

The Catechetical Review

October - December 2018

Communicating Christ for a New Evangelization

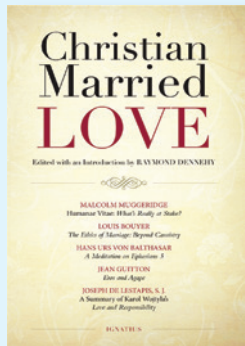
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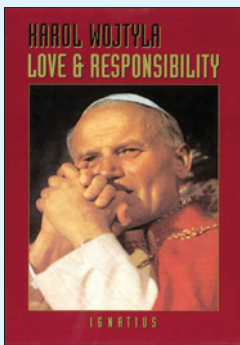


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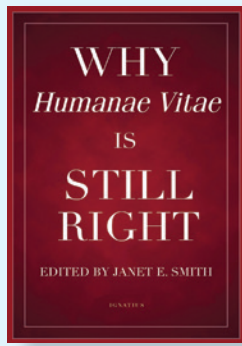
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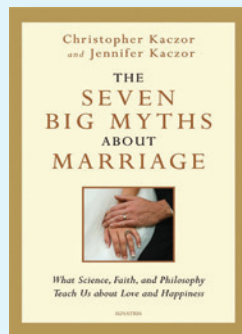
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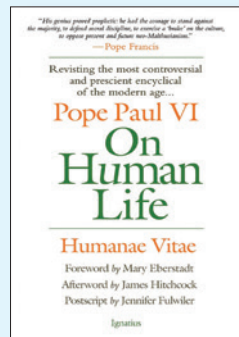
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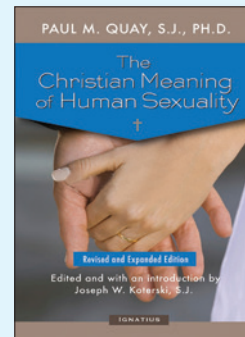
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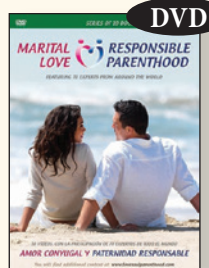
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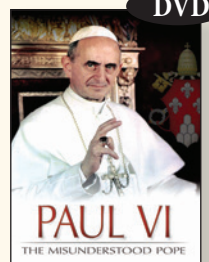
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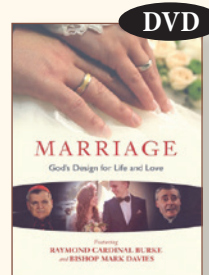
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Learning to Live the Catholic Faith

By James Pauley

What does it mean to *learn* the Catholic Faith?

Certainly there are names and historical periods that are important. Essential revealed truths must be understood. This is so because it is God's revelation that has been entrusted to the Church, a revelation that all the baptized have a right and a need to hear and understand over a lifetime. There is a story to grasp, that of salvation history and our particular place in it. But it is quite possible, of course, for these things to be learned "at a distance," as a string of doctrines and precepts that are briefly considered but then quickly discarded. Because of the unique cultural challenges we face, if our catechesis doesn't also speak to the heart, if it doesn't move those we teach to desire a life of union with God and sacrificial love of others, and if it doesn't help them live from their own personally-formed Catholic convictions, the faith of our students will lack what it most needs to survive.

Today, catechesis is ineffective if it is merely conceptual. A conceptual catechesis depends upon the stability provided by a Catholic culture present in society and in the home; and such a milieu can no longer be presupposed in most instances. We must, therefore, teach in ways that stir up personal convictions to follow the way of Christ, even as we try to rebuild cultural supports.

When the Fathers of Vatican II restored the ancient catechumenal process as the preferred way to form and initiate adult converts to Catholicism, they used these words to describe this "new" kind of formation: "The catechumenate is not a mere expounding of doctrines and precepts, but a training period in the whole Christian life, and an apprenticeship duty drawn out, during which disciples are joined to Christ their teacher."¹ Much can be gleaned here for our own catechetical work. How could our catechesis better resemble a "training period in the Christian life"? How do we teach in such a way that our students not only know the Faith but deeply desire to join themselves to Christ, so that he becomes their teacher?

In a 2015 book, Jim Beckman insightfully describes just such a process for youth ministry.² Inspired by his helpful paradigm, what movements would catechesis need to include if our learners are at the same time to be apprenticed?

Teach. First, of course, we teach. The content of the Faith originates not in ourselves, it emerges not from our own experience, but it is, in fact, *revealed*. St. Paul

put it well when he wrote, "for I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you" (1 Cor 11:23). There is a content to Christianity that our students need to hear and respond to and this content animates every aspect of our teaching.

Show. Because we are forming them so that they can live out of their communion with God, they have to actually see that intimacy with God embodied in real human beings. The theological concept of cooperation with grace, for instance, becomes something I want to do when I see its fruits realized in another person who can realistically and authentically describe for me the process. We "show," therefore, when we can offer a personal account—a testimony—of what we teach. If we can't speak from our own experience to help them in this way, perhaps there is another person in the room or in the parish (or from a family of one of our learners) who might be able to offer a compelling testimony. Of course, "showing" the faith lived is exactly the point of turning to the testimonies of the saints.

Try. In order for a real change of life to be a possible outcome, opportunities for our students to begin to put into practice what we've taught and shown them are necessary. How can we help them try to pray as we've prepared them? Perhaps there's a chance for them to attempt an answer to a challenging objection to the faith. If they've encountered the Lord in a compelling way, how can we help them put this powerful experience into words that can be shared? Without being challenged to take a step forward in some real-to-life way, our catechesis isn't going to form new instincts and habits. And it is precisely these instincts and habits that are needed if a person is to flourish as a disciple today.

Do. What we try, with accountability to see us through the experiences of failure, becomes a confident reality.

In apprenticing the Christian life, *we teach* and *show* so that *they* can *try* and *do*. The catechist, then, helps others begin to walk so that they can very soon run.

Dr. James Pauley is Professor of Theology and Catechetics at Franciscan University of Steubenville and author of the book Liturgical Catechesis in the 21st Century: A School of Discipleship (Liturgy Training Publications, 2017).

Notes

- 1 Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*, art. 14.
- 2 Jim Beckman, "Rethinking Youth Ministry" in Sherry Weddell, ed., *Becoming a Parish of Intentional Disciples* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2015).

Pastoral Accompaniment and Catechetics

By William J. Keimig

This article is the first of a two-part discussion of an area of critical importance for those working in any ministry setting—clergy or laity—whose interactions with others require mentoring skills, evangelical hospitality, ongoing pastoral interactions in the course of catechetical work, small group facilitation, parenting, nurturing, and intercessory prayer outreach. This first article addresses pastoral accompaniment's fundamental relation to good catechetics. The second article will explore practical and creative ways to implement such formation in ministry settings.

"I never look at the masses as my responsibility; I look at the individual. I can only love one person at a time, just one, one, one... So you begin. I began – I picked up one person. Maybe if I didn't pick up that one person, I wouldn't have picked up forty-two thousand... The same thing goes for you, the same thing in your family, the same thing in your church, your community. Just begin – one, one, one."

~ St. Teresa of Calcutta

Remembering something old for something to be made new

Did the early Church have emails, blogs, social websites, EWTN, publishing powerhouses that provided pamphlets, holy cards, books, CDs, DVDs, or even Bibles? Did the early Church have parish bulletins, flyers, posters, handouts, parishioner mailings, media racks, certified catechists, great circuit speakers from afar, even DREs? Did the early Church have lovely vestments, soaring art, beautiful baptismal fonts, gilded altars, glowing monstrances, well-designed hymnals, even church buildings? Did the early Church have devotional societies, knights, sodalities, bazaars, spaghetti dinners, golf tournaments, vacation Bible



schools, elementary schools with professionally printed textbooks, private colleges filled with faithful professors, or even bingo? Did the early Church have highly developed devotional traditions, a calendar full of feast days, a liturgy that organizes Christ's life for us, or even offertory envelopes?

The point is not that any of this is in any way *bad*. The point is that the Church grew by leaps and bounds *without any of it*. All of that good stuff *can* be a huge

help, but none of it can make up for the lack of people that seek to "pick up just one," and not count the cost.

What *did* the early Church have? 1) Apostles, 2) the first generation of bishops and priests and deacons, 3) a laity made up of people who were discipled in such a way that following Jesus and sharing Jesus were indistinguishable, 4) martyrs at all social levels and ages. All of this was made possible by two factors: people who *lived* as other Christs and sacramental grace to lift that witness *beyond* human weakness.

St. Paul is frequently invoked as a person who would use all the modern forms of reaching out if they were available to him, but this would *never* replace him being *sacrificially present* to souls. Do you and I prioritize that?

Something to be made new

Above all things, the Christian is called to imitation of Christ himself. The call to holiness and into a life of service is a very real call to the hearts of all people by the God who made them. Fr. Benedict Groeschel, CFR, called it “neurotic to settle for what is less than God when he has called us.”¹ God calls us and offers himself to us. The path is clear: to receive God we must partake in his mission.

The vocation of the lay faithful is thus one calling them to “restore to creation all its original value.”² Since the lay faithful are in the world, they have the ability and call to reorder the world. They promote the fullness of authentic well-being of humanity, work that is governed and nourished by the life of grace.³ The lay faithful share in Christ’s own great mission: to make God everything to everyone.⁴ Such genuine Christian living “demands a great deal,”⁵ but it is a mark of maturity for the Christian adult to seriously take on the challenge of appropriating the life of faith.⁶

In order to make God everything to everyone, the Christian must make himself “all things to all men.”⁷ For this purpose, an adult commitment to the faith necessarily “implies the death of self.”⁸ This emptying of self for the fulfillment of others is foundational in the work of Christian ministry. The call to make the faith present in the lives of others is not neatly fitted into any job title, unless that job title is no narrower than “baptized person.” It cannot be outsourced solely, or even primarily, to “official” catechists and Catholic school teachers. There must be ministry *among* laity; the mature Christian is called to minister explicitly by word and by example to their own peers. This call is a common one, but it must be further specified to a catechetical ministry field.

St. John Paul II, speaking in reference to catechesis, noted:

Accordingly, the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity.⁹

Let’s consider how adult formation can be viewed in a particularly person-to-person direction, in relation to *intimacy* or *immanence* in ministry. If the point is *intimacy with Christ*, then it could be considered that those who impact the choice of and deepening in that intimacy are those *most* in ministry. If ministry is fundamentally the work of passing on a relationship (with Christ), then those *most* in relationship (with a person to be introduced to or deepened in Christ) or who should be, are prime in consideration as ministers. Instead of ranks or offices having sole priority in defining ministry, this method instead suggests an outcomes-based definition: whoever is best able to foster this kind of intimacy in a given situation should

receive the most focused effort of ministry formation in a parish’s life.

This concept is founded in St. Paul’s expressions of his closeness to those he discipled: “Like a mother feeding and looking after her own children, we felt so devoted and protective towards you, and had come to love you so much, that we were eager to hand over to you not only the Good News but our whole lives as well.”¹⁰ To the Corinthians he wrote:

We put no obstacle in any one’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, watching, hunger; by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything. Our mouth is open to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide.¹¹

This unmistakable tone of sacrificial intimacy is echoed in the way the *General Directory for Catechesis* expresses the role of catechists:

[The exercise of catechesis] will cause [the catechist] to grow in respect and in love for catechumens and those being catechized: “What is this love? It is the love, not so much of a teacher as of a father, or rather of a mother. It is the Lord’s wish that every preacher of the Gospel, every builder up of the Church should have this love” (CT 23; cf. SC 35)... The formation, above all, nourishes the *spirituality* of the catechist, so that his activity springs in truth from his own witness of life.¹²

This deeply challenging call has been more recently communicated by Pope Francis, preferring to make use of a term analogous to intimacy and immanence—*accompaniment*:

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 (cf. Ex 3:5). 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. To accompany them would be counterproductive if it became a sort of therapy supporting their self-absorption and ceased to be a pilgrimage with

Christ to the Father... One who accompanies others has to realize that each person's situation before God and their life in grace are mysteries which no one can fully know from without... Someone good at such accompaniment does not give in to frustrations or fears. He or she invites others to let themselves be healed, to take up their mat, embrace the cross, leave all behind and go forth ever anew to proclaim the Gospel. Our personal experience of being accompanied and assisted, and of openness to those who accompany us, will teach us to be patient and compassionate with others, and to find the right way to gain their trust, their openness and their readiness to grow... Genuine spiritual accompaniment always begins and flourishes in the context of service to the mission of evangelization. Paul's relationship with Timothy and Titus provides an example of this accompaniment and formation which takes place in the midst of apostolic activity. Entrusting them with the mission of remaining in each city to "put in order what remains to be done" (Tit 1:5; cf. 1 Tim 1:3-5), Paul also gives them rules for their personal lives and their pastoral activity. This is clearly distinct from every kind of intrusive accompaniment or isolated self-realization. Missionary disciples accompany missionary disciples.¹³

The way of parsing the concept of ministry is varied. One way is to divide "ministries" along *temporal* grounds (full-time/part-time). More accepted, perhaps, is to divide along lines of *authority*. For example, it could be argued that the concept of "extra-ordinary" ministry is relative to something other than "intimacy" but instead relative to hierarchy. A ministry can also be defined by who has *rights* (in the Church and in the natural law) in an official form (e.g., a canonically-installed pastor) or relational form (e.g., parents have inalienable rights due to relationship).



If a sense of being in ministry *were* based on levels of *intimacy* or *immanence*, the definition of minister might be as follows: those who, with intention, discern their vocational and life circumstances in light of the baptismal call to foster intimacy with Christ, in and through the Church, primarily by means of personal accompaniment, sacrifice, and witness (by works and words). Basic and initial discernment of whether to enter a given ministry might take the form of three questions: 1) What are my vocational duties? 2) Who has God given me to love within those duties? 3) What gifts do I have (natural and supernatural) and how do I need to grow (formation sought within the context of vocational needs)?

Called to honor that which is nearest

There are other applications of sense of ministry being derived from levels of intimacy or immanence. For example, this chiefly explains the primacy of parents in ministry to their children, but it is important to remember that the primary form of catechesis will always be adult to adult.¹⁴ Because of this, it is necessary to ensure that catechesis is delivered to all adults, those newly reached as well as those who have already received the sacraments of initiation, thus implying a constant accompaniment. Adult accompaniment within a robust ministry of the Word is intended to bear significant fruit. Out of all Christians, "adults have the greatest responsibilities and the capacity to live the Christian message in its fully developed form."¹⁵ The mature lay Christian is primarily responsible for assisting in the accomplishment of the work of the greater mission of the Church as a whole.

To support the vital need for accompaniment in adult formation, it's useful to express a catechetical form of the principle of *subsidiarity*, as defined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

The teaching of the Church has elaborated the principle of *subsidiarity*, according to which a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good.¹⁶

The principle of subsidiarity stems from the Church's social teaching and is rooted in the fundamental understanding that the human person is the principle subject of every social organization. Because society is founded and centered on the person, the principle of subsidiarity holds that human affairs ought to be dealt with on the lowest possible level—that closest to those affected. Subsidiarity promotes the dignity of the individual person by showing concern for the diverse areas of life and communities in

which they are involved, a concern extended to “the family, groups, associations, local territorial realities; in short, for that aggregate of economic, social, cultural, sports-oriented, recreational, professional and political expressions to which people spontaneously give life and which make it possible for them to achieve effective social growth.”¹⁷ The principle of subsidiarity allows for consideration of the whole of society, while focusing on the people by whom society is made up. Subsidiarity considers the realm of civil society, which can be understood as “the sum of the relationships between individuals and intermediate social groupings... [that] strengthens the social fabric and constitutes the basis of a true community of persons.”¹⁸

Subsidiarity gives priority to *individual* relationships (the more local the better), allowing such relations to effect positive change within a community. In his landmark social encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, Pope Pius XI gave the classic definition of subsidiarity:

Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them.¹⁹

Making accompaniment a priority in ministry amounts to recognizing that passing on the faith is a *social* activity. All conversion is local, which is why faith formation must remain a robustly-supported *local* activity. From this principle arises the importance of mentorship, and for that guidance to be proximal and personal: a mentoring accompaniment. Failure to honor this principle risks disempowering the local community in favor of a cult of distance experts, and making instruction less able to address individual experiences and learning needs. As the *General Directory for Catechesis* explains:

Catechetical pedagogy will be effective to the extent that the Christian community becomes a point of concrete reference for the faith journey of individuals. This happens when the community is proposed as a source, locus, and means of catechesis. Concretely, the community becomes a visible place of faith-witness. It provides for the formation of its members. It receives them as the family of God. It constitutes itself as the living and permanent environment for growth in the faith. Besides public and collective proclamation of the Gospel, person-to-person contact, after the example of Jesus and the Apostles, remains indispensable. In this way, personal conscience is

more easily committed. The gift of the Holy Spirit comes to the subject from one living person to another. Thus, the power of persuasion becomes more effective.²⁰

A new skill set to form disciple-makers

Any oversight or higher-level formation should be designed to support and complement the formation being undertaken locally and personally, in parishes accompanied by those committed to personally come to know participants over an extended time. Never forgetting that formation in the faith is always first and foremost God’s attentive presence to the *individual*, adult formation should aim at that which best fosters actual *competency* in *those* individuals, rather than solely a generic approach to certifying. This includes encouraging personal accountability to excellence and creating formation structures that train towards effective of soul-to-soul persuasion, dialogue, genuine openness to others, and empathic listening—the skill-set of personal attentiveness.

