be directed outwards. We should soberly take responsibility for these sins and correct them, not just at the institutional level but also in our individual lives, with a stout Catholic identity, a serious ecclesial and personal relationship with Christ, which remains the most attractive stimulus for true conversion.

Karl's Story Didn't End at Easter

How did Karl's story end? After some time and effort on everyone's part, he eventually was ready to receive the appropriate sacraments. While not without many struggles, now his faith grounds his life, seemingly as its only permanent feature, although he would be the first to admit that stability is more his strong suit in ideal theory than in applied practice. The Holy Eucharist properly holds the utmost central place in his worldview, but he regularly falls short in praying as he should. Whereas we all tend to see ourselves as exceptions to history, his twitchy heart is emblematic of our human nature's consistent fickleness, fallen as it is. Considering his conversion complete after his parish paperwork was dutifully filed away would be a terrible mistake opposed to

our Catholic understanding, but one that is made far too often. He needs ongoing discipling, like every single one of us.

Labels like “fallen away” and “unchurched” have morphed into a fluid and strained range of ecclesiastical statuses. Many young people describe their reversions in the same terms as classical conversions, discovering their identities and destinies as if for the first time. It’s exhilarating and exhausting to witness the full drama of salvation played out in another soul, yet no two are perfectly alike. While we expend time and resources futilely trying to psychologize why they left, we would be wiser to concentrate on what will summon them in.

An Apostolic Approach to the Karls

To be a mentor in the ways of holiness, mind your own house first. Vocations in family life and religious life lived faithfully attract others like the stories of the saints—because that’s exactly what they are. We might not be official martyrs, but our personal witness is powerful. Prepare for patient, personal accompaniment. Don’t drill the dogma. Even when they come from mainstream or non-denominational backgrounds, often all but empty of coherent doctrine and practice, they don’t need heresies uprooted; they need the dependable authority the Church can provide. Don’t cast meetings as classes with textbooks and boards; consider them extended meditations. Disconnect from the digital and plug into the real. Use authentic experiences, not arguments and gimmicks. Cultivate deep humility before the fullness of truth. Find their transcendent spiritual currency and exchange with them on those terms. Focus not on why they fell away, or even what can bring them back, but what will keep them close. Speak openly, joyfully, and normally about your own faith. Never fall into the temptation to attempt to change the Church and the Lord to please others; change the hearts of others to please the Lord. Above all, encourage them to true prayer. The saints’ praise of God in heaven should be begun by us on earth if we’re planning to make it there.

Have we brought our concerns before the Lord with an open heart, or smugly asked him to confirm our granite mindset and embolden our proselytizing all the more? Do we slough off our evangelizing responsibilities by forming more committees and creating more catechetical content, or do we practice the peripatetic tactics of Christ and his first Christians? Have we imposed our outlines and timelines with endless meetings and business-minded efficiency, or are we really, actually, humanly interested in real, actual humans? We need to examine our ministerial consciences for any trace of self-serving, self-satisfied, self-centered, self-conscious labor in the vineyard.

If Karl's conversion account didn't seem to fall neatly into the pat categories in your mind, you should probably get to adjusting them, as inconvenient and uncomfortable as that might be. Peter and Paul encountered droves of Karls and grew the universal Church by providing for their spiritual and material wellbeing, curing whatever afflicted them within or without, regardless of what level of involvement with the faith they'd had. We're seeing plenty of them these days, too. We need to evangelize them properly by caring for their souls as well as we can.

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Art Credit: *Tobias and the Fish* by Andrea Vaccaro, Naples, 1604-1670; Wikimedia Commons.

Friends of Christ, Friends in Christ

BY PHILIP COUTURE

“What relationship can compare to Christ’s friendship? How many people in our lives have died for us? How many have sacrificed significantly for us? Because of Jesus, we all have at least one such person in our lives. He is the standard for all true friendship.”



WHO AM I, REALLY? What makes me who I am? And how much do other people affect who I become? These perennial questions reflect the fact that we are deeply affected by things around us, especially by other people. In some ways, our surroundings helped make us better people, and in other ways, worse. Whether for better or worse, we can wonder who we would be without these influences in our life. It seems hard to argue against how impactful our relationships are, and it raises the question of just how much our relationships define us.

Our Image and Likeness

The search for our own identity goes hand-in-hand with who God is. The Trinity is “the source of all other mysteries, the light



that enlightens them,” which includes our own mystery (CCC 234).

However, the Trinity is anything but easy to understand, and attempts to resolve the mystery neatly have resulted in numerous heresies in the Church’s history. How can a God

whose identity is beyond human understanding or expression help us understand ourselves? How can the unfathomable essence of God help us fathom who we are?

As mysterious as the Trinity is, the Church’s dogma makes one thing clear: our triune God is a relational God. When two things are in relationship with each other, it means that their existence and identities are intertwined. In this sense, none of the persons of the Trinity can be separated from the others (see CCC 255). The Father cannot be apart from the Son, nor the Son apart from the Father, nor the Holy Spirit apart from either.¹ At the same time, a relationship implies distinguishability; it is not possible to say something is unique if there are no differences to tell it apart from something else. The persons of the Trinity are essentially united, but each is distinguished by their relation to each other (see CCC 254–55). The Father is who he is because of the Son, and vice versa. The Holy Spirit is who he is because he is the Spirit of the Father and the Son.² To put this more simply, the relationship each person of the Trinity has to the others is both unitive and

1 Eleventh Council of Toledo, in *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, ed. J. Dupuis (New York: Alba House, 1982), 102–6, no. 316.

2 *Ibid.*, no. 311.

distinctive: their relationships simultaneously describe their union and their distinction.

Created in God's image and likeness, human persons bear a certain similarity to the relationality of the divine persons.³ Being distinct persons, we are nonetheless made for unity. John Paul II observes that all human reality can be understood through the lens of relationship. In fact, everything in our lives is composed of four fundamental relationships: with God, with oneself, with others, and with the rest of creation.⁴ Sin is ruptured relationship, and reconciliation is its repair. The first sin in Eden is a loss of friendship, and it is echoed in all human strife and injustice.⁵ Salvation history, on the other hand, "is the wonderful history of a reconciliation," a restoration of friendship.⁶ Notwithstanding the immense difference between the divine persons and us, we are also constituted by relationships.

It Is Not Good for Man to Be Alone

It is startling to recognize how much others form us into who we are. Our very lives depend on two people coming together for our sake. If left to fend for ourselves, we will learn from any relationship available to us. The radicality of this truth is seen with so-called "feral children," real-life cases of children who were separated from their parents at an extremely young age and somehow survived. Coexisting with animals, their behaviors bear an uncanny resemblance to the creatures with which they related. Fictional representations of these cases abound, like *The Jungle Book* or *Tarzan*, but the real stories are far more tragic. Most of the time, these children are never able to learn human language or integrate into society. Though they are human by birth, they never learned how to be human. It is relationships, not instincts, that

3 Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 24.

4 John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et poenitentia*, no. 4.

5 *Ibid.*, nos. 14–15.

6 *Ibid.*, no. 4.

help us become persons. We need other people to become who we are.

Even so, it seems we do not have much direction in how to be with other people. Mere connectivity is not sufficient to remedy our relational needs. Disenchanted with fallen humanity, some have chosen to abandon society altogether and live in the wild. However, our relational constitutions follow us everywhere, even if nobody else is around. Perhaps Christopher McCandless said it best in some of his last recorded words before dying alone in the Alaskan wilderness: “HAPPINESS [IS] ONLY REAL WHEN SHARED.”⁷

Others have this loneliness thrust upon them in the wilderness of the concrete jungle, often leading to comparable consequences. In the first year of Christ in the City’s relational ministry to the homeless, the missionaries were directed to a man who had slept under a tree for three weeks. Abandoned to his state, he did not move even to go to the bathroom, leading him to urinate and defecate in his pants. Despite his positioning within

It is relationships, not instincts, that help us become persons. We need other people to become who we are.

the crowds and traffic of downtown Denver, Steve had no relationships to share his life. If it were not for the missionaries,

he would have literally died from loneliness, and even the connectivity of the big city was not enough to cure his poverty of relationships. We are clearly in need of relationships, but not just any relationship.

I Have Called You Friends

God is also not content with just any way of relating with us. The entire Old Testament reveals God’s initiative to renew a relationship with us. Unwilling to allow us to remain as enemies, he unfolds a plan to restore what was ruptured. But it is not

7 Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild* (New York: Vintage Books, 2015), 189.

enough to simply bring us into his household. As Christ said to his apostles, “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (Jn 15:15). God does not just want to relate to us as his servants. He wants to share his life with us. He wants to share the intimacies of the Trinity with us (see Jn 16–17).

The importance of benevolent relationships, of true friends, is one that has been recognized across cultures since before Christ’s coming. Aristotle describes friendship as a treasure worth living for despite any poverty. He observes that friendship seems to hold society together and inform all other relationships, even unequal ones.⁸ However, he is realistic in recognizing that friendship is only possible if some commonality unites them.⁹

The possibility of friendship with God would be unfathomable by Aristotle’s definition. If God is infinite, then there is an infinite distance between us and him. There is simply too much inequality to be bridged.¹⁰ It is a testament to the incomprehensibility of God’s love that the Son relinquished equality with God not just to become like us but become a servant (see Phil 2:6–8; Mt 20:28). He shares our every experience except for sin, since that would be a rupture of friendship (see Heb 2:17–18; 4:15). By taking on our human nature, we are able to take on his divine nature (see 2 Pet 1:3–4). Through his Incarnation, death, and Resurrection, Jesus made himself the best friend we could ever imagine.

Perhaps this has something to do with Christ’s special identification with those who suffer greater miseries, which reflects the ruptures that persist among humanity. When the poor and afflicted seem inhuman to us, Jesus, who “was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the sons of men” (Is 52:14), recognizes himself in them. When the miseries of a person are invisible to society, he who “was despised and rejected by men . . . as one from whom men hide their faces” (Is 53:3) sees them.

8 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. 8, no. 1.

9 Ibid., nos. 6–8.

10 Ibid., no. 7.

No Greater Love

What relationship can compare to Christ's friendship? How many people in our lives have died for us? How many have sacrificed significantly for us? Because of Jesus, we all have at least one such person in our lives. He is the standard for all true friendship. He reminds us that with him all things are possible (see Mt 19:26), and without him nothing is possible (see Jn 15:5). Our friends help form us into who we are, but we would continue to exist without them. God, however, is the one relationship without which we cannot exist, even when he is a stranger to us. Put simply, relationship with God is the source of our existence, and his relational essence makes all other relationships possible.

