

c | CATECHETICAL LEADER



POLITICAL ISSUES AND CATECHESIS



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Public Talk
Public Engagement

CATECHETICAL UPDATE:
Come Lord Jesus



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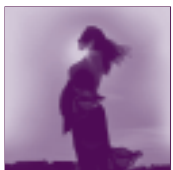
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EMMANUEL — MORE THAN JUST AN ADVENT WORD

Leland Nagel



If we prepared for Christmas the way the candidates are getting ready for the 2008 elections, we would be yelling — “Enough already.” How long can you prepare for an event and still build excitement? Why do we believe the coming of Jesus will make a difference? After all, isn’t God with us now? Why are we still singing, “O come

O come Emmanuel” years later? Maybe it is the ransom part. That still seems overwhelmingly right at times. It is not just Israel, but all of us, who need to be ransomed to be free!

Rescue me from the Christmas commercials. Release me from the false promises. Liberate me from the chains of credit card debt. Deliver me from the hands of my own selfishness. Set me free from the shackles that bind me in servitude to the wrong master. Secure the release of my desires, so that I might be free to proclaim the birth of Christ and his message of peace and joy to all people, all ages and all heritages.

It is hard to be countercultural in a society where Christmas items have been for sale since August. One does not want to be accused of not having “the Christmas spirit” or worse yet, “not caring enough” if you wait too long to purchase your gifts or write Christmas cards. What can we do to prepare? Surely, there is more to getting ready for Christmas than the lighting of the Advent wreath. While the symbolism of light growing with each week is powerful, why not carry that theme into all our preparations? Set yourself free to transform your traditions to support *Come Lord Jesus, Come*.

We could start with the Christmas tree. Ideally, it would be real, regardless of the size. Put it up on the first Sunday of Advent and let it be unadorned, except for the top. Whether it is an angel or star, let the top of the tree hold the only light or decoration for the first week. You could also place the crèche and the manger under the tree, but wait for the animals. We are preparing. The light at the top of the tree can be turned on right after the evening meal and shine as the only light in the room. You might want to sit there a little longer each night; and give thanks for your blessings, maybe even sit a little longer each succeeding evening. When you are finished recounting your blessings, you can turn off the light.

What better way to cast aside darkness and put on the armor of light than to hang the lights on your tree for the second Sunday of Advent? But don’t plug them in all in at once. Each evening as you sit in front of the tree, plug in another string of lights. Better yet,

increase the amount of time the lights remain lit each night. This could be a good time to remember the ancestors of Jesus, perhaps with a Jesse tree, as well as your own ancestors. Share the stories of godparents, sponsors, even the animals that served as witnesses of God’s love and faithfulness. Some of these animals might find their way into your stable during this time.

Be sure the third Sunday of Advent, Gaudete Sunday, is really one of rejoicing. This is a good day to decorate your tree. Stringing popcorn and cranberries can be ideal — some for your mouth and some for the tree. You can hang the ornaments throughout the week and perhaps into the next week until the tree is full. At the same time, you can also increase the time the lights burn. Meanwhile, the shepherds and their sheep can begin to gather in the fields around your house, perhaps on the mantle or various end tables. This can also be a great time to just lie by the tree and reflect on the joy of being a disciple and living in the light.

Set yourself free to transform your traditions.

About this time, Mary and Joseph, along with their donkey, can also begin a journey from another point in your house. Traveling their route will take them from the Fourth Sunday of Advent until Christmas Eve, progressing through your home, always heading towards the stable. While they will arrive safely on Christmas Eve, perhaps during the day, the baby Jesus will arrive later that night when light will brighten the stable. Shortly thereafter, the shepherds can leave their flocks, followed by a few sheep or lambs, to gather around the manger. Almost as soon as the light appears in the stable, another light, possibly a small lamp or even a flashlight hanging from a pole, can appear in the farthest corner of the house, appearing as the star to guide the journey of the three kings. Their journey will continue until they arrive at the stable on January 6, the Feast of the Epiphany.

Meanwhile your tree can continue to be lit well into the dark and ensuing daylight as Carols are sung, Christmas CD’s are played, and reflections on the peace and joy of Christ coming in human flesh abound. While God is with us at all times, sometimes we need to experience *Come Lord Jesus* moments with reckless abandon and freedom of spirit. After all, there is nothing more ecumenical than to wish “peace and joy to all, goodwill to every living creature.” Merry Christmas. Emmanuel! |

The Value of Public Talk in a Public Church

by Matthew Hayes

No one takes leave of a real conversation the same as when one entered into it. Our conversations create us. Conversation and risk and conversion belong together. Conversation is dangerous, therefore, to anyone unwilling to embrace or at least accept transformation.

— M. Cowen and B. Lee

Conversation, Risk & Conversion: The Inner and Public Life of Small Christian Communities

Some years ago, in NCCL's Catechetical Update, Jane Regan clearly identified the central importance of conversation within the process of adult religious education and described the connection between conversation and conversion.¹ When this conversation focuses upon public policy issues in the light of Catholic social teaching, it can be an occasion for public talk which has the potential to shift one's "ground" toward Gospel values.

DEVELOPING POLITICAL RESPONSE-ABILITY

In my twenty-five years of fostering adult learning within Catholic parishes, I've heard the lesson not to mix religion and "politics" clearly resounded. I vividly recall a member of my parish's pastoral council who complained about such an "unhealthy" mix in a reaction to the homily given on social responsibility by the local Catholic Conference state director. Admittedly, "politics" in the usual sense of candidate endorsement does not belong in the faith community. However, politics of a different sort — the gathering of people to talk about significant issues that face our society and to do so within the context of the social justice tradition of the Catholic community — does have a legitimate place. An invitation to and experience of public conversation within the parish can be

Public talk has the potential to shift one's "ground" toward Gospel values.

a mechanism to foster political response-ability in adult education.

The Catholic community has a significant social justice tradition. In the 1971 synod document, *Justice in the World*, the bishops taught: "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel."² In June 1998, the United States bishops wrote, in *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching*, of "... the urgent task to incorporate more fully and explicitly Catholic social teaching into Catholic educational programs" and described sharing of the social tradition as a "defining measure" of Catholic education and formation.³ An important aspect of transformative action and education is engagement, from a Gospel perspective, in public policy debate of significant issues.⁴

Various United States bishops' documents have encouraged Catholics to become engaged in a dialectic process, which joins aspects of the tradition with policy issues. For example, *Communities of Salt and Light*, in a reflection on the social mission of the parish listed advocating for justice and legislative action as one of seven tasks in integrating the social mission into the parish. As local institutions, parishes "have special opportunities to develop leaders, to promote citizenship, and to provide forums for discussion and action on public issues." In 1995, the United States Bishops issued, for the sixth time, a statement about the upcoming presidential election, entitled *Political Responsibility*, which identified the church's role in the political order as including the following tasks: educating the faithful regarding the teachings of the

church and their responsibilities; analyzing issues for their social and moral dimensions; measuring public policy against Gospel values; participating with other concerned parties in debate over public policy; speaking with courage, skill, and concern on public issues involving human rights.

RECOGNIZING THE PUBLIC CHURCH

Martin Marty⁵ was one of the first writers to use the term “public church.” Parker Palmer outlined the essential continuum of the private and public spheres for the authentic Christian community as a “company of strangers.”⁶ Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton described churches as public not as a consequence of being officially established, but “because they enter into the common discussion about the public good.”⁷ Seymour, O’Gorman, and Foster traced the process of the “domestication” of religious education in the United States, losing sight of its role in the education of the public. They described the church as “the yeast in the public order” intentionally focusing upon “the way the religious infuses both personal and public life.”⁸ O’Brien described the public church as having two tasks: the formation of members in a community of memory, and responsible engagement in the education of the public.⁹ Brueggemann described the legitimate role of the faith community’s sectarian hermeneutic which allows members to enter into dialogue with the “empire,”¹⁰ and Coleman described two overlapping pedagogies within the faith community: one educating for discipleship and one for citizenship.¹¹ The need for a public dimension to small Christian communities has also been evident in recent literature on their presence and development within the United States Catholic Church.¹²

The challenge for the parish, as a public church, is to invite parishioners into public talk about policy issues. In so doing, it assists parishioners to exercise their political response-ability.

GROUNDING CONVERSATION: PUBLIC TALK ABOUT POLICY ISSUES

Grounded conversation is a term used to express the important role of conversation within the process of continuing conversion within the faith community.¹³ Conversation within the faith community is grounded within the tradition of its teachings. The process of conversation can lead to the transformation of one’s perspective. As a result of conversation within the community, one becomes aware of the

ground on which one stands and is challenged to reaffirm or revise this perspective.

Public talk in a public church is a form of grounded conversation. Public talk is at the heart of deliberation about policy issues. Since 1982 the Kettering Foundation of Dayton, Ohio, has been fostering deliberation about national public policy issues through the development of resources for the National Issues Forum network.¹⁴ National Issues Forums (NIF) is a voluntary, non-partisan nationwide network of forums and study circles “rooted in the simple notion that citizens need to come together to deliberate about common problems in order to act on them.”¹⁵ By 1997 approximately 5000 civic and educational organizations around the country were sponsoring forums.¹⁶ Lappe and DuBois cited NIF as an example of one of the grassroots efforts that is “quicken[ing] public life in America by fostering the “ten arts” of democracy.¹⁷ Pearce and Littlejohn described NIF in some detail as an example of a process fostering “transcendent discourse” in the face of moral conflict.¹⁸

The church can be “the yeast in the public order.”

Starting in 1989 the National Issues Forum in the Catholic Community (NIFCC) attempted to foster public deliberation in Catholic parishes, by adding a component from the Catholic social justice tradition to the deliberative process.¹⁹ NIFCC was a partnership between the Kettering Foundation

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Does the Ground Shift as a Result of Public Talk?



by ~~Matthew Hayes~~

IN THE FALL OF 1998, I UNDERTOOK A STUDY TO EXPLORE THE DIFFERENCE PUBLIC TALK IN A PUBLIC CHURCH MADE IN THE THINKING OF CATHOLICS THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE OF A NATIONAL ISSUES FORUM. THE STUDY EMPLOYED A THREE-GROUP DESIGN TO EXPLORE THE DIFFERENCE IN OUTCOMES AS A RESULT OF PARTICIPATION IN A NATIONAL ISSUES FORUM ON THE ISSUE: "AT DEATH'S DOOR: WHAT ARE THE CHOICES."¹ THE STUDY EMPLOYED A NON-EQUIVALENT CONTROL GROUP DESIGN.²

Design of Study

TYPE GROUP	OBSERVATION	PROCESS	OBSERVATION
Experimental group: Catholic, grounded in context	Pre-forum ballot	From NIFCC Leadership Handbook	Post-forum ballot <i>before</i> Catholic tradition is examined
32 participants			
Experimental group: Catholic, grounded in context and content	Pre-forum ballot	From NIFCC Leadership Handbook	Post-forum ballot <i>after</i> Catholic tradition is examined
45 participants			
Control: Kettering	Pre-forum ballot	Unknown	Post-forum ballot
47 participants			

The content centered on the question “How should society care for those who are suffering and near death?” by focusing on three public policy choices in regard to doctor assisted-suicide: “Let patients die with dignity”; “Improve care for the dying”; and “Above all, sustain life.” The process used was outlined in the *National Issues Forum in the Catholic Community Leadership Handbook*. The NIF has a pre- and post-forum ballot for each issue. In order to understand the Catholics involved in the study, questions relevant to acceptance of Catholic social teachings, developed by James Davidson and colleagues³ were added to the pre-forum NIFCC ballot. Identical pre- and post-forum ballot data were also available from the Kettering Foundation. Pre- and post-forum ballot responses from all three groups were analyzed for variance, with demographics and Davidson indices serving as controls for possible intervening variables. The research tested for significant difference in responses to the pre- and post- ballots from the participants in the two Catholic study groups; pre- and post-forum ballot responses of the two Catholic study groups to identical pre- and post-forum ballot responses found in comparable regional data available from the Kettering Foundation.

It was my hope to be able to statistically support the finding that Catholics did not initially approach this public policy issue differently than other participants; and to support the second finding that, as a result of becoming acquainted or reacquainted with issue relevant selections from Catholic social teaching, Catholics would arrive at opinions different from Catholics simply participating in a forum on the issue.

The statistical analysis did not support either finding. Catholics in this study were initially different from Kettering participants. In addition, they may have been acquainted with the Catholic tradition’s approach to this issue before the forum occurred, thus negating any significant shift toward the tradition because of con-

versation about it within the faith context. In this study, the “ground” on which Catholic participants stood did not significantly shift as a result of participation in public talk about the issue. However, the ground on which Catholics stood seems to have been firmed up by the deliberative process. There was a statistically significant difference in post-forum response to the statement “Doctors should be allowed to help dying patients who choose to end their lives with dignity” between the Kettering participants and both Catholic groups. In addition, Catholics who were acquainted or reacquainted with issue relevant Catholic content before responding to the post-forum ballot reported a higher response as having a clear and definite view of what public policy should be upon this issue. Although not statistically significant, the experience of the forum within the context of the faith community, involving the explicit content of the faith community’s tradition, did evidence a shift in clarity among participants toward the faith community’s position as part of the deliberative process.