This skill-set helps those who minister to honor the movements of grace within each person, building people to serve people, encouraging relational ministry, with the goal of helping people discover by experience the value of making the effort to be more personally available to people.

Following this divine pedagogy, the work of forming souls must be attentive to the words of Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*:

[I]n the long run, is there any other way of handing on the Gospel than by transmitting to another person one’s personal experience of faith? It must not happen that the pressing need to proclaim the Good News to the multitudes should cause us to forget this form of proclamation whereby an individual’s personal conscience is reached and touched by an entirely unique word that he receives from someone else.²¹

This recognizes that the work of forming souls is entrusted to other souls *because* witness has the power to convict. “The one thing most likely to induce the faithful to lead a really Christian life is precisely the virtue of the one charged with teaching it.”²² The faith that is passed on is of necessity profoundly personal, from human being to human being. The mature Christian adult has the ability to see himself or herself as a minister of God’s own divine providence, called to be his hands, voice, and listening ear in the world.

The importance of individual attentiveness cannot be swallowed in the larger context of forming large numbers of people for the work of catechesis, for “every person, family, and intermediate group has something original to offer the community.”²³ Faith is nurtured most naturally

in a community of individuals centered on shared faith. The community of faith builds itself up as a body and finds individuals—accompanying figures—who can commit to the demanding task of building up the individuals within it, empowering them to strengthen and give back to that community themselves.

An old way to renewal

In Acts of the Apostles, Luke describes the first local Christian community:

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and the prayers.²⁴

As noted in this passage and echoed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, four pillars marked this early community's way of being together: 1) The apostles' teaching (Creed); 2) fellowship (life in Christ); 3) The breaking of the bread (liturgy, centered on the Eucharist); and 4) the prayers (Christian prayer). Non-local efforts can aid or enrich these four pillars, but their essence is fundamentally local. Fellowship is profoundly proximal. The Mass, and all sacramental celebrations, exist only when clergy and laity share a sacred space and a personal moment of offering and reception. And prayers, always stemming from Jesus' own emphasis, draw the faithful together in community: "If we pray the Our Father sincerely, we leave individualism behind, because the love that we receive frees us from it."²⁵

However, the first pillar, which encompasses catechesis and formation in Catholic teaching, is less often recognized as a work self-evidently local. In current times, guest speakers from afar and high-quality audio and video teachings threaten to replace local catechists.

For all their talent and all they have to offer, guest speakers and audio/video teachers are neither connected to the many local dioceses and parishes that use their services nor involved with the ongoing work of forming and loving a particular people in a particular place. They are unable to participate in the struggles and graces involved with forming those people. An over-reliance on distant experts can also undercut a diocese's commitment to form people locally, a commitment that takes far greater effort, time, and resources but that more fruitfully addresses the particular needs of a parish, region, or diocese. Pope Paul VI cut to the heart of this when he wrote, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than teachers, and if he listens to teachers it is because they are witnesses."²⁶ Although a guest speaker or teacher may have impactful things to say, no teaching cuts to the heart more than that of an authentic witness. It is imperative that catechists give *personal witness* to those they teach.

In keeping with the principle of subsidiarity, this harder way is the Church's way: "*the most precious gift that the Church can offer the bewildered and restless world of our time is to form within it Christians who are confirmed in what is essential and who are humbly joyful in their faith.*"²⁷ To reemphasize, non-local helps and training can aid this first pillar, but its essence remains fundamentally *local*. The long-term goal should be forming a confident parent in *that* place, a competent catechist in *that* place, a capable lay leader in *that* place, and (most important of all) a clearly empowered chief catechist in *that* place: a priest whose vocation can become the locus of teaching, community fellowship, liturgy, and prayers, allowing the immanent hospitality of Christ to enliven catechesis with a spirit of human warmth and welcome around *that* particular altar.

Accompanying figures are absolutely essential to accomplish this kind of formation, in order for evangelization and catechesis to remain appropriately situated with those who can be in authentic ministerial relationships in the field. Accompaniment brings a necessary measure of *intimacy*, of closeness to those being formed, of sacrificial presence.

"It's not enough to love. People have to feel that they are loved." ~ St. John Bosco

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Notes

- 1 Fr. Benedict Groeschel, CFR, *Spiritual Passages: The Psychology of Spiritual Development* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1984), 11.
- 2 John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, art. 14.
- 3 *Ibid.*, art. 14.
- 4 *Ibid.*; also 1 Cor 15:28; Jn 12:32.
- 5 Peter Feldmeier, *The Developing Christian: Spiritual Growth Through the Life Cycle* (New York/Mawah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2007), 173.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 175.
- 7 1 Cor 9:22.
- 8 Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages*, 69.
- 9 John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, art. 5.
- 10 1 Thess 2:7-8.
- 11 2 Cor 6:3-11.
- 12 *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 239.
- 13 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), arts. 169-170, 172-173.
- 14 See GDC, no. 258.
- 15 GDC, no. 38.
- 16 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 1883.
- 17 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005), IV.185
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno: Encyclical Letter on Reconstructing the Social Order* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1931), art. 79.
- 20 GDC, no. 158.
- 21 Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, art. 46.
- 22 Dom Jean-Baptiste Chautard, O.C.S.O., *The Soul of the Apostolate* (Kentucky: Catholic Way Publishing, 1946), 135.
- 23 CSDC, IV.187.
- 24 Acts 2:41-42.
- 25 *Catechism*, par. 2792.
- 26 EN, art. 41.
- 27 Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, *Guide for Catechists* (Vatican City, 1993), no. 8.

Tailored Accountability: The Art of Pastoral Accompaniment

By Carole Brown

As the horrors of World War II were unfolding in Europe, a certain parish in Krakow with a thriving youth ministry was particularly hard hit. Of the dozen or so Salesian priests who served there, all but two were arrested and removed to Nazi concentration camps. With a parish full of young people who were being traumatized on a daily basis, how could they possibly pick up the pieces?

The man who stepped in to fill the gap was a layman named Jan. He was not an obvious pick. Besides his already intense personality, he had stomach problems and a peculiar voice. A nervous condition prevented him from maintaining his career as an accountant. As stress compounded his health difficulties, he moved home to work in the family business as a tailor. He likely would have lived and died as an eccentric recluse, were it not for the crisis situation that was erupting into his milieu, and now his parish.

When he was asked to pick up some of the slack in the parish youth ministry program, he readily volunteered, but it wouldn't be all fun and games with Jan. It took a while for the youth to warm up to his somewhat peculiar personality and his methods. He organized them into small groups, designating some of the young adult men to help lead. He would meet with the leaders to ask them questions about their spiritual habits and assign them with "spiritual homework" for which he held them personally accountable.

When one of those leaders lost his father, Jan took the grieving young man under his wing and, in what seemed like a counter-intuitive move, gave him a copy of the works of St. John of the Cross. The young man was deeply intrigued by both the poetry and prose with which the saint described the journey of the soul to union with God, and the role that suffering played in that journey. This young man eventually completed a doctorate on St. John of the Cross.

But this is not so much a story about that young man, Karol Wojtyla, who would later become a priest, and then a bishop, and then Pope John Paul II, and then Saint John Paul II, as it is about the man who accompanied him



Karol Wojtyla as a University Student by L.S. Andrews

in his formation. Actually, Karol was only one of eleven priestly vocations to emerge from the "Living Rosary" youth ministry program, developed by that most unlikely lay person, Jan Tyranowski.¹ Jan was a trained accountant and a tailor, and his method could truly be described as "tailored accountability." We can only wonder how different the world might be today, if not for his influential role in the life of Karol Wojtyla.

Some four centuries earlier at the university of Paris, two students were looking for a third housemate to help defray costs. They were an improbable pair: one of them was a handsome nobleman from the Basque country with many worldly pretensions, the other a studious peasant who really wanted to be holy. As it happened, the student who joined them was a Spaniard preparing for priesthood. His name was Ignatius. He was experimenting with a set of "spiritual exercises" that had emerged from his own experiences in prayer, and he persuaded his two housemates to let him experiment with it on them. He found that he needed to adapt the exercises somewhat differently to the already holy Peter Faber who struggled with scrupulousity, and the not-quite-converted Francis Xavier. His personalized approach worked! Not only did both become his first companions in the Society of Jesus,

but they also became canonized saints. And it's fair to say that the world would be a much different place, were it not for Ignatius' way of accompanied discipleship. With the help of Ignatius and the grace of God, both of these men were able to overcome deep personal obstacles that were keeping them from maturing in their discipleship.

All of these examples supply us with a picture of the value of real pastoral accompaniment, wherein a more personally directed style of formation takes place, either alongside traditional classroom catechesis, or, for a season at least, *instead of* the classroom lecture style of formation. Pastoral accompaniment, whether formal or informal, takes place when a spiritually experienced mentor walks with a less-experienced disciple through the steps of gaining maturity. It could be called a type of spiritual life-coaching.

What the Spirit is Saying in the Church

In recent years, the Holy Spirit has been calling for a renewal of pastoral accompaniment in the Church. Pastoral accompaniment is not the same as spiritual direction, although there are similarities and overlaps. The term "spiritual friendship" or "spiritual mentoring" might be more apt to convey the sense of what the Spirit seems to be inviting the Church to develop. Accompaniment happens when one who has been practicing the spiritual life with some intentionality advises another who wants to grow in the spiritual life. We get a hint of this in Saint John Paul's seminal work on catechesis, *Catechesis in Our Times* (1979), where he described a variety of scenarios that can endanger the faith development of the baptized:

A certain number of children baptized in infancy come for catechesis in the parish without receiving any other initiation into the faith and still without any explicit personal attachment to Jesus Christ; they only have the capacity to believe placed within them by Baptism and the presence of the Holy Spirit; and opposition is quickly created by the prejudices of their non-Christian family background or of the positivist spirit of their education. In addition, there are other children who have not been baptized and whose parents agree only at a later date to religious education: for practical reasons, the catechumenal stage of these children will often be carried out largely in the course of the ordinary catechesis. Again, many pre-adolescents and adolescents who have been baptized and been given a systematic catechesis and the sacraments still remain hesitant for a long time about committing their whole lives to Jesus Christ - if, moreover, they do not attempt to avoid religious education in the name of their freedom. Finally, even adults are

not safe from temptations to doubt or to abandon their faith, especially as a result of their unbelieving surroundings. *This means that "catechesis" must often concern itself not only with nourishing and teaching the faith, but also with arousing it 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. This concern will in part decide the tone, the language and the method of catechesis. Surely, all experienced catechists recognize this "hesitancy" of many, or even most adolescents to commit their whole life to Jesus Christ.*²

What St. John Paul hints at here is the personalization of instruction that recognizes and takes account of the secular surroundings, the resistance at home, the hesitancy to commit, or the temptation to abandon faith. Truly human formation doesn't just continue plowing through content, but takes sensitive measures to journey people through such conditions to "the threshold of faith." Perhaps he was thinking of the tailored apprenticeship he had received from Jan Tyranowski.

Of course, there are also many who *are* curious about what it means to put faith in Jesus Christ. These too need living witnesses who are willing to share concretely "how it's done." The *General Directory for Catechesis* refers to this process as "an apprenticeship in the whole Christian life"³—or in contemporary terms, "intentional discipleship,"⁴ brought about through personal accompaniment.

Pope Francis, himself a spiritual son of St. Ignatius, has also championed the practice of spiritual accompaniment. In *Joy of the Gospel*, he wrote:

In our world, ordained ministers and other pastoral workers can make present the fragrance of Christ's closeness and his personal gaze. 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 (cf. Ex 3:5). 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.⁵

Further to that, in 2017, the United States Catholic Bishops published a booklet entitled *Living as Missionary Disciples* in which they proposed a practical "pastoral methodology," articulated in four parts: "Encounter, Accompany, Community and Send". It is an excellent and practical description of the work that is before us.

Accompanied Discipleship for Adults in the Parish

In 2014, I led four small groups of men and women from sixteen parishes in the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City through

the discipleship materials developed by Catholic Christian Outreach.⁶ The course has 36 sessions, which took nearly a year with breaks for holidays, summer vacations, and flu season. The small group atmosphere created a more intimate environment within which participants could have an open conversation about the status of their own personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as savior. This was followed by conversations about opening themselves more consciously to the influence of the Holy Spirit, to basic Christian disciplines, and to the attitudes that mark the obedience of faith—such as overcoming concern about what others think. Finally, the study walks people through the how-to's of evangelizing and accompanying others in this journey.⁷

Several of the participants returned to their parishes and began a group of their own—which in turn multiplied, as men and women from that group went on to lead their own group of disciples. The small group experience is, itself, a valuable experience of being accompanied.⁸ One woman shared that, on the first night her group met, she was coping with a spouse who was suicidal. When they introduced themselves, she simply said, “My name is Rachel and I am not okay.” As she shared what was going on, the group accepted her and prayed with her, inviting Jesus right into her situation. She said later that in the discipleship group, she made some of the best friends and got some of the best support she'd ever had. But she also learned how to put Jesus at the center of her life in a way she never had before. The accompaniment and bonding that developed in the group became a source of deep joy for her when she went to Mass each Sunday. Suddenly, it was no longer an anonymous experience—she met people from her group at Mass who actually knew her, knew what was going on in her life, and who cared about her. *Voilà*: genuine community! This same woman went on to disciple a new group of women the following year, and the experience multiplied.⁹

One particularly powerful aspect of this process is the “one-on-one” meeting that the leader has with each of the disciples at the conclusion of each study. This method of “accompaniment” is, to say the least, unusual—and sometimes uncomfortable—for Catholics to experience. But it opens up a whole new world in terms of actually helping people to mature in their spiritual life. We discovered that often, even active parish leaders have some obstacle that is blocking the effect of grace. Such things wouldn't normally come up in a parish formation setting, or even in the small group. But in the one-on-one, we heard things like the following: “I actually haven't been to confession in 35 years”; or “I'm in my second marriage, and I haven't sought an annulment”; or “I'm not sure what to think about the idea of a ‘personal relationship with Jesus’”; or “I'm being emotionally abused in my marriage, and I'm not sure if it's okay for me to leave.” These are extraordinary moments of accompaniment.

Personalizing the Culture of a Parish

Leading lay people through such a process to the point that they can lead others into a transforming relationship with Jesus will ultimately also be transformative for a parish—not only because of the rich network of personal relationships that develops between parishioners, but also because of the genuine pastoral gifts that exist among the laity. As parishioners learn how to help each other along the path of Christian maturity, an enormous amount of pressure is taken off the priest, who in most cases cannot offer such personal attention to each of his parishioners.

The Spirit continues to prompt the Church into a more personalized approach to its ministry. No doubt, if we look to the small core of parishioners who are bearing the great burden of just trying to keep the bases covered, we could be overwhelmed. The Church in our day needs a veritable army of disciples who are skilled in the art of accompaniment to respond to the Spirit's call.

How can we get there? We must commit to methods that not only teach solid doctrine but also are embodied in the practice of accompaniment, and that are designed to multiply. Methods such as the discipleship process of Catholic Christian Outreach will be a great aid in developing leaders with a solid foundation, as well as skills to recognize and address the interior and personal obstacles that can stunt the normal spiritual development of a baptized person. As the Church advances in the New Evangelization, methods and materials that can do this will be an invaluable asset.

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Notes

- 1 See George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of St. John Paul II* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999), 58–62. Also George Hunston Williams, *The Mind of John Paul II: Origins of His Thought and Action*. (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), 77–81. Also, Andre Frossard, *Be Not Afraid: Pope John Paul II Speaks Out on his Life, his Beliefs, and his Inspiring Vision for Humanity*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), 18.
- 2 Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979), art. 19 (emphasis added).
- 3 *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 63.
- 4 See Sherry Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2012).
- 5 Pope Francis, *Joy of the Gospel*, art. 169.
- 6 For more information about the CCO discipleship materials, visit <https://cco.ca/>
- 7 Some cautionary notes are in order. Such methods require taking the “long view.” This is not a process that can be launched before it is built. Leaders themselves need to have the experience of being disciplined and accompanied. Rather, discern carefully a group of eight leaders (ideally 4 men and 4 women) who have the potential to lead others, and lead them through it with a view to leading a group themselves the following year.
- 8 This approach prioritizes the faith development of adults as the “chief form” of catechesis—as does the *General Directory for Catechesis* (59). While parishes typically devote most of their energy into the catechesis of children and adolescents, they might be well served to consider an adjustment of priorities—for, if adults have been properly disciplined, they will be better prepared to disciple their own children, as well as those who come to the parish for catechesis.
- 9 See her video testimony along with others, on “Impact of a Glacier: The Power of Multiplying Discipleship in a Catholic Parish”. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5CM2i92kfn5>

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20). Christ’s promise may be counted on by any catechist in any catechetical situation. In this department, we wish to include testimonies from catechists who can speak of how God’s unique presence in the catechetical setting may be discovered. We hope you enjoy and are encouraged by this testimony as we all attune ourselves to his presence in the catechetical mission.

Finding God in Poverty

The most memorable statement from the angry email was, “This is not what my son signed up for.” Three weeks prior to departure, I had finally informed our youth group of some final needs for our summer mission trip to Hardin County, Kentucky: a sleeping pad or air mattress, as we would likely be sleeping on a floor, and a swim suit—mainly for the tarpaulin-screened bucket baths we would be taking. “Kevin McQuiggen’s” mother was distressed by the conditions in which her son would be living for the week of the trip. The theme for the week was Catholic social teaching, so I replied how our “difficulties” for the week would be a good exercise in solidarity with the people with whom we would be staying to try to assuage her objections.