In fact, it is this incomparable friendship with Christ that makes the greatest of friendships possible. Many saints who are the first to recognize the fickleness of humanity are also the most bound to their holy friends. St. Augustine writes with unapologetic affection to a fellow saint, Paulinus. He declares that he is unimpressed by those who are so patient when distant from their dear ones, and even as Augustine grieves his distance from Paulinus, he is consoled to love him so much that it hurts.¹¹ St. Bernard can relate, as he makes no effort to stoically mourn the death of his brother and best friend. On the contrary, the cries from this passionate monk have the power to make future generations weep for Bernard's loss. "But I do lament the loss of a loyal helper, one whose advice on the things of God was ever reliable. It is Gerard whom I weep for. [. . .] My soul cleaved to his. We were of one mind, and it was this, not blood relationship, that joined us as one."¹² Yet even these pale in comparison to St. Aelred of Rievaulx, whose writings devastate any notion of religious saints being dispassionate and detached friends. Referencing the Scriptures,

11 Augustine of Hippo, "Letter 27 to Paulinus," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, trans. J.G. Cunningham, ed. Philip Schaff, 1st ser., vol. 1 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1887).

12 Bernard of Clairvaux, sermon 26, "The Blackness of the Bride Compared to the Tents of Kedar; Bernard's Lament for His Brother," V.8-9, in *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, online at <https://ia800702.us.archive.org/11/items/St.BernardOnThe-SongOfSongs/StBernardOnTheSongOfSongsall.wps.pdf>.

Aelred asserts that “the one who remains in friendship remains in God, and God in him.”¹³ The saints feel deeply their need for relationship, especially for relationships that bear the image and likeness of Christ.

Since Jesus united himself to our condition, we can become friends with anyone. If friendship requires a basic commonality, then communion with Jesus is what makes all friendship possible because he is our “common-union.” This is the foundation for our commission to go “and make disciples of all the nations” (Mt 28:19). Far from being satisfied with the number of our current Christlike friends, the Lord calls us to go find more. Indeed, if the Church’s mission consists of establishing communion through Christ, then we are called to find these friends throughout world.¹⁴

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Christ in the City is a nonprofit that offers Catholic formation to college-aged missionaries, who in turn regularly walk the streets of Denver with the mission of befriending and supporting the homeless they encounter. To learn more, visit christinthecity.org.

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13 Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, trans. Lawrence C. Braceland, ed. Marsha L. Dutton, Cistercian Fathers 5 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 1:70.

14 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 26.

The Humble Christ

BY ANN SCHMALSTIEG BARRETT

Still Life with Flowers and Grapes Encircling a Monstrance in a Niche by Jan van Kessel. 70 x 105.5 cm oil on copper. 1670. The National Galleries of Scotland. <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/62197>.

A full color image of this painting is available on the back cover of this issue and with the digital version of this article located on the website of the Catechetical Review.



IN THE TRADITIONAL HIERARCHY OF PAINTING, still life has often been viewed as the lowest genre to pursue. While history and religious painting served a moral or spiritual purpose, frequently involving an engaging narrative or drama, still life painting served to depict believable props rather than focusing on the objects themselves. This changed in the Dutch Golden Age as commercial prosperity in the port cities increased the wealth of the 17th-century middle class. With interest in beautifying their homes, the modest still life increased in popularity, adding color to walls while also conveying subtle meaning through composition and the language of symbolism.

One form of still life that developed in the southern part of the Netherlands was the devotional garland painting.





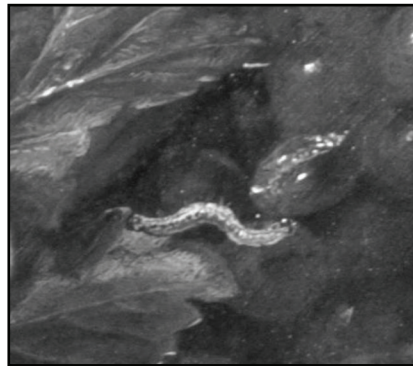
Composed in a predominantly Catholic area, these paintings presented an image of the Madonna and Child or other devotional scene surrounded by an elaborate garland of florals. Not only were the incredible skills of the artist on full display through the intricate detail of the paintings, but the images also reaffirmed the goodness of devotions that were challenged by Protestant neighbors to the north. In preparation for the fourth centennial of the feast of Corpus Christi in 1664, garland paintings adopted a Eucharistic focus, presenting a monstrance or chalice with the Eucharist within an architectural niche. Promoted by the Jesuits, these paintings not only encourage belief in the Real Presence but also cultivated a desire for the Eucharist, combatting the Jansenist discouragement of its frequent reception. In the 1670 painting by Jan van Kessel titled “Still Life of Flowers and Grapes Encircling a Monstrance in a Niche,” we see the rich potential of this humble genre to guide the viewer in meditation on the Eucharist, revealing what appears to be bread to truly be the source and summit of our faith.

Although the Eucharist is at the center of Kessel’s painting, the colorful fruit and florals that frame the niche draw the attention of the viewer. A cornucopia containing the material origins of the Eucharist overflows on each side. The variety of colorful grapes is paired with the variety of grain in the wheat and the corn. While only the wheat is used to make the bread of the Eucharist, the corn (a grain native to the “new world”) highlights the distant lands with which the Gospel is to be shared. We may think of the elevated dignity of the wheat and grapes, chosen by the Creator as that through which he becomes substantially present from generation to generation, but it is even more surprising to consider the humility of the Creator, united to material without distinction and easily trodden underfoot.

Following the vine, the viewer is led to the bouquets of flowers at the foot of the niche. The florals are particularly appropriate for a Eucharistic painting, considering the feast of Corpus Christi was also known as “The Day of Wreaths” due to their use in decorating the streets and in Eucharistic processions.

The symbolism of individual flowers was well known through prayer books, allowing the 17th-century viewer to recognize a deeper meaning within the arrangements. We probably already recognize the rose as a symbol of the Blessed Virgin Mary, with the white, bell-shaped lily of the valley representing her tears while witnessing the Passion. The carnation, representing love, appears next to orange and white anemones. These flowers are often depicted in Crucifixion scenes and are thus associated with Christ's suffering and death. The tulip, a symbol of the fragility of life, is found along with the blue hyacinths, conveying a desire for heaven.¹ All together, the bouquets show the beauty of creation offered back to the Creator while also subtly presenting the drama of the Passion.

While studying the meticulously painted florals, we discover animated life throughout the scene. Insects were a common addition to still life paintings, particularly in *vanitas* scenes, in which ants and flies are found crawling among spoiled fruit. Kessel was well known for paintings of insects, which were often displayed along with the curiosity cabinets of the day. In the context of the Eucharist, Kessel used this area of intrigue to offer further meditation and support devotion. Unlike the *vanitas* paintings, the beetles and snail are found among the branches and florals, respectfully leaving the grapes and wheat untouched. Standing on a leaf in the right side of the painting, a caterpillar reaches toward a grape that has been cut (the only damaged grape in the scene). It is as if the caterpillar sees the wound as necessary



1 The striped tulips also expressed great wealth, as was evidenced by the “Tulip Mania” market bubble, which began in 1634 and burst in 1637. Artists would often compose floral bouquets from botanical drawings or other studies, especially when they involved very expensive and exotic flowers.

for metamorphosis. This transformation from an old life to a new resurrection is found throughout the painting, symbolized by the butterflies that fill the scene.

With the static scene thus enlivened, it is easy to miss the spider that quietly hangs on a thread in the lower left section of the painting. Camouflaged by the darkness of the background, the natural predator is not seen within a web to catch its prey. Rather, it is present to recall Isaiah's prophecy regarding the time when a descendant from Jesse will come: "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid . . . They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD" (Is 11:6, 9). It is through the smallest members of the animal kingdom that we see creation redeemed to its original purpose: revealing the creative glory of God and the harmony of relationship within his presence.

Aware of this context, the viewer is now prepared to perceive the reality within the center of the painting. Along the frame of the niche are the words "*Ecce Panis Aeng[elorum]*" (behold the bread of angels). With "*aeng[elorum]*" partially hidden, the artist signals that we must consider what we do not see in order to fully understand what is being shown. Although the incised phrase is immediately recognized from the Corpus Christi sequence, it is also found within the Old Testament in reference to the manna that nourished Israel as they wandered through the desert: "and he rained down upon them manna to eat, he gave them the bread of heaven. Man ate of the bread of the angels; he sent them food in abundance" (Ps 78:24–25). The full reality of the manna is revealed by Jesus in the bread of life discourse: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever" (Jn 6:51).

This heavenly origin of the Eucharistic bread in the center of the niche is testified by its monstrance. Two angels are presented on either side, like the angels that flanked the ark of the covenant, signifying the presence of God. The pearls and jewels that adorn the monstrance convey the human recognition of the true "pearl of great price" (Mt 13:45–46) and the greatest gift of our faith: Emmanuel, God with us.

While revealing this summit of our faith is the central purpose of the painting, the source of our faith is equally significant.

Crowning the filigrees next to the angels, the *Arma Christi* (weapons of Christ) are sculpturally rendered. The cross stands on the left side, mounted with the sign identifying the king of the Jews, with a torch from the soldiers in Gethsemane in front and the ladder from the disposition behind. On the right, the pillar of the flagellation stands in the center, topped by the rooster whose crow fulfills Christ's prophecy of Peter's betrayal, with the spear of Longinus leaning before the pillar and the sponge attached to a long branch at an angle in the back. Veiled within the shadow of the niche, this devotion meditates on the tools used in the Crucifixion as the weapons by which Christ defeated sin and death. The jeweled cross at the top of the monstrance expresses the transformation of this instrument of torture into the source of our salvation. Within the monstrance, our crucified Lord is shown embossed on the host, establishing the source of our faith in the self-sacrificing love of God.



Each detail of Kessel's painting beckons the viewer to sit a moment longer. Through the guidance of the composition and symbolic expression, the painting directs the viewer beyond what is seen into meditation on the reality of the Eucharist. Although historical and religious paintings may engage the imagination through narrative and drama, it is through the humility of the still life painting that the viewer is given the lens to perceive the humility of God in Eucharistic adoration.

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Accompaniment Toward Faith

BY FR. PIETER VAN ROOYEN

“When God’s word—communicated through Scripture or the definitive teaching of the Church—challenges us, or when he asks for obedience and trust in the face of difficulty or distress, he always promises to provide. But, remarkably, God doesn’t just give us a ram like he gave to Abraham; he gives us his Son.”