As shown by this study,⁴ participation in a National Issues Forum in the Catholic community fosters a solidification of awareness about the Catholic position on an issue. It enhances the political response-ability of Catholics by strengthening their Catholic voice in public discourse. Catholics can take this voice into the deliberative process, opening it to “the scrutiny of the larger community.”⁵ As part of this larger process, it is hoped that a Catholic community can exercise more fruitfully its role as a public church, with its members acting as disciple citizens. Through such a process world-views can be constructed⁶ and perspectives transformed⁷ according to values informed by the faith community.

— Matthew Hayes

1 In its more than ten-year history, NIF has developed resources on many other issues from the Catholic social justice tradition. Three or four new issues are identified each year.

2 D. Campbell and J. Stanley, *Experimental and Quasi-experimental Designs for Research* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963), 47-50.

3 J. Davidson, A. Williams, R. Lamanna, J. Stenftenagel, K. Weigert, W. Whalen and P. Wittberg., *The Search for Common Ground: What Unites and Divides Catholic Americans* (Huntingburg, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1997).

4 The full study can be found in an unpublished doctoral dissertation: M. Hayes, *Grounded Conversation: Public Talk In A Public Church*, Spalding University, Louisville, 1999, available through UMI Dissertation Services.

5 “The legitimacy of a sectarian hermeneutic: 2 Kings 18-89,” 9.

6 L. McKenzie, *Adult Education and Worldview Construction* (Malabar, FL: Krieger, 1991).

7 J. Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1991).

Standing Our Ground

by Louise Akers, SC

How many of us have been admonished “never talk about religion, politics, or sex”? Today these topics are a public and major concern of many and a primary focus of our U.S. media. So, as faith persons within our contemporary cultural context, how do we, as parents, teachers, catechetical leaders or pastoral ministers, deal with this shift? I would like to encourage conversations related to politics and religion and their relationship to one another in a democratic society that is increasingly pluralistic and polarized.

I wish to be upfront about the bias with which I approach this topic, borrowing words of Joan Chittister in *Called to Question: A Spiritual Memoir*:

My metaphor for thinking about the world is The Beloved of God. It means that I must tie my life to the voice of God in my heart as I hear it through the poor, the oppressed, the disenfranchised, and those with voices other than the voice of the institutions.

In choosing these words I also choose my stance, claim my positions and suggest alternatives to many of the scenarios existing today. I believe, when approaching political/moral issues, as disciples of Jesus, we are more apt to make choices that will bring about a more just country and world.

OUR GROUNDING

We are fortunate to have strong principles from which to draw — in both our political and religious histories. Politically, the grounding lies in our country’s foundational documents. We know that our U.S. Constitution, written by people having lived through persecution or alienation in countries that combined politics and religion states in the First Amendment: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, nor prohibiting the free exercise thereof... .” This mandate has received affirmation throughout our history, one example being in 1963 when the Supreme Court banned Bible reading in public schools: “We have come to recognize through bitter experience that it is not within the power of government to invade that citadel (religion), whether its purpose or effect be to aid or oppose, to advance or retard. In the relationship between man and religion, the State is firmly committed to a position of neutrality.”

Likewise, during the early days of our fledgling country, letters and journals of political leaders expressed belief in the following propositions:

- Freedom of religion is a fundamental right.
- There should not be one official religion of the United States.
- Different religions from around the world should be respected.

Vatican II documents reiterate the above principles. Particularly relevant is the *Declaration on Religious Freedom*. U.S. Jesuit John Courtney Murray’s strong influence helped produce a document that was clear in its vision of separation of church and state along with its recognition of each religion’s freedom in its search for God:

The Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. Freedom of this kind means that all people should be immune from coercion on the part of individuals, social groups and every human power so that ... nobody is forced to act against their convictions in religious matters in private or in public...

This right of the human person to religious freedom must be given such recognition in the constitutional order of society as will make it a civil right.

AN OPERATIVE FAITH

While respecting and supporting these ideas we continue to wrestle with an inevitable, subtler dimension of these principles: how should *faith* (of which religion is an expression) influence our politics? Isn’t this a major question in our country today? The topic of values — identified interchangeably with religion and/or faith — continues to be hotly contested in our national debate and political campaigns. Major historical movements and watershed moments in the recent history of the United States have been influenced, and at times orchestrated, by people of faith: Martin L. King, Jr., Cesar Chavez, the Berrigan brothers (Dan and Phil), Theresa Kane, Dorothy Day, Coretta Scott King, Rosa Parks. Millions of grass-roots, faith-filled people continue to work toward the systemic changes called for by these exceptional leaders.

Consider two significant sources that raise the challenge of an operative faith today, though their words and wisdom were conceived in the 1960s. The introductory paragraph of the Vatican II pastoral document, *Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* announces:

The joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these, too, are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their heart ... The church has always had the task of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel.

Catechesis and Public Engagement in a Transformed University

by Patricia McGuire

President, Trinity (Washington) University

Congress, in its wisdom, decreed in 2004 that all colleges and universities receiving federal funding should have an observance of Constitution Day on September 17 of each year, the anniversary of the day in 1787 when the delegates to the Constitutional Convention gathered to sign the document creating the new government of the United States. Constitution Day 2007 here at Trinity in Washington proved to be an occasion for an ongoing public discussion of the Jena Six [African American students charged with attempted murder for beating up a white student who was taunting them with racial incitements], focusing on the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of due process and equal protection of the laws. Among other activities, I sent an email to the campus community inviting student comments on the constitutional implications of the case.

As I read and posted numerous student comments to my blog (www.trinitydc.edu) I found myself wondering if West Virginia Senator Robert Byrd (who attached the Constitution Day mandate to an appropriations bill) knows what he hath wrought. My students at Trinity, who sometimes seem diffident when it comes to discussion of political issues far from their experience or control, roared into the Jena Six discussion with passion and deep conviction.

The majority of our students at Trinity are African American, and the issues in Jena hit close to home. One student's reflection aptly captures the feelings of many:

It amazes me that even after The NAACP, The Civil Rights movement, The Freedom Riders, and so many others that have fought and died for everyone to be equal, we still look at each other as the enemy. . . . I think everyone involved with this case needs support and prayer. I pray that these young black men take from this experience that even though there was prejudice and hatred against them, that they will not continue to fuel what is ultimately tearing us apart. I think anyone who is an American should be ashamed by . . . how we have let hate and racism grow and become how we are defined.

Catechesis occurs at the most local level, in the heart and soul of each student. Trinity students resonate in powerful ways with the

issues of justice and oppression that they have lived in so many ways themselves. They come to Trinity because they want to become powerful, developing the knowledge and skills necessary to transform their lives, and the circumstances of their families and communities.

ENGAGING STUDENTS

In my nineteenth year as Trinity's president, I've had long experience with the challenges of engaging students — some young, some at mid-life and even into retirement years — to exert the kind of "faithful citizenship" we Catholics are called to embrace. Reflecting the demographics of the city we serve, 90% of our students at Trinity are African American, Latina, Asian or from a broad range of immigrant backgrounds, and the majority today are not Catholic, though most are Christian. Nearly half are D.C. residents — Trinity educates more District of Columbia residents than any other private university in the world.

Yes, this is a different place from the Trinity of yesteryear in many ways, but still powerfully focused on making women successful. We have sustained our historic undergraduate women's college — which is now growing by leaps and bounds as urban young women discover the empowerment of this form of education — while also adding a School of Professional Studies for working women and men, and a coeducational School of Education for teachers, principals and guidance counselors. We have recently opened a new associate degree program at THE ARC in Southeast Washington, the first university offering a full degree program east-of-the-river in Anacostia.

A PLACE AT THE TABLE

The great diversity of our student body is both a delight and a challenge when it comes to catechesis across this remarkable range of experience, interest and belief. Yet, I have also learned that our diverse community can be united, indeed, galvanized by those issues that are at the heart of church teaching. In the words of the bishops in their 2004 "Faithful Citizenship" document:

Politics in this election year and beyond should be about an old idea with new power — the common good. The central question should not be, "Are you better off than you were four years

ago.” It should be, “How can ‘we’ — all of us, especially the weak and vulnerable — be better off in the years ahead? How can we protect and promote human life and dignity? How can we pursue greater justice and peace?”

Those issues remain central heading into the 2008 elections. The bishops go on to ask, “Who has a place at the table of life?”

At Trinity, this question envelopes our students, faculty and staff in countless ways each day. The issues that preoccupy our campus community are those central questions of economic and social justice, the dignity of women in particular, civil rights, the rights of immigrants and the quest for true human rights. These are not just theoretical issues for our students; with our median family income at less than \$40,000, and with life experiences of poverty and violence, Trinity students arrive on campus with a high expectation for personal transformation through education.

This quote from one of the hundreds of application essays written by our first year students is typical:

I want to become the first person in my family to go to college. Where my family is from (the Dominican Republic) the chance to get a higher education was limited, especially for women. It's not that women from my country don't believe in education, but they tend to have families at a young age. The woman has to stay home and take care of the children or get some type of job to help pay the bills. I want to break this type of thinking and start a cycle of success through education.

PAYING THE BILLS

How do we make it possible for our students to reach such lofty goals?

Trinity's curricula and programs focus on building the skills and knowledge our students must have to be successful — in college, later on at work, in graduate school, as parents and as citizen leaders. We remind them continuously of their obligation to repay the gift of education by building better communities.

Sustaining the work of Trinity is not always easy. Because we serve a critically low income population, we must discount tuition deeply, meaning that we share the poverty of our students in many ways. With about \$4 million annually returned to the students in unfunded discounts (that means we do not have money behind the discounts, since our endowment is just about \$10 million), leaving operating revenues of about \$20 million to run a 1600-student university with 250 full-time employees, we stretch our dollars carefully.

I often have to remind our faculty and staff, many of whom come from larger, arguably wealthier public institutions that the tradition of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur who founded Trinity in 1897 means that we do our work without too many frills — “poverty is our grand tradition” is a wry statement we sometimes say to each other. Trinity was built on the free and generous labor of those religious

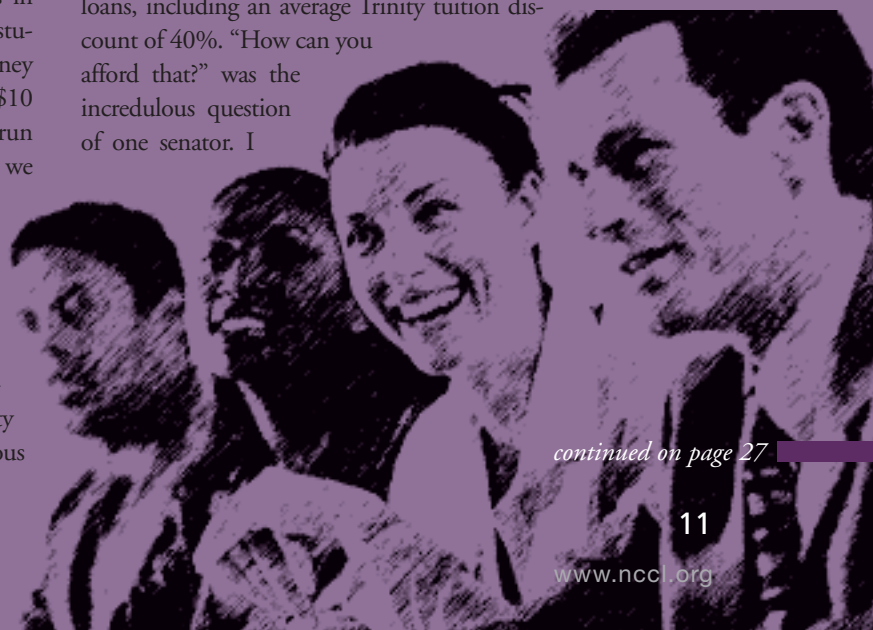
women; until 1990 Trinity accepted the contributed services of the SNDs. From these great women we also receive our mission. St. Julie Billiart founded the Sisters of Notre Dame in 1804 in France to educate the poor girls orphaned by the French Revolution. “Teach them what they need to know,” was her pithy direction to her sisters, and so it continues to this day at Trinity.

STILL CATHOLIC?

In spite of the fact that we live the Gospel every day in so many ways at Trinity, I am sometimes confronted by Catholics and others who demand, with an accusatory tone, “Is Trinity still Catholic?” because the majority of our students are not. Those who measure a university's Catholicism by the census of Catholics in our midst miss the whole point of our catechesis: we are deeply Catholic at Trinity, not because of the professed religions of our students, but because we who minister to them are deeply committed to doing the Lord's work in this particular vineyard. We're not talking to ourselves; we are evangelizing new nations every single day.