My town has only a few people I would consider “rich.” The population is mainly mid to lower-middle-class. Kevin’s family is solidly middle-class, and his parents are understandably happy that their children have a comfortable life. Kevin was a regular altar-server, but wasn’t involved in much else at our parish. When he did attend some

youth activity it was for him primarily a social event. I was somewhat surprised when his mother turned in the paperwork to have him make the trip, really. The first time I had tried to recruit some teens after a Mass he had jokingly asked, “Can’t we just write a check and stay home?”

In Kentucky, Kevin was assigned to a crew which was re-framing, re-siding, and re-roofing a rotted-out double-wide trailer. The family of four was living in the living room with all their possessions as the rest of the home was uninhabitable. They had no running water and one jerry-rigged electrical outlet. Only one of the adults was employed part-time, the other had lost his job when the coal mine had closed and he couldn’t find steady work, so they had no health insurance either. On the first day of work Kevin was visibly distressed by the living conditions he had seen. After the third day he remarked, “They’ve got nothing but they are still so friendly, and they want to share some things with *us*.” Some of the topics of discussion during the evening sessions with the trip leaders were the dignity of the human person, the preferential option for



the poor, the dignity of work and rights of workers. Kevin was engaged in the discussions and was connecting the teaching to his observation of the family he was helping. He had heard Jesus' command to love one's neighbors all his life, but he said he had never met anyone who was not pretty much like himself, so he had just been nice to people who didn't really need much of anything from him. These were people who really needed help, and Kevin felt now that God expected more from him. The mission trip did not only expose Kevin to the reality of poverty. When he internalized that God loved each of us and wanted us to give of ourselves to care for each other, he began to better appreciate how much God loves us to have died to save us.

Since returning home from that trip two years ago, Kevin has done more volunteer work to help others in need: Habitat for Humanity, the local food pantry, and the Family Promise program that houses homeless families in churches for a week on a rotating basis. He has also started to study more about his faith. He has attended the Great Adventure Bible Timeline study, and his mother shared with me that he had started regularly receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation. For Kevin, a personal experience of putting Jesus' command of love into practice made him want to understand more about the Savior and grow closer to him.

Matthew Fallon
Danville, IN

God Doesn't Love Me

The first time I met "Laura," she entered our junior high faith formation session with her arms crossed, head down, and a look of disdain on her face. This first day of sessions for the school year was wild. Parents were a bit confused on which classrooms their kids should be in, and general chaos was the norm. I did not get a chance to talk with Laura that night, as she was one of ninety students in our session.

Our faith formation sessions included activities, presentations, and small group discussion time so the young people would discuss the topic in more detail. We quickly found two types of junior high students: those who liked to talk and those who did not participate in the least. Laura was in the latter group. She was never disrespectful, but it was easy to see she did not want to be there. I have to think there were signs leading up to her eventual participation that were overlooked, but one night, two months into our year, we were discussing salvation and she spoke. One of the jumping off points for that discussion included the phrase, "God loves us enough to die for us." As I finished that statement Laura defiantly said, "God doesn't love me. I'm too terrible of a person, and I've done so many bad things." After the shock of *who* spoke wore off, the heartbreaking realization of *what* she said remained.

Laura, thirteen-years-old, had written herself off because she thought her sins were too great to overcome. Though this was my first year with this junior high group, Laura had been attending faith formation sessions for many years and still thought that she was too far gone, too stained, too "bad" of a person to be loved by God.

As heartbreaking as her point was, she was opening up for the first time. The conversation of love stirred something in her to become vulnerable. This provided an opportunity to share, in a simple way, the *kerygma*. God is love and God created man and woman out of love. He created man and woman in his image and likeness, and he created them very good (Gen 1:27). Sin entered the world and distorted man's relationship with God, but his love is so far reaching that he became man, suffered, died, and conquered death in the resurrection so that man would have the opportunity to spend eternity with God. His love is relentless and cannot be outrun. Laura listened intently to the message, as if it was the first time she had heard the Good News. She didn't scoff or ignore what was said, but she listened with an openness to hearing the message. That was the beginning of the change we saw in Laura. It was not an overnight change, but it was a message that resonated with her. Each week after that session, she participated more in the discussions by asking questions and really thinking about the message. Her demeanor changed, too, as she came with a smile most weeks and engaged more of our adults and other teens in discussion before the sessions started. Our adults continued to follow up with her throughout the year checking in, reiterating the message of the Gospel, reinforcing the dignity and worth of being made in the image and likeness of God. We noticed the immense difference months later and the conversion of heart.

Typically we ask our students to open our session in prayer if they would like. This usually means the room gets quiet and, after a short time, one of our adults prays. Just before the end of the faith formation year, though, Laura offered to pray. Though it was not overly theological, it was heartfelt and authentic. What a joy it was to witness the transformation of Laura throughout the year. Article 56 in the *General Directory for Catechesis* describes conversion as a process. This process has been and will continue to be witnessed as our community continues walking with her, mentoring her, and teaching her the Faith that brings all of us back to the love of the Father. Laura's conversion has been a transformation from a closed off young lady, to receiving the Good News, pondering these things, and eventually acting upon them enough to pray out loud in front of her peers. This conversion process that many have observed has become a living witness to the power of the Gospel.

Mike Sylvester
Bluffton, SC

CHANGING THE SUBJECT: FORMING PEOPLE TO ENCOUNTER MYSTERY



By Leonard DeLorenzo

There is a scene in the film *Good Will Hunting* where Sean (Robin Williams) and Will (Matt Damon) share a pivotal conversation on a bench overlooking a swan-filled lake. The week before, Will quickly and incisively interprets a painting that Sean had created and hung in his office. As Sean says to the younger Will: “You presume to know everything about me because you saw a painting of mine and ripped my [bleeping] life apart.” Will Hunting is a transcendent kind of genius with limitless intellectual abilities and who seemingly already knows everything except for one truly necessary thing: he doesn’t know that he’s trapped by his own presumptuousness. And this is where Sean begins to turn things around on Will, starting with art:

If I asked you about art, you’d probably give me the skinny on every art book ever written. Michelangelo... you know a lot about him: life’s work, political aspirations, him and the pope, sexual orientation, the whole works, right? But I’ll bet you can’t tell me what it smells like in the Sistine Chapel. You’ve never actually stood there and looked up at that beautiful ceiling; seen *that*.¹

Will has never been in the atmosphere of the mysteries he presumes to know so much about. As if for the first time Will senses that rather than there being just more stuff to learn, there is a whole different way of thinking, apprehending, and even being grasped that is foreign to him. A latent desire stirs within him to see what Sean’s seen and to feel what he’s felt.

The issue with forming Will Hunting is not primarily about getting the right information in front of him, as if the object of his gaze is everything. The issue has to do with changing him as a subject, opening him up to beauty and mystery, guiding him past his insecurities, helping him dismantle his defenses, and unlocking the certainties that clamp down his gifted mind. Even if he were, at that very

moment, transported to the Sistine Chapel with the early morning light streaming in the windows and the sweet musty smell of the cloistered night still lingering, Will wouldn’t see and feel what Sean did unless he opened himself up to the atmosphere, rather than cataloguing it. The wrong disposition makes beauty, truth, and goodness recede into obscurity, muteness, and invisibility.

The example of Will Hunting is an entrée to thinking about a hidden and foundational aspect of catechetical instruction, which concerns the issue of forming the mannerisms—the approach—of those being catechized. Few, if any of us, work with transcendent geniuses. What we more likely have are people quite a lot like ourselves: distracted, hurried, insecure, perhaps presumptuous, and unskilled in yielding to mystery. I want to focus our attention on the necessity of the slow work of teaching the habits, the disciplines, the approach to encountering the mysteries we proclaim and pass on in the life of faith. To do this, I will consider what Scripture demands of us when we encounter it, alongside sacred art. The hope on the horizon is to invite those we catechize into the atmosphere of the mysteries, but only after or at least alongside nurturing a change in them as subjects.

Between Certitude and Ignorance: A Prelude to Encounter

Will Hunting knew too much in the wrong way. He was locked in to his own certitude. He was in need of wonder that is only given to those willing to stand humbly before mystery—and here the term “mystery” is used quite broadly to include certainly the “mystery of God,” but also “the mystery of another human being” or even “the mystery of art.” In that respect, I actually have worked with quite a lot of students and adults who are more or less like Will Hunting and, to be honest, I have been like him, too. Certitude may take various forms such as “I already know

what this is really about,” or “I absolutely must keep to my schedule,” or “that is just the way that person is,” or “I just can’t be bothered.” These predispositions are rarely receptive to a revelation of beauty.

There is also an equal and opposite obstacle to apprehending beauty that comes not from presuming to know too much but from assuming that since you can’t really know for sure, just about anything goes. As is sometimes thought with art, the subjective experience is everything, which functionally means that there is no objective quality to the work itself. All that matters, it seems, is what it *does for me*. Likewise, in other instances, what seems to count is who *my God* or *this person* is for me. These assumptions run on scripts of banal tolerance, dictating that “I can think *this* and you can think *that* and we can all think *what we want* and there is no way to adjudicate because, well, the experience is everything.”² Rather than certitude, this is a form of willful ignorance, or entrenched skepticism about actually arriving somewhere definite in the interpretation of a work of art, or the apprehension of another person, or the worship of God.

Part of the crucial hidden work of catechesis is leading others away from these forms of rigidity and vagueness—which often coexist in different ways within each person—so as to be willing and ready to be grasped by beauty.

The Willingness to See: Encountering Scripture

How do we teach people to encounter Scripture? A Will Hunting might think of it as a collection of things to know about, perhaps with occasionally helpful moral lessons mixed in. The vague skeptic might see it as useful to the extent that it helps you with what you need or corresponds to what you were already looking for.

But what about thinking of Scripture as Sean spoke above about the Sistine Chapel: as an atmosphere, an environment, a culture in which to be grasped in wonder? Sure, that’s a tough sell to bleary-eyed tweens on a Sunday morning or overextended adult inquirers on a Wednesday night, but it was also a tough sell to the publicly overconfident, privately insecure Will Hunting. If Sean was right, maybe this is right, too.

Instead of trying to wade into this inquiry about Scripture from the shallow end, let’s just jump straight in to the most daunting part—i.e., the Book of Revelation. It is far more common than it should be for the Book of Revelation to be treated as either a repository of strange images or as a photographic testament to what the final future of things shall be, precisely and exactly, at the end of time. Things get weird pretty quickly when an imbalanced literalism is applied to the text, and people get weird just as quickly when they start to use the images in the Book to validate their own *a priori* views.

When Romano Guardini—the twentieth century theologian, liturgist, and literary scholar—wrote on the Book of Revelation, he set out, first of all, to teach his readers *how* to approach the text. While recognizing that readers should eventually know certain things, he argues that inflexibility renders the text lifeless. Moreover, too much looseness, as if this were all unendingly open to interpretation, also keeps the deep meaning of the text obscure, mute, and invisible. Guardini writes:

To understand [Revelation], one must first of all free oneself from the conception of things’ rigidity. Gradually animated, they must mingle and flow, and the reader must surrender himself to the movement... He must learn to listen, to be docile of spirit, accepting the images as they come, opening his heart to their meaning, harmonizing his being with them. Then the degree of understanding willed by God will be his. Once he has made this intrinsic approach to [Revelation], not before, careful study of its symbols, its construction, its historical background will be wonderfully profitable.³

Guardini recognizes the typical human tendency to want to change the things that we encounter to fit into our pre-existing expectations or biases. The thing about approaching Scripture is that the objective quality of the Word takes precedence (if Scripture is to be read *as Scripture*, that is). What is required of the one who stands before this work is, therefore, the same thing that is required of anyone who is to encounter, say, a work of art in an honest and truthful manner: the viewer must be willing to see what is *actually* there and to hear what is *actually* said.⁴ The first and most important part of encountering this work is the very manner by which you approach it.

Usually with considerable guidance, the reader must learn to let go of the ways of interpretation he or she *imposes* on the work. “We must be careful,” Guardini continues elsewhere, “not to pollute and darken the divine converse with our impurity and darkness; not to confuse it in our confusion, distorting it to fit our pride and pleasure, dragging it down into our worldliness, instead of adjusting our lives to its truth!”⁵

The Book of Revelation is all about the unveiling of true beauty and a judgment upon all that is not *that*. In fact, the unveiling of the Lord’s beauty is the final “No!” to all our feeble attempts to control and dictate meaning, or perpetually keep things open and revisable. The practice of reading this work correctly is, therefore, a way of participating in what is revealed therein: that the only “attitude toward Revelation [that] is valid [is a] readiness to hear and listen.”⁶ This is what I call “aesthetic recalibration”—letting go of the need to make beauty fit our preferred categories as the willingness to grow into the

dimensions of the beauty we encounter takes its place. This is what it means to read Scripture *as Scripture*.

The Virtue of Strategic Patience: Becoming Capable of Encounter

It is one thing *to say* that encountering beauty on its own terms is preferable, another *to will* to do that, and another thing still to *actually be able* to do it. Living in our present digital culture makes this all harder. Consider this summary conclusion from a study on online research habits from the University College London:

It is clear that users are not reading online in the traditional sense; indeed there are signs that new forms of ‘reading’ are emerging as users ‘power browse’ horizontally through titles, contents pages and abstracts going for quick wins. It almost seems that they go online to avoid reading in the traditional sense.⁷

This particular study was completed in 2008, when both *Twitter* and iPhones were still in their infancy. There is no risk in saying that the desire for “quick wins” has only increased since then. But even then, culture commentator Nicholas Carr recognized a change in himself, as a subject:

Immersing myself in a book or a lengthy article used to be easy. My mind would get caught up in the narrative or the turns of the argument, and I’d spend hours strolling through long stretches of prose. That’s rarely the case anymore. Now my concentration often starts to drift after two or three pages. I get fidgety, lose the thread, begin looking for something else to do. [...] The deep reading that used to come naturally has become a struggle.⁸

Attention is difficult and patience is fleeting. Especially Millennials (and those coming after them) have been reared in a culture that has trained them to scan everything and focus on little. So how does one do what Guardini says we ought to do when encountering art, or the revelation of God’s Word, or even just what someone else wants to tell us?

By practicing, strategically.

Here’s what the Harvard art historian Jennifer Roberts says about the place of such practices in the learning environment:

I want to...[create] opportunities for students to engage in deceleration, patience, and immersive attention. I would argue that these are the kind of practices that now most need to be actively engineered by faculty, because they simply are no longer available “in nature”, as it were. Every external pressure, social and technological, is pushing students in the other direction, toward immediacy,

rapidity, and spontaneity...I want to give them the permission and the structures to slow down.⁹

This is a critical point. The kind of environments that incline us to wait, to wonder, to slowly grow in understanding, to pass through waves of boredom to *perhaps* arrive at insight—these kinds of environment have become quite rare in the ordinary course of modern life. Teachers and catechists must therefore create these environments for their students. In Roberts’s view, the craft of teaching requires the deliberate cultivation of environments that will challenge—even *force*—students to exercise patience and attentiveness. The foundational but often hidden educational task is in forming intentional *cultures*.¹⁰

This does not mean simply that organizing a classroom in a certain way or choosing a particular kind of space for a faith formation session will do the trick. Again, transporting Will Hunting straight from the side of the lake to the middle of the Sistine Chapel wouldn’t magically deliver to him the sense of being grasped by beauty that Sean once experienced. Just as Will would have to slowly learn how to rest intimately with a lover, so too did he need to be prepared, formed, even prodded into opening himself to the sort of contemplation a place like the Sistine Chapel invites and demands. So too with those who undergo catechetical instruction, who are being made capable of intimacy with Jesus Christ and of being grasped by the mystery of divine love.

Dwelling in Beauty: Encountering Art

How do you guide people into the virtue of “strategic patience,” of a willingness to wait for rather than grasp at understanding, to dwell in poised attentiveness rather than seeking to run away through any number of immediately enticing distractions? By beginning with small exercises, then slowly increasing the concentration and intensity. To illustrate my point, I will share a way I, as a teacher, led a group of students through such a training regimen.

A few years ago, I developed a theology course that integrates academic study with deep spiritual reflection, through the medium of (mostly) sacred art. Like Sean talking to Will, I intended to stir my students’ imaginations with appeals to places like the Sistine Chapel; but unlike Sean, I received a grant to actually take the entire class to Italy over Spring Break. As wonderful as that sounds (and it was wonderful), there was a daunting challenge right from the start: in addition to teaching the students the theology that would discipline their minds (a form of teaching which is in my comfort zone), I also had to prepare them to read art well (a form of teaching *not* in my comfort zone). The latter task was very much about developing the right approach. It wouldn’t matter if they were in the Sistine Chapel if they weren’t prepared to give themselves over to the atmosphere of mystery.

I had two months to lead typical college students from their fast-paced, often impatient, regularly distracted, “quick win” obsessed rhythm of modern life to a decelerated and patient slow mode of inquiry where they would be willing to see clearly, wait on understanding, move through waves of boredom, and immerse themselves with humble attentiveness in the art we would encounter in person. So rather than meet in a normal classroom, I moved our class into our campus museum. In alternating class sessions, we went from a typical lecture and seminar format to an atypical “gallery” format, during which they practiced spending time with particular pieces of art and learning how to talk about them together—thoughtfully, discerningly, confidently.