IN HIS APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *Evangelii gaudium* (“The Joy of the Gospel”), Pope Francis urged the Church to practice the “art of accompaniment.”¹ But what does this mean, and how do we do it? As others have noted, we have a model of accompaniment in our Lord’s appearance on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13–35).² When the two disciples were walking away from Jerusalem, their hopes dashed at the foot of the Cross, Jesus accompanied them on

1 Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 169; see further nos. 169–73.

2 See, for example, Bob Rice, “Listening and Accompaniment,” *Catechetical Review* vol. 4, no. 4 (October–December, 2018): 42.

the way: he listened to them, he asked questions, and, eventually, he challenged them and shared the Gospel with them.

What does this mean for us catechists, priests, and teachers



who sometimes meet people who are disillusioned and moving “away from Jerusalem”—away from Christian life? How can we help them? Where do we start? Like Christ on the road to Emmaus, we accompany them: we meet them where they are, we enter their lives, we listen to them, and we ask them questions. But also, like Christ, we accompany them toward a destination, so that, with minds enlightened and

hearts set aflame by the Gospel, they may “return to Jerusalem” and live in the power of Christ’s Resurrection. Thus, Christian accompaniment requires a clear sense of our “destination,” and, in particular, a clear understanding of the nature of Christian faith.

In what follows, I briefly outline the nature of Christian faith (as distinguished from “natural faith”), describe its grandeur and demands, and offer some consequences for our ministry.

Faith Defined: Its Object and Motive

Popularly, “faith” means believing something invisible to the eyes or mind. We can call this “natural faith” or simply “belief.” This kind of natural faith is normal in everyday life since we rarely prove things we commonly believe. For example, I believe that England exists even though I have never seen it.

But Christian faith differs from natural faith because it concerns truths beyond this world, things which “no eye has seen” except God, the angels, and the blessed in heaven.³ In Christian

3 Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, no. 7: “the distinction between *theological faith* and *belief* in the other religions, must be *firmly held*.”

faith the believer assents to truths revealed by God in Scripture or through the definitive teaching of the Church because he trusts God, who is truth itself (see CCC 144). So the *Catechism* explains: “Faith is first of all a personal adherence of man to God. At the same time, and inseparably, it is a *free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed*” (150).

Thus we may distinguish two dimensions in Christian faith: (1) the content believed, which is called the “material object,” such as the truths contained in the *Catechism*; and (2) trust in God, which is called the “formal object,” or the motive or grounds upon which man freely gives his assent.⁴ Both dimensions are essential, but the foundation of faith is trust. Again, the *Catechism* states it clearly: “What moves us to believe is not the fact that revealed truths appear as true and intelligible in the light of our natural reason: we believe ‘because of the authority of God himself who reveals them, who can neither deceive nor be deceived’” (156).⁵

Faith: Supernatural

The fact that Christian faith is rooted in trust in God guarantees its supernatural power. Indeed, as St. Thomas Aquinas noted, although faith includes the “imperfection” of not yet seeing or being able to prove what is believed, because faith is rooted in trust in God, the believer “clings” to God and already attains union with him.⁶ Like the woman with the hemorrhage who reached out and touched Jesus (Mk 5:25–34), the believer “touches Christ” with faith, and receives from him a share in his divine life. Indeed, by trusting in Christ through faith the entire “substance of things hoped for” (Heb 11:1) becomes present in the believer, who thus experiences a kind of foretaste of the beatific vision.⁷

4 See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* [ST] II–II, q. 1, a. 1.

5 An old Act of Faith prayer expresses this well: “My God I believe in thee, and all thy Church doth teach, because thou hast said it, and thy word is true.”

6 See ST II–II, q. 17, a. 6.

7 Explaining St. Thomas Aquinas’ exegesis of Heb 11:1, Benedict XVI wrote: “through faith, in a tentative way, or as we might say ‘in embryo’—and thus according to the ‘substance’—there are already present in us the things that are hoped for: the

The *Catechism* notes, quoting St. Basil, “faith is already the beginning of eternal life: ‘When we contemplate the blessings of faith even now, as if gazing at a reflection in a mirror, it is as if we already possessed the wonderful things which our faith assures us we shall one day enjoy’” (163).

Faith: Firm and Unconditional

But the foundation of trust also requires a believer’s firm and unconditional assent to everything revealed by God. The assent of faith is firm because “it is founded on the very word of God who cannot lie” (CCC 157).⁸ Faith does not *hedge its bets*, because doing so would reduce faith to mere opinion.⁹ Rather, by faith the believer entrusts himself entirely to God and orders his life and priorities according to the truth of what God has revealed.

Likewise, the assent of faith is unconditional because the ground and motive for faith is trust in God. The believer cannot pick and choose what he believes or withhold his assent until he understands or proves what has been revealed, because putting these kinds of conditions on faith undermines its foundation in trust. Reason can help man understand God’s revelation and demonstrate its reasonableness, but a Christian cannot make his understanding the *sine qua non* for the assent of faith. Faith demands our trust in God, who has spoken and who is truth itself (see CCC 156).

Indeed, St. Thomas Aquinas taught that someone who obstinately (i.e., culpably) withholds assent from one article of faith eliminates all faith in his heart since he destroys faith’s

whole, true life. And precisely because the thing itself is already present, this presence of what is to come also creates certainty: this ‘thing’ which must come is not yet visible in the external world (it does not ‘appear’), but because of the fact that, as an initial and dynamic reality, we carry it within us, a certain perception of it has even now come into existence” (*Spe salvi*, no. 7).

8 This firmness of faith doesn’t preclude questions and even the feeling of darkness—consider the life of Mother Teresa of Calcutta or St. Thérèse—rather, firm faith means clinging to God, who is with you in the darkness.

9 See ST II–II, q. 5, a. 3.

foundation in trust.¹⁰ As the *Catechism* notes, because he loves and trusts God who has spoken in Scripture and through the Church, the believer “submits his intellect and his will to God. With his whole being man gives his assent to God the revealer” (143).

Practical Consequences

What does this mean for the catechist who seeks to accompany men and women toward faith? Does this mean that we should begin with the hardest doctrines to “weed out” the unbelievers? No, of course not. But neither should catechists ignore difficult teachings or take lightly someone’s refusal to believe what God has revealed in Scripture or through the definitive teaching of the Church. Since faith is rooted in trust in God, catechetical accompaniment should lead with the *kerygma* and seek ways for men and women to encounter God’s love in Jesus so that they can give their “yes” to Christ, whose truth and goodness are manifest in his words and deeds. Faith as “personal adherence to Christ” provides the foundation for the believer’s assent to everything revealed by God, so catechetical accompaniment needs to help men and women first know the love of Jesus.¹¹ Knowing Christ and experiencing his love and mercy provides the power and motive for repentance and faith.¹²

But while they proclaim the *kerygma* and share Christ’s invitation to faith, catechists must also share the depth of the demands of faith, which is a full and personal adherence to God, a “surrender,” through which the believer conforms his mind and

10 See *ibid.* Note the qualifier of “obstinacy”—God alone knows the culpability of someone’s unbelief, and, as Fulton Sheen noted, many of those who reject Catholic doctrine actually only reject what they think the Church teaches, which is often very different from Catholic doctrine. Many who reject Catholic faith, therefore, reject a caricature of it without ever having heard a morally compelling explanation of the truths of faith; thus, much unbelief may not be “obstinate” unbelief. Cf. Pope Francis’ encouragement for pastoral prudence and charity in this regard in *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 44.

11 Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, nos. 36–39, 164.

12 Recall the sinful woman in Luke 7:47, who showed great love in response to having received great mercy: “So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.”

heart to God's word, not vice versa. Indeed, as C. S. Lewis expressed through Aslan in the *Chronicles of Narnia*, Jesus is not a "tame lion" who merely confirms our ideas and tells us what we want to hear. Rather, as Lord of the Universe, Jesus reveals truth that sometimes challenges us and always demands our faith.

Indeed, while the road to Emmaus may provide a model for catechetical accompaniment, Abraham's faith may provide a model for the destination of that accompaniment. God asked Abraham to do something that seemed utterly opposed to the fulfillment of his promises and Abraham's happiness—surely God's word to Abraham felt like darkness and death. But Abraham trusted God's goodness, confident that God would somehow provide (see Gen 22:1–24).

And just as God did for Abraham, he does for believers today. When God's word—communicated through Scripture or the definitive teaching of the Church—challenges us, or when he asks for obedience and trust in the face of difficulty or distress, he always promises to provide. But, remarkably, God doesn't just give us a ram like he gave to Abraham; he gives us his Son. In Jesus, the "LORD provides" (Gen 22:14) more than we could ever ask or imagine. Thus, even when the surrender of faith seems to lead to sadness and pain, in fact, it always leads to light and life, since the one whose Word we believe is himself ultimate truth, beauty, and goodness. In pastoral accompaniment, we walk with people toward faith in Christ so that they may follow him wherever he leads: often through a cross but, ultimately, toward resurrection and eternal life.

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Art Credit: *Saint Augustine of Hippo receiving the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus*, painting by Philippe de Champaigne, 17th century; Wikimedia Commons, CC.

The Rosary and The New Evangelization

BY BISHOP MARK DAVIES

“I saw how the Rosary formed an unbroken chain through every scene of my life, linking every moment with Gospel contemplation, intercession, reparation, praise, and thanksgiving to the Holy Trinity.”



THE JOY AND YOUTHFULNESS of the Catholic priesthood never fade. The passing years only increase a sense of wonder at the grace and power of the priesthood, not least in the daily offering of the Mass and in a life dedicated to the service of countless souls in the light of the Eucharist. A priest needs look no further for the source of his life and joy. On the 40th anniversary of my ordination, I traveled as a pilgrim to Lourdes on February 11 which celebrates a moment when “the Mother of Christ made her presence felt and her voice heard.”¹

1 John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, no.7, cited in text as RVM.

I came to Lourdes to give thanks to God for Our Lady's accompaniment throughout my priestly life. The pilgrimage led



me to recognize anew the place of her Rosary in this life and mission. I saw how the Rosary formed an unbroken chain through every scene of my life, linking every moment with Gospel contemplation, intercession, reparation, praise, and thanksgiving to the Holy Trinity. As John Paul II once reflected, "The Rosary has accompanied me in moments of joy and moments of difficulty. To it I have entrusted any number of concerns; in it I

have always found comfort" (RVM, no. 2).