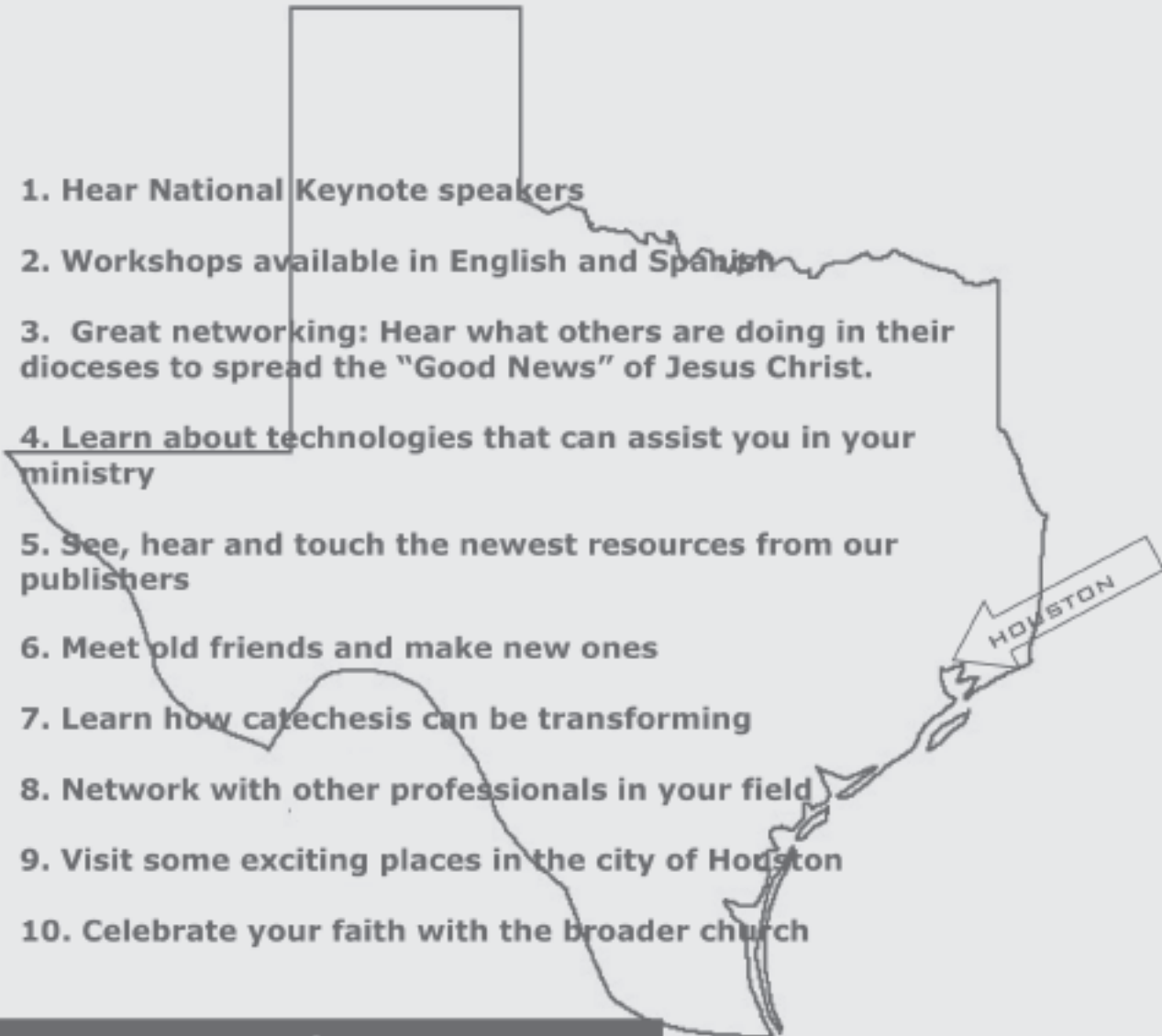
Because Trinity has become a remarkably different kind of university from the norm, one that is focused on ensuring the success of urban learners, I sometimes receive invitations to testify before Congressional committees on issues where a different voice needs to be heard in public policy development affecting our students. Catechesis occurs in many unusual places — even before the Senate Finance Committee. In December 2006, I participated in a hearing before that committee on the topic of the wealth of colleges today. (My testimony can be found on our website at www.trinitydc.edu).

Testifying in counterpoint to witnesses who spoke of the ways in which some of the most elite universities in the country compete for top students, many of whom come from very wealthy families, I sketched out the very different lives and concerns of universities that serve a completely different group of students — those who are “the least, the lost, the left out among us.” Senators and staffers expressed surprise when I told them that the average full-time Trinity student pays about \$2,000 out-of-pocket after they receive the financial aid package of grants and loans, including an average Trinity tuition discount of 40%. “How can you afford that?” was the incredulous question of one senator. I



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Adolescent Catechesis in a Culturally Diverse Context

by Michael G. Lee, SJ

Across the United States, adolescent catechetical programs are educating in faith youth who represent Catholic churches from nearly every nation on earth

Sprinkled throughout the *National Directory for Catechesis (NDC)* are a series of short separate discussions of the cultural diversity of the U.S. Catholic population. This article attempts to organize the various discussions of the issues, tensions, and hopes for the future of U.S. adolescent catechesis in a culturally diverse context.

INCARNATION: CHRIST AND CULTURES

Jesus Christ *is* Christianity. Catechesis, whether for adults or adolescents, rightly centers on Jesus. His name appears twice in the very first sentence of the introduction to the *NDC*. Jesus is the starting point for *catechesis*, a particular ministry of the word that educates believers for “a deeper knowledge and love of his person and message, and a firm commitment to follow him.”¹

“And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The Incarnation is the special revelation of God in Jesus Christ in a specific culture, space and time.² The Incarnation provides the theological foundation for exploring the close connection between Christ and diverse cultures.

“*Culture* means the ways in which a group of people live, think, feel, organize themselves, celebrate, and share life. In every culture, there are underlying systems of values, meanings, and views of the world which are expressed visibly in languages, gestures, symbols and styles.”³

The church is committed to connecting Christ to cultures. Each Sunday, the U.S. Catholic Church prays in more than eighty languages and labors to help people to make sense of their lives and cultures in light of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.⁴ It might be said that the Church *inculturates* the Gospel each Sunday. That is, it strives to help faith in Jesus take root in diverse cultures so that it grows like a plant in its native soil. “It is not a superficial adaptation designed to make the Gospel more pleasing to its hearers. It is, rather, a process that brings the transforming power of the Gospel to touch persons in their hearts and cultures at the deepest levels.”⁵

The *NDC* outlines a process for inculturating the Gospel that involves listening to the people’s culture for an echo of the word of God and then discerning the presence of (or openness to) authentic Gospel values. “This discernment process is governed by two basic principles: ‘compatibility with the Gospel and communion with the universal church.’”⁶

PROFILE OF CATHOLIC POPULATION IN THE U.S.

The *NDC* suggests that “the increasing diversity present in most local churches has provided rich opportunities. The multiple ethnic, racial and cultural communities make possible a spirit that renews and sustains the life of the church.”⁷ Cultural diversity is intertwined with the spiritual renewal of the U.S. Catholic Church, and adolescent catechesis is already engaged in this renewal movement. Across the United States, adolescent catechetical programs are educating in faith youth who represent Catholic churches from nearly every nation on earth.

Elaborating on this reality, the *NDC* (2005) reported “the Catholic population in the United States is generally comparable, in racial and ethnic distribution, to the population of the United States as a whole, except with a smaller proportion of African Americans and a larger proportion of Hispanic/Latinos.”⁸ Consequently, the U.S. Catholic Church with its estimated 69 million members is more ethnically diverse than any other similarly sized Catholic population in the world.⁹

Cultural diversity is a hallmark of the U.S. Catholic Church, and this diversity has urgent implications for adolescent catechesis. Chief among them is the need to assess the impact of cultural diversity on adolescents’ experience of learning. To access their experience, one practical suggestion is to have adolescents complete a “Critical Incident Questionnaire” in which they are asked to name their most rewarding or exciting moment (learning high), their most distressing or frustrating moment (learning low), and the most important insights that they realized about themselves. Adolescents also may be asked for specific examples

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of observable catechist characteristics or behaviors that either were helpful to their learning or hindered it.¹⁰ An alternative to the “Critical Incident Questionnaire” is to ask one or two adolescents to informally interview their peers. Once catechists or teachers have collected the responses, the hard work of interpretation may begin.

Interpretation depends on a working knowledge of history, especially each cultural group’s history of education and its history of catechesis. History is an indispensable tool for catechists seeking to understand an adolescent’s experience of learning. Given the increasing cultural diversity of the U.S. Catholic Church, it is difficult to overstate the need for everyone involved with adolescent catechesis to learn about their own histories and those of other cultural groups. Knowledge of history is essential to inculcating the Gospel, in part, because history still plays out in our day. “As author William Faulkner observed, ‘The past is never dead. It’s not even past.’”¹¹ For example, consider the history of education of many Native American tribes, which is epitomized in the traumatic boarding school experience that lasted from about 1879 to 1968. Boarding school curricula of that era systematically sought to extinguish tribal languages, cultures, family ties and tribal affiliations, and it effectively replaced them with their counterparts in the dominant culture. Such practices continue to undermine tribal culture and have led to terrible suffering. This lesson of the importance of cultural differences is an essential lesson for those involved in adolescent catechesis.

*With increased diversity comes the need
to adapt programs and teaching methods
to meet adolescents where they are.*

With increased diversity comes the need to adapt programs and teaching methods to meet adolescents where they are. For example, a catechetical program might offer a unit in which small groups of adolescents study and take pride in their particular culture’s church history and its distinct popular religious practices (e.g., Polish, Cuban, Black, Mexican, Irish, Lakota Sioux, Puerto Rican, Vietnamese, etc.). Subsequent large-group discussions might link these local histories to the history of the universal church. For this proposed unit on church history, a learning outcome might read: to recognize that each culture in the church can learn from every other culture.¹² Increasing diversity also suggests that catechists need to adapt and expand their repertoire of teaching methods in ways that make sense for adolescents in their diocese, school or parish.¹³

In Acts of the Apostles 2:1-13, the Holy Spirit at Pentecost appeared as tongues of fire that came to rest on each of the apostles and they went out to preach courageously in languages new to them, but intelligible to people from all parts of the known world. Begging the help of the Holy Spirit, catechetical leaders have the difficult task of recruiting and training future catechists for a culturally diverse adolescent population.¹⁴ Some practical recruitment suggestions include using every language spoken by the adolescents to be catechized in hope of finding a team of catechists who are comfortable in a range of languages and cultures. Try to consult face-to-face with as many adults and teens as possible in each racial and ethnic group represented among the adolescent population.

CHRISTIAN PRACTICES

One innovative model that holds great promise for adolescent catechesis in a culturally diverse context is the Christian practices movement funded by Lilly Endowment, Inc., a private, Indiana-based family foundation that promotes social structures that benefit the common good.¹⁵ The foundation underwrites an array of projects aimed at enhancing the religious formation of youth within Christian communities throughout the United States. One project is dedicated to the recovery of a core set of Christian practices — hospitality, Sabbath-keeping, discernment, forgiveness, shaping communities and so on — as a contemporary synthesis of belief and action in concrete, down-to-earth ways. “Christian practices are things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in the light of and in response to God’s grace to all creation through Christ Jesus.”¹⁶

Christian practices are based on the conviction that Christians are formed by their beliefs about Jesus and by their actions that echo the actions of Christ: feeding the hungry, tending to the sick, caring for the poor and needy, praying with others. For the founders of the Christian practices movement, human needs are important because they are openings for God’s grace, mercy and presence.¹⁷ The list of Christian practices is growing as people reflect on their faith and its connections to daily life. For example in the anthology, “Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens,” some eighteen new Christian practices were identified by pairs of adult mentors and adolescents.¹⁸

Applied to adolescent catechesis in a culturally diverse context, Christian practices are noteworthy because they are broadly accessible, they emphasize community, and they allow for local variety in their expression. Christian practices are a type of field experiment in hands-on Christianity.¹⁹ Christian practices not only foster the sort of social, affective and moral bonds that adolescents need to become active adult Catholics, but also incarnate the Christian life and Gospel in a particular cultural context, lan-

guage, space and time. Christian practices are practices of commitment.²⁰ Christian practices are distinct from other renewal movements in catechesis because its founders claim that all of the Christian practices, when woven together, can form a healthy way of life that is faithful and has integrity.²¹ Parish members are bound together not only by their common faith and beliefs, but also by their willingness to engage in Christian practices with those who might be different from themselves. As a sign of hope for the future of catechesis, Christian practices can promote a sense of belonging and relatedness regardless of racial and ethnic diversity.

It is difficult to overstate the need for everyone involved with adolescent catechesis to learn about their own histories and those of other cultural groups.

There are many ways that these Christian practices can be made a part of culturally appropriate adolescent catechesis. For example, consider the possibility of punctuating a semester-long classroom-based catechetical program with an experience of the Christian practice of hospitality. For example, at Dolores Mission (a culturally diverse Latino/a and white (Anglo) parish in East Los Angeles), engaging adolescents in an experience of hospitality as a Christian practice might include participating in the parish celebration of *Las Posadas*, an Advent season, night-time candlelight pilgrimage that over a span of several nights stops at parishioners' homes in a ritual reenactment of the expectant Virgin Mary and Joseph searching in vain for a room at an inn in Bethlehem (Luke 2:1-7).²² Given the short-term nature of the commitment, adults and older teens could more easily be found to supervise a small group of adolescents and to assist them in reflecting on their faith and on the significance of the Incarnation. For more ideas, consult the Christian practices for teens Web site at www.waytolive.org.