They were very bad at this at first. They wanted to over-interpret things: jumping to conclusions, inserting bizarre theories, going for “quick wins.” But we stuck with it. Along with the museum curator, I gave them questions to slow them down and make them think. We spent time just silently gazing together at the art. They journaled. And in a few weeks’ time, they were beginning to have more careful and more absorbing discussions.

Once they had a bit of experience, we increased the challenge—quite considerably. As a major class assignment, each student was required to spend three full hours (in blocks of no less than an hour each time) with a single and rather simple piece of art. The whole point was to struggle to pay attention to what was there, with the inevitable waves of boredom sure to arrive. They were to take notes

on what they were seeing, sketch shapes, write out short reflections, jot down questions, then allow themselves to reconsider things as they perceived new features of the art. When I first introduced this assignment, there was audible dread at the prospect of spending three hours alone with a single piece of art. By the end of the assignment—following several weeks of incremental practice with other works beforehand—they experienced an unexpected form of delight, having developed some kind of relationship with *their* piece of art.¹¹

All of this, remember, was to prepare them for the encounter with sacred art in Italy. They did go to the Sistine Chapel and, though surrounded by the noisy throng of tourists who packed the chapel, these students gazed wide-eyed with mouths agape at the ceiling, the walls, the majestic Last Judgment. They were absorbed, not by the busyness around them, but by the beauty beckoning them.

It wasn’t in the Sistine Chapel, though, where I witnessed the greatest fruit of their training in the exercise of wonder, but rather in a smaller chapel in Orvieto in which frescoes from Fra Angelico and Signorelli cover all four walls and the entire ceiling. It was a cold day and the cement floor was hard on our feet. It was a rather uncomfortable environment. The students were free to come and go as they pleased. And they *all* stayed, by their own free choice, in that chapel for more than three hours in rapt wonder, or what I might describe as “tenderly poised attentiveness.” They silently reflected, they journaled,



they shared quiet conversations, they asked me and our guide questions, they prayed. In the end, they stayed past the cathedral's closing time and had to be asked to leave. That chapel was for them an intentional culture they were prepared to enjoy. It wasn't endlessly open to interpretation but instead a definite act of communication that necessitated exceptional imaginative energy. We might think about an adoration chapel, a gospel parable, or service site in similar terms.

Few people ever work with a genius like Will Hunting and it is highly unusual to be able to take a class to Italy for a week. Those rarities aside, what must become more common especially in catechetical instruction is a pronounced emphasis on forming the mannerisms—the approach—to the mysteries encountered in the life of faith. The selection and creation of intentional cultures that invite attentiveness and patience is key, but only alongside intentional practices that prepare growing disciples to enjoy what these cultures make possible.¹²

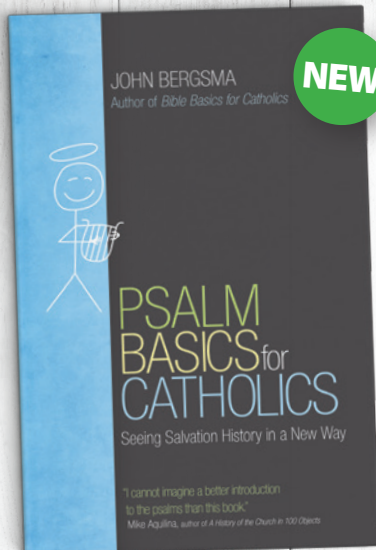
Leonard J. DeLorenzo, Ph.D., directs undergraduate studies at the McGrath Institute for Church Life and teaches theology at the University of Notre Dame. His most recent book is What Matters Most: Empowering Young Catholics for Life's Big Decisions (Ave Maria, 2018). You can find him online at leonardjdelorenzo.com.

Notes

- 1 Film clip available at <https://youtu.be/qM-gZintWDe>, under the title “[Great Movie Scenes] Good Will Hunting—Park Scene.”
- 2 Christian Smith argued for something like this when he concluded that “civic tolerance” is the chief operative value in American religio-civic life today (“Is Moralistic Therapeutic Deism the New Religion of American Youth? Implications for the Challenge of Religious Socialization and Reproduction,” in *Passing on the Faith: Transforming Traditions for the Next Generation of Jews, Christians, and Muslims*, ed. James L. Heft (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 55-74.
- 3 Romano Guardini, *The Lord*, trans. Elinor Briefs (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing Company, 2013), 562.
- 4 This corresponds with the priority of the “literal sense” of Scripture (see CCC §116; cf. ST I, 1, 10, ad. 1)
- 5 Guardini, *The Lord*, 596.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 608.
- 7 Quoted in Nicholas Carr, “Is Google Making Us Stupid?,” *The Atlantic*, 2008, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/is-google-making-us-stupid/306868/>.
- 8 Carr.
- 9 Jennifer L. Roberts, “The Power of Patience: Teaching Students the Value of Deceleration and Immersive Attention,” *Harvard Magazine*, 2013, <http://harvardmagazine.com/2013/11/the-power-of-patience>.
- 10 For more on these points, see especially chapters three and four of my *What Matters Most: Empowering Young Catholics for Life's Big Decisions* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 2018).
- 11 For more on this assignment, see Rika Burnham, “Intense Looks: Solitude, Scholarship, and a Teacher's Transformative Experience,” in *Teaching in the Art Museum: Interpretation as Experience* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011), 67-78.
- 12 This essay is adapted from a conference paper delivered at the 2016 Fall Conference of the Center for Ethics and Culture at the University of Notre Dame.

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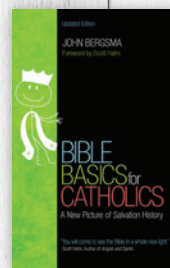
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Author of *A History of the Church in 100 Objects*

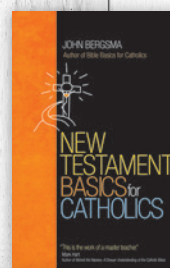
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Inspired THROUGH Art

The Annunciation

Piero della Francesca, 1452

By Linus Meldrum

How does God make order and beauty in the world, and show it to us? Along with glorious sunsets and colorful flowers, there are other ways to know God as the Creator of beauty. In the apparently invisible realm of mathematics, he is not silent; rather he conveys his order and mystery in mathematical forms, contemplated and understood as meaningful and expressive of his Divine Mind. Hidden in plain sight, those embedded forms can be seen inside of nature in things like symmetries, tessellations, crystals, and plant growth patterns. Those forms can also be incarnated in artwork, which is an area of creative interest for some artists. One of those artists is Piero della Francesca.

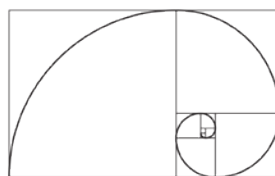
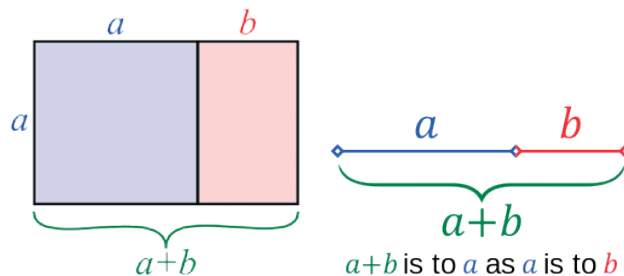
Piero – An Early Renaissance Master

Piero della Francesca (1415-1492) was an Italian Early Renaissance painter recognized as an artist with an interest in both religious art and mathematics. He was born into a noble family in Sansepolcro (modern-day Tuscany). After an apprenticeship, he became familiar with the art of some of the highly regarded artists of the day: Masaccio, Donatello, Fra Angelico, Brunelleschi, and others. Piero is known not only as a Renaissance artist but also an authority on mathematics, writing books on geometry, perspective, and proportion. Mathematics and proportion have been embedded in architectural ornamentation since Vitruvius, the ancient Roman architect. Sacred artists and designers made use of much of this knowledge throughout the Middle Ages. The interest in a “Divine Proportion” heated up in the time of the Renaissance when Luca Pacioli, an Italian mathematician and Franciscan friar, wrote his treatise titled *On the Divine Proportion*, and had it illustrated by his student, Leonardo da Vinci. Pacioli had been a student of Piero della Francesca and developed ideas he gained from Piero, especially those which deals with proportion and proportionality.

What is the “Divine Proportion”?

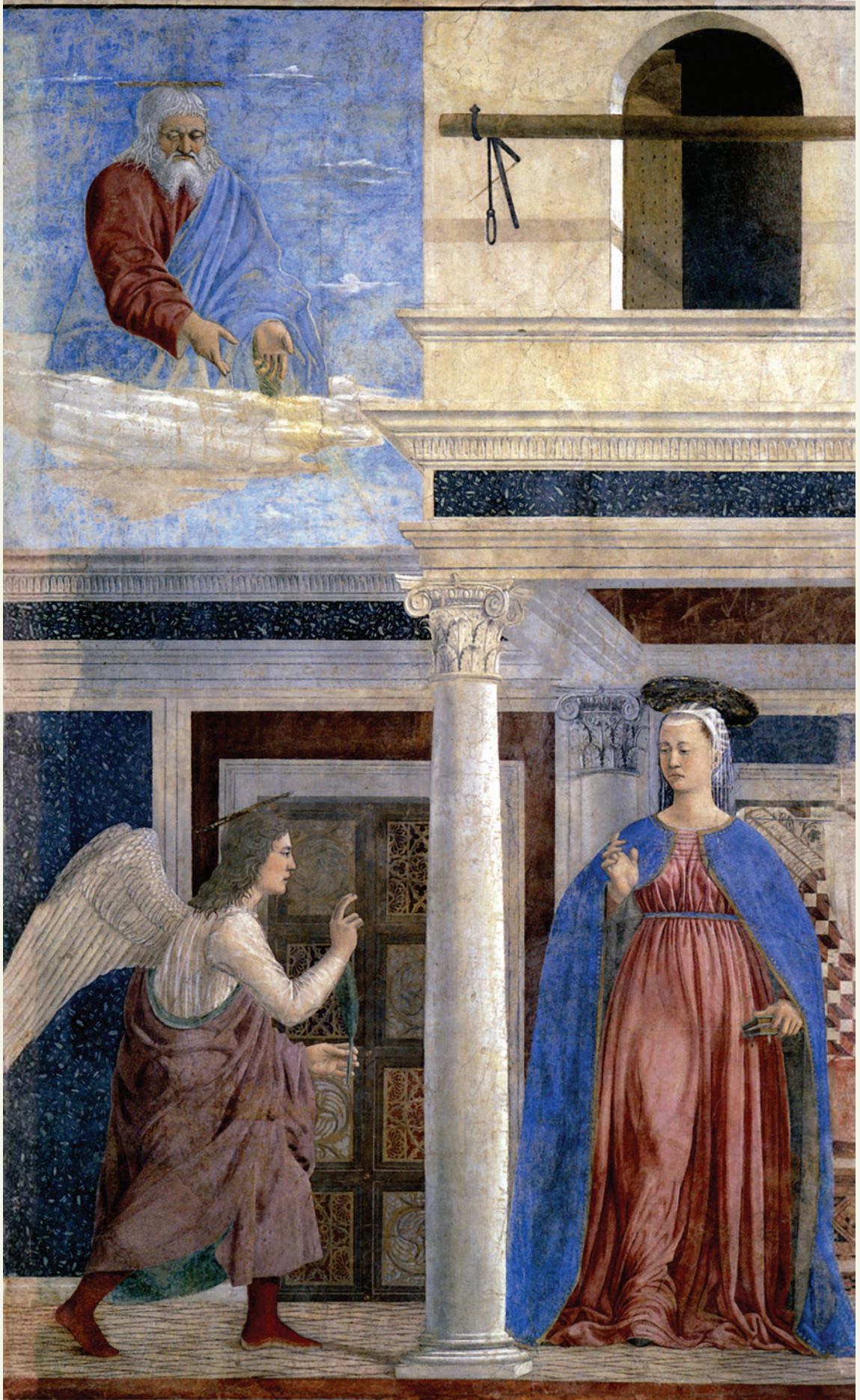
The “divine proportion” is a particular ratio of one part to another part that holds a mystery: when a form that contains

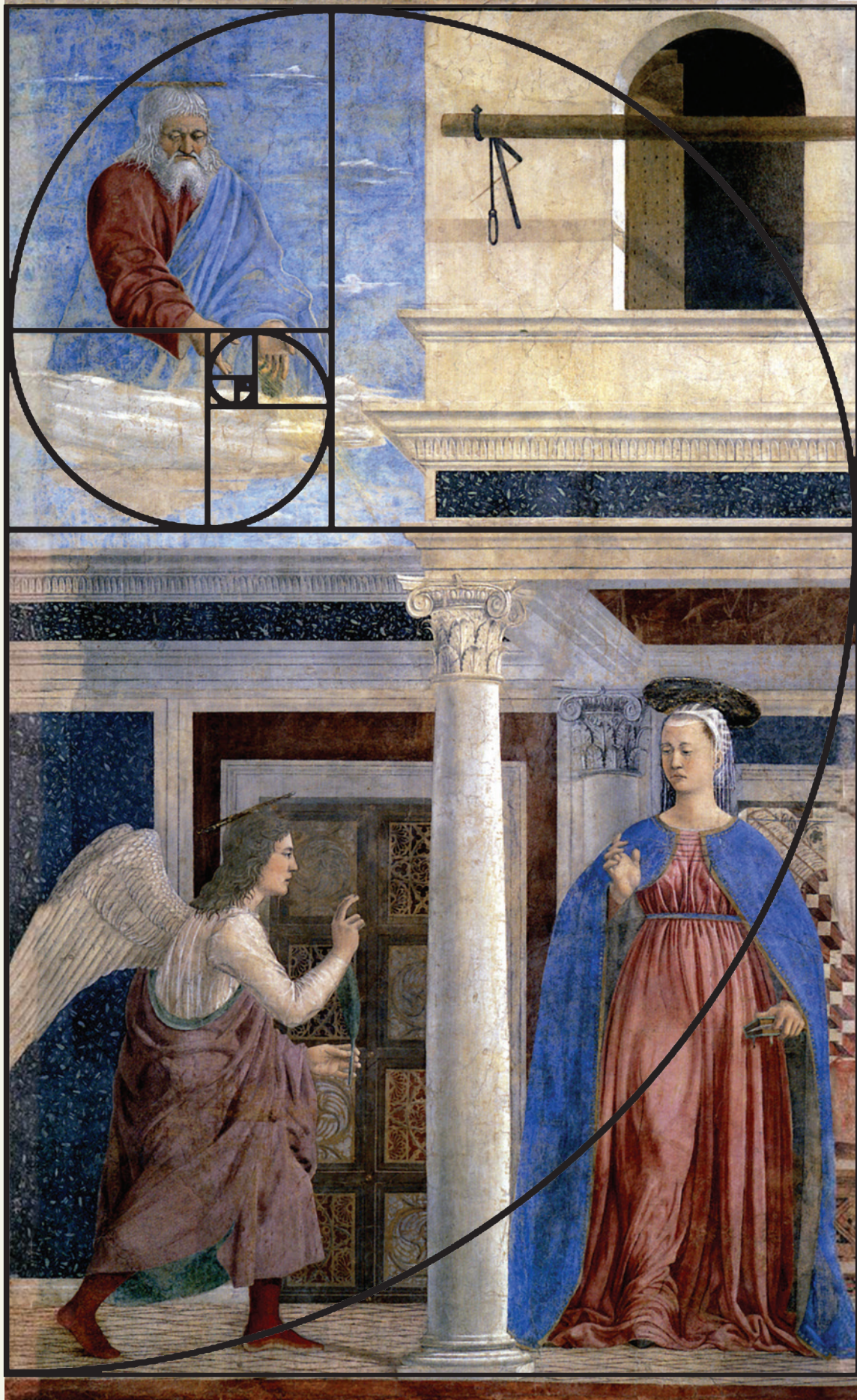
that ratio multiplies or divides into successive forms, the ratio persists. In mathematics, this is called *self-similarity*, something found in fractals as well as in nature. Because of this apparent uniqueness, the ratio is sometimes called “Golden.” Over the centuries, artists have been interested in this Golden Ratio and its product, the Golden Rectangle as a composing tool, since some claim it produces beauty when used as an element of design. The ratio works like this: $A + B$ is to A as A is to B . In this ratio, when the larger is divided by the smaller, the numerical expression is 1.618..., an irrational number without a fixed end. In practical geometric design, if a rectangle is built with sides that match the ratio components of A and B , and a square is removed from the rectangle, the remaining rectangle is also a Golden Rectangle. The reverse is also true: if a square is added to the longer side of a Golden Rectangle, a new larger Golden Rectangle is formed. If one draws an arc through the diminishing squares found in a Golden Rectangle, an approximate Golden Spiral is created. This spiral follows the squares on a journey to infinity, as there is no end to the succession of squares found within a Golden Rectangle.



A Controversy

While the mysterious Golden Ratio certainly has its appealing elements, there have been efforts to teach it





as a *perfect* ratio, therefore making it the “best” choice for creating a design. Does the Golden Ratio produce an aesthetic perfection? The answer: *it depends*. There are so many other elements that are part of the creation of beauty, that leaning on the Golden Ratio to provide an ultimate solution to a design problem would be foolish. Given that fact, there has been much debate over the usefulness of the Golden Ratio as a concrete and universal good in design. This brings us to Piero’s *Annunciation*.