At the grotto, I was struck by the memory of the eloquent silence with which Our Lady came to stand with St. Bernadette in her poverty. The essence of the message of Lourdes is found in the very graciousness with which heaven looked on Bernadette. In those blessed moments, Mary Immaculate wished to open to every pilgrim the riches God offers us in prayer; the need to intercede for souls destitute in sin; the grace of healing and conversion, flowing like the spring of water for all humanity; and the need to make a place at the heart of our lives for the supreme gift of the Holy Eucharist. Such was the spoken message of Lourdes; yet, the apparitions consisted largely in the unbroken silence of prayer, during which Our Lady held a rosary. In this we see a silent invitation to share the prayer of her Immaculate Heart, prayer which St. Luke describes as the way she "treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2:19). According to the Gospel imperative, the Rosary requires that you and I change and become as a little child, contemplating Christ in his Incarnation and redemption. In this way, "*Mary constantly sets before the*

faithful the 'mysteries' of her Son, with the desire that contemplation of these mysteries will release all their saving power" (RVM, no. 11).

In the New Evangelization, John Paul II held up the Rosary as offering "the *depth of the Gospel message in its entirety*" and a prayer "destined to bring forth a harvest of holiness" (RVM, no. 1). Yet, if we ask who first gave us the Rosary, an awesome realization dawns that it was the Mother of God who placed the Rosary into our hands and who now leads us through the joy, light, sorrow, and glory of the mysteries to be "In living communion with Jesus through—we might say—the heart of his Mother" (RVM, no. 2). This is the gift we have received in the Rosary "which gradually took form in the second millennium under the guidance of the Spirit of God" (RVM, no. 1).

At the dawn of this new millennium, John Paul II invited us to rediscover the Rosary with urgent words: "May this appeal of mine not go unheard!" (RVM, no. 43). In continuity with the constant encouragement of the Magisterium and the witness of the saints, he reminded us that, in the work of evangelization and catechesis, the Rosary offers a path of powerful proclamation and a means by which we can personally assimilate the mysteries of Christ. If we help others discover—or rediscover—the Rosary, we will have done no small thing in opening hearts to the Gospel message and setting them on a path of lifelong contemplation that is "nothing other than to *contemplate with Mary the face of Christ*" (RVM, no. 3). My pilgrimage to Lourdes reminded me that, in our poverty and need, we are invited by the Rosary to discover the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph 3:8) with Mary's gaze and with Mary's wonder (see RVM, no. 10).

The Most Reverend Mark Davies is Bishop of Shrewsbury, in England.

Art Credit: *Our Lady of Lourdes appears to St Bernadette* by Fr. Lawrence Lew, OP; Flickr.com CC.

Walk with Me: Accompanying Children in Faith

BY JOSEPH D. WHITE

“Young people today need role models of discipleship . . . A commitment to live what we teach so we can mentor by example can help us to cultivate what is perhaps our most important tool as catechists—a witness of the faith in daily life.”



ACCOMPANIMENT HAS BEEN A POPULAR TOPIC in catechesis for the past several years, and rightfully so. The *Directory for Catechesis* lists “accompanier” as one of the primary roles of the catechist, adding, “the catechist is an expert in the art of accompaniment.”¹ In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (“The Joy of the Gospel”), Pope Francis defines accompaniment as a process of walking with the other, listening, and leading

1 Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, *Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2020), no. 113.

others “ever closer to God.”² The image of walking together is a particularly salient one as we think about children’s catechesis,



since children (especially young children) often literally walk hand-in-hand with an adult in most places, especially unfamiliar ones. We walk with children for a variety of reasons: we want to make sure they go in the right direction and don’t get lost along the way; we want them to feel safe; we

want to make sure they don’t miss things that will form them and excite their imaginations. But most of all, we walk with children because we love them, and we know that people grow best when that growth occurs in the context of relationship.

Getting to Know You

How can catechists of children walk with young people in a spiritual sense as they are formed in the faith? One way is by getting to know our learners. Look for resources on the cognitive, social, moral, and spiritual development of children in the age group you teach. This information, which can sometimes be found in the catechist manual accompanying a religious education curriculum, can offer a starting point for understanding the thinking and developmental needs of your learners.

Even as we understand what’s typical for children at a particular age, it’s important to remember that every child is different and to get to know the individual child. Listening to the individual experiences, hopes, dreams, and interests of our learners can help us present the faith as relevant to their lives. It might be

2 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 170.

helpful to begin each session with icebreaker questions or games that allow learners to share something about themselves and their interests. Think of questions that begin with phrases like, “Tell about a time when you . . .” or “What is your favorite . . .” In today’s hectic and noisy world, too often we fail to take time with one another, to listen without worrying about what *we* will say next. Accompanying children means sitting with them, listening to the words they speak, and reflecting on the feelings behind the words. It means recognizing what a gift we are being given when little ones trust us with their stories. It means being present to children as a reminder that God is present with them.

The Importance of Forming Questions

Nothing engages us in learning and formation more than curiosity and wonder. If we don’t have any questions about a topic, we don’t get excited about learning more. Very often in catechesis with children and teens, we provide answers before our learners have asked the questions. Helping those to whom we minister form their questions is an important part of the learning process because it helps our learners anticipate and get excited about seeking the answers.

But most of all, we walk with children because we love them, and we know that people grow best when that growth occurs in the context of relationship.

One way to do this is to begin with a brief proclamation of the topic, such as a developmentally appropriate passage of Scripture connected with the topic to be explored in the session. First, we can take a modified *lectio divina* approach, asking learners to share what they hear God saying to them through the Scripture. Next, we can ask another critical question: “What do you wonder about this?” Children sometimes need some help forming their questions, so you might want to have some sample questions ready. For example, if your session is on the Holy

Trinity and you have just read the Gospel account of the baptism of the Lord, a question you could model might be, “How are the Father (whose voice we hear when Jesus is baptized), the Son, and the Holy Spirit (who we see descending like a dove in this passage) all connected with one another?” or, “What does it mean that God is three, yet also one?”

Witnesses to the Gospel

Another important part of accompaniment is cultivating our own spiritual maturity and listening to God’s call in our lives and work so we can be effective witnesses. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis states, “Today more than ever we need men and women who, on the basis of their experience of accompanying others, are familiar with processes which call for prudence, understanding, patience and docility to the Spirit.”³ Young people today need role models of discipleship. They often find their heroes in questionable places, from internet influencers and gamers to actors, musicians, and athletes. Oftentimes, these individuals fall short of offering an effective example to follow. A commitment to live what we teach so we can mentor by example can help us to cultivate what is perhaps our most important tool as catechists—a witness of the faith in daily life.

Likewise, we can point young people to the many saints who lived courageous lives of virtue even in childhood and adolescence—faithful young men and women like Ss. Jacinta and Francisco Marto, Bl. Imelda Lambertini, St. José Sánchez del Río, St. Clare of Assisi, and Bl. Carlo Acutis, just to name a few. Ultimately, our pattern for living is the person of Jesus Christ, but we are encouraged by the examples of imperfect people like ourselves who, through God’s grace, became the women and men they were created to be.

3 Ibid., no. 171.

Learning and Re-learning Humility

Finally, accompanying children means learning to be humble. We mustn't see ourselves as the "experts." After all, it's the Holy Spirit who is the pedagogue, guiding each individual toward the truth as we walk alongside our learners sharing the witness of the faith.

We must understand that, while we might know some things our young learners haven't yet mastered, we are all still growing. (And, in fact,

Young people today need role models of discipleship.

Jesus points to *children* as examples of how *we* need to grow—see Mt 18:3). As we learn humility, we understand that God has the same love for each one of us. God loves each of us with a full, passionate, and unselfish love. In fact, God's love for us is the only bond that unites all of humanity, the one thing each of us has in common with the other.

One of the beautiful things about our Catholic Church is that none of us are called to come to faith alone. As we walk together with one another, and especially with the littlest among us, we experience the truth that "where two or three are gathered" in his name, God is always with us (Mt 18:20).

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Christian Initiation: A Liturgical, Catechetical, and Pastoral Process

BY WILLIAM J. KEIMIG

“ . . . the OCIA process seeks to prepare people not merely for assent to eternal truths but more so to fall in love with an eternal Lover. If participants are falling in love with the person of Jesus, then it is only reasonable that, like anyone we love in the human order, they would want to *know* him more.”



THE ORDER OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION FOR ADULTS (OCIA) is a privileged and, in many ways, challengingly complex form of adult formation. Its complexity flows from the need for the process to be authentically truthful (implying catechesis that is far removed from the easy, sound-bite answers and errors of the culture), authentically personal (implying pastoral flexibility and sacrificial effort to call forth deep conversion), and authentically unitive (implying insertion into a profoundly countercultural liturgical way of life to realize union with a divine Spouse). In other words, to the degree that the OCIA process is complex, it

is so because it must be *fully human* so that it may be fully open to the divine. The restoration of the ancient catechumenal process,



as called for in no less than five documents of the Second Vatican Council, is a reflection of the Church's wisdom in going back to a tried-and-true practice in order to lovingly bring people into her fold.

The catechumenal process is not a program. Programs have a fixed length of time and a determined course of studies. No one can “program” the Holy Spirit as he moves individuals to conversion; each person's conversion journey is unique.

While a parish may do things systematically and make a calendar of events each year, the OCIA team's primary task is not to run a program but to be present to help facilitate conversion. For this reason, it is not desirable to call what parishes do “the OCIA program,” as this invariably creates a false impression for all involved and tends to imply that the journey of the participants is an isolated endeavor within the community of faith.

Catechesis is understood to be concerned with conversion in Christ and with how to live continuously in such a manner not only prior to but after initiation as well. . . . Catechumens are viewed not as anonymous attendants at private educational inquiry classes, but as public persons in the local church. Their faith, progress, and prognosis in communal faith-living are the concerns of the entire local church met for solemn public worship.¹

1 Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1978), 128, see also 120–22.

One way to understand the Christian initiation process is by breaking it down into its three distinct aspects: liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral. *All three are equally important.* It is an injustice to those considering union with the Church for a catechist to be unambiguously catechetical to the detriment of the liturgical aspect, or be wonderfully pastoral while offering poor catechesis. In order for OCIA to be what it has the potential to be, directors and catechists can benefit greatly from understanding the implications of its liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral dimensions to make available the fullness of the process as intended by the Church.

The catechumenal process is divided into four periods: (1) the Precatechumenate up to the Rites of Acceptance and Welcoming; (2) the catechumenate proper up to the Rites of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion, normally held on the first Sunday of Lent; (3) the period of Purification and Enlightenment, which normally coincides with Lent; and (4) Mystagogy, which traditionally spans the seven weeks of the Easter season, followed by the Neophyte Year, which lasts until the first anniversary of one's initiation. It is useful to discuss the nature and scope of these periods in light of the three aspects.