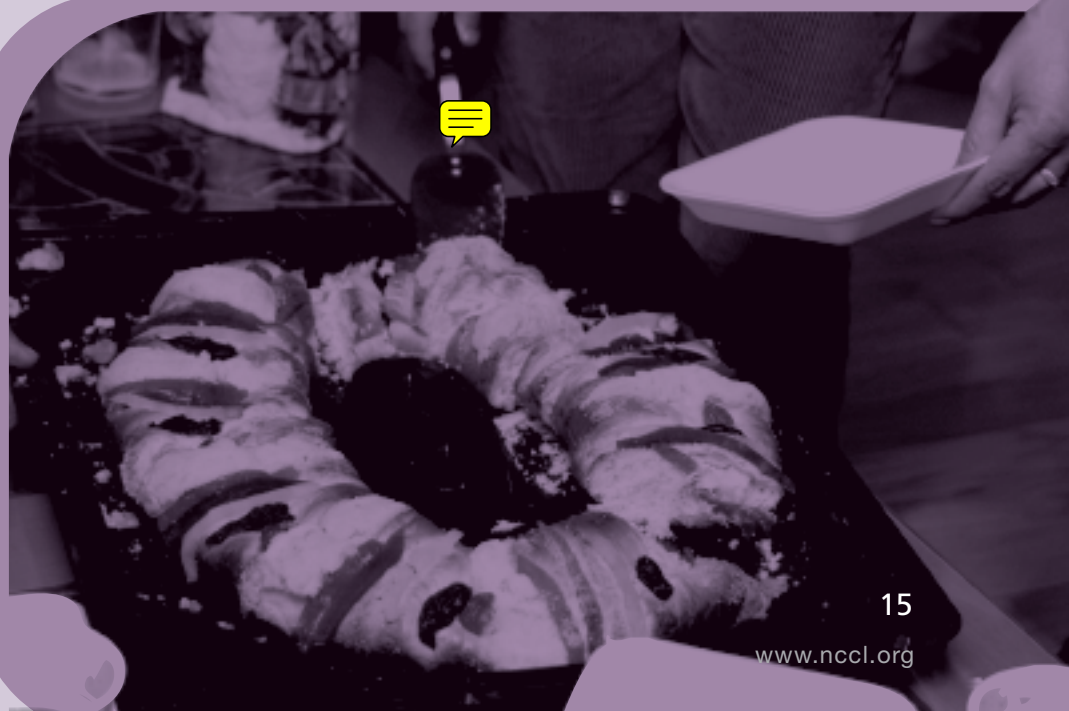
CATECHUMENATE AS A MODEL FOR ADOLESCENT CATECHESIS

The catechumenate, the process by which new members are initiated into the faith community, is an appropriate model for describing effective adolescent catechesis in a culturally diverse context. In keep-

ing with the spirit of the new evangelization that leads to effective adolescent catechesis, the catechumenate involves personal conversion to Jesus Christ and a growing desire to encounter him in Scripture, tradition, service and the sacraments of the church. The NDC recognizes the need to inculturate the catechumenate by employing "with proper discernment, the language, symbols and values of the catechumens and those being catechized."²³ It is also possible to consider the catechumenate as a way of life in the same way that the many Christian practices are a way of life. Both are processes by which one's beliefs and actions come into greater conformity with Jesus Christ and allow for greater spiritual intimacy in prayer. This is often facilitated when spiritual retreats are seen as an integral part of both the catechumenate and adolescent catechesis. Examples of successful adolescent retreat movements that feature peer faith formation are Teens Encounter Christ (TEC) and Kairos.²⁴ Such retreats can facilitate positive interactions among adolescents from diverse ethnic and racial groups, and can serve as a benchmark spiritual experience for teens.

When applying the catechumenal model to catechist in-service programs, consider a spiritual retreat format that encourages experiences of personal and communal prayer that facilitate deeper intimacy with Jesus. In designing such a retreat, care should be taken to incorporate Christian symbols that are laden with cultural meaning for the participants. Avoid indiscriminately appropriating or handling symbols from another's culture. For instance, only a Native American should handle an eagle feather and incense for a smudging rite. In similar fashion, only Mexican Americans should be allowed to carry the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in a religious procession, or to take one of the leadership roles in the parish's celebration of the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

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CATECHETICAL UPDATE

A publication of the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership

COME LORD JESUS

WHAT DO THESE WORDS MEAN TWO THOUSAND YEARS AFTER JESUS' BIRTH?

by Robert J. Hater



When I was a little boy, 4:45 P.M. was an important time. Then, my sister and I made our way to the front of our house and sat on a step with a clear view of the street corner three houses up the block. Soon the anticipated time arrived and one of us said, "Here he comes!" Then we ran down the steps and up the sidewalk. By the time we arrived at the corner, my Dad's old Plymouth turned the corner and began his last leg toward our driveway. Excitedly, we followed him down the street, running on the sidewalk near his car. After Dad drove into our yard, we greeted him joyously.

The time before we saw Dad at the corner was one of hope, longing, and waiting. When I got a little older, my parents told us that Advent was a similar time. So we'd go to church and listen as the priest spoke of Jesus' coming. As a child, I wondered why we made such a big thing of this season, for Jesus had already come and now was dead. He could not be born as a child again. So why should we wait with hope dur-

ing Advent? I finally figured out that it must be because we got Christmas gifts after it was over.

As I matured and learned the real reason for celebrating Advent, I wondered what this time of waiting was like for Mary, his mother. I asked whether she "really got it" right away when the angel told her that she was to be the mother of God. Or did it take time? When did Mary begin to appreciate the implications of the angel's words? As such thoughts streamed through my mind, I thought of other ways that Jesus comes to us, besides his physical birth.

PRESENCE

As an adult, I reflect more deeply on the incarnational aspects of the Advent Season. I began by asking if Mary ever uttered an expression similar to *Come Lord Jesus*, when the reality set in that she was to be the Mother of God. When did this realization come? Was it right away or later? Was she praying in her Nazareth home or walking alone over the hot dusty sands nearby while flies distracted her? Was Joseph or Anna, her

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MARY: THE FIRST WELCOME

by Kathy Coffey

FPO

Author
photo

The first “Come Lord Jesus” was said by Mary at the Annunciation, her *fiat* welcoming him to the human race. As a girl, she saw the world pivoting on its hunger, filled with rage, blind to the victims of its brutality. This teenager saw the full horror. Then she said yes to whatever she could do, despite her youth, despite her innocence, to change it. Despite the struggles ahead, the angel called an “insignificant” peasant “highly favored” and invited her to rejoice. Hard to refuse *that* invitation!

VULNERABILITY AND HOPE

At the Annunciation, Mary models qualities to which should all aspire this Advent. Whether we accept it or not, when God enters our lives, it’s on God’s terms. No pregnant mother can say, “Today I’ll work on the liver; tomorrow, the ears.” No one but God can create that child. So God continually creates us. Pregnancy merely makes visible what occurs daily in the life of the Christian.

While our century values invulnerability, Mary models vulnerability. We erect costly defense shields in the delusion that they’ll protect us. We invest in insurance policies;

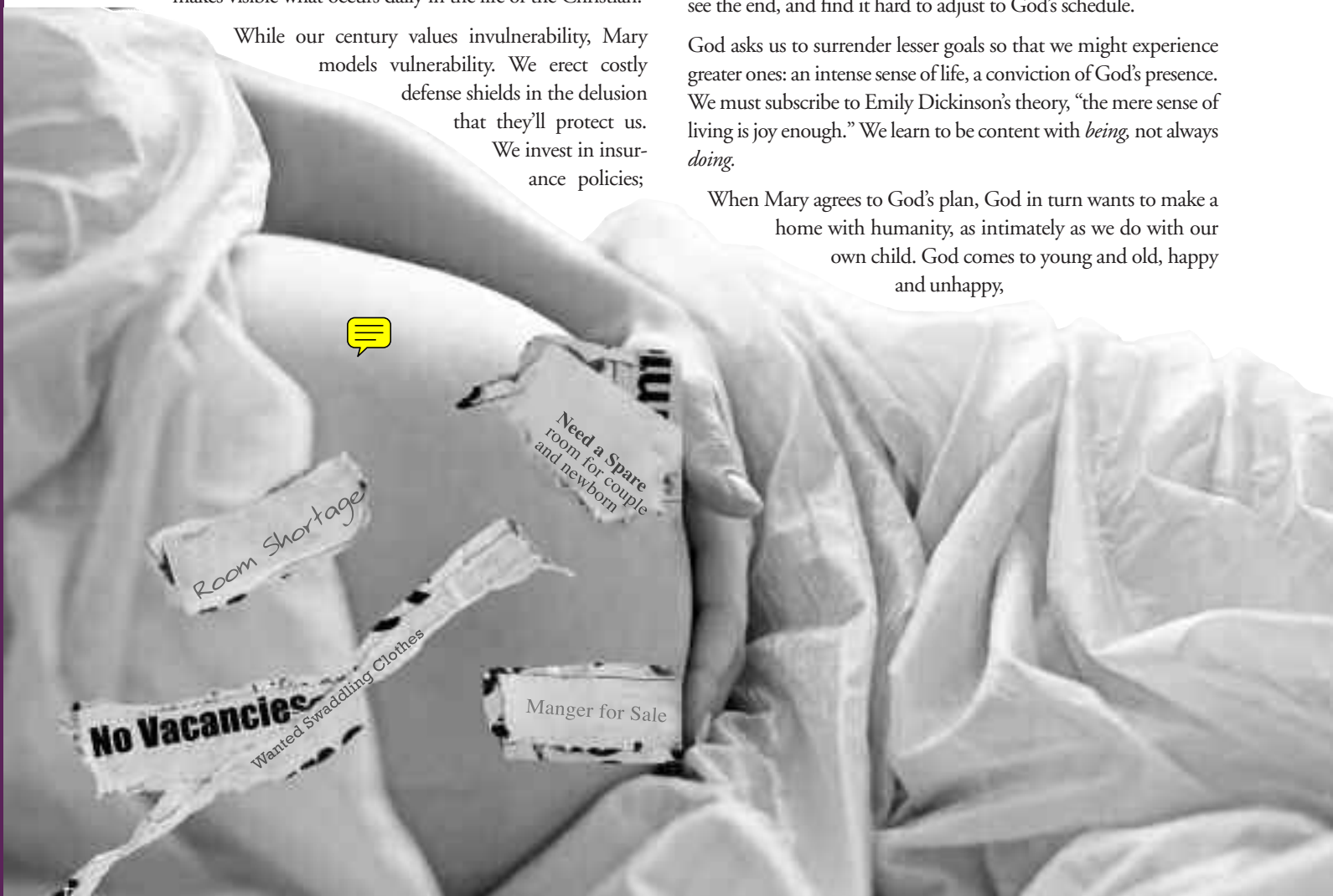
we try to prevent disease. But pregnancy makes us vulnerable, and that vulnerability is the necessary ingredient for growth. The Advent wreath and calendar are both symbols of hope, reminding us that life with an undercurrent of potential is far richer than any safe status quo.

The hymns that express longing, the readings from Isaiah point to one culminating certainty: after a wait that seems intolerable, God comes. Furthermore, God comes not with trumpets that herald royalty, but simply, from within, to a human home with sleepy, bumbling parents.

To the many questions that arise during pregnancy, there is only one answer: trust. Such a quality is somewhat foreign to us, whose sense of control extends even to the tops of our panty hose. We’re used to taking charge of our lives and decisions and often those of others. But God asks us to turn over the reins to divine care. Just as Mary could not foresee the consequences of her “yes,” so we often do not see the end, and find it hard to adjust to God’s schedule.

God asks us to surrender lesser goals so that we might experience greater ones: an intense sense of life, a conviction of God’s presence. We must subscribe to Emily Dickinson’s theory, “the mere sense of living is joy enough.” We learn to be content with *being*, not always *doing*.

When Mary agrees to God’s plan, God in turn wants to make a home with humanity, as intimately as we do with our own child. God comes to young and old, happy and unhappy,



to each person in a unique way. In individual lives God answers the Advent prayer, “Come, Lord Jesus and do not delay.”

GENERATION TO GENERATION

Mary later sings her *Magnificat* during a visit to her cousin Elizabeth when both women know they are pregnant (Luke 1:39-56). Her words “from generation to generation” stretch before and after her own moment in history. Mary stands in a long line of foremothers who had experienced astonishing surprises before her: Miriam, Deborah, Judith, Esther. Her words parallel Hannah’s, who became pregnant after God’s gracious intervention with the childless.

Spiritual writers speak of women like Mary creating the “master metaphors,” which later generations then adapt to their own times. Almost 1900 years after she lived, Mary’s timelessness prompted the anguished cry of Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, in “No Worst, There is None”:

Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?

Hopkins would also find comfort in her, “The Virgin Mother Compared to the Air We Breathe”:

I saw that we are wound

With mercy round and round

As if with air ...