The Legend of the True Cross Frescoes

In 1452, Piero was assigned to complete a series of frescoes at the basilica of San Francesco in Arezzo, Italy. The overall subject was the collected stories about the True Cross upon which Jesus died. The images follow the wood of the cross from the tree which provided the fruit eaten by Adam and Eve to the cross upon Calvary to the finding and proving of the cross in Jerusalem by St. Helen, Constantine’s mother. The series of frescoes form an important contribution to the Early Renaissance in Italy. Although indebted to the groundbreaking work of Giotto di Bondone from a century before, Piero’s art is unlike the humanizing art of Giotto, who used gestures and expressions to convey emotional narratives. When looking at any image by Piero, one notices a strange sense of poise in the figures; they seem to stand transfixed and held in position like a painted sculpture. In the *Annunciation* image, Gabriel’s half-genuflection and forward-staring gaze, as well as Mary’s upright, slow turn are examples. There is no Baroque dramatic gesturing here. This strangeness is found in the overall design, as well. Things seem sectioned and ordered in a particular way. This is not obvious; rather it is a recognition that movement has been arrested and fitted into a structure. The frieze of an ancient Greek temple had this type of dense seriousness.

The painting of the *Annunciation* is particularly unique in this cycle of images. It stands apart from the rest of the paintings in Arezzo because it is apparently not part of the narrative of the cross. Perhaps one might say that the vertical and horizontal division of the image is cross-like, at best. However, it does demonstrate Piero’s meditation on the subject of the Incarnation, the moment in time when God entered human history. The literal narrative of the Incarnation is this: God, from beyond infinity, casts himself into our world and takes flesh from Mary as the fruit of her womb. How can an artist convey this mystery of the Incarnation? What elements of design can express the singular event of the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us?

First, while it is difficult to say exactly where the image begins inside the borders, the overall shape of the image closely approximates a Golden Rectangle. That in itself is not something we would say is beautiful. However, when we follow the visual narrative that proceeds from that design, we discover something remarkable. As indicated in

the image overlay, if we track a Golden Spiral through the diminishing squares of the rectangle we arrive at the place in the image where God the Father gestures with his open hands as his gift of himself is being given. If we consider that an origin point, in heaven an infinite distance from us, then track that spiraling line into the image below, we find the line passes through the abdomen of Mary, who is receiving the news from Gabriel. This “passage” of the Word becoming flesh, is thereby expressed in visual form as movement through an expanding, yet repeating, geometric ratio. The Golden Ratio idea of self-similarity is present here as well; Jesus is not the product of God, he *is* God: the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Piero, the Narrative Artist

It is almost impossible that Piero, the visual scientist, did not see this himself. It is a way to connect the cosmic mystery of the Incarnation with a mysterious geometric form to express this subject in a visual image. Tying the two together is the work of genius. But to be clear, we are not saying that the Golden Rectangle makes the image beautiful, nor that Piero has shown us what it looked like when Gabriel greeted Mary. Piero simply organizes the image to be true; the narrative of the Incarnation is like the narrative of the Golden Spiral. Piero is a magnificent fresco painter who carries forward many of the techniques of the Florentines, such as Fra Angelico, whose frescoes at San Marco exude a sense of quietude, and Masaccio, who combined continuous light and true perspectival space for the first time. Piero’s work obviously contains many aspects of naturalism, using light and form to make convincing images. However, the creative choice of *this* composition—the linking of the Incarnation with a composition that remarkably suits the subject—is profound.

When we meditate on the Incarnation, we are asked to wrap our minds around the impossible gulf between God and humankind. It is almost inconceivable that God would lower himself to be one of us. This is at the heart of the Narrative of Salvation, God stretching himself out to us to rescue us from ourselves. Piero della Francesca is known for his analytical study of perspective: the system of creating the image of believable space on a two-dimensional surface. Perhaps the best way to use Piero’s image of the *Annunciation* is to see it as the beginning of an ever-expanding future. If one looks at the ever-widening Golden Spiral as something moving toward us in space, growing larger as it grows closer, then the narrative doesn’t end; *it just keeps advancing into the world*. Jesus is present in every tabernacle, at every celebration of the Eucharist, on every tongue in the reception of Holy Communion. God is still reaching out to us, today and every day.

Linus Meldrum is Assistant Professor of Fine Arts at Franciscan University.

A Catechesis of Belonging

The Role of the Family as the Catechetical Model for Hispanic Ministry

By Most Reverend Michael F. Olson

When I was about 12 years old, I visited a classmate at his home. He had been born in the United States of America, but his parents were born and raised in Poland and had immigrated to Chicago as young adults. On that afternoon, we were upstairs playing a board game when his mother called up from the basement, where she was finishing up the laundry. She called, “Tony! *Trow* me down da stairs a rag!” He and I looked at each other and started to laugh at the image that her grammatical error implied along with the awkward sound of her accent. He and I began to act like we were throwing each other down the stairs. She came upstairs and caught us and at first looked confused but quickly grasped the situation. She frowned and spoke some words of correction to my friend in Polish. I do not speak Polish but I assume that her grammar and syntax were correct because she seemed to convey her point clearly enough to my friend Tony.

This story is an attempt to illustrate three important aspects of catechesis involved in our mission as the Church: language, culture, and family. Among us catechists, the interplay of these three aspects can cause confusion because language and culture are filters in the way faith is presented and practiced. In dealing with those of a different culture and language, we may not fully grasp the aspects and contours of their understanding. Language and culture are essential human characteristics shared by the natural and graced reality of the human family, but manifested in different ways. Hopefully, these thoughts will help us to make some headway in understanding how to prioritize these aspects in order to better evangelize and form the faith life of the Church in the United States of America. The three aspects of language, culture, and family involve delicate attention because they are areas of human life where people are most vulnerable, and thus are precisely the areas where the Gospel message of Christ most intentionally needs to be incarnate.

The catechesis of belonging begins with responsibility to serve the common good of the family and the common good of the communion of the Church. We are baptized, chrismated, and married to be inconvenienced for the sake of others with whom we share communion, not to receive grace that helps us to be strong, autonomous Christians.

Family and the Fourth Commandment

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) teaches that “the fourth commandment is addressed expressly to children in their relationship to their father and mother, because this relationship is the most universal.” The *Catechism* continues that the fourth commandment also “extends to the duties of pupils to teachers, employees to employers, subordinates to leaders, citizens to their country, and to those who administer or govern it.” Furthermore, “this commandment includes and presupposes the duties of parents, instructors, teachers, leaders, magistrates, those who govern, all who exercise authority over others or over a community of persons” (CCC, 2199).

The *Catechism* calls us to consider that the fourth commandment establishes the foundation and order for the subsequent commandments revealed to Moses. These commandments not only serve for the salvation of the world but also articulate human rights; among these are the right to life, the integrity of human sexuality and marriage, the right to property, the right to be told the truth, and the right to a good name. Thus, the fourth commandment “constitutes one of the foundations of the social doctrine of the Church” (CCC §2198).

It is important to note that the first three commandments articulate what we justly owe God, which is the virtue of piety. The fourth commandment follows upon this debt to God with what we owe to our parents, which is the virtue of justice. This human debt begins with our fathers and mothers; and what follows in the subsequent commandments are the just delineations of other human relationships within society.

We must remember that the Ten Commandments are the Covenant made by God with Moses, which makes the disparate group of refugee slaves into one chosen people—*God’s* chosen people on pilgrimage to the Promised Land. The commandments are not an arbitrarily placed list of single and distinct imperatives united only in that they are ordered by

God and intended for human obedience. As the Covenant, they are binding and follow each other in a clearly ordered and inherently united sense. Within God's Covenant, each one follows the previous one by drawing God's people more deeply into the loving and just relationship of belonging to him and to each other. The commandments belong to each other in both substance and order; God's people belong to each other in both the substance of family life and an order of language and culture.

So much of what we see happening at the border of the United States and Mexico, presented through eyewitness accounts of the separation of children of asylum seekers from their parents, offers a living metaphor for the destructive assaults upon family life in the name of individual and state rights. The situation at the border is more than a political conflict regarding the balance between border integrity and the right to asylum; it is more than a clash between language groups or cultures or even a partisan disagreement.

I would like to offer it as an example of a broader and thus more Catholic understanding of family that should underlie matters of pastoral care and catechesis.



Catechesis of Belonging Leads to Communion

First, the current multi-generation Hispanic presence in the Church in the United States provides an opportunity for us to develop a “catechesis of belonging” that reflects the primacy of the family over individual desires and the acquisition of property. This catechesis clarifies the role of the family and provides a healthy understanding of culture rooted in Christ and his Church. It reverses the current secular practice of a culture defining the meaning and role of the family. As we read in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “The Christian family constitutes the realization of an ecclesial communion called the domestic Church” (CCC, 2204; see also *Familiaris Consortio*, 21).

Secondly, a catechesis of belonging requires that we understand our responsibility to serve the higher cause of the common good of the family over slavery to self-

interests. Theologically this may be highlighted by the metaphor of God's chosen people: they begin as disparate refugees from slavery in Egypt, are gradually formed by their experience in the wilderness under the servant-leadership of Moses, are covenanted with God, and thereby become his pilgrim people through a covenant of belonging, not a contract of reciprocal self-interests. This metaphor of the Old Covenant helps us to understand the New and Eternal Covenant, whereby the Church becomes the Pilgrim People, the New Israel, and God's family of families. As we read in the *Catechism*, “Discipleship in Christ leads us to belong to God's family” (par. 2233).

Finally, God brings us into communion with him through grace. We belong to him and to each other. This communion provides the foundation for the successful integration of the family within society and rooted in Christ. As we read in paragraph 781 of the *Catechism*, the people of God are rooted in the Church formed via a new covenant in Christ. In the Acts of the Apostles we read that Peter proclaimed, “Whoever fears God and acts uprightly is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:35).

The Primacy of Family

To develop a systematized catechesis of belonging requires that we begin with a consideration of my first point regarding our contemporary situation as the Church in the United States of America: *the current multi-generation Hispanic presence in the Church in the United States provides an opportunity for us to develop a catechesis of belonging that reflects the primacy of the family over individual desires and acquisition.*

We Catholics in the United States of America pride ourselves as being an “immigrant church” or a “church of immigrants.” Although this is true, how we catechists understand this is critical in developing an effective strategy today as a local and diverse church charged with the evangelization of a society increasingly lost in the egoism of postmodern individualism.

When our ancestors came as immigrants to the United States to escape oppression and persecution, they also experienced a traumatic change to the fabric of family life. Our immigrant ancestors were forced to learn a new language and many times were forced to forget a familiar language, but in doing so were also forced culturally to conform to the philosophy of individualism while being confronted by the societal trauma of the industrial revolution. These experiences damaged the role and responsibility of the father as teaching the wisdom of a trade within family life, and to the mother as providing the domestic history of family life and faith. It was a subtle shift but a shift nonetheless.

Modern British political philosophy, engendered in the Constitution of the United States, enshrined the rights of

individuals as primary to responsibilities of members of a community directed to the common good, including the common good of the family. The common good became, in practice, reduced to its material dimensions. Jacques Maritain pointed out in his work, *The Range of Reason*, “As concerns civilization, modern man had in the bourgeois state a social and political life, a life in common without common good or common work, for the aim of common life consisted only of preserving everyone’s freedom to enjoy private ownership, acquire wealth, and seek his own pleasure.”¹ The pursuit of happiness soon came to be measured materially by property acquisition, protected by legislation and judicial decisions.

Likewise, the industrial revolution with its need for many workers prompted the breakup of families. This need of the industrial revolution drew individuals away from traditional family farms and immigrants away from traditional family trades. This rupture of the family was for the sake of material production directed to the acquisition of wealth by the likes of such historical figures as Carnegie, Mellon, and Rockefeller.

Social policy makers soon discovered that the family was theoretically needed in society for a new purpose: to raise individuals for the sake of national security and for the development of a workforce.² Thus, the modern understanding of the nuclear family developed, whereby the family became an aggregate of individuals based on a contract of marriage between individuals. Families were no longer viewed as a unified whole, but instead as parts of a society designed and structured to protect the rights of these individuals. Family members would be bearers of individual rights and derivative responsibilities, established in shared and agreed upon self-interest, but the value (and frequently the size) of family itself diminished. To summarize, families became understood to be aggregates of individuals making more individuals to form a society that served individual needs and identity. It sounds a lot like the right to privacy that has produced destructive abortion rights and same sex marriage. “Belonging” is optional and temporary but mutually offered through individual contract. Education and human formation, removed from a communal context and purpose, became directed towards industry and commerce.

Past methods of catechesis have neglected to uncover this presupposition on which modern and contemporary education rests. The Hispanic presence—devoid of the effects of the industrial revolution and the influence of modern British and continental political theory, but resting upon the experience of covenant and refuge from oppression—shine a light upon this previously overlooked foundation. It invites a new approach to catechesis that begins with the covenantal belonging established in baptism. The geographical proximity of their homelands, as

opposed to the distance of Europe, has helped to maintain this primary sense of belonging to family and not to the modern nation state or to a postmodern and bifurcated culture. Now catechesis can and should be structured to include parents, grandparents, and children simultaneously, as well as groups based upon age and language.

I return to Tony’s mother in my opening story. When she spoke to Tony in Polish, she claimed her maternal rights and executed her maternal responsibility in bringing Tony back into right relationship. She reminded him that he belonged to her as her son and she belonged to him as his mother, and that they belonged together to God. Together they belonged to a broader society with attendant responsibilities to others in that society.

Our Responsibility to Serve the Family

A catechesis of belonging requires that we understand our responsibility to serve the higher cause of the common good of the family over slavery to self-interests. This is different than what has been practically done in recent catechesis. For example, much of our catechetical practice for the Sacrament of Confirmation has involved completing requisite class hours, retreat time, and service hours in order to “earn” the right to belong through full initiation to the Church. Likewise, when approaching the Sacrament of Matrimony, couples are too frequently confronted by a list of rules involving peripheral matters (e.g., hiring of an organist), by which they must contractually abide in order to have their wedding at the church—a parish to which they belong by contract (i.e., through registration and agreement for stewardship). This sends the message: “Grace is free but not cheap.” There appears to be little difference between education, which is purchased like a commodity, and belonging, which is earned through will power and choice.

The baptized Catholic’s “rights” to the sacraments become misunderstood in terms of modern rights that take precedence over and only tenuously establish belonging. Likewise, a catechesis that is reduced to merely an articulation of abstract, theoretical doctrinal knowledge or moral rules doesn’t manifest or strengthen belonging. In either case, the focus of the Gospel is lost or appears meaningless to the lives of those preparing to receive the sacraments.

The catechesis of belonging begins with responsibility to serve the common good of the family and the common good of the communion of the Church. We are baptized, chrismated, and married to be inconvenienced for the sake of others with whom we share communion, not to receive grace that helps us to be strong, autonomous Christians. We are entrusted with the mission of Christ, of communion, of the common good. It turns us outward in evangelization and ministry and not inward toward introspection and self-fulfillment.

Communion: Formation of Society in Nature and Grace

Finally, God, through his grace, helps us to belong in communion with him. This communion provides the means for the formation of society in nature and grace, understood by faith and reason as providing the foundation for the successful integration of the family within society and rooted in Christ.

When we belong in the ordered way to our families, as the fourth commandment teaches, we belong to the Church and to society with responsibilities and rights. The obligations of charity, delineated by justice in our communion in the Church, provide the impetus of evangelization through word and action within the broader society.

It is this evangelization that threatens our postmodern judicial and legislative process, which craves the privatization of our faith so that we belong to nobody but our private interests. The family is required to bring this evangelization to fruition, not as the modern incubator of individuals but rather as the womb of graced persons living in communion within society in harmony with God and neighbor. Such a family, mindful of their weakest members, teaches society to be mindful of its weakest members. The substance and order of our catechesis must involve shared word and action through teaching, and also through outreach anchored in the specificity of the Gospel message. This is in contradistinction to the cold and sterile social ideology and outreach of antiseptic government services that provide a one size fits none approach to human needs. Such an outreach is not measured by justice or charity but by instruments of economic commodities of private interest. This ethic could be described well as, “When I was hungry, you gave me the pill.”

When we Catholics unquestioningly accept the secular definition of the family as our presupposition for the moral and sacramental life, we run the risk of losing our identity as disciples of Jesus Christ. When we catechists of the Church intentionally fail to question this secular presupposition, we commit scandal against the Truth, as known by right reason and revealed fully in Jesus Christ. When we begin our catechesis with the family—belonging in communion with Christ and each other—we foster the family unit as the cell of society bridled by responsibilities of justice, prudence, fortitude, and temperance.

The individual person—including the weak, the elderly, the infirmed, the unborn—then belongs to and plays a needed role within the family who, as an integrated whole, play a role within society. This role emphasizes formation in love of God and neighbor, respect for life, the integrity of conscience, the responsibility to respect the reputation of others, and the proper use of property that develops human flourishing. We subsequently cease living within our families as an aggregate of individuals without the naturally

defined roles of husband and wife, father and daughter, mother and son, brother and sister; instead we receive our relationally defined mantle as part of the family of God.