The First Aspect of the Process: Liturgical Formation²

The OCIA process is dynamically moved along by liturgical rites that serve as gateways into the major periods of the process. Beginning with the Rite of Acceptance (for unbaptized catechumens) and the Rite of Welcoming (for baptized candidates), and going through all the subsequent minor rites and major gateways, liturgy propels the process and motivates conversion. The Sacraments of Initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist—are the powerhouses for the whole process, and grace comes with every liturgical moment. This grace—all that it means to be reborn in Christ, to be infused with the theological virtues, to become a coheir with Christ, to be sealed with a deeper configuration to

2 See *The Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* (International Commission on English in the Liturgy, 2022), nos. 40, 75.1, 75.3, 79, 141, 147, 247. Hereafter cited as OCIA.

the crucified One, and to come to the table of the Lord among his people—abundantly provides the ongoing impetus for the conversion process. All involved in OCIA must understand the Catholic sacramental and liturgical sense of reality:³

The sacraments [in the catechumenate of the early Church] were seen as a totality coextensive with the Church's life itself. . . . The liturgy was not seen as a matter of exquisite ecclesiastical ceremony to occupy clergy and religious but as the way a Christian people live in common. . . . [The rites of initiation] were a unified sacramental discipline through which both convert *and* community moved in the Spirit from what each had been toward what each was capable of becoming under grace in that same Spirit—a movement shot through with both pain and glory, with affirmation and renunciation, exorcism and celebration toward a new degree of communion in faith that would leave both convert *and* community irrevocably changed.⁴

The OCIA process aims to lead participants to become “liturgical people,” moving them toward full and active participation in the worshipping community around the one table:

Here is the last and most decisive reason why teaching through worship is superior to all other forms of Christian teaching: *The liturgy gives what it teaches*. It not only presents the mystery of Christ concretely; it also lets us immediately participate in this mystery. If there is anywhere in Christianity that a true initiation into the mystery of Christ takes place, it is here.⁵

3 See Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1998), no. 85. Hereafter cited as GDC.

4 Kavanagh, *Shape of Baptism*, 118, 120–21 (*italics original*).

5 Johannes Hofinger and Francis J. Buckley, *The Good News and Its Proclamation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 56 (*italics original*).

The liturgical aspect in each particular period is the driving force behind the whole process and the primary means of inserting those along this journey into the mystery of Christ. In the first period, the Precatechumenate, the liturgical aspect is at a minimum. There are no formal liturgical rites during this stage because the inquirer has not yet entered a publicly recognized relationship with the Church. While no formal liturgy takes place at this stage, prayer is an important part of evangelization. Singing hymns, which is a form of prayer, can help draw the heart up to God and facilitate conversion.

The first liturgical rites, the Rite of Acceptance and the Rite of Welcoming, establish (for a catechumen) or deepen (for a candidate) a relationship between the Church and the participant and are the gateways into the period of the catechumenate. There are numerous liturgical moments in this period that impart grace to participants and help them continue along the path of conversion. Blessings, minor exorcisms, anointings, and celebrations of the Word are all designed to introduce those in the catechumenate into the liturgical life of the Church and the benefits of the graces of liturgy.

The next gateway, the Rite of Election (catechumens) and the Continuing Call to Conversion (candidates), begins the intense period of preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation. Participants are greatly helped by the Scrutinies (catechumens) and the Penitential Rite (candidates), as well as the Presentation Rites and Preparation Rites, all directed toward their final preparation for complete Christian initiation. Lent becomes a rising crescendo of liturgical graces, the war against sin at the height of its strength (see Rom 5:20).

The third gateway, reception of the Sacraments of Initiation, fully inserts participants into the mystery of Christ. This is the climax of the catechumenal process, and it is not by accident that it occurs during the Easter Vigil, the Church's greatest and most solemn feast of the year. This third gateway produces the new "fledgling Catholics," or neophytes, who, while enjoying the fruits of all the sacraments like the rest of the

faithful, are still cared for in a special way during their first year. The Neophyte Year begins with seven weeks of Mystagogy, that is, Post-Baptismal Catechesis. During this period, neophytes are invited to participate in the main Sunday Mass of the parish as a group, and the readings during this time have been selected by the Church to meet their needs.

It is important to communicate to both current and future Catholics that liturgy is much more than



ritual, and that it is through the liturgy that our relationship with Jesus Christ becomes as intimate as possible outside of heaven. As OCIA participants move toward full communion with the Church, nothing is more fundamental to their catechesis, or more crucial to impart to the worshiping community, than the fact that a foundational relationship with Jesus is most firmly established through these liturgical rites and the sacramental participation to which they point.

The Second Aspect of the Process: Catechetical Formation⁶

Catechesis, stemming from the Greek verb *katekhein*, can be defined as the re-echoing of that which has been received, making “the faith, as illumined by teaching, a vital, explicit and effective force in the lives of men” and concerning “itself not only with nourishing and teaching the faith, but also with arousing it

⁶ See OCIA, nos. 38, 75.1, 78, 139, 245.

unceasingly with the help of grace, with opening the heart, with converting, and with preparing total adherence to Jesus Christ on the part of those who are still on the threshold of faith.”⁷

The three major liturgical gateways of the OCIA process help to define the methodology and scope of catechesis during each of the four periods. During the Precatechumenate, the focus is mainly apologetic and evangelistic, with a delivery of the basic Gospel message and unreserved answering of questions:

From evangelization, carried out with God’s help, arise faith and initial conversion, by which each person feels called away from sin and into the profound mystery of divine love. The entire Period of the Precatechumenate is devoted to this evangelization, so that the will to follow Christ and to seek Baptism may mature. (OCIA 37)

The Precatechumenate prepares for and is ordered to the first liturgical step, the Rite of Acceptance (catechumens) or the Rite of Welcoming (candidates).

In the catechumenate, the focus moves to a systematic, organic catechesis involving the complete delivery of the essential elements of the deposit of faith, laying the flesh on the bones of the Gospel proclaimed in the previous period. Describing the deposit of faith, Vatican II stated:

Now what was handed on by the Apostles includes everything which contributes toward the holiness of life and increase in faith of the peoples of God; and so the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes. . . . Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church.⁸

7 Second Vatican Council, *Christus Dominus*, no. 14; *Catechesi tradendae*, no. 19. See also Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *General Catechetical Directory* (1971), no. 17.

8 Second Vatican Council, *Dei verbum*, nos. 8, 10.

The catechumenate is typically the longest period of the Christian initiation process, lasting “long enough for . . . conversion and faith to mature, even over several years, if need be” (OCIA 76). It is also the most densely catechetical. Catechesis is to be “fully presented, suited to the liturgical year and supported by Celebrations of the Word” (OCIA 75). The character of the instruction received during this period should be such that, “as every aspect of Catholic doctrine is explained to [catechumens], faith is enlightened, the heart is directed toward God, participation in the liturgical mystery is fostered, apostolic activity is encouraged, and the whole of life is nourished according to the spirit of Christ” (OCIA 78).

This systematic and organic delivery of the deposit of faith seeks to ensure that, by the second liturgical gateway, participants sufficiently understand and desire to live the faith so that they may choose without hesitation to enroll their names among the elect or, if candidates, confidently continue their progress toward full communion with the Church. These rites call forth power and grace to nourish the elect (unbaptized) and the candidates (baptized) during the next period.

During Purification and Enlightenment, the catechist places stronger emphasis on the spiritual and mystical life. The ritual book’s guidelines for this period, as well as the associated rites, direct catechists to shift focus from an exposition of the deposit of faith to spiritual, reflective, and meditative preparation for the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation. In this, the Church seeks to foster a state of repentance and effectively arouse the life of prayer and the practices of self-denial and charity. Before they receive the sacraments of initiation, the elect “should resolve to achieve an intimate sense of Christ and the Church. Above all, they are expected to progress in genuine self-knowledge through a serious examination of their lives and true penitence” (OCIA 142).

In Mystagogy and Post-Baptismal Catechesis, the focus is on a deepening of the neophytes’ understanding and practice of the sacramental life, in light of now being able to receive the

fullness of sacramental grace, and to present ways to synthesize all that they have learned, applying it to their lives. The rest of the Neophyte Year would then be devoted to substantiating, strengthening, and deepening their understanding of the faith that will lead to more committed and mature Christian lives. “The character and value of this period should arise from this new personal experience both of the Sacraments and of the community” (OCIA 247).

The Third Aspect of the Process: Pastoral Formation⁹

The OCIA process is a growth in intimacy as much as in knowledge. Aidan Kavanagh, in *The Shape of Baptism*, refers to the catechumenal process as “a structure of Christian nurture.”¹⁰ Along with the powerful liturgical moments of the process and the catechetical endeavor, there is also an intense pastoral activity, which must be initiated from the first time an inquirer expresses interest in the Church. This activity operates with the knowledge that each participant will vary in his or her background, lifestyle, motivation, and state in life. Those doing the OCIA apostolate steep themselves in the lives of participants with gentleness, prudence, and a genuine desire to open their hearts wide to any whom the Spirit draws (see 1 Cor 6:11).

The pastoral components of OCIA are the *people* who participate, some intimately and others from a distance, in Jesus’ work of conversion and discipleship. The pastoral work of the catechumenal process is accomplished through the love and labor of many people, including the clergy, catechists, ministers of hospitality, sponsors, small group leaders, prayer intercessors, and parish members:

But this Christian initiation in the catechumenate
should be taken care of not only by catechists or

9 See OCIA, nos. 42, 45, 75.2, 75.4, 120, 244, 246.

10 Kavanagh, *Shape of Baptism*, 182.

priests, but by the entire community of the faithful, so that right from the outset the catechumens may feel that they belong to the people of God.¹¹

This work is a people-to-person endeavor—all the people serving this one person for the Lord. The pastoral aspect of OCIA involves both information and formation. By instruction and by the experience of authentic fellowship, the catechumens and candidates learn who God is, what his plan is, and how to follow him as a member of the Christian community, “which lives, celebrates and bears witness to the faith”:¹²

The OCIA process seeks to prepare people not merely for assent to eternal truths but more so to fall in love with an eternal Lover.

The People of God, represented by the local Church, should always realize and show that the Initiation of adults is its own concern and a matter for all the baptized. It should therefore show itself always prepared to fulfill its apostolic vocation by helping those who seek Christ (OCIA 9).