“From generation to generation” touches our own day. In Kathleen Norri’s *Meditations on Mary*, a grieving Lutheran woman in North Dakota tells her: “I love Mary, because she also knew what it is to lose a child.” Two popular contemporary novels show how Mary continues to mother even abused or neglected children. Rebecca Wells describes such a child in *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*:

Sidda stands in the moonlight and lets the Blessed Mother love every hair on her 6-year old head ... From one fleeting, luminous moment, Sidda Walker knows there has never been a time when she has not been loved.

THE BLACK MADONNA

The Black Madonna is one heroine of Sue Monk Kidd’s novel, *The Secret Life of Bees*. Lily the narrator describes this depiction of Mary:

Her eyes were mysterious and kind and her skin dark brown with a glow, darker than toast and looking a little like it had been buttered...I thought of Mary’s spirit, hidden everywhere. Her heart a red cup of fierceness tucked among ordinary things.

To African-American slaves, the Black Madonna represented freedom and consolation. Years afterwards, Lily the narrator, abandoned by her mother, longs to touch the statue for the consolation it had offered people before her. Her yearning parallels Teresa of Avila’s, whose mother died when she was twelve. Turning to Mary, Teresa says simply, “in the end she brought me back to myself.”

More important than Mary’s appearance is the way she empowers Lily to “live like the glorious girl you are.” As a wise mentor

explains, “Our Lady is not some magical being out there somewhere, like a fairy godmother... She’s something *inside* of you ... You have to find a mother inside yourself ... Even if we already have a mother, we still have to find this part of ourselves inside... This Mary I’m talking about sits in your heart all day long, saying, ‘Lily, you are my everlasting home. Don’t you ever be afraid. I am enough. We are enough.’”

REDEMPTIVE JUSTICE

When Jesus later praised the woman who found the lost coin (Luke 15: 8-10), did he remember Mary? As a boy, he must have heard her exuberant celebration in the *Magnificat*. She is completely caught up in joy, not one who grudges God some half-hearted thanks. The identity she has found transcends her low status in society. No mere girl, she is the partner of God and together they will do great things.

Just as Jesus’ knowledge of the Father inspires his whole outlook and ministry, so Mary trusts God completely and finds her delight in God. As Elizabeth Johnson says in *Truly our Sister*: She becomes the first “spokeswoman for God’s redemptive justice” and Jesus becomes the “mother lode of God’s life-giving mercy for the world.” To Mary, the divine compassion is no pious abstraction, but a matter of forthright deeds. In her “Magnificat” vision, God’s active mercy lifts up the poor and overthrows the oppressive. This revolutionary woman uses active verbs: *scatter* (the proud), *pull down* (the powerful), *send away* (the rich). Her canticle prefigures the Beatitudes, which became the mission statement for many Christians.

*Pregnancy makes us vulnerable, and
that vulnerability is the necessary
ingredient for growth.*

Anyone who has ever felt lonely, debased, dis-empowered or abandoned can look with hope to her words. She announces a new order: God will not tolerate the degradation or destruction of a single one of God’s precious creatures. We who have grown overly familiar with the “Magnificat” forget how subversive it can be. During the eighties, the Guatemalan regime forbade its singing in public. For those who are cozy with the way things are: beware. It points not only to the uplifting of the poor but to the transformation of the rich. God takes mercy on a suffering world and sends us *all* to make it better.

Mary embodies this new order because God hasn’t chosen a princess or a priestess for Jesus’ mother. In choosing Mary, God has affirmed every woman who struggles to feed her family, protect her children, beauti-

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fy her world and bring hope into the ruins. She says “yes” to God, but she also says “no” to injustice: “Enough. This cannot continue.”

The God of Jesus sounds familiar; then you realize this is the God of Mary. It seems safe to assume he learned to pray from her. So the echoes of “fill the starving with good things” resonate in “give us this day our daily bread.” In the thirteenth century, reports Sally Cunneen in *In Search of Mary*, Richard of St. Laurent made the allusion specific: “Our mother who art in heaven, give us our daily bread.” Contemporary Jesuit Joseph Brown says, “There is a whole lot of ‘Our Mama’ in the ‘Our Father.’” The God of Jesus and Mary is a motherly chef, who cooks the best recipes for the hungry kids.

It would be understandable if Mary saw God as distant, punitive or angry. After all, she lived in a small village under Roman oppression, and wasn’t highly educated. She didn’t see much liberation — of women or anyone else. She was prophetic to envision the reign of justice so boldly. How could those who followed *not* get caught up in the “Magnificat’s” heartening vision?

Contemporary theologians describe Mary’s relevance today. Beatrice Bruteau writes: “The Blessed Mother means some graciousness of God *in me*.” This ground of being nurtures the spiritual life and guards embryonic desires. The “inner Mary,” this “deep source of life and protection” gives strength for the struggle. The “Holy Mother at the foundation of our self” is full of grace.

Ronald Rohlheiser points out in *The Holy Longing* that when Mary later stands on Calvary the word “stands” represents a position of strength. She doesn’t faint as some artists suggest. Instead, she does exactly what her son does: transforms the pain and the brutality and the ugliness so they do not give it back in kind. She is the same unflinching woman who proclaimed the “Magnificat” — nothing pious or syrupy about her.

She drew her strength, as all must, from her son — and in turn gave him her support. Betsie Ten Boom wrote from her own Calvary of a Nazi concentration camp: “We must tell the people what we have heard here. We must tell them that there is no pit so deep that [God] is not deeper still.”

“MARY UNDERSTANDS”

Because she has suffered ultimate loss, Mary knows the suffering of others. Examples from two different cultures affirm her empathy. Sally Cunneen Father Virgil Elizondo, an authority on Mexican spirituality describes belief in Our Lady of Guadalupe: “When no one else understood, she understood.” An Italian-American who had lost her son would nod her head over and over, repeating, “*Madonna capisce* (Mary understands).”

Their instincts accord with peoples’ responses to the Black Madonna from the Middle Ages on. These popular black statues

were carried in procession so people could hold up their sick children to Mary or ask her help in childbirth and conception. Her large hands suggest her peasant origins, attuned to the daily realities of nature, crops and illness. She gazes into the distance, perhaps looking beyond immediate suffering to immense joy. Through her face, writes French philosopher Andre Malraux, “God calls out to humanity sorrow by sorrow.”

An incarnate God becomes one with human sorrow and joy. All who have new babies know how the center of their lives shift. Parents suddenly understand the promise, “Behold, I make all things new.” Poet W. H. Auden describes the effect of Christ’s coming: “Remembering a stable where for once in our lives everything was a You and nothing was an it.”

Perhaps that is the message of Advent. The old controls, successes and defenses don’t matter so much. One comes who changes all that, and that person comes, not from without but from within. We continue the life-giving, extend it beyond one child. We learn to come to others as wonderfully, as trusting, as vulnerably, as God came to Mary — and comes to us. |

Kathy Coffey, an author, editor and mother of four, gives retreats and workshops nationally and internationally. This article is drawn from her book Women of Mercy, illustrated by Michael O’Neill McGrath, OSFS (Orbis Press) and from an article on Advent that originally appeared in Eucharistic Minister. Her newest book is The Art of Faith (Twenty-third Publications).

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Mother, there? Or was it when her cousin Elizabeth greeted her? We don't know, but at this moment Mary must have experienced a profound inner conversion. She felt God's presence as a child; now she felt the Son of God dwelling inside her womb.

Scripture tells us little about Mary's spiritual state after the angel's announcement. That's up to us to figure out. The closest I come to appreciating her feelings, after she realized that Jesus dwelt in her womb, happens immediately after I receive Holy Communion. Were her feelings of Jesus within her in any way similar to mine? On one occasion I thought they might be. It happened as I gave thanks after a weekday morning Mass.

Suddenly, I experienced an overpowering realization of the Lord's presence in my body. The God of heaven and earth was within me. My fleshly body was the temple for the Lord who moved over the waters in creation, entered Mary's womb, taught in the countryside, worked miracles, walked the streets of Jerusalem, was crucified, died on the cross, was raised up, and ascended to the Father. Was it similar for Mary?

What was it like for Mary? He dwelt within her as in a bodily temple for nine months in a different, but analogous way to his presence in us after Communion. As she felt Jesus growing and kicking in her womb, did she ever repeat words similar to, "Come Lord Jesus," as she waited anxiously for his birth?

*Advent helps us recognize that conversion
is an ongoing process.*

Jesus' presence in the Eucharist is real, but not in the same way as it was for Mary. He dwells in us in his risen bodily presence, but he lived in her in his physical bodily presence.

Such reflections led me to look more intently at Jesus' presence, especially in the Advent Season. What does "Come Lord Jesus" mean two thousand years after Jesus' birth?

It took me a long time to appreciate how Jesus comes to us in different ways. These include his *historical (physical) presence*, *risen presence*, and *eschatological presence*. They root the Advent liturgy, observes Pius Parsch in *The Church's Year of Grace*.

HISTORICAL PRESENCE

Prophets and teachers of the Old Covenant anticipated the Messiah's coming. The Sunday Advent readings reflect this anticipation. Isaiah says:

On that day a shoot shall spout from the stump of Jesse,
and from his roots a bud shall blossom.

The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: a spirit of
wisdom and understanding,

a spirit of counsel and of strength,

a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord...
(Is. 11: 1-10. 2nd Second Sunday, A)

We also read:

The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the
promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah...
I will raise up for David a just shoot...

(Jer.33:14-16. 1st Sunday, C)

The Gospels, too, reiterate his coming. Quoting Isaiah, Luke says:

The voice of one crying out in the desert:

Prepare the way of the Lord

Make straight his paths.

Every valley shall be filled

And every mountain and hill shall be made low.

The windings shall be made straight

And the rough ways smooth,

and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

(Luke 3 4.6. 2nd Sunday, C)

In the fullness of time, Jesus was born as one like us in all things but sin. As the Christmas Midnight Mass puts it:

... she gave birth to her first-born son. She wrapped him in
swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there
was no room for them in the inn. (Luke: 2: 1-14)

Jesus' historical presence as a man ended when he was crucified. After the Resurrection he remained with us in his glorified, risen body, and eventually ascended into heaven. On Pentecost, He sent his Holy Spirit to dwell with us and now lives in our midst in his risen presence.

During his time with us on earth, how often did Mary utter words similar to "Come Lord Jesus," after he left home, during his suffering, and preceding his resurrection?

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Advent anticipates Jesus' historical coming, which the Christmas Season celebrates. The only ones who can properly utter the words, *Come Lord Jesus*, referring to the Messiah's historical coming were those who prefigured and anticipated his coming. Even as a child, I had some idea that this was the case. Hence, Advent as waiting for Jesus to come left me confused. Only later, did I understand its implications and the other modes of Jesus' presence.

Even though his *historical presence* cannot be repeated, the Advent liturgy helps us appreciate Jesus as *God's eternal now*. The Advent readings and the Eucharist transcend history, as Jesus comes to us in a grace-filled manner. In the liturgical action, our hope turns into the living reality of the Son of God.

RISEN PRESENCE

After Jesus ascended into heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit to be with the church to the end of time. As Paul says:

I give thanks to my God always on your account for the grace of God bestowed on you in Christ Jesus, that in him you were enriched in every way with all discourse and all knowledge. (1st Corinthians 1:3-9. 1st Sunday B)

When I was a child, Advent as waiting for Jesus to come left me confused.

Through his *risen presence* Jesus now is with us. He dwells especially in his church, individual Christians, the sacraments, and the Liturgy of the Hours. At Mass, he offers again his eternal sacrifice to his Father and he comes to us under the appearance of bread and wine. Jesus is present, also, in nature and all people of good will. His redemptive death reconciles the whole world to the Father.

Jesus' risen presence is a special grace. How often has the birth of a child or the death of a loved parent brought us an overwhelming realization of the presence of the Lord? How many times have we been inspired by a powerful liturgical celebra-

tion during Advent, Lent, or on special occasions, like the admission of catechumens into the church at the Easter Vigil Mass?

Come Lord Jesus can aptly be said on such occasions or when doubt or disillusionment beset us. Then, we more clearly realize that these words can be a cry of thanks or a request for a deeper relationship with Jesus.

Advent helps us recognize that conversion is an ongoing process, as we ask Jesus to come again through his risen presence. In so doing, we beg God to give us the grace to enter deeply into the mystery of our redemption.

We connect this cry for ongoing conversion with love, as we listen to what Paul says to Philippians:

And this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ ..."

(Phil 1: 9-11. 2nd Sunday, C)

These words cry for continuing conversion, while we grow in anticipation of the ever-deepening Lord's presence in our lives.

Did not the desire to become more deeply united to her son enter Mary's thoughts after Jesus' Ascension? When she felt Jesus' risen presence did she utter words akin to *Come Lord Jesus*, asking him to enter fully into her heart and bring her to eternal life?

The Eucharist focuses the continued cry for Jesus to come to us through his risen presence. Here, we unite the many ways the Lord is present everyday with Jesus' eternal sacrifice. The Eucharistic action recapitulates the ongoing work of our salvation.