With this renewed understanding of the family, presupposed by the catechetical teaching of the Church, the doctrine and sacramental teachings lose their theoretical and sclerosing tedium. These teachings now become practically understood, since they reveal the relational character of that which is covenantal, communal, ecclesial, and social. The truth of Catholic doctrine and sacrament are seen to inhere in the character of each catechized person, and in the moral and social fabric of the family and of the broader community wherein we have purpose, responsibility, and belonging. This manner of living and teaching sacramental doctrine and morality saves us from the possible sins of nationalism and statism and returns us to the virtue of patriotism.³

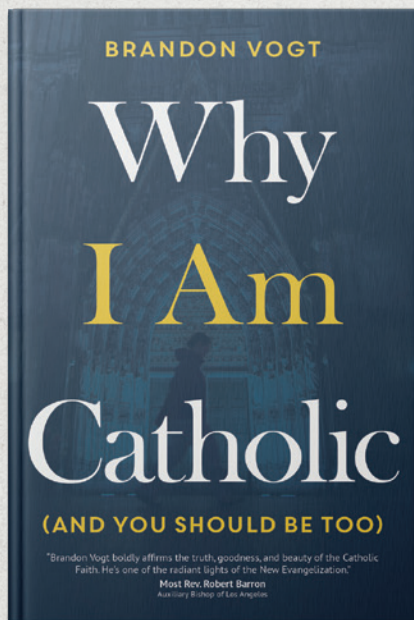
In conclusion, the border conflict involves more than national security, business interests, or even the right to asylum. In this, we see the historically familiar hostility directed towards a Catholic and natural anthropology by a secular and individualized society that would rather live by the power of Alexa or Siri than the by the wisdom of Paul or Sirach. We see an attack not only on family order and structure but on belonging itself. The responsibility of faith and right reason forms our conscience and prompts us towards greater belonging through our ability to change our catechetical approach in accord with a more Christian and realistic anthropology. The Hispanic presence within the Catholic Church and in the society of the United States of America—whether it makes itself known in Spanish, English, “Tex-Mex,” or “Spanglish,” through immigrants or grandchildren of immigrants, documented people or undocumented people—is “the Catholic moment” about which the late Father Richard John Neuhaus wrote at the end of the last century. It looks much different than what we might have expected, but make no mistake that it has arrived at the right time for our salvation. It is a graced opportunity that calls each of us back to our Catholic roots and strengthens our nation through married life and the family at a time of urgent and critical need.

The Most Reverend Michael F. Olson, S.T.D., is Bishop of the Diocese of Fort Worth, Texas. This article is adapted from his keynote presentation to Diocesan Directors at the St. John Bosco Conference for Evangelization and Catechesis at Franciscan University of Steubenville, July 16, 2018.

Notes

- 1 Jacques Maritain, *The Range of Reason*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), 197.
- 2 Charles H. Cooley, *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909).
- 3 See Pope St. John Paul II, Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly of the United Nations, October 5, 1995, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English n. 41:8-10.

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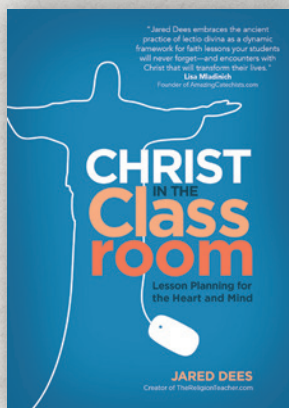
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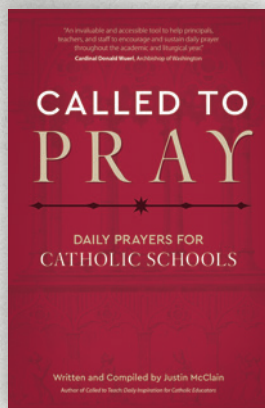
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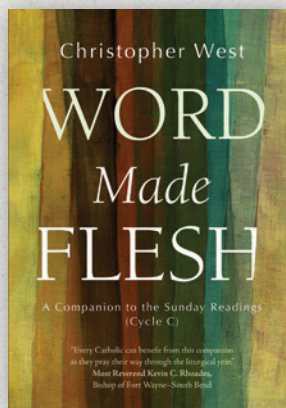
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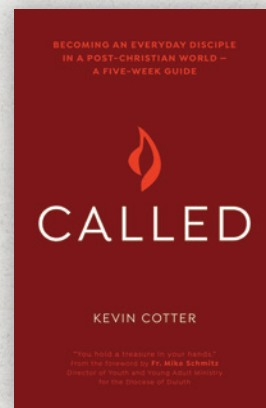
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Forming a Culture of Prayer within the Home

By Sr. Patricia M. McCormack, IHM

What do you remember of your first day of Grade One? My memory gave prophetic purpose and life-long value to my life! After taking roll and assigning seats to her 120 students (not a typographical error!), petite Sister St. Rose announced that our first lesson would be the most important lesson of our lives. She distributed our first catechism book and directed us to lesson one. With pencil in hand, we circled question numbers one, two, and three. Sister instructed us in the meaning of the words and told us to have our parents teach us how to say the words with our eyes closed.

My mother proctored homework time. She amazed me when, without looking at the book, she knew the answers to the three questions. More amazing yet was dinner conversation that night. Mom said, “Pat, tell dad what you learned at school today.” I looked my dad straight in the eye and declared with conviction, “I learned why God made me.” Without skipping a beat my father proclaimed, “Pat, God made you to know him, to love him, and to serve him in this world, and to be happy with him forever in the next.” Dad’s reply had an exponential influence because he had justly earned the nickname of “Daddy Old Bad Boy.” Dad’s misbehaviors were legendary and yearly Santa Claus deposited coal in his stocking because of it. So, when *this* man knew why God made me, I embraced the belief hook, line, and sinker! Echoing the sentiment of Robert Frost¹, “that has made all the difference.”

Coming to know God—and growing in that knowledge and experience over time—is our universal call, our primary vocation. Knowledge of God and the ways of God leads to love. A person who does not love God does not know God! And whenever any of us love another person we can’t help but overflow into service for them.

Prayer: Both Action and Attitude

As “First Heralds of the Gospel”² parents bear the privilege and the responsibility to introduce their children to God; to sensitize them to recognize the ways of God; to learn how to speak to God; to distinguish God’s voice and will from other voices; and to respond to God in age-appropriate ways. Prayer is the common thread for these goals.

What is prayer? Definitions abound. Even *Wikipedia* weighs in on the topic. My core definition, and one that I offer to contemporary parents, comes from that same first grade catechism: “Prayer is the lifting of our minds and hearts to God.” Prayer can be vocal or mental, formal or informal, private or corporate, scheduled or spontaneous. Prayer changes through the ages and stages of one’s life, just as the quality and style of communication changes over time between persons who are growing in relationship.

Prayer is communication with the One who knows us better than we know ourselves and Who loves us beyond our ability to comprehend such love. Consistently God communicates God’s love and life-giving will, though we are frequently unaware or inattentive. Often the busyness of life blocks recognition of God’s movements. The noises of our environment drown out the whispers of God’s love. Regardless of our awareness, God continues to speak, to reach out, and to offer friendship.

Prayer is both an action and an attitude. Any person, place, stimulus, or event that lifts our minds and hearts to God can be a catalyst of prayer. Spiritual practices that are understood and faithfully embraced raise our spiritual consciousness. Environments, customs, and rituals that tutor the soul or recall God’s presence can stir holy desire and affection.

Contemporary Prayer Culture

Quite simply, a culture of prayer—understood and embraced—nurtures an intimate relationship with God. By *culture* I mean a set of accumulated habits, beliefs, values, attitudes, norms, customs, and behaviors that are passed along by communication and imitation. Within the context of this article, a culture of prayer is the total set of the learned activities of a people of faith. In times past, the Catholic culture was well-defined and actively practiced. Since Vatican Council II, we've seen a decline, or some would even say a lacuna (void).

Prior to Vatican II, the Catholic culture of prayer included numerous activities and practices: **rituals**, like blessing yourself with holy water upon entering a room, pausing at the sound of the Angelus bells rung three times a day, genuflection to reverence the Blessed Sacrament, double-knee genuflection when the Monstrance was displayed, and regular, often weekly, participation in the sacrament of Penance; **customs**, like seasonal fasts, stationary Holy Days, Corpus Christi procession, Forty Hours devotion, May procession, or purple draped statues, icons and sacred images during Lent; and time-honored **prayer forms**, like Eucharistic adoration, stations of the cross, or novenas. These kinds of spiritual expressions, as well as the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, were core to Pre-Vatican II spirituality. They contributed to a culture of prayer. Though predominately church-centered and communal in nature, some elements of this culture of prayer also influenced actions or attitudes within the family home.

Parents or grandparents, teachers, and catechists born after 1960 do not know *this* culture. They matriculated through religious education classes at a time that these kinds of activities were no longer common experience. Their curriculum and catechesis focused on Catholic Social Teaching, Scripture, and reforms in liturgy and the sacraments. Rather than exerting an intentional effort to blend the perennial values from the historical prayer culture with the necessary focus of Vatican II's goals, unintentionally the traditional culture was deleted rather than adapted. Today we recognize a need to restore or to introduce new practices that integrate faith within daily family life.

Before proceeding, a word of caution is advised! Re-introducing elements of Catholic prayer culture is not an automatic solution to the spiritual lacuna of today. After all, "back in the day," a person may have observed external rituals or customs and simultaneously lie, cheat, or hurt others. Numerous prison inmates can quote cat-

echism teachings and yet be incarcerated for just cause. Knowing and practicing external observances does not guarantee that we understand the meaning(s) inherent in them and, therefore, does not automatically lead us to the love of God and personal growth. Ideally, a culture of prayer sensitizes us to recognize God's movement in our lives and then to respond by loving God, neighbor, and our true-self—the one and only commandment that Jesus issued (Mt 22: 36-40)!

Evangelize the Family

Pope John Paul II reminded us that "we shall not be saved by a formula but by a **Person**, and the assurance which he gives us: *I am with you!*"³ Popes Benedict XVI and Francis furthered the call to the New Evangelization. All

three popes urge us to reach out to folks who were baptized, who received

Eucharist, who were confirmed, and yet who never experienced

the person of Jesus. Many Catholic parents and teachers

need evangelization. We are asking them to create a

culture of prayer for themselves and their children wherein

they might encounter the person of

Jesus; and yet, they have no experience of what that might mean, nor how they might approach that goal.

Pope Francis cited accompaniment as a core characteristic of evangelization.⁴ We have the opportunity to do that by helping parents to create a sense of the sacred within the family home, to establish an ambiance conducive to raising the mind and heart to God, and to participate in practices that might "jump-start" the heart! Parents transmit spiritual heritage/spirituality to their families, not by transforming the home into a religious goods store or museum but by choosing meaningful, tasteful markers, practices, and spiritual disciplines that tutor the soul to know, love, and serve God. I've encountered parents who are quite intentional about creating such a culture for their families. What follows are their ideas. Pick and choose or spin-off these starter-ideas! May they prime the pump of your own creativity.

• ENVIRONMENT

Spiritual reminders of the sacred: crucifixes, a Jesus chair, prayer center, prayer bowl; kitchen table centerpiece with symbols of the liturgical season (like an Advent wreath, Christmas crèche, crown of thorns, hefty nails, family paschal candle, or a Mary-themed table centerpiece); prayer aids, wall hangings, patron saint statues, or a favorite scripture verse above each bedroom door and/or at the family front door . . .

*Parents
transmit spiritual
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by choosing meaningful, tasteful markers,
practices, and spiritual disciplines that
tutor the soul to know, love,
and serve God.*

• CUSTOMS

Social habits or practices that “season” family time with the sacred: place the figurine of the Infant Jesus into the Christmas crib; re-consecrate house crucifixes on the feast of the Triumph of the Cross, September 14; use a mini-easel to display spiritual practices, virtues, scripture thoughts, or motivating quotations, and then pick a thought-card randomly and “walk with it” through the day; pose a dinner-time question like, “What is one way that I experienced or needed to experience God today?” Determine ways to celebrate the Triduum days (Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday).

• RITUALS

Routines that integrate awareness of God into the ordinary events of the day: a greeting at wake-up time; a blessing at bedtime and when leaving the family home; using gestures like signing the forehead, lips, heart; blessing the house every January 1st; verbalizing a prayer/aspiration at the sound of emergency sirens; praying grace before and after meals; marking birthdays with a special blessing; frequently evoking a family mantra like, “God is good, all the time! And all the time, God is good!”

• SACRAMENTAL LIFE & EUCHARISTIC PRACTICES

In addition to Sunday Eucharist, what special occasions are celebrated annually by family participation at Mass or a sacrament and pairing it with an enjoyable activity like a meal, picnic, or family service project? For instance, re-dedicate the family to Jesus on Christ the King Sunday; on Corpus Christi Sunday recall each member's First Communion; celebrate the feast of the Nativity of Mary (September 8) with Mass participation followed by visiting a pregnancy shelter or pro-life center, donating baby layette items, and enjoying a birthday cake for dessert; or make a family visit to the Blessed Sacrament during the Forty Hours mission and/or pilgrimage visits to the Holy Thursday Repository of nearby parishes; teach children how to adapt ACTS (Adore, Confess, Thank, Seek) as a prayer exercise during Eucharistic adoration.

Parish Catechetical Leaders (PCLs), Directors of Religious Education (DREs) and Catechists: heed the call to put your gifts of nature and grace at the disposal of families. Join your talents with the professionals and dedicated volunteers of other parishes to orchestrate ways to nurture a culture of prayer within the home (the Domestic Church). Make available resources like *Our Catholic Family*.⁶

Schedule a mini-retreat, an idea-swap session, a multi-generational event, a multi-cultural sharing of prayer customs, a make-and-take workshop, or discussion-sessions based on a series of bulletins or newsletters that focus on ways to create a spiritual culture through each liturgical season.⁵

Add a video feature to your parish website where you demonstrate and advertise ideas for the liturgical seasons. Invite families to submit a photo of their liturgical environment and post a collage on the parish website. (“A picture is worth a thousand words!”)

Eventually expand to host a parish-wide carnival-style event where each booth features a different element (environment, custom, ritual, sacramental life) of a particular liturgical season (Ordinary Time, Advent, Christmas, Lent, Pentecost). For each table engage parish parents, or groups of parents, to prepare its display(s).

Organize a committee of parents to plan, design, and create a “starter box” to gift to each wedding couple or to celebrate the baptism of their first child. In it include something to “mark” each of the liturgical seasons. My dream starter box would include six items: (1) Advent wreath makings, (2) a paper summary of the Courts of the Infant King, (3) a crown of thorns with three nails, (4) a miniature easel to display theme-posts, (5) definition cards of the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit for Eastertime use, and (6) a set of picture-cards for each of the mysteries of the Rosary to display during May, October, and on Marian feast days. What would you include in your box? Dream big!

It has been my experience that most folks can adapt or tailor ideas to fit their own circumstances; that all they need is a starter-idea, an example. It is a catechist's privilege to introduce the concept of creating a God-centered ambiance in the home and to expose parents to the kinds of spiritual practices that likely incorporate that sense of the sacred. What a gracious way to be agents of accompaniment and evangelization!

Sr. Pat McCormack, IHM, EdD is Program Director of the IHM Office of Formative Support for Parents and Teachers, Philadelphia, PA. She speaks internationally to a variety of audiences and has authored numerous articles and several books. Her work blends Catholic spirituality, psychology, and wisdom gathered from parents, teachers, and students. Reach her at www.ParentTeacherSupport.org or DrPatMcCormack@gmail.com.

NOTES

¹ Robert Frost, *The Road Not Taken*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44272/the-road-not-taken>

² John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, art. 39.

³ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, art. 29.

⁴ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, art. 173.

⁵ Sr. Patricia McCormack. *Creating a Spiritual Culture* (A series of newsletters). Available online at <http://www.ParentTeacherSupport.org> > Newsletters > Family Faith > Creating a Spiritual Culture.

⁶ Dziena, D. and Shahin, G. (2015), *Our Catholic Family*. Twenty-Third Publications. For each Sunday, major feast, and holy day, it offers activities, conversation-starters, and prayer for sharing faith at home.

Book Review

Educating in Christ: A Practical Handbook for Developing the Catholic Faith from Childhood to Adolescence For Parents, Teachers, Catechists and School Administrators

By Gerard O'Shea (Angelico Press, 2018, 290 pages)

Following the Second Vatican Council, the universal Church has given us three significant documents on catechesis: the *General Catechetical Directory* (1971), Pope John Paul II's *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979), and the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997). The many texts on Catholic education from the Congregation for Catholic education, as well as numerous Bishops' Conferences guidelines, make up a veritable forest of documents.

Gerard O'Shea's fine new book is an important contribution to the Church's catechetical and educational mission. It is a set of signposts leading us through the documentary forest alluded to above. As the long title reveals, it is ambitious in thematic scope and intended audience. The claim to be a "handbook" is instructive but might unintentionally undersell what is: a well-argued and academically rigorous map through the many challenging features of contemporary catechesis. Dr. O'Shea succeeds in bringing together insights from wider educational thought and classic Catholic thinking on education. The text offers practical suggestions for those on the front line of catechesis. Dr. O'Shea often draws on his long experience of teaching (and parenting!) to offer something warm and personal to underpin his deep scholarship.

The book has sixteen chapters, divided into two sections: Part 1 deals with "Religious Education for the Human Person"; Part II explores "Religious Education for the Classroom." Dr. O'Shea locates his work in the tradition of Maria Montessori and the "movement" known as the *Catechesis for the Good Shepherd*, which presents catechesis for the contemporary age according to Montessorian principles. This historical/contemporary interaction, which roots the work in solid Catholic tradition, is complemented by frequent reference to ideas current in wider educational thought. The many allusions to the work of John Hattie remind us that Catholic educators are obliged as professionals to be engaged in wider scholarship. As seekers of the Truth, there is nothing to fear!