Through the pastoral attention of others, participants are informed about him, and formed in him, so that their experience of the community of believers becomes an “apprenticeship of the entire Christian life.”¹³

As with liturgy and catechesis, the pastoral aspects change as participants move through the periods of the process. The Precatechumenate is a time of inviting people to come

11 Second Vatican Council, *Ad gentes*, no. 14.

12 GDC, no. 68

13 GDC, no. 67.

and see, of determining their motivation, and of moving them through the initial stages of faith: an encounter with Jesus, turning away from sin, and finding a home in the Church. During the next period, the catechumenate, the pastoral aim is to facilitate the work of Holy Spirit in moving the participants from initial motivation to firm conviction, with strong elements of fellowship and spiritual guidance. Purification and Enlightenment serves as a time of strong support, spiritual direction, and encouragement for participants to examine their conscience, intensify their life of prayer, and increase in works of charity. In the period of Mystagogy, new Catholics receive help to become more open to the pursuit of holiness by deepening their spiritual life through the communal experience of the sacraments and by strengthening relationships in their new parish family. For the remainder of the Neophyte Year, the pastoral focus is to provide continued support and encouragement in living out a full Catholic life in a parochial setting where they feel comfortably at home. The process aims not just at making non-ignorant Christians—it facilitates transforming them into outwardly-focused Christians growing in an authentic Catholic worldview, sure in the conviction that the fullness of the truth has been revealed and can be shared with joy.

In summary, the OCIA process seeks to prepare people not merely for assent to eternal truths but more so to fall in love with an eternal Lover. If participants are falling in love with the person of Jesus, then it is only reasonable that, like anyone we love in the human order, they would want to *know* him more. Without the teaching and converting aspects of the liturgy and the loving witness of the community, formal instruction runs the risk of becoming just information, instead of light for the path of faith in Christ.¹⁴ The catechumenal process, a balance of liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral aspects, thus becomes an engine of conversion today, as it was centuries ago, fulfilling the intention of its restoration by Vatican II.¹⁵

14 See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 89.

15 See Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, nos. 64–66.

The Church can be understood as the earthly configuration of Jesus Christ—to be a member of the Church is to be configured to Christ. Our inner being in Christ has its demands. They are not obligations imposed from outside, although one of the Church's missions is to articulate those demands for our guidance and growth. The Christian initiation process invites a beautifully simple view of the matter: the reason to be a Christian is to be perfectly configured to Christ: to be a saint. The reason to be a Catholic is because within the Church subsists the fullness of the means to become a saint—through her graces, her teachings, her people, and her Head—enabling those who so will to be perfected in love.

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The Art of Accompaniment: Authentic Friendship On the Journey Toward Christ

BY JIM BECKMAN

“The spiritual life needs human accompaniment precisely because we are *not* divine. Despite all the great riches of truth, Scripture, doctrine, and belief, without other human beings most of us would struggle to know exactly how to put all those riches into practice in our day-to-day lives.”



“**W**ALKING WITH,” commonly referred to as “accompaniment,” is a critical aspect of discipleship. And while it’s one of the new buzzwords these days, I’m not sure those who use it always understand what the word exactly means. Pope Francis has used it many times, particularly in his statements and writings to young people. For example, we hear him say in *Evangelii Gaudium* (“The Joy of the Gospel”), “The Church will have to initiate everyone—priests, religious and laity—into this ‘art of accompaniment’ which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other. The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze

which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life.”¹

What exactly does accompaniment mean? I had an



experience a long time ago during my single young adult years. At the time, I was living with a family with small children. One night, the parents were trying to get their five-year-old down for bed. Instead of going to sleep, the young girl kept coming up with all kinds of “needs”—one more drink, one more story, one more hug and kiss, etc. I had trouble not laughing as her poor father kept getting more and more frustrated with her pleas. Finally, in a hopeful and exasperated attempt,

her dad grabbed the crucifix off the wall in the family room and brought it into her room. He laid the cross on her bed, prayed with her, and asked Jesus to be with her in a special way and help her go to sleep. My eyebrows raised as I watched the scene; *that was a good idea*, I thought. I was taking notes for my eventual parenting days. But I’m not sure any of us could have guessed what would happen next. After almost 15 minutes of silence, we heard from her room:

“Daddy?”

“What?!” her father replied.

“I need someone with some skin on.”

As frustrating as the whole experience was for her parents, that five-year-old might have come up with one of the best definitions for accompaniment I have ever heard. The spiritual life needs human accompaniment precisely because we are *not* divine. Despite all the

1 Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 169.

great riches of truth, Scripture, doctrine, and belief, without other human beings most of us would struggle to know exactly how to put all those riches into practice in our day-to-day lives. Some of that accompaniment can be “virtual” or indirect, as when we are accompanied by the saints—holy men and women whose lives we hear about or words we read. But a large part of it needs to be personal and direct, meaning from a real person who is walking beside us and modeling for us how they are living out the faith.

What Exactly Is Accompaniment?

The Catholic Apostolate Center published a book in 2019 called *The Art of Accompaniment*. It’s a great resource for understanding this topic, and I highly recommend reading it. One thing the authors make very clear is that it is ultimately God who accompanies:

Throughout Sacred Scripture, relationship unfolds as a sacred space of love, mission, and transformation for God and his people; the Old and New Testament reveal the Trinitarian God to be a God who *accompanies*. This relational model is foreshadowed in the Old Testament through God’s guidance of his Chosen People, explicitly manifested in the New Testament in the ministry of Jesus, and continued under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit after the Ascension of Jesus. In the unfolding of his plan for humanity, God draws near to humanity in love through *accompaniment*.²

We could even point to themes of divine pedagogy to unpack that modeling in many rich and meaningful ways. Yet, as we have established, God often employs others “with skin on” to further his accompaniment.

2 Colleen Campbell and Thomas Carani, *The Art of Accompaniment* (Washington, DC: Catholic Apostolate Center, 2019), 5.

What does it look like for us to walk with others the way God has walked with us? *The Art of Accompaniment* provides a helpful list of terms associated with accompaniment: the one who accompanies, the one accompanied, apprenticeship and learning, and missionary discipleship.³ The authors further develop the various dimensions of accompaniment: mentoring, witnessing, spiritual friendship, and spiritual motherhood and fatherhood.⁴

I have been privileged for the past couple of years to work more closely with the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS). It's inspiring to be around so many young people who are on fire for evangelization and discipleship. The terms above get fleshed out quite well in their approach. Accompaniment is woven all throughout their efforts to reach the typical college student. At the heart of the FOCUS vision is what they refer to as the three essential habits: divine intimacy, authentic friendship, and clarity and conviction about spiritual multiplication.⁵ FOCUS is also beginning to get traction with discipleship in the diocesan and parish spheres as the new FOCUS Parish, a division of Lifelong Mission, has emerged over the past several years.

Practical Challenges with Accompaniment

True accompaniment also incorporates apprenticeship and mentoring. In his recent book *Intentional Accompaniment: An Apprenticeship for a New Generation of Builders*, Michael Hall explains it like this:

Apprenticeship is a process that involves a high level of on-the-job training that teaches the particular skills and knowledge needed to succeed in that trade. Experienced tradespeople invest time to teach the next generation of skilled workers in their trade through

3 Ibid., 11–13.

4 Ibid., 14–18.

5 Curtis Martin, *Making Missionary Disciples* (Genesee, CO: FOCUS, 2018), 9.

one-on-one mentorship and training. They invite the apprentice to join them in their work, intentionally sharing with them the skills, knowledge, and wisdom they have acquired throughout their career.⁶

Apprenticeship is exactly what we are invited to do as evangelists and catechists. The term is used six times in the *General Directory for Catechesis* to describe the work we do in helping new believers and converts grow in their faith. “How do we develop apprentices for the next generation of builders? We do it through intentional accompaniment.”⁷

I have a friend who has been in the health care industry for years. Throughout nursing school and the subsequent training for her master’s degree and to become a nurse practitioner, a common phrase used in her training was “teach, show, try, do.” I have found this framework helpful for discipleship and mentoring relationships, particularly with young people. I could teach them some concept or aspect of the faith, then I could show them how I put it into practice in my life. I then would give them an opportunity to try to do it themselves, with me still close by and able to help them tweak their application. Finally, they were able to do it on their own without me helping at all. I have seen this approach work with everything from overcoming struggles with lust and sexual sin to helping someone learn how to pray.

Another tricky challenge with accompaniment is the tendency to try and fix things. Never try to help a caterpillar in the struggle to break free from its cocoon—you will cripple it and prevent it from ever being able to fly. There’s a dimension to accompaniment that requires the heavy lifting to be done by the one being accompanied. Typically, when I have tried to do something for someone that they could do for themselves (including my own children), it has gone badly. I can *teach* them

6 Michael Hall, *Intentional Accompaniment: An Apprenticeship for a New Generation of Builders* (Ottawa, ON, Canada: Catholic Christian Outreach, 2021), iv.

7 Ibid.

about some aspect of the faith. I can *show* them how I do it in my life. But at some point, they must *try* to do it themselves. I can be nearby, and even help, but only a little. Accompaniment is like spotting someone when they are lifting weights: The spotter is not supposed to actually lift the bar, only assist, and only then if absolutely necessary. A spotter takes over the lift only if their partner starts to drop the bar altogether. Most of us struggle with that kind of holding back. When we see someone struggling, we tend to take over and show them how to do it the “right” way, which typically means *our* way.

A further challenge is our basic tendency to want to give lots of advice without really listening. Don’t get me wrong; we need good teachers and even good teaching. But has there ever been such a plethora of content? Not only teaching in the classroom but on streaming platforms, in podcasts, on blogs, in inspirational viral social media posts, and on and on. We are inundated every day with information. I meet many Catholics whose primary struggle is not really with *knowing* the faith but with putting it into practice in their daily life.

This is exactly why authentic accompaniment is so important. In my experience, what most people need more today is a *coach* rather than a *teacher*. At the heart of coaching is knowing the best questions to ask and then *really* listening. Michael Hall calls this “Prophetic Listening.” I love the concept! It’s a deeper listening assisted by the Holy Spirit. It’s listening not to just what is said, but what is *behind* what’s being said or asked—the “QBQ,” the question behind the question. Hall gives several real-life examples in his book that help flesh out the concept practically.