ESCHATOLOGICAL PRESENCE

The Lord's presence among us is climaxed in the future. His *historical presence* happened in the past, his *risen presence* happens in the present, and his *eschatological presence* will happen in the future. As the goal of the history of salvation, the Sunday Advent readings anticipate Jesus' Second Coming. As Paul tells the Corinthians:

... the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you, So that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will keep you firm to the end, irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 1, 3-9. 1st Sunday B)

The Letter to Peter reflects a similar theme, when it says,

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a mighty roar and the elements will be dissolved by fire, and the earth and everything done on it will be found out ... But according to his promise we await new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” (2 Peter 3: 8-14 2nd Sunday B)

Near the end of Mary’s life, she must have looked forward to her death and Jesus’ coming again. Was her heart overwhelmed if she repeated words like, *Come Lord Jesus?* Over the centuries, holy people who await their day of blessedness in heaven expressed similar sentiments.

The ongoing need for deeper conversion through God’s grace and our cooperation, climaxes at Jesus’ eschatological coming. As Mark says:

Jesus said to his disciples: Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come.”

(Mark. 13, 33-37. 1st Sunday, B)

The words, *Come Lord Jesus*, used for Jesus’ eschatological coming in the future, refer to two realities, often called the *individual* and *general judgments*. The former occurs at the end of earthly existence outside of time and space. Then, people’s lives are recapitulated before them and they begin to live for all eternity. Eternal happiness is the reward for a life graced by the Jesus’ risen presence. We pray, *Come Lord Jesus*, asking him to come at life’s end and bless us with eternal happiness.

The *general judgment* will occur when Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead. He will enter the world, not as he came at his birth, but as the Lord of Heaven and earth in his risen and glorified body. Advent points to this event and offers us the opportunity to pray, *Come Lord Jesus*, asking God



for the grace to persevere, so that when Jesus comes we will join the righteous who will hear the words, “Come you blessed ...” (Matt. 25: 31-46)

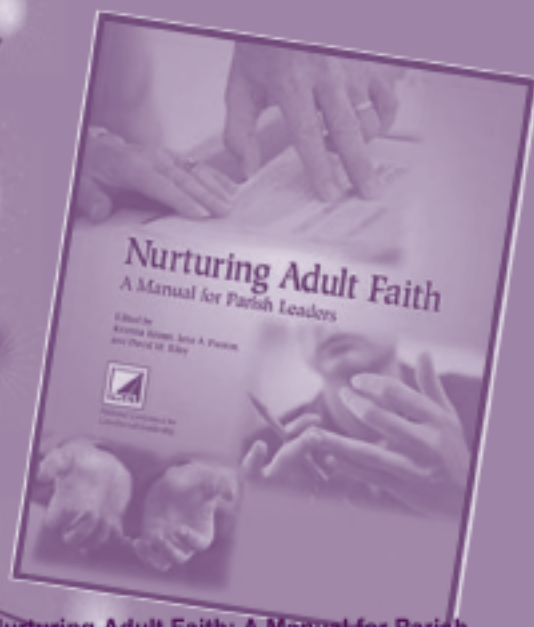
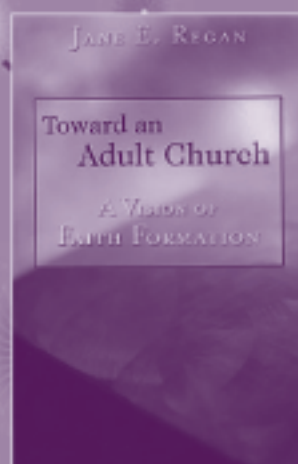
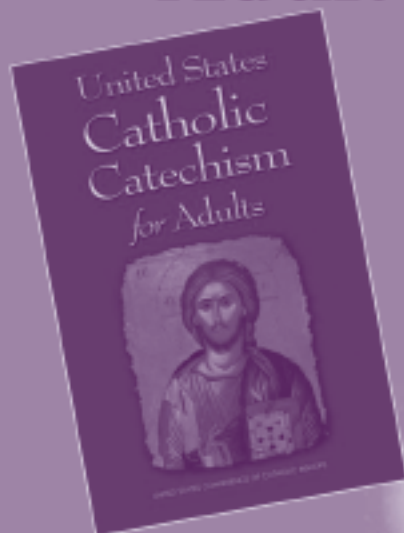
During Advent liturgy, the *historical, risen, and eschatological planes* form a unified whole. This season celebrates the process of our salvation and challenges us to enter deeply into God’s saving acts. We ask for help from Mary, for she is our mother and model. We ask for divine wisdom through her intercession. At the Incarnation, during her life, and after Jesus died, did she reflect on words, similar to, *Come Lord Jesus?* If so, what did her words say to her? We too can ask what these words mean to us at each life stage. The answers we receive give us insights into how to live a happy life.

Our Advent hunger is not for physical food but for Jesus’ risen presence.

We hunger to appreciate Jesus’ historical coming while meditating on his eschatological coming in Advent. As we look to the past and anticipate the future, we live in the present, asking for God’s grace to deepen our yearning for Jesus’ saving presence. Our Advent hunger is not for physical food but for Jesus’ risen presence, which brings peace here, and ultimate fulfillment in heaven. ■

Rev. Robert J. Hater, PhD, is professor emeritus at the University of Dayton and professor of pastoral and systematic theology at the Athenaeum of Ohio.

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JOURNEY TO INNER FREEDOM

Crossing the Desert: Learning to Let Go, See Clearly, and Live Simply by Robert J. Wicks. Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2007. Hardcover, 186 pages, \$18.95.

Reviewed by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat

“A few of the brothers came to see Abba Poemen. They said to him, ‘Tell us what to do when we see brothers dozing during prayer. Should we pinch them to help them stay awake?’

“The elder said to them, ‘Actually what I would do if I saw a brother sleeping is to put his head on my knees and let him rest.’”

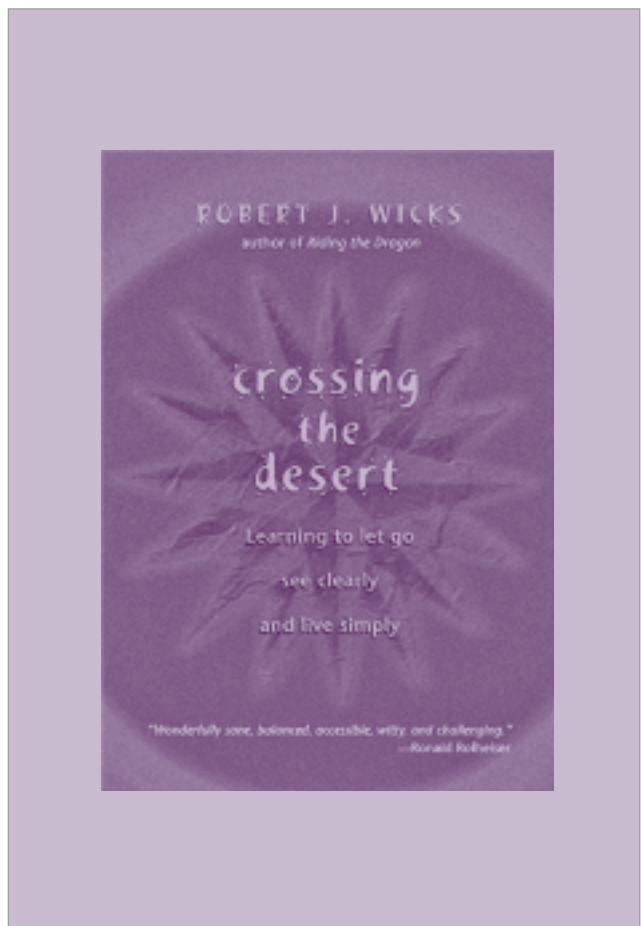
This is one of our favorite stories from the Desert Fathers, who always emphasized spiritual practice over all else: here kindness is given priority over the rule of criticism and discipline. Robert J. Wicks, a professor of psychology at Loyola College in Maryland and the author of over forty books for professionals and the general public, regards the wisdom of these Christian Fathers and Mothers as a treasure trove of insights for those who are undergoing their own special desert experiences of stress, desolation, or loss. In this well thought-out and delivered volume, the author challenges us to become spiritual apprentices to these fourth-century seers.

The Desert Fathers and Mothers knew the key to inner freedom. Wicks discusses their practice of humility and the art of letting go. He also explores the four types of friends that can assist us on this journey and the value of gratefulness as a virtue that enables us to walk in the dark and not be afraid. The sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers enable us to ponder the four central questions that come up during the journey to inner freedom: (1) What am I filled with now? (2) What prevents me from letting go? (3) How do I empty myself? (4) What will satisfy me yet leave me open to more? The last chapter examines three necessary steps that must be taken on the quest for inner freedom.

Wicks maintains that these early Christians appreciated their own ordinariness and as a result were able to realize intuitively what theologians call “the divinization of the human person.” This single-mindedness, purity of heart, and peace enabled them to handle any difficulties or dark nights of the soul.


Wicks believes that the art of letting go is very relevant to our modern insecurities and attachments. We agree, and this erudite little work offers much food for thought. |

Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat’s review first appeared on the website of Ave Maria Press. Reprinted with permission.



STORYTELLING 21ST CENTURY STYLE

by April Dietrich

As catechetical leaders, storytelling is a part of  lives. In fact, some would argue it is the basis of what we do. The Gospels tell us the stories of Jesus and the community and society in which he lived. In Mark's Gospel we hear the words "And he said to them, 'Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.' "

A cyber search on the word *tell* in the Gospels came up with 196 entries; and, depending upon which resource you consult, there are in the area of forty parables. All told, parables included, there are about eighty stories that the synoptic Gospel writers tell us Jesus told to his disciples.

Story is an integral part of who we are as a Christian people. The stories we tell, both old and new, are at the heart of who we are. Even in our celebration of the Eucharist, we take part in the telling of the story, both the salvation story of old in our Liturgy of the Word and in the re-telling of the story of the Last Supper during the Eucharistic Prayer.

Our individual stories are also important to who we are as a people. Every life *is* a story. No one is "story-less." The individual stories of the people in our parishes are interwoven into the community story that becomes the fabric of who we are as a Gospel people.

A few years ago, storytelling was confined to meetings, Bible studies and coffee and donuts after church. The occasional story made it to the pulpit either in the homily or in our Prayers of the Faithful. The collective narrative was an ongoing experience passed on mainly by word of mouth.

With the advent of the Internet that began to change — parish (and diocesan) stories were now able to be told in webpage format. By looking at a webpage on your PC you can begin to get a feel for a community. While not a complete picture, a webpage provides a synopsis, especially if the bulletin is part of the site.

DIGITAL STORYTELLING

With today's technology has come the advent of a new communications experience. Masses of people are telling their individual stories online. YouTube, MySpace, Blogger.com, pod-feed.net and individual websites offer prolific examples of individuals saying: "Look at me, look at me!" on the Internet. People are crying out to be heard and are spending hours looking at other peoples' stories. They have found a completely new way to connect with others.

This phenomenon has become known as "digital storytelling." All you need to put your own story out to the entire world is a home

computer, Internet access and a webcam or microphone! To hear others' stories, you need just a computer with Internet access.

In a conversation with a few friends in a car a few months ago, the topic inevitably came up: How is today's Internet society affecting catechesis?

The main challenge that my cohorts saw was the lack of "face time" that provides real community. In some Internet situations, this can happen. Sites that are purely message boards or chat rooms don't provide that valuable "face time" that we consider necessary to a true community. I conceded that yes, there is a certain amount of anonymity in a message board, and a completely untrue persona could be created; but many times, the freedom of anonymity allows people to show their true selves. People will say things in truth that they would never have the nerve to speak aloud to another person. While this has advantages and disadvantages, the reality is there: for many people, the Internet has become their community.

MOVING BEYOND ANONYMITY

With the upsurge in use of sites like YouTube and MySpace, people are able to see "face to face" and interact from distances that span the globe. This creates an interesting type of community, non-traditional to be sure. People share and tell their stories through this media more and more. Some are uploading old family movies and sharing them with the world; others are making new stories about anything and everything. The anonymity factor is now gone and people who have become accustomed to being open on the Internet through chats and message boards have taken that next step and put their faces, persona, and lives out there for the world to see. (Who has seen and can forget "star-wars boy? The YouTube upload made the national news for days.")

In a sense, digital storytelling has also become a conversational media: people who upload their own stories also watch others' stories and converse back and forth in the comments sections. Sometimes, this leads to Internet friendships, sometimes, enmity — much like the experiences people have in the real world when they take the chance and say what they think.

Through this new experience of digital storytelling, individuals are reaching out to the world from their dens, bedrooms, laptops, kitchens and are telling the stories of change, injustice, life, themselves — and sharing it with anyone who has the notion to watch. The challenge for us as catechetical leaders is the same challenge faced by the disciples when Jesus issued his mandate in Mark: how do we go out into this unknown world and spread the good news? ■

“Console Another with These Words”

by Gerard S. Sloyan



When I was a boy in high school I used to read the “Saturday Evening Post” regularly. It cost five cents and it had short stories, serialized novels, and all sort of other features. One writer in particular that I enjoyed was Octavius Roy Cohen. He was identified as a southern newspaperman and, from his name, obviously a Jew. He wrote the most entertaining and informative stories about Negro life in one southern city, Birminkam, as the residents of a certain area called it.