The chapter headings outline the trajectory of the work: Union with God-Our Ultimate Goal; Catechesis according to Age and Stage of Development; The Data Gatherer; The Big-Picture Seeker; Testing and Analyzing

the Big Picture; Personalizing and Reconstructing; Faith and Reason in Religious Education; Moral Formation and Moral Reasoning; Mystagogy: Reaching Spiritual Realities through the Liturgy; The Scriptures and Typology; Prayer; The Indispensable role of the Family; Effective Teaching Practice; The Pedagogy of God; Classroom Methods for Religious Education/Catechesis; and finally, Catholic Education, Religious Education, and Catechesis in the Documents of the Church since Vatican II. There are also two appendices on curriculum structure.

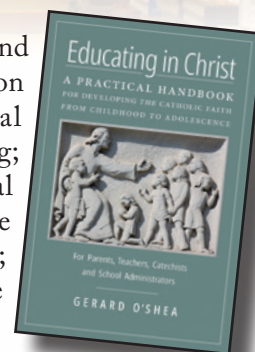
This overview provides us with a clear picture of the book's interrelated themes. While there is a logical order in the chapter progression, each chapter can be read independently of the others. There are many highlights, but I will focus briefly on two:

- Chapter 10, The Scriptures and Typology, is especially good. The introductory definitions of *Mysterium, Figura, Umbra, Species* and *Imago* are followed by an explanation of typology and how it can inform effective classroom practice in teaching Creation, the Fall, the Flood, Abraham and Exodus. This excellent chapter deserves a wide audience;
- Both appendices offer outlines of an age-related spiral curriculum for catechesis /religious education. While this is aimed specifically at Australia, the suggested sequence of topics/themes is a welcome practical addition. This enhances the text considerably.

This book should be essential reading for those interested in Catholic education, not just those on the front line of catechesis and religious education. The wider challenge, however, is the complexity of Catholic education in this secular age: what does this mean for the family, the Catholic school, and the Catholic College/University? I suggest that a reappraisal of how we conceptualize Catholic education is now essential. Dr. O'Shea's volume will be one of the texts Catholic leaders should read if we sincerely wish to be a "light to the nations."

Reviewer

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Unprofitable Servants and the Mystery of God's Ways

By Lani Bogart

God is always at work in the hearts of his children. When catechists become aware of the mystery of the Triune God at work in the hearts of the children we serve, we naturally respond with humility and a desire for greater obedience to God, the Master Catechist.

Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi, cofounders of the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* knew how to bow before the mystery of God at work in children, as is evident from this quote they wrote in a letter to catechists in Canada:

It happens that in being with children we will sense the presence of a force, mysterious and silent, which does not belong to us, and we will treasure it as an inestimable privilege to be granted at times to “see” it working within the child. As Elijah did on Mount Horeb when he heard the “tiny, whispering sound,” at moments like this we too will want to “cover our face” in beholding the presence of God (1Kgs 19:13).¹

If we fail to acknowledge the reality of this always-present mystery, we are tempted to rely on our own education, training, experience, or skills as catechists to produce something we can measure. Rather than bow in humble obedience before God's mysterious ways, we may become frustrated at not being able to share all we know. An inordinate focus on our own successes or failures as catechists impedes our growth in humility, an essential virtue in our work.

Unprofitable Servants

Those of us who work in parishes often find ourselves in circumstances far from ideal. Maybe our pastor is unable to support the program of our dreams or cannot allocate the necessary space and resources. Perhaps we lack the hours we believe are necessary to thoroughly cover the lessons, or do not have funds for Bibles and materials. The available room for catechesis may be cluttered or dirty by a previous group; or we may arrive early to our session only to be turned away from our regular space due to a parish scheduling conflict and be forced to a less desirable and unfamiliar space. When faced with such challenges, it is helpful to recall that Christ calls us to radical obedience and humility. Not only did he exemplify obedience and humility through the Incarnation, Jesus also taught us

to view ourselves with a radical humility, as unprofitable servants:

Who among you would say to your servant who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, “Come here immediately and take your place at table”? Would he not rather say to him, “Prepare something for me to eat. Put on your apron and wait on me while I eat and drink. You may eat and drink when I am finished”? Is he grateful to that servant because he did what was commanded? So should it be with you. When you have done all you have been commanded, say, “We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.” (Lk 17:7-10)

Our contemporary minds recoil at the concept of slavery. We find servitude repugnant. We can scarcely conceive of slavery as anything other than unjust. But, it is worth the effort to lay aside our modern sensibilities and ponder the *Parable of the Unprofitable Servant* as it applies to our role as catechists.

The catechists' long hours and hard work of study, preparation, and prayer necessary for our sessions with the children can be likened to the servant's work in the fields or caring for sheep. Surely the master provides everything the servant needs for the work he is given. Who is the servant to complain that the tools he is given for his work are not to his liking, not suitable to his knowledge, training, or education? The faithful servant simply serves in the best manner he can with the tools he is given. A servant may find joy in the labor, as we often do in ours, but the effort is also exhausting.

Jesus asks in this parable whether the master will, at the end of the day's work, invite the servant to dine with him. His hearers would have known the answer. Of course not! The servant would never be invited to eat with the master. That is not how their roles were lived. It follows that after we have given our best efforts, God does not owe us a “thank you” for the work we have done. Never! The work itself is a gift, a privilege; and weary though we are, we have done only what we were obliged to do. God does not owe us anything. In fact, in the Kingdom of God, just like in the parable, the reward for work well done is often more work with greater responsibility.

After all his labor in the field, it is the servant's next duty to serve his Lord more intimately, at table. The servant is expected to wait on the master at table and only afterward will he eat. Here Christ tells his listeners, "So should it be with you. When you have done all you have been commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.'"

Servants and Friends

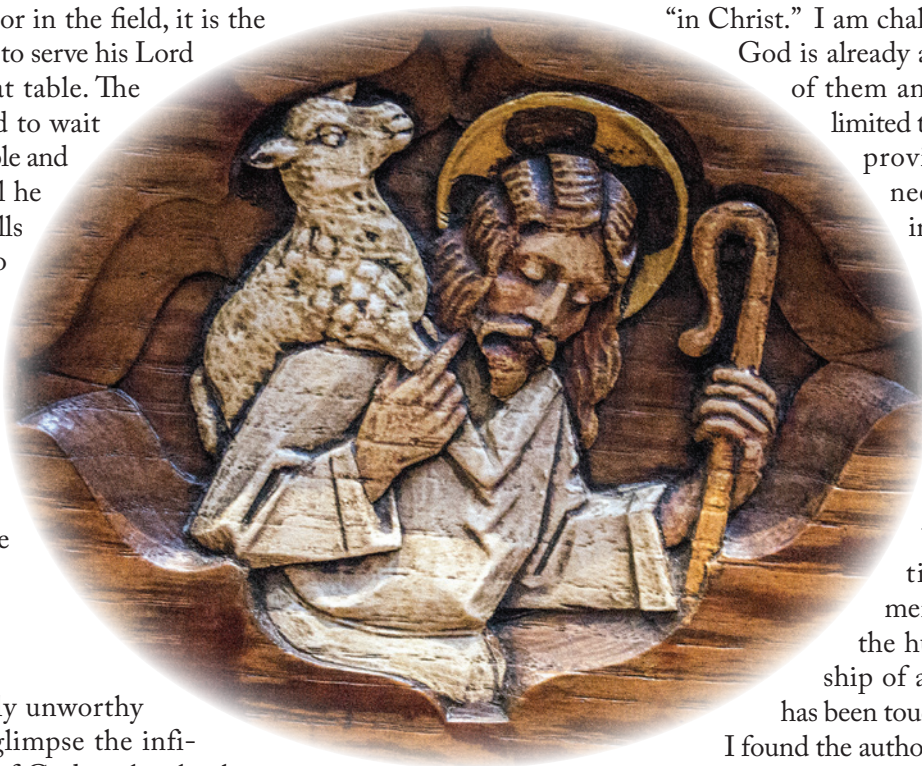
While we are truly unworthy servants, we can glimpse the infinite graciousness of God in the shocking way that Jesus speaks of those who are his disciples. In the Gospel of John, Jesus describes an important effect of obeying his commands: "You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father" (Jn 15:14-15).

Though he owes us nothing, and we *unprofitable servants* owe him everything, Jesus calls us *friends* and invites us to his table where he gives us himself in Holy Communion. Before receiving this unmerited gift, we humbly and obediently acknowledge our status as servants. "Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed" (Mt 8:8).

Jesus knows how quickly we forget our fundamental poverty, our lack of anything to offer. So, he gives us a remedy. He teaches us to call ourselves *unprofitable servants*. Our servant status highlights God's generous provision and tender care. We, too, can be certain that our Lord tenderly provides all we need.

Learning to Bow Before the Mystery

At my parish, I have only eight hours each school year with the children from our parish school preparing for Confirmation and First Communion. They attend Mass daily with their classmates and receive regular religious instruction from their teachers. Then, eight weeks before reception of the Sacraments, they come to me for an intensive proximate preparation. There is no opportunity for me to develop a relationship with most of the children, except



"in Christ." I am challenged to trust that God is already at work in each one of them and that, despite our limited time together, he will provide everything we need. God is at work in each child's heart long before my eight weeks with them.

The following prayer was left in my classroom during my last session with them before their reception of the sacraments. It demonstrates the humility and friendship of a child whose heart has been touched by God. When I found the author, a boy in 4th grade, he gave his permission to me to make a copy and share it. I keep it near my desk to remind me that, despite my weaknesses, God is deeply at work in the hearts of the children I serve.

Dear Jesus, come with me in my Holy Communion. Be there like if you were my best friend. Help me be like you and grow. Help me be strong and not lag. Hail Mary, full of grace, be my mother like you were the mother of Jesus. Help the world, Jesus. Help me to know you better. Help my family be there with me. Guide me through your journey. Help me go to Heaven when I die. Help with all the power and hope. And I pray for you to help my sister for she is doing her first Holy Communion too.

May we catechists be humbled by the mystery of God at work in the hearts of children. And may we never lose sight of the privilege it is to be called unprofitable servants, obeying the commands of our beloved Master who deigns to call us his friends.

Lani Bogart oversees all things catechetical at Our Lady of Perpetual Help, a mostly Hispanic urban parish in Glendale, Arizona. She holds an MA degree in Theology. She also co-leads the Committee to Serve Wives and Widows of Deacons for the Diocese of Phoenix. Lani delights in each encounter with her five children and seven grandchildren and enjoys knitting, calligraphy, and singing.

Note

- 1 Sofia Cavalletti, Patricia Coulter, Gianna Gobbi, Silvana Quattrocchi Montanaro, Rebekah Rojcewicz, *The Good Shepherd and the Child: A Joyful Journey, revised and updated*, (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2014), 102.



The Work of Sofia Cavalletti: Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

By Gerard O'Shea

Introduction

Sofia Cavalletti was arguably the most effective catechetical theorist and practitioner of her era. Born in 1917, she belonged to a noble Roman family, who had served in the papal government. Marchese Francesco Cavalletti had been the last senator for Rome in the papal government, prior to its takeover in 1870 by the Italian state. Sofia herself bore the hereditary title of Marchesa, and lived in her family's ancestral home in the Via Degli Orsini. In 1946, the young Sofia Cavalletti began her studies as a Scripture scholar at La Sapienza University with specializations in the Hebrew and Syriac languages. Her instructor was Eugenio Zolli, who had been the chief rabbi of Rome, prior to and during World War II and who had become a Catholic after the war. Following her graduation, Cavalletti remained a professional academic for the whole of her professional career.

Cavalletti's involvement with catechetics came about by chance, in 1952, after she was asked to prepare a child for his first communion. Soon after this experience, Cavalletti began collaborating with Gianna Gobbi, a professor of Montessori education. Together, they developed what came to be known as the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*, painstakingly creating materials that would serve the religious needs of children from the ages of three to twelve years. Taking the Montessori sensitive periods as a starting point and guided by the response of real children as the "reality check," Cavalletti refined her understanding of the religious experiences that children were likely to respond to at each stage of their development. She would create materials and make them available to the children. If the material was not used, she determined that it had not met the mark and she would dispose of it, irrespective of how much effort she had put into it.

The Role of Wonder

Very early in her work, Cavalletti discerned the central role of "wonder" in a child's religious development and

she realized that for young children (and indeed for every human being), wonder is evoked by "an attentive gaze at reality."¹ Consequently, young children were encouraged to begin their relationship with God by recognizing, one by one, the gifts offered to them in the created world. To meet this need, the Montessori "practical life" works were found to be ideal. Children were given tasks such as flower arranging, slow dusting, leaf washing and the like. The experience of Montessori classrooms for over a hundred years has borne witness to the effectiveness of this approach. Engagement with concrete "hands on" activities seem to be the basis not only of religious development but for learning of any kind.

The careful observation of the needs of real children by Montessori had identified the basic stages of learning, (outlined in my previous article). Cavalletti summed this up in a simple axiom: first the body, then the heart, then the mind. As the twentieth century progressed, she evaluated new ideas in education, Biblical scholarship, and theology. Cavalletti did not easily fall prey to a widely reported educational phenomenon, the "band wagon effect." She was an "action researcher" who allowed herself to be guided by the reactions of the children she was working with. If a learning material failed to engage the children, it was discarded and alternatives sought.

One of the most striking and commonly reported phenomena of the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* is that children seem to be able to arrive at profound theological understandings for themselves—without being told. Pope Francis has offered support from the contemporary Catholic Church for this view: "The presence of the spirit gives Christians a certain connaturality with divine realities and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively, even when they lack the wherewithal to give them precise expression."² There is a particularly poignant illustration of this in *The Religious Potential of the Child*.

We will never forget seven-year-old Massimo, who continued to repeat this exercise [pouring

wine and then water into the chalice] for so long a period of time. The catechist, thinking that he was doing it out of laziness, came up to him several times to introduce him to some other work; but Massimo's facial expression was intent and rapt and he was trying to explain the meaning of what he was doing as he repeated the various actions... Finally—it was almost at the end of the year—he managed to say: “A few drops of water and a lot of wine, because we must lose ourselves in Jesus.” In the end, Massimo had known how to express it with words worthy of a mystic.³

Many similar stories and accounts of children's profound yet simple theological discoveries are chronicled in the *Journals of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*, made available through the United States National Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. A comprehensive set of materials which has proven very effective in the Catholic formation of young people has now been worked out and is in constant use. An outline of the essential content and a scope and sequence of activities up to the age of twelve years can be found in my book, *Educating in Christ*.⁴

Cavalletti's Texts

Cavalletti wrote books and delivered courses to share the fruit of her experiences. There are two core texts which provide closely argued and illustrated descriptions of her findings. *The Religious Potential of the Child* outlines Cavalletti's views about the child from three to six years of age, while the sequel, *The Religious Potential of the Child, Six to Twelve Years* describes the next level. Two further works of Cavalletti should be regarded as foundational to understanding the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*. *Living Liturgy* is widely regarded as one of the most “accessible” books ever written on this subject. Finally, the complementary areas of Salvation History and the Scriptures are presented in *History's Golden Thread*. When she came to revise these two books, Cavalletti wanted to emphasize the link between the Sacred Liturgy and Divine Revelation in the Scriptures. *History's Golden Thread* became *The History of the Kingdom of God Part 1: From Creation to Parousia*; and *Living Liturgy* was re-named *The History of the Kingdom of God Part 2: Liturgy and the Building of the Kingdom*. This link between liturgy and Scripture was made normative in Benedict XVI's apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* in 2010.⁵

Impact of Cavalletti's Work

The impact of Cavalletti's work has been impressive. Time and again, in every culture in which it is tried, catechists have reported that children respond profoundly to the mystical meanings they have deduced for themselves from the concrete materials they have used. This in turn has enhanced and vivified their reading of the Scriptures, their



participation in the Liturgy, and their prayer life. Repeating the experience of the 1907 “Montessori Miracle,” the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* has now won over passionate supporters on every continent, people from all walks of life who have devoted much of their own time and resources to its ongoing implementation and promotion. A worldwide “action research” community has taken shape, and Cavalletti's work continues to expand through National Associations of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. This approach has now come to embrace all of the major themes required for an integrated education in the Catholic Faith: Scripture, liturgy and sacraments, prayer, moral formation, practical life activities, profound doctrinal understandings and salvation history. All of these are brought together primarily under a unifying strategy described by Cavalletti as *mystagogy*—a *liturgical* catechesis that draws human beings to participate in the mystery of Christ as revealed in the Scriptures and Tradition. Vindication for this approach has come most recently in the apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, which draws attention to this aspect of religious education, and describes it in very similar terms to Cavalletti: “a progressive experience of formation involving the entire community and a renewed appreciation of the liturgical signs of Christian initiation.”⁶ Moreover, the pope also made it clear that he expected religious education generally to move in this

direction: “Many manuals and programmes have not yet taken sufficiently into account the need for a mystagogical renewal....”⁷

A Pastoral Challenge

Yet there remains a pastoral problem to be addressed. While it may be clear that religious formation is at its optimum when it follows the natural developmental sensitive periods, in many if not most cases, this is not possible. By the time the process of catechesis begins, the ideal sensitive period may have already passed. What can be done in this situation? Perhaps a simple comparison will provide the best answer. Is it possible to learn a language after the sensitive period is over? Of course, but it is just more difficult. It seems that the sequence by which even adults learn has striking formal similarities with the sequence that unfolds across the developmental span. There remain four basic stages. First, we must “gather data” just as the youngest child with an absorbent mind does. Next, the learner must look for connections and try to discern a pattern (a “big picture”) to explain the data; this is the typical task of the 6-9 year old. The third stage sees the learner testing the big picture that has been created by applying all existing data, and seeking out new data to see whether or not it too fits into the pattern. If it does not, the “big picture” must be modified or replaced. The 9-12 year old children are generally involved in this process. Finally, the learner must personalize the information and theories developed. How is this relevant to *me*; does it have an application that *I* find relevant? This is the approach of the typical need of the adolescent.