Finally, many who walk the path of accompaniment often confuse *acceptance* with *affirmation*. We are living in a very divisive culture. The driving modern progressive agenda will not tolerate opposition. Benedict XVI had some great articulations of this when he coined phrases like “a dictatorship of relativism,” and “a new religion of tolerance.” Some make the error of thinking that, when confronted with opposing beliefs and even lifestyle choices, to remain in friendship means supporting someone’s belief system

regardless of what they believe. This is a dangerous and slippery slope. It may start with something seemingly insignificant, but typically moves to doctrinal issues that could completely contradict what the Church teaches to be true. Authentic accompaniment never needs to stray from the truth. God never calls us to abandon or disregard something we believe in order to be an authentic friend to someone. I would argue that the minute we do so we would actually be abandoning *authenticity*.

By way of example, I'll diverge slightly to tell you about an episode of *Restore the Glory*, a podcast hosted by Dr. Bob Schuchts and Jake Khym. In 2022, they featured a Catholic guest who had come out as a homosexual and was even planning to get married to his partner later that year. His whole story was further complicated by the fact that he had been involved in many well-known Catholic communities. In other words, he was very well versed in everything Catholics believe. Yet, this person had still come to the conclusion that he was meant to pursue a secular, gay lifestyle. Dr. Bob and Jake carefully navigated the entire conversation, somehow doing two things: first, the guest felt accepted, even loved and embraced in authentic friendship; but it was also very clear that both Dr. Bob and Jake did not believe the same things their guest did and could not affirm the choices he had made. How is this even possible? In all honesty, I don't know, exactly. But they did it. If you would like a model in how to navigate a very delicate conversation without succumbing to relativism and a mistaken notion of tolerance, this episode is definitely worth a listen.⁸

Conclusion

We are living in desperate times. It is sometimes easy to be discouraged by what seems like too daunting a task. You might find yourself asking, "How can I make any significant difference?"

8 Bob Schuchts and Jake Khym, "Episode 64: Same-Sex Attraction, Part 5, with Christopher Dowling," in *Restore the Glory*, podcast, <https://www.restoretheglorypodcast.com/episodes/64>.

In his book *Making Missionary Disciples*, Curtis Martin devotes a whole section to the habit of “clarity and conviction about spiritual multiplication.” He stresses that the principle of spiritual multiplication “beautifully illustrates the amazing potential impact one person can have in changing the world!”⁹ He goes on to say, “God deeply desires for every person in each generation to come to know his love and mercy. He modeled the method to make this possible, and then commissioned us to imitate him by making disciples . . . this generation is waiting for us to become what we were meant to be. Everyone on earth is experiencing poverty of some kind, and they are waiting to be cared for by people who have experienced the enriching reality of life in Christ.”¹⁰

Authentic accompaniment allows us to show the love of the Father to those who need it most. It allows us to be present, “with skin on,” to the lost sheep Christ seeks. And it allows the Holy Spirit to work through relationships to deepen faith and restore the broken. Let us walk with others so that we may all walk home—together.

Jim Beckman is Executive Director of ImpactCenter, an apostolate dedicated to ministering to ministers and leadership development in the Catholic Church. A graduate of both Franciscan University and the Augustine Institute, Jim has served in various roles of leadership for national, regional, and local ministry over the years. He is a dynamic and passionate speaker and has a great love for the Catholic faith and for discipleship. He has built solid and thriving ministry programs in numerous parishes and dioceses. Jim also serves in a contract role with FOCUS, serving to help foster greater Church engagement and strategic partnerships. He and his wife, Meg, live in Littleton, Colorado, with their five children.

Art Credit: *Memorial tablet*, Master of the Spes Nostra, Wikimedia Commons.

9 Martin, *Missionary Disciples*, 30.

10 Ibid., 31.

Empower Students to Be Family Evangelizers

BY SR. PATRICIA M. MCCORMACK, IHM

“With each project, family members will be learning or reviewing bits of Catholic spirituality that may, by grace, feed their souls and lead to a deepening relationship with Jesus. I call this “Backdoor Evangelizing.” ... At the very least, family members will refresh previously gained familiarity with our Catholic heritage—or experience it for the first time.”



CATHOLIC SCHOOL EDUCATORS: heed the challenge! Extend your vocation response to include the family.

The vocation of the Catholic school teacher calls us to be catalysts that lead students to come to know, love, and serve God. In bygone times, home and school worked “hand in glove” to form a Christian character within the child. Some contemporary families are enthusiastic about pursuing that call. Many others, however, admit feelings of inferiority when it comes to being the spiritual formators of their children. They count on us to

fill in the gaps that they perceive exist. Those parents need us to evangelize them.

What? You might say, I am already on overload! Lesson plans that incorporate various learning styles and mediums,



differentiating instruction, student support meetings, mainstreaming, maintaining the student information system, extracurricular activities, faculty committee work, school duties (arrival, lunch, dismissal) . . . and the list goes on. Now you want me to add intentional evangelization of the family? I have no

more time! Well, the good news is that you do not need more time if you apply the adage, “work smarter, not harder.”

First, identify projects for liturgical seasons and other faith-formation topics that are part of your normal teaching curriculum. Then, develop interactive lessons that lead from the head (ideas) to the heart (affection, emotion). You may engage the students in the lesson with activities like becoming a character in the Christmas crib scene, defining the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit with modern examples, depicting timeline events of the Triduum, building a Jesse Tree, or choosing a favorite proverb or “Jesus one-liner” from the Bible. Within instructional class time, teach the students how to find Scripture citations and where to look for information on Church-related themes like feast days, novenas, litanies, women in the Bible, etc. Finally, work with the full class or in small groups to produce a single, unified class project. Display it in the classroom for the season.

Here is where we can engage the family with minimal added effort. For each seasonal project, create for the students a

sheet of directions so that the project can be replicated at home. Include a grading rubric. Assign students to repeat the lesson for their family, document family participation via photos, and convert the photos into a slideshow presentation. Have them each turn in one of the photos to you for you to make into a collage or a class PowerPoint to post to the classroom website. The finished product can yield a grade for religion, language (following directions), and technology.

With each project, family members will be learning or reviewing bits of Catholic spirituality that may, by grace, feed their souls and lead to a deepening relationship with Jesus. I call this “Backdoor Evangelizing.” The overt purpose is to help the student complete the assignment, which is to teach the topic to his or her family. The covert possibility is that parents and other family members may be touched by grace. Tidbits of our spiritual heritage can trigger an affective response that, in turn, may lead to spiritual awakening. At the very least, family members will refresh previously gained familiarity with our Catholic heritage—or experience it for the first time.

The goal of these family projects is to create a catalyst, a stepping stone, that takes family members on a journey from their heads to their hearts. The ultimate goal is to encounter Jesus. Therefore, each project needs to conclude with a personal application and an invitation to private prayer. Personal application includes questions like:

- What God-message is in this project for me or for our family?
- How am I like, or how could I be like, the character in the story?
- What difference would it make if I acted like this character when I am upset or stressed?
- Who can I name from my life that resembles this character’s virtue or this scriptural personality?
- What about this story (or activity, image, etc.) touches me?

After family sharing on the personal application question, the student imitates your way of wrapping up the session by inviting the members of the family to talk with Jesus about what thoughts this project stirred up in them. A period of silence follows.

Draw from the curriculum assigned to your grade level. Any topic has the potential for backyard evangelizing. The point is to facilitate the activity as a classroom exercise, and then for the student to imitate you and become the teacher of the family, engaging the family in replicating the lesson or project. By way of example, consider the usefulness of the following kinds of projects:

- Modern application for each decade of a rosary (Joyful, Sorrowful, Glorious, or Luminous). For example, Jesus Falls a Second Time: Open me to recognize the Simons in my life and to be a Simon for others.
- Each family member shares a favorite Gospel story.
- Collect 10 “Jesus said” sentences from Matthew’s Gospel. Have the family vote on one favorite.
- Read the Scripture story of one Old Testament woman. Summarize her story. What role did she play in salvation history? How can she influence your family today?
- Read the Scripture story of one Old Testament man. Summarize his story. What role did he play in salvation history? How can he influence your family today?
- Name and illustrate each of the precepts the Catholic Church.
- Feast of the Angels (October 2): Name, define/explain, and illustrate the nine choirs of angels, as well as the archangels Gabriel, Michael, and Raphael.

Punctuate the Liturgical Seasons

Breathe new life into our celebration of the liturgical seasons. Create opportunities for students and their families to enter a liturgical season with an attitude of personal investment.

Introduce a practice that begins with information but flows into formation and easily becomes an annual custom that the entire

The goal of these family projects is to create a catalyst, a stepping stone, that takes family members on a journey from their heads to their hearts.

family anticipates with joy. Here I will highlight the practice of “choosing by lot” a “function card” that gives a role to imitate during the season, a scriptural character to tutor you through the season, a virtue to practice, a specific

grace to seek, etc. At one and the same time, the custom that I am proposing serves as both a corporate and a personal activity.

Choosing by lot is an ancient practice to decide something by chance rather than by deliberate choice. For example, blindly drawing the shortest straw, casting dice, or pulling a slip of paper from a container. The Acts of the Apostles relates how the 11 cast lots to choose a replacement for Judas, and “the lot fell upon Matthias” (Acts 1:26). “Function cards” serve the purpose of choosing by lot.

The ritual that I put before you includes five steps:

1. Prepare an environment where function cards are arranged face down
2. Introduce the liturgical practice and teach the elements of the practice
3. Explain the custom of choosing by lot
4. Pray to the Holy Spirit to determine which choice is best for the student at this moment in time
5. Invite the student to choose a Function Card by lot (ie., by random choice).

Cultivate student and family spirituality throughout the school year with choose-by-lot rituals for Ordinary Time, Advent,

Christmas, New Year, and Pentecost. For each of these five examples, facilitate a simple prayer ritual during class time for the students to blindly choose a function card. Then, lead a discussion in which each student will share either (1) how they can practice the “function,” (2) their observation of someone who lived that characteristic, or (3) how that particular “function” could have made a positive difference in an actual instance that day. Model this discussion so that the student can imitate it with their family. Throughout the season, refer to the practice.

Reproduce the individual function cards on a single sheet of paper that the student will take home for family use. Advise the students, when he or she teaches the lesson at home, to designate one night a week throughout the season for family members to share how they practiced the function that week or how they saw it practiced by someone. That someone could be from real life or fictional (from a story, TV show, comic strip, etc.). Devote a bulletin board in the classroom to displaying pictures of moments from the family assignment.

Be-Attitudes

The Gospel story of the eight beatitudes (Mt 5:1–12) is proclaimed annually on the feast of All Saints, November 1. Celebrate it by creating a function card for each of the beatitudes. Include the words of the beatitude followed by one or two ways that a student could practice the beatitude throughout the month. Either create the cards yourself or engage the class in creating them. Guide class reflection to elicit practical, age-appropriate applications of the practice(s) that the function card suggests.