One feature of that life was a society that originated in a church setting. From the stories you could deduce that everybody was black and Baptist. The society existed to take care of the burial expenses, low as they were, of the families that could not pay for them. The society — and it seemed to be very vigorous and active — was called The Sons and Daughters of I Will Arise. I knew, of course, of the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Holy Name Society and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul but I could not imagine a Catholic parish named I Will Arise. This was not because there were not enough poor in our parish to need such assistance but because of the name. My mother’s mail was always peppered with invitations from various religious congregations of men to join purgatorial societies. Of resurrection from the dead societies, not a peep — perhaps because then the risen would be in no need of prayer.

Some three weeks ago I had a long ride to a cemetery for the burial of an eighty-five-year-old sister of Mercy whom I had known in a parish where I served before she entered. I had not been in the cemetery before. It was the holy ground where the bodies of all my elementary and high school teachers lie, and where the body of my older sister Jean — known in the world as Sister Mary Stephanie — will repose. But I reminisce about something else. I was seated on the long drive next to a funeral home employee, who was at the wheel. He was fairly young, a committed Catholic with a Polish name. As we passed through several towns, I mentioned parishes and priests I was familiar with. This was the Metuchen diocese, so all the older men had been fellow Trenton clergy.

My companion then began to tell me his story. He had received training in two professions after high school and worked at them, but all the while he felt the call to be a mortician (a euphemism we use to avoid speaking of death, the dead). No one had ever told me that before. Some of you seniors (another verbal dodge) will have memorized the seven corporal works of mercy in the No.3 catechism. The list ended, “to visit the imprisoned, to shelter the homeless — sounds modern, doesn’t it? — to visit the sick, and to bury the dead.” Other people did that, men in our town named Worden and Mount and John E. Day. I knew all three, having been an altar server at many funerals. And here was a young man, my contemporary, who felt a call to fulfill the seventh corporal work of the church: “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?... that whoever is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him... Are you not aware that your body is a temple of the Holy Ghost?” All those questions Paul put in a fiery letter to the church at Corinth; and in a calmer letter to the same congregation: “We are the temple of the living god, as God said: ‘I will live with them and move among them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people.’”

Our brother, Carl, knew well that, as a person baptized, his body had been through his life the dwelling place, the shrine, of the Holy Spirit of God. He taught literally tens upon tens of thousands of the baptized to hold fast to that truth and to live it. And now his body, that temple, has received all the tender care that Christians can visit on each other — first in a final long illness and then in death.

But we are not gathered at the Eucharistic table to commemorate important events in his and Janaan’s recent past. It is another event, an event of God’s mysterious future, that holds our attention. Just before that place in the first Corinthian letter that I quoted, Paul spoke of the body’s real purpose. “It is not for immortality but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body; God raised the Lord and will raise us up, too, by God’s power.”

continued on page 20

Such is the body's ultimate purpose and destination, as the church had believed for a quarter century before Paul put it into words, ever since Jesus' body had been raised up glorious and immortal. Our resurrection in the body with Christ on the Last Day was a matter of faith from the earliest promulgation of the Gospel. Yet, strangely, it was not strongly featured in teaching and preaching in the Catholic West as the consummation of our earthly lives. Heaven, yes, but as disembodied spirits. The Apostles' Creed, the one that we recited most often, said, in a phrase about Jesus, "he ascended into heaven, sitteth at the right hand of God" — his ascension in the body, nothing of ours.

We did a little better in the longer creed, but the presiding priest said it in Latin on the great feasts, facing away, not letting the congregation in on the faith declaration. On Sundays it was different at the last Mass, which was sung (and which people avoided because it was so long). At the Mass the music was nineteenth-century baroque. The choir repeated the phrase — "*et incarnatus est*" slowly and solemnly, everybody kneeling, but when the choir came to "*et resurrectionem mortuorum et vitam venturae saeculi*" (no one was standing), it was sung in a great rush to indicate that the piece was coming to an end and to make way for all those repeated *amens*, the important part.

Throughout some seven or eight hundred years the priest proclaimed to the wall, in a tongue not understood by the people, at every funeral Mass and memorial Mass of requiem: "If we believe that Jesus died and arose, so too will God, through Jesus, bring with him those who have fallen asleep... Indeed, the Lord himself with a word of command, ... will come down from heaven and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then those who are alive will be snatched, seized up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the middle of the air. And we will be with the Lord forever." It was left to an English clergyman of the state Church

of Ireland to call this Rapture, while we Catholics continued to have one man read it in a low tone in a foreign tongue. We never Englished 1 Thessalonians Chapter 4 immediately after the Latin at funerals as we did the fifty-two Sunday epistles. What a marvelous catechesis and comfort it would have been for a family trying to cope with grief. I can still hear my boyhood pastor concluding the lection with a flourish, "*Itaque, consolamini invicem in verbis istis* (Console another with these words)." How could they if they never comprehended them?

But what people did well understand was a snatch from Zephaniah, Chapter 1, which was also the major contributor to the test of *Dies Irae*. Again I heard it some hundreds of times in youth, standing at the pastor's side before the casket, holy water bucket and thurible at the ready. "That day will be a day of wasting and of misery. A day of wrath and exceeding bitter, when thou shalt come to judge the world by fire" — all this while a beloved baptized person lay in the middle aisle, mercifully incapable of hearing a word.

What did we hear moments ago, within the Eucharistic rite itself, not outside it? "In the spirit of faith," Paul wrote, "we speak what we believe. We know this, that God who raised the Lord Jesus to life will raise us too, with Jesus, and will take us, together with you people of Corinth into his presence."

In featuring our future resurrection in the body with Christ Jesus on the Last Day, we could make the same psychological blunder that was made by those who framed the text of a Mass of the Resurrection for funerals shortly after the council. It was all joy and exultation about an event that lay millennia-to-the-third-power ahead, leaving no space for grieving now. If we are to console Janaan and Carl's family and his closest and dearest friends, we can do it not by words of comfort but by grieving with them.

Consider the void in their lives, Janaan's especially. Carl is no longer a part of her, their daily lives. Life has never been like this before, they are stunned terribly, set back by the new arrangement. What can the life that lies ahead for them be like? The man, the brother we called Carl, is simply not here and will not be for the conduct of the rest of their, our lives.

Who was he, this son of a German-American family in St. Louis? He was a highly gifted man — intellectually, volitionally, emotionally — who did not seem aware of his gifts. Or, if he realized them, he never dwelt on them. He was an extremely modest man. Not shy and retiring but not one to press his person and personality on others. What he did all his life was put himself in the service of others. Once he learned in early childhood the command to love the other as one loves oneself, he set about doing it, and he never stopped.

*It is another event, an event of
God's mysterious future, that holds
our attention.*

Carl did not have what we mistakenly call a sense of humor, but a sense of fun, of quiet enjoyment, of the absurd in human life, the inconsistent, that irrational. It was not a thigh-slapping, laugh-out-loud humor of the kind movie advertisements promise but never deliver. It was wit — genuine, quiet wit. And it was never directed against another. Carl was a gentleman in the profoundest sense, a gentle man. But he was not soft. He was, in

character, hard — equal to courageous decisions, by the grace of God, doing the right thing, not what he thought was the right thing, but the genuinely right thing, which Christian prudence, Christian insight, is uniquely equipped to identify and do. In a word this man spent his life in service of the other, as Jesus, his great model and friend had done before him and does now, over the ages, making intercession for us with his Father as our great high priest.

Enough of words, perhaps too many. It is time now, not to take leave of Carl, as is so often said, who seems to have taken leave of us. It is time to continue our bond of love and friendship with him in the communion of saints. This will not be easy for most of us to do. For Janaan and his siblings and their families and his closest associates it will not be easy; but for the rest of us it means keeping firm a bond of prayer in the Catholic manner, prayer for the dead. It's not as if Carl were standin' in the need of prayer, not that. It is we who are, we the living, who need always and ever to be reminded of the stature in Christ this lover of God and of the other person had in our lives. ■

—Gerard S. Sloyan

ECHOES OF FAITH PLUS: HOW DO I USE THE BONUS INTERVIEWS?

by Jo Rotunno



As I've traveled around the country the past few months, a number of DREs have asked me about the bonus interviews included on the DVDs for the new *Echoes Plus* modules. Instructions for their use will be included in the Director's Manual, scheduled for completion next spring. In the meantime, here is some background on the interviews and how to use them.

Each interview can provide the basis for an enrichment session one to two hours in length. Over the past two years, we have conducted video interviews with thirty catechetical and theological experts on topics related to the module themes. The interviews appear as two 15-30 minute bonus features on each DVD, but not the CD-Rom. The CD-Rom has less space available, and on

some modules the bonus interviews double the length of the video content.

Among the experts interviewed, Dr. Tom Groome provided us with a master interview that we edited into three half-hour segments, one for each of the three DVD's in the Catechist series. Amy Florian, a well-known workshop presenter, spoke on topics related to ritual prayer in the classroom. Her interview was used in a new fourth segment on the Methodology modules, with additional material becoming a bonus interview on all four modules. Sr. Angela Ann Zukowski provided material for two separate bonus interviews: new trends in catechesis, which appears in the Catechist series, and media in catechesis, used in the Adult Faith Formation module.

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ECHOES *continued from page 22*

Presenters on the theology bonus interviews include Dr. Margaret Ralph on biblical interpretation, Fr. Bryan Massingale on Catholic social teaching, Fr. Ron Rolheiser on prayer and spirituality, Sr. Catherine Dooley and Sr. Linda Gaupin on liturgy and sacraments, and Fr. Bert Buby on Marian theology.

Each interview is divided into four to six subtopics that can be viewed separately or continuously. A summary screen concludes each of the subtopics. If you are interested in using one of these interviews in the winter or spring before the Director's Manual is completed, here is a simple format you could use:

BONUS INTERVIEW ENRICHMENT SESSION

1. **Prayer.** Open the session with a brief prayer asking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
2. **Invitation.** Invite the participants to reflect on a life experience question related to the interview theme. For example, for the bonus interview from the Roles of the Catechist module where Tom Groome reflects on the six tasks of catechesis, you could begin by asking participants to describe aspects of their own catechetical roles. Map their responses on newsprint or a white board.
3. **Watch the Interview.** Show the interview to the participants. Be sure you have previewed the interview ahead of time. Decide whether or not you wish to show the interview in its entirety or in segments. (The total length of each interview is noted on the front of each DVD disk.) You may wish to show longer interviews in sections, perhaps one or two parts at a time.

4. **Discuss the Video.** Invite participants to share their thoughts on the interview content. Ask a few specific questions to guide their reflection. For example, in the case of the Groome interview, you might ask: *What insights did you gain about your catechetical role as you watched this video? Which task of catechesis do you feel most qualified to perform? In which area do you feel that you need more knowledge and support?*
5. **Conclusion.** Summarize the group's conclusions. Refer to related summary statements in Church documents and suggest further reading from sources listed in the Resource Bibliography of the booklet. In the case of the Groome interview, you could also refer catechists to the enrichment article on the six tasks of catechesis in the back of the Roles of the Catechist booklet. Conclude your session with prayer. The ritual prayer service found at the end of segment 4 in each booklet is available to you if you have not already used it.

Take the opportunity to watch some of the valuable video content in these interviews. Use them to expand the knowledge base of your catechists and as a basis for sharing. The interviews are just one more way that *Echoes Plus* can help you to build a more capable and committed community of catechists. |

Jo Rotunno is director of creative development at RCL — Resources for Christian Living, which produced the Echoes of faith project for NCCL. She has worked in catechist formation for the past twenty-five years.



TENSIONS AROUND LANGUAGE, SANCTUARY AND CREDENTIALS

In some parishes and dioceses, increasing cultural diversity has led to rising tensions around issues of language and culture. For example, Spanish-language and English-language groups compete for access to the main sanctuary at prime time on Sunday mornings: being relegated to the gym or to the downstairs church is a badge of inferiority. Often enough, Hispanic culture and distinctive liturgical practices are kept in the shadows, but on big feasts such as Our Lady of Guadalupe (December 12) it seems as if the whole church would like to pray in Spanish. This suggests a certain ambivalence in the U.S. Catholic Church regarding cultural distinctiveness and language.²⁵ While Hispanic ministry is a priority for the church, many U.S. catechists, teachers and pastors still can speak only English and are mono-cultural.

In some parishes and dioceses, increasing cultural diversity has led to rising tensions around issues of language and culture.

Another source of tension in the church is the issue of credentials for catechists. At the diocesan level and in larger parishes, a master's degree in theology or its equivalent is a minimum requirement for employment. Given that about one in four Americans has a degree from a four-year college, most parishes will have some catechists who do not have a college degree. If certificates are required for all catechists, then what happens to Catholics who might be excluded due to the lack of educational background, a shortage of funds or the absence of a training program in their own language? Are the poor being excluded from serving as catechists?