In terms of religious development, the starting point that a very young child with an absorbent mind needs is the same as the one needed for an adult with no experience. Just as the young child must gather and name the data of the faith and just as this same child must come to know of the care, love, and protection of God, so too must neophytes of any age begin. A child of ten who has no religious experience still needs to move back to the foundational experience of God’s love before proceeding. The same is true of the adolescent or the adult. Even if the sensitive periods are missed, the same basic experiences follow one another in more or less the same order.

Atrium: The Ideal Context for Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

The ideal context in which the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* is delivered is called an atrium: a sacred space set up for the purpose of allowing children to work independently with a wide variety of materials suited to their developmental stage. Nevertheless, it is possible to adapt much of Cavalletti’s method for this purpose. As a teacher, principal, and finally an educational academic, I had always

felt uneasy about excluding a very large number of students from the benefits of these discoveries. In 2008, I raised the problem with Cavalletti herself. Her response was characteristically generous. She said that her goal was to have the “Shepherd’s voice” heard as widely as possible and I was free to use any of her materials for this purpose. She had given a similar response to Jerome Berryman some years earlier. Nevertheless, Cavalletti insisted that every effort should be made to offer children “the best” by giving them the opportunity of participating in an atrium. Any adaptation, she insisted, should not be referred to as *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*. I have done as she has asked, always promoting the ideal method as a designated atrium with trained catechists and the adaptations.

In 2012, I began supervising a doctoral student, Anne-Marie Irwin at the University of Notre Dame, Australia, in Sydney. Her project was to take an adaptation I had made from the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* which was as close as possible to the original but designed to be implemented in a Catholic school classroom. Irwin put her project into action in a school with challenging social problems in which the majority of students came from non-practicing Catholic families. As she moved through this process, she added her own adapted materials in order to meet the needs of the children with whom she was working. The results were highly gratifying – the change in the students over three years was remarkable. Irwin reported on her findings in December 2017, using rigorous empirical methods, verified by the School of Education at the University of Notre Dame, Australia. She was awarded a PhD for her work in April 2018. Irwin’s enormous body of evidence will be published shortly. Even when not at its best, it seems, Cavalletti’s method is still stunningly successful.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of Cavalletti’s work, however, has been its ability to reach people across many divides: of geography, culture, religion, and theological perspectives. The response of children and adults to this form of the *kerygma* indicates that the message of Christ still has a potent attractive power in our own day, just as it did in the early days of Christian preaching.

Dr. Gerard O’Shea is Professor of Religious Education at the University of Notre Dame, Australia, in Sydney. He and his wife Anne have five children, and seven grandchildren. See his new book on page 33.

Notes

- 1 Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child*. (Chicago: LTP, 1992), 139.
- 2 Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, art. 119.
- 3 Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child*, 92
- 4 Gerard O’Shea, *Educating in Christ. A Practical Handbook for Developing the Catholic Faith from Childhood to Adolescence*. (Brooklyn, NY: Angelico Press, 2018) Appendix A.
- 5 See Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, art. 52.
- 6 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, art. 166.
- 7 *Ibid.*, art. 166.



CATECHIZING THE “QUASI-CATECHUMENS”

By Lucas Pollice

The catechesis of adults is one of the great catechetical challenges in this time of the New Evangelization. This is a particularly difficult and unique challenge because, as we are all keenly aware, many of the adults in our parish pews are poorly catechized and are not only in great need of authentic and systematic catechesis but are also in need of an evangelization, or a presentation of the basic Gospel message. St. John Paul II addresses this reality in *Catechesi Tradendae* when he refers to many adult Catholics as “quasi-catechumens.” He reminds us that adult catechesis today needs to be “directed to those who in childhood received a catechesis suited to their age but who later drifted away from all religious practice and as adults find themselves with religious knowledge of a rather childish kind. It is likewise directed to those who feel the effects of a catechesis received early in life but badly imparted or badly assimilated” (art. 44). If we are honest in our assessment, quasi-catechumens comprise perhaps 70 to 80% of the adults occupying the pews at any given Sunday Mass.

To make things even more urgent, the New Evangelization requires and even demands that the lay faithful take up their particular baptismal vocation to be present and active in the ordinary places of secular culture, and to work within it like leaven to build up the kingdom of God.¹ Until the laity are able to understand and live out this crucial mission, the New Evangelization is in danger of never becoming a reality despite the extraordinary movement and promptings of the Holy Spirit in our time. St. John Paul II expresses this urgency clearly when he states,

“A new state of affairs today both in the Church and in social, economic, political and cultural life, calls with a particular urgency for the action of the lay faithful. If lack of commitment is always unacceptable, the present time renders it even more so. *It is not permissible for anyone to remain idle.*”²

Adult Faith Formation Must Become Both a Priority and a Process

How are we to meet this extraordinary challenge of adult catechesis? First, we need to get very serious about making adult faith formation a catechetical priority in the parish. When it comes to the New Evangelization and missionary discipleship—two frequently-discussed ideas in the Church today—things are not really going to change until we make adult catechesis the first catechetical priority in the parish. As the United States bishops proposed nearly twenty years ago, “such lifelong formation is always needed and must be a priority in the Church’s catechetical ministry; moreover, it must ‘be considered the chief form of catechesis. All the other forms, which are indeed always necessary, are in some way oriented to it.’”³

Secondly, making adult catechesis a catechetical priority is not just about offering adult bible studies or making programs available to our adults. This is a great start, but if we want to be serious about forming missionary disciples, and if we really desire to reach the hearts and minds of the quasi-catechumens sitting in our pews, then our adult faith formation efforts need to become a well-organized effort of making missionary disciples. Adult faith formation

must become an intentional parish-wide process of discipleship formation. We don't have to look any further than the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*—the Church's own ancient missionary discipleship formation process—as the model and inspiration for adult catechesis and the formation of our quasi-catechumens.

How many times have we heard someone who has gone through RCIA—either as a catechumen, candidate, or a sponsor say, “I wish all of the adults in the parish could go through RCIA”? While that would not be possible, we can intentionally organize our adult faith formation efforts in ways that would allow adults to participate in an *RCIA-like* process of ongoing formation that is structured to form missionary disciples. In fact, the *National Directory for Catechesis* directs us to this very idea of the baptismal catechumenate being the model form of adult catechesis. It states:

While a distinction is made between catechumens and those already baptized and are being catechized, some elements of the baptismal catechumenate are instructive for post-baptismal catechesis. In that sense, the baptismal catechumenate inspires a continuing catechesis. It reminds the Church that her catechesis accompanies a continual conversion to Christ and an ongoing initiation into the celebration of the sacraments and the life of the Church...All catechesis should provide those being catechized with the opportunity to journey with Christ through the stages of the Paschal Mystery.⁴

Here we see the NDC clearly advocating for a post-baptismal catechesis of adults that mirrors and uses some elements of the RCIA process. This is important because the baptismal catechumenate provides a model that offers both continuing catechetical formation as well as ongoing pastoral accompaniment that is exactly what the typical quasi-catechumen in the parish needs. This helps us to see that adult catechesis shouldn't be merely a series of classes or programs—as good as those might be—but rather a well-organized and intentional process of discipleship formation. Let's take a more in-depth look at how the baptismal catechumenate can transform our parish catechesis of adults into a vibrant formation process that turns our quasi-catechumens into true missionary disciples.

Step 1: Start with the Basics and the Burning Questions

First, we need to consider the starting point for our quasi-catechumens; and if we look to the RCIA for inspiration, the starting point there is the period of the precatechumenate. The precatechumenate in the RCIA is designed



to meet inquirers where they are, to “provide a suitable explanation of the gospel” and to bring about an initial conversion and intention to conform their lives to Jesus Christ (RCIA, no. 38). The precatechumenate is also an opportunity to answer the inquirers' pressing questions concerning the Catholic faith, so there is often an apologetic quality to the precatechumenate. For our adult quasi-catechumens, we will want to consider adult faith formation opportunities that mirror the approach of the precatechumenate.

Additionally, quasi-catechumens in this stage are not yet *passionately* searching for truth and therefore are not going to come to long, commitment-heavy opportunities like a 20-week bible study or 12-week study on the *Catechism*. They would be more inclined to come to a once-a-month event that addresses topics or questions that peak their interests. Perhaps we can answer some of the burning questions they might be asking about the Mass, or about why we go to Confession, or what the Church really teaches about certain issues. It would also be important for these sessions to have catchy titles, perhaps taking a *Theology on Tap*-type approach, located not at church but at a local sports bar or coffee shop. The pressing question for us is this: what kind of event might attract the quasi-catechumen to come—and then how can we be sure it is a compelling and enriching experience? If child care is possible for these sessions, that would also be a plus as we want to remove as many barriers to participation as possible. Also, keep in mind that our quasi-catechumens are not completely uncatechized, but they do need to be re-evangelized. Consequently, these events should be designed to peak their interest, and then hook them with an engaging and rich catechesis infused with the Gospel message. If we do this successfully, their curiosity will turn into a deeper desire.

Step 2: “Feed My Sheep”

This would bring us to the second stage of our intentional adult faith formation process. While continuing some of the events described above, we would then want to consider doing some events that mirror the second period of the RCIA—the catechumenate. The period gives “an appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts” and also leads the catechumens to a “profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to participate” (RCIA, 75.1). Our quasi-catechumens are now going to be hungry to not only receive a systematic and organic catechesis, but they will want to know how to authentically live out what they are learning and experiencing. This stage of the process would be directed to the first four tasks of catechesis: promoting knowledge of the faith,

liturgical education, moral formation, and teaching to pray (see GDC, no. 85). This is where we can offer a more systematic presentation of the faith employing a 12-week study (perhaps six in the Fall and six in the Spring) on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, or presenting an adult faith formation series using *Symbolon: The Catholic Faith Explained*, or the *Catholicism* series by Bishop Barron, or other similar studies or programs. Offering formation opportunities addressing the sacraments, the moral life, or prayer would also be beneficial. An introductory adult Bible study might also be appropriate. While we don't want to overwhelm, we want to provide opportunities for our quasi-catechumens to continue their process of formation and ongoing conversion.

Step 3: Foster Spiritual Maturity

While the first two stages of our process are continuing, the third stage would be modeled after the third period of the RCIA—the period of purification and enlightenment. This period is a “more intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction and to purify the hearts of the elect as they search their own consciences and do penance” (RCIA, 139). In our adult catechetical process, this is where parish retreats, missions, and holy hours are beneficial. Here we want to start to provide opportunities to deepen serious spiritual maturity, and to help advance the conversion of our once quasi-catechumens. Retreats can be offered annually or semi-annually, parish missions offered during Advent and Lent, as well as weekly or monthly holy hours.

Step 4: Form and Commission Intentional Disciples

The fourth and final stage of the adult faith formation process would be modeled after the fourth period of the RCIA—mystagogy. Mystagogy provides the opportunity for the neophytes “to grow in deepening their grasp of the paschal mystery and making it a part of their lives” and to also “derive a new perception of the faith, of the Church, and of the world” (RCIA, 244; 245). This stage of the process would orient participants to the two final tasks of catechesis: education for community life and missionary initiation (GDC, no. 86). For adult faith formation, this final step should provide adult Catholics formation to help them fully embrace their baptismal mission of sharing in the mission of Christ as priest, prophet, and king, and to live out their lives as missionary disciples. In addition to offering more robust ongoing formation in the faith, this formation should also include a proper understanding of Vatican II, the New Evangelization, and the crucial role of the laity in transforming the secular culture and building up the Kingdom of God. The ultimate goal of this final stage would be to form, equip, and commission agents for the

New Evangelization who can then go forth to evangelize and re-evangelize others to either bring them into the RCIA process or into this ongoing process of adult faith formation in the parish.

This is Serious Business—Don't Go It Alone

There is one more crucial aspect of the RCIA process we need to consider modeling for adult faith formation—the RCIA team. One of the greatest success stories of the RCIA over the past thirty years has been the effective use of the RCIA team to help execute the RCIA process. In the same way, it would be advantageous for parishes to establish an adult faith formation team of volunteer parishioners to help the pastor and the adult faith formation leader to develop and carry out an intentional and ongoing adult faith formation process modeled after the RCIA. This is not a “go it alone” effort—to do this successfully requires a dedicated and talented team of parishioners, bringing forth a variety of gifts: teaching, organizing, communicating, marketing, collaborating, etc. This works best when the pastor and the adult faith formation leader prayerfully discern and choose the members of the adult faith formation team. The USSCB's Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, provides some helpful guidelines and objectives for establishing an adult faith formation team and is a valuable training resource for getting your team off to a great start.

Patience Will Pay Off!

Finally, it is important to remember that all of this will take time to accomplish, and like all good catechesis, will happen gradually and in stages. If you are just beginning to do adult faith formation at your parish, the first year may be entirely devoted to the first stage and then in year two begin to add the second stage, etc. This process may need to develop within a 3 to 5 year strategic plan, but patient planning and execution will ultimately bear fruit. Once we begin in earnest this important task of adult catechesis, our parishes will then be equipped to get down to the real business of the New Evangelization—winning over the minds and hearts of modern men and women to Christ. As St. John Paul II so often reminded us: “Do not be afraid! Open wide the doors to Christ!”


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Notes

- 1 Cf. Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, art. 31.
- 2 John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, art. 3.
- 3 USSCB, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, no. 13.
- 4 NDC, 35 D.

Listening and Accompaniment

By Bob Rice



The *Instrumentum laboris* describes the scope of the upcoming Synod on Youth, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment with these words: “just as our Lord Jesus Christ walked alongside the disciples of Emmaus, the Church is also urged to accompany all young people, without exception, towards the joy of love” (no. 1). The theme of accompaniment weaves through the document like a melody on which all other harmonies are based. In fact, accompaniment is explained as a non-negotiable within youth ministry. “The accompaniment of younger generations is not an optional element in the task of educating and evangelizing young people, but an ecclesial duty and a right of every young person” (no. 85).

This concept is not new in the life of the Church. In 1976, the United States’ Bishops published *A Vision of Youth Ministry*, which proposed the story of Emmaus as the guiding image for how ministry to youth should be carried out: through the process of listening and accompaniment. These two principles go hand in hand.

Intentional listening is an essential part of accompaniment, and one that we in the Church must strive to increase in our work with young people. Though Jesus knew the answers to the questions the two disciples were asking, he engaged them in a dialogue about what had just occurred in Jerusalem and listened as they shared their stories. Only when they were finished did he open up the Scriptures to give them a fuller understanding.

We must have patience to allow young people to talk about their opinions and experiences, especially when those might not be aligned with Church teaching. Our goal is their true conversion of mind and life, not merely their correction. At any moment in the conversation on the road to Emmaus, Jesus could have cut in and said, “No, that’s not right.” I imagine if he had, those disciples may have been less likely to invite him in for a meal when he gave the impression he was going on farther.

There has been an impressive amount of listening going into this Synod. Every Bishops’ conference was asked about the state of young people and best practices for ministry with them; an online questionnaire received over one hundred thousand responses; experts in youth were consulted; and the Vatican had a pre-synodal gathering in March with over three hundred young people from around the world.

The publication of the Final Document of the pre-synodal meeting in March 2018 was not without controversy, as some youth questioned the Church’s teachings on matters such as contraception, cohabitation, and homosexuality. In the section “Search for Meaning in Life,” it states that these “polemical issues” result in them wanting “the Church to change her teaching or at least to have access to a better

explanation and to more formation on these questions.” Conversely, “Many young Catholics accept these teachings and find in them a source of joy. They desire the Church to not only hold fast to them amid unpopularity but to also proclaim them with greater depth of teaching” (no. 5).

Those who quickly condemned the document for including these statements missed the point. This was not about whether or not the Church would change her doctrine. This was a moment of listening to what youth had to say. Such listening is difficult to do, because at times it means we will hear things that we would rather not. The *Instrumentum laboris* acknowledged how challenging this kind of listening can be, but also emphasized its importance. “The Pre-synodal Meeting showed that listening is the truest and boldest kind of language that young people are vehemently seeking from the Church” (no. 65).

Even the late Stephen Covey recognized this important habit in his famous *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*: “seek first to understand, then to be understood.” He gives an analogy of a doctor who doesn’t listen a patient when he tries to explain what is wrong, but hands him a prescription to fix it. Is that patient likely to have confidence in the prescription? Unfortunately, that same can be applied to the way young people are sometimes treated by adults, even within the Church. When we believe we have all the answers, we can stop caring about the ones who are asking the questions. We can even become frustrated by those questions, thinking that we answered them already.

Young people today are in more need of catechists than catechisms. They want to see the Gospel joyfully lived out in their midst by people who care for them and who will listen to them—only then will they feel the freedom to engage in a dialogue about the things that have significance in their lives.

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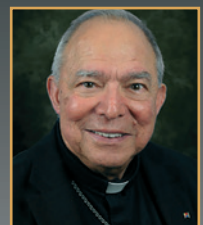
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