An example of a beatitude function card might read:

- Beatitude: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:3)
- (Older Child) Admit that I have needs; be open to change; realize that I am incomplete and in need of God’s grace.

- (Younger Child) Show your dependence on God by slowly reciting an “Our Father” once every day.

Advent Mentors

During the week between the solemnity of Christ the King and the first Sunday of Advent, guide students to reflect on the Gospel personalities that are part of the Advent and Christmas story: Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, angels (both Gabriel and the angel choir), Herod, the Wise Men, and shepherds. Ask questions like: What are the character’s personality traits? How can those attitudes (positive or negative) be an influence for me?

Explain the word “mentor.” Illustrate how a Gospel mentor could guide a student in daily events if the student prayerfully asks questions like: How would you handle this? How can I be like you today? What ought I avoid in my actions today? What about your attitudes and behaviors should I imitate or avoid? Remember, even Herod has something to teach us!

For each character, read the Scriptures that give a glimpse into his/her personality or values. Elicit student summaries of the event and the character traits of the person. For each, agree on one focus that can serve as a practice during Advent. Then create function cards. Include the character’s name, his/her scriptural references, and a practice (practical application related to the character).

For example:

Zechariah (Zachary/Zacharias)

(Luke 1:5–24, 61–66, 67–79)

PRACTICE: Listen well instead of speaking.

Serving in the Court of the Infant King

Ancient cultures and medieval Europe were governed by kings who lived in royal palaces. Privileged people, attendants, and slaves comprised the “court” and served various functions. In the 17th century, St. Alphonsus Liguori introduced a spiritual

practice in which the Nativity scene mirrored the court scenario. He viewed Jesus as king on a throne-bed of straw, and serving in his court were the Gospel figures who were a part of the Nativity story (star, stable, crib, straw, Mary, Joseph, animals, angels, shepherds, Wise Men, and Herod).

In the week preceding Christmas vacation, discuss each figure. What part did the figure play in the Nativity story? What life lesson or virtue might the student practice during the Christmas season as that member of the Court of the Infant King? For each of the ten figures, make a function card indicating how that character served and giving a prayer for grace to apply that virtue in daily life throughout Christmas week. For example:

Straw

Prayer: Father, like the straw that became your Son's first resting place, may I be a source of welcome to Jesus and to all whom I meet.

Practice: Jesus, let my acts of charity be the straw that supports others.

Choreograph a prayer ritual wherein the Nativity Gospel story is proclaimed aloud. During the reading, arrange for the students to build the Christmas crèche scene. For instance, when the stable is mentioned, the student(s) who randomly chose the "stable" function card place the stable on the table. All students who hold the card then pray aloud the words from the function card. Continue the reading and pause at the next court function for the student(s) to place the figurine and pray aloud from their cards.

Smarter, Not Harder

At the onset of this article, I advised you to work smarter, not harder. I caution that there is no need to "reinvent the wheel" and spend hours of time to prepare for these liturgical season rituals. Similar ideas are included in teacher manuals. I am a firm believer in the concept "divide and conquer." Join with other teachers.

Divvy up the themes and then swap ideas. Identify parents in your program who would be willing and able to take your lead suggestion and develop it. Trust that you have what it takes to evangelize the family within the time parameters available to you. Recall often that, at his Ascension, Jesus promised to be with us all days, to the end of the world. You are one very significant way that Jesus is keeping his promise!

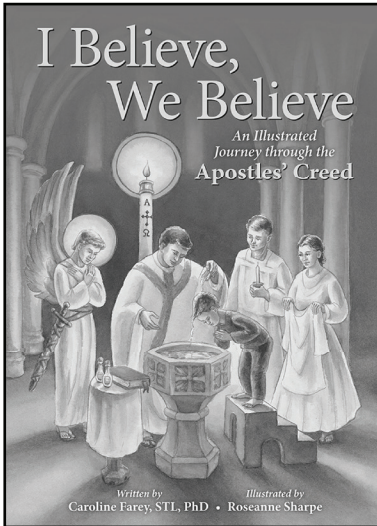
Sr. Patricia McCormack, IHM, EdD, is an international formation-education consultant, public speaker, and author. Her work blends Catholic spirituality, psychology, and wisdom gathered from parents, teachers, and students. Her book Empowering the Parking Lot Parent: A Catechist's Guide to Coaching Family Spirituality (Twenty-Third Publications, 2021) provides explanations, handouts, and function cards for each of the liturgical season rituals suggested in this article. It is a rich resource for evangelizing the family. It includes 27 reproducible handouts for families. Find more resources and information at www.ParentTeacherSupport.org.

Art Credit: *The Holy Family At Home*, Fr. Lawrence Lew, OP; Flickr.com CC.

*I Believe, We Believe:
An Illustrated Journey
through the Apostles' Creed*

By Caroline Farey and Roseanne Shape
(Bethlehem Books, 2024, 43 pages)

REVIEWED BY PETROC WILLEY



IN HIS EXPOSITION ON THE CREED, St. Ambrose calls it “our heart’s meditation and an ever-present guardian . . . unquestionably, the treasure of our soul.” I wonder how many of us think of the Creed in this way—and how many children do? A *guardian*? The *treasure* of our soul? Something on which our heart *loves to meditate*? In *I Believe, We Believe*, however, we have been given a book for children and adults that not only teaches richly and attractively but

also feeds the longing of the soul for God's beauty and eternity.

It is an illustrated catechesis on the Apostles' Creed from Bethlehem Books with text by Caroline Farey and artwork by Roseanne Sharpe. Five double-spread watercolors delightfully proclaim the whole of the Creed in pictorial form, the images simple, strong, and clear. Each illustration is followed by a catechetical commentary that walks engagingly through it, highlighting and explaining the main images. The book takes the form of a journey through the Creed, using the central figure of a child being led through the doorway of baptism into the mysteries of the faith, accompanied by the child's guardian angel who introduces the mysteries and teaches the child. The book is recommended for ages nine to adult, with read-aloud interest for those of ages seven and up.

The second half of the book is made up of a section called "Enrichment Pages"—rich resources for catechists, parents, and teachers to use to introduce their children to essential and

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foundational principles for understanding *any* aspect of the faith, principles that will help form the child in an authentic Catholic worldview. These pages draw from the same five illustrations, this time identifying images and features that appear in different ways and guises across the artwork as a

whole, in this way revealing the marvelous coherence of the Creed and the faith it proclaims. A glossary of terms and a set of cross-references to parts of the *Catechism* concludes the book.

I cannot recommend this work too highly; every place of Catholic formation, whether home, parish, or school, would benefit greatly from it. It is steeped in the catechetical principles that the Church prioritizes in her magisterial teaching. It is a

convincing testimony to the importance that mother Church places on beauty; on a gradual, mystagogical approach; and on designing materials for an accompanied, personal style of learning that make the spiritual life of the child the main concern.

One of the features of the book that makes it so valuable is precisely the way in which it encourages and supports the spiritual growth of the child: young children will find the watercolors attractive and intriguing—the faces and demeanor of Our Lord, Our Lady, and the saints will reassure and draw the child into the mysteries, while the young catechumen on the journey is present in each illustration to communicate attitudes of reverence, delight, and interest. Older children will also appreciate the affirmations and explanations of the faith accompanying the pictures. All of these truths are *lovingly* introduced in this close union of image and text, communicating a serene sense of the certainty of the faith that will aid the child in building trust in the faith.

The discovery method in the book also assists in each stage of this expanding understanding of the faith. Readers move from the initial simple contemplation of the art through the learning of terms and the basic understanding of the meaning of the text, and then gradually into an appreciation of how the biblical and liturgical figures and symbols present in the words and images lead them ever deeper into the mystery of Christ. It is a book that invites accompanied use. The parent, catechist, or teacher working with the child will find it easy to act as a midwife to the learning and will be able to follow and feed the child's appropriation of the work at whatever level. And meanwhile, the adult catechist will be learning how to communicate the faith from a place of beauty, using a text rich in Scripture and liturgy that will nourish the soul.

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The Simplicity of How God Works

“I always ended our time in the chapel by lifting up our prayers and intentions to Jesus through Mary, and then we would pray a Hail Mary together. After a while of me leading the Hail Mary, I had one of my students... ask if she could do it. I was more than happy to allow her to take the lead on our closing prayer!”



LAST YEAR WAS MY FIRST YEAR as a high school campus minister. Part of my job was also teaching an “Approaches to Leadership in the Faith” class. Students had to apply and interview to be in this class, and they were then selected to be the retreat leaders, and leaders in our school community, for the year. I had a lot of freedom when it came to how I instructed the students and what I decided to teach them. I felt as though the most valuable thing I could do is take them to the chapel for the first 20 minutes of class each time I had them. To me, having them develop a personal relationship with Christ was the most important thing in which to invest.

While we were in the chapel, I would introduce the students to different forms of prayer. We would do *lectio divina*,

intercessory prayer, praise and worship, reflections for the liturgical seasons, etc. I always ended our time in the chapel by lifting up our prayers and intentions to Jesus through Mary, and then we would pray a Hail Mary together. After a while of me leading the Hail Mary, I had one of my students, Gabriella, ask if she could do it. I was more than happy to allow her to take the lead on our closing prayer!

Soon after, she was leading the Hail Mary every time we went in the chapel, and she took her job very seriously. While this may seem small, it meant so much to me that she wanted to take on this role. From the start of the year to the end of the year, I saw her not only grow in her faith but also have a desire to continue to grow.

Fast-forward to her graduating and going to college. I reminded her not to forget to say her Hail Mary every day. After her first couple of weeks in college, she sent me a text saying that she had been praying about things a lot and that she could definitely feel the Lord working in her. This was a moment that, quite honestly, made me emotional. It was when I was able to see, as the catechist, a conversion taking place. She went from just attending chapel time, to wanting to lead the Hail Mary for the class, to going to college and praying on her own. To this day, when I talk to her I remind her to pray her Hail Mary, and she reminds me to pray mine as well!

While this is something very simple, it shows me the action of God. The Lord took action in the 20 minutes of chapel time each class to open Gabriella's heart to the importance of prayer. When she made herself available to the Lord, he took action again, helping her to recognize that she can turn to him in prayer and seek a personal relationship with him. The Lord always desires to take action in the lives of my students; when I am able to witness a young man or woman allow him to do so, it is one of my greatest joys.

Hannah Wiand
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