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the contemporary issues, tensions and hopes of the church for adolescent catechesis in a culturally diverse context, paying special attention to the history, experience and racial-ethnic frame of reference of minority Catholic populations. In the longing for greater faith, hope and love grounded in a close relationship with Jesus Christ, the church embarks with greater zeal for catechesis on the way of new evangelization. Let our prayers for the future of adolescent catechesis join with the Eucharistic prayer for reconciliation wherein the church asks Christ "to gather people of every race language and way of life to share in the one eternal banquet." ■

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TAKING A STAND

We need to ask ourselves: Do I believe it is critical where I, along with others in my faith community, choose to stand — and with whom? I frequently recall the remarks of Jesuit Father Dan Berrigan during the 1980s: “I would like to be a middle ground Jesuit but the times do not allow for this.” Isn’t his stance relevant for us? What does this mean and where does this place us in *today’s* world? I believe the times today do not allow for those of us who identify ourselves as disciples of Jesus to be “middle ground.” But how do we bridge the growing glaring gap between those on the left and those on the right? What must we do to broaden and deepen the conversation of the moral values debate? We must act, using our faith as a lens, and this means we must be involved in the political process. Almost twenty-five years ago Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin offered his reflections on “A Consistent Ethic of Life.” I believe they provide a helpful framework:

The substance of a Catholic position on a consistent ethic of life is rooted in a religious vision. But the citizenry of the United States is radically pluralistic in moral and religious conviction. So we face the challenge of stating our case, which is shaped in terms of our faith and our religious convictions, in non-religious terms which others of different faith convictions might find morally persuasive ...

In the public policy exchange, substance and style are closely related ... I suggest a style governed by the following rule: we should maintain and clearly articulate our religious convictions

stating our case and attentive in hearing another’s case: we should test everyone’s logic but not question his or her motives.

Another major contributor in focusing this faith lens is the document released every four years the by the U.S. bishops entitled “Faithful Citizenship.” In 2003 the bishops raised a number of questions. The following are a sampling:

- How can our nation help parents raise their children with respect for life, sound moral values, a sense of hope, and an ethic of stewardship and responsibility?
- How will we address the growing number of families and individuals without affordable and accessible health care? How can health care better protect human life and respect human dignity?
- How will our society combat continuing prejudice, overcome hostility toward immigrants and refugees, and heal the wounds of racism, religious bigotry, and other forms of discrimination?
- How will our nation pursue the values of justice and peace in a world where injustice is common, desperate poverty widespread, and peace is too often overwhelmed by violence?
- What are the responsibilities and limitations of families, community organizations, markets, and government? How can these elements of society work together to overcome poverty, pursue the common good, care for creation, and overcome injustice?
- When should our nation use, or avoid the use of, military force — for what purpose, under what authority, and at what human cost?
- How can we join with other nations to lead the world to greater respect for human life and dignity, religious freedom and democracy, economic justice, and care for God’s creation?

In addition the bishops emphasized, “...Politics cannot be merely about ideological conflict, the search for partisan advantage, or political contributions. It should be about fundamental moral choices. How do we protect human life and dignity? What kind of nation do we want to be? What kind of world do we want to help shape?”

As catechists and participants in an increasingly pluralistic and polarized country I believe we are challenged to create more effective approaches to wrestle with the above questions. Creative responses require taking new paths, participating in diverse coalitions, relinquishing traditional institutions and building new structures that will engender growth and reverence for life. This assumes openness and ongoing conversion — not an easy task but a necessary one. |

Sister Louise Akers is the coordinator of the Office of Peace, Justice & Integrity of Creation for the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati. She has been involved in civil rights and women’s rights organizations in eleven countries. She has been social concerns director for the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, director of the Social Action Office of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, and a radio talk show host.

I would like to share an anonymous prayer I came across a number of years ago:

*May God bless us with discomfort
at easy answers and half-truths ...
May God bless us with anger
at injustice, oppression and
exploitation of people,
so that we may work for justice,
freedom and peace.*

*May God bless us with tears,
to shed for those who suffer from
pain, rejection, starvation and war,
so that we may reach out our hands ...*

*And may God bless us with enough
foolishness to believe that we can
make a difference in this world,
so that we can do what others claim
cannot be done.*

AMEN!

explained that much can be achieved when mission, not money, drives the institutional agenda (though a little more money would be nice!).

But higher education today is deeply preoccupied with money, and the divide between the “haves” and “have-nots” institutionally is growing each year, driven in part by the quest for improved credit ratings and publicity like *U.S. News and World Report* rankings. Those colleges and universities who fall on the downside of the “have-nots” often have religious roots, many of which are Catholic. Among these, the small group of historic Catholic women’s colleges that still operate — Trinity, the College of New Rochelle, Rosemont, the College of Notre Dame of Maryland, among others — all carry a deep sense of institutional catechesis arising from the mission and charism of our founding congregations. None of us have large endowments or much operating margin; all of us have welcomed new populations of students once marginalized by mainstream higher education.

Through recognizing an institutional design and operating style that embodies our catechesis today, we ensure that our students live and learn in an environment that reflects our values, including the expectations of citizenship. Like many of our sister colleges, Trinity makes service learning a top priority, expecting our students to learn how to bear witness to justice and charity through participation in projects that serve our local community. But beyond the simple yet important acts of good works, we also teach our students to take the next big step: to become advocates for the voiceless, to become activists in the creation of law and policy that will improve the conditions of life for all in the human community.

INTO THE FRAY

Participation in the process of public governance — in the local neighborhoods in D.C., in the cities or states from which our students hail, or at the national level — is a strong tradition among Trinity students and graduates. Sometimes, the engagement of Trinity graduates can be controversial. Our students were thrilled when our alumna Nancy Pelosi, Trinity Class of 1962, became the first woman ever to serve as Speaker of the House. Similarly, they are proud of the fact that one of the very few women ever to hold office as a governor of a state is Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius, Class of 1970. Some critics have demanded to know how Trinity can be faithfully Catholic while also expressing pride in the achievements of these politicians who have taken positions on issues contrary to Church teachings, notably, pro-choice positions.

Faithful citizenship calls us to participate in a public square that is loud and raucous, where people disagree about many issues. Americans, in particular, cherish their right to make their own political decisions free from any institutional pressure. Politicians

respond to the expectations of their constituents, and very few politicians on either side of the aisle have voting records that are 100% aligned with or opposed to church teachings.

Our responsibility at Trinity is to teach our students to make good moral choices, and to apply these moral values through engagement with the political process. The examples of our alumnae achievements incite our students to consider their own political engagement; to deny today’s Trinity students a modest claim of some sense of alumnae sisterhood with powerful women would be a great loss. Taking pride in our alumnae does not mean that the students — or Trinity — necessarily agree with all of their votes or political views, or that we would vote for them. But we praise the fact that they have had the courage to assume public leadership.

We are mindful of the guidance of “Faithful Citizenship” on this complex web of issues:

A Catholic moral framework does not easily fit the ideologies of “right” or “left,” nor the platforms of any party. Our values are often not ‘politically correct.’ Believers are called to be a community of conscience within the larger society and to test public life by the values of Scripture and the principles of Catholic social teaching. Our responsibility is to measure all candidates, policies, parties, and platforms by how they protect or undermine the life, dignity, and rights of the human person, whether they protect the poor and vulnerable and advance the common good.

Catechesis at Trinity is eminently practical, working with a population of urban women and men who are striving mightily to learn how to engage effectively with the larger civic, corporate and political societies where wealth and power reside. In so many ways, Trinity students today give witness to the Gospel through their very presence here, through the courage many have had to summon even to enroll in classes. This recent message from an adult student upon her acceptance to our associate degree program at THE ARC says it all:

Going to Trinity has been a dream of mine since I got my GED in ’93, but ... I never thought this would actually happen. I’m very thankful and to God be the glory for having good people in my life to help me through the rough times ... I want my legacy to include helping my (sister-daughters) with re-discovering moral, ethical and practical values so that they can become an example for their children and raise them to be motivated and achieve positive greatness.

Amen to all that. I look forward to the proud day when I can award her degree. ■

Patricia McGuire is president of Trinity (Washington) University in Washington, DC.

and the National Advisory Committee on Adult Education of the United States Catholic Conference. Pearce and Littlejohn characterized NIFCC as “distinctive because of its size and because it employs materials of special relevance to the church, including scriptural concerns, church history, and ... social documents.”²⁰ In 1998, the United States Catholic bishop highlighted NIFCC as a process for engaging adult Catholics with Catholic social teachings.²¹ (While the partnership between Kettering and USCCB is no longer active, a handbook developed for this process is still available at www.nifi.org/discussion_guides.)

The parish should consciously establish itself as a dialogic community

The NIFCC process is an example of grounded conversation. Conversation within the faith community is grounded within the tradition of its teachings. Grounded conversation is consciously reflective conversation about public policy issues within the context of the tradition of the faith community. The process of conversation can also lead to the transformation of one’s perspective. As a result of such conversation within the community, one can become aware of the cultural ground on which one stands and may be challenged to reaffirm or revise this perspective in the light of the tradition. (See a report of the author’s study of the NIFCC process on page 6).

SPECIFIC STEPS TO FOSTER GROUNDED CONVERSATION

In addition to using NIFCC as a form of grounded conversation, what might be some additional steps a parish can do to foster conversation as a public church?

Those responsible in the faith community for faith formation embrace a vision of adult religious education that includes the goal “to focus the light of the Gospel on the issues of our time,” listed in *Serving Life and Faith* and to challenge its adults to “have a mission in and to the world: to share the message of Christ to renew and to transform the social and temporal order.”²² Adult religious education is not solely religious by content, but can be religious also by context.²³ Such a vision makes room for study of, and deliberation about, public issues.



The planner of adult religious education become informed of the long history of the study circle movement²⁴ and conscious of the development of small Christian communities within the North American Catholic Church.²⁵ Both approaches are compatible with engaging learners in dialogue about public issues.

A key component of adult learning in the parish should center upon conversation and dialogue.²⁶ Literally, a comfortable “third place” could be established at the parish where adults can gather on a regular basis for conversation and dialogue about issues of faith and life. Or the parish can invite parishioners to gather in one another’s homes for conversation and dialogue.²⁷

The parish should consciously establish itself as a dialogic community:

- Norms for conversation, similar to those articulated by Burbules and Rice,²⁸ would be articulated and continually referred to whenever a group gathers — for learning or for leadership (e.g., a parish council).
- Members of leadership committees and facilitators of dialogue groups can be given specific training in skills of conversation, consensus and conflict.²⁹
- A number of parishioners can move through a process of “framing issues,” developing materials for dialogue on these issues by fellow parishioners.³⁰
- Parishes can undertake dialogue about controversial issues within the church, using resources like the Catholic Common Ground Initiative.³¹
- Prepared materials on public issues can be made available to parishes. The Study Circles Resource Center (www.studyircles.org) has developed a series of discussion guides on public issues.³² In addition, as mentioned above, the Kettering Foundation, through the National Issues Forum (www.nifi.org) continues to produce a series of booklets for public deliberation. |

Matt Hayes spent 25 years as a diocesan leader in catechesis and adult faith formation. He also held volunteer leadership positions in adult faith formation and catechesis at USCCB, NCCL, NCEA/CACE. He is currently the president of Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School in Indianapolis, Indiana.

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Trinity (Washington) University president Patricia McGuire, who contributed the article for this issue on catechesis and politics on campus, has recently been named (for the third time) one of the “150 Most Powerful People in Washington” by the *Washingtonian* magazine. The October 2007 cover story, “Power 150: People Who Make Things Happen,” names the most influential people in Washington, DC, in the arts, business, education, sports, real estate and more. The list was compiled by the magazine based on nominations, a survey, and a review by the editorial staff. She has been recognized for her contributions to business and civic life as well as working to broaden educational opportunities for District residents.

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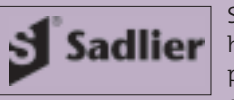


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DAVID THOMAS

It has been a busy year for our friend and colleague Dr. David Thomas — a long time member and supporter of NCCL. He has published four books in 2007:

**A COMMUNITY OF LOVE
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Here are a few titles that have caught my attention and might have a special interest for catechetical leaders.

**MY LIFE WITH THE SAINTS
James Martin, SJ**

Loyola Press, 414 pages, paperback, \$15.90

James Martin, SJ, an editor at *America* magazine and a frequent commentator for the media, has written a “delightful” (*First Things*), “remarkably engaging” (*U. S. Catholic*), and “outstanding and often hilarious memoir” (*Publishers Weekly*). Martin introduces us to sixteen of his historical friends and explores their relevance to how we live the Christian life. Some of his friends are John XXIII, Thomas Aquinas, Dorothy Day, the Ugandan martyrs, and Thomas Merton.

I heard Martin address all those in attendance at the Religious Booksellers Trade Exhibit (May 29 – June 1, 2007.) This is available as a podcast at www.loyolapress.org.

**BUTLER’S SAINT FOR THE DAY
Paul Burns**

Liturgical Press, 633 pages, \$34.95

The choices for this volume are from the 2,500 included in the twelve-volume *Butler’s Lives of the Saints*, with an emphasis on contemporary saints. “The aim remains a simple readable presentation of flesh and blood figures, chosen to give a variety of inspiration throughout the year.”

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Dan Pierson served as the director of religious education for the Diocese of Grand Rapids for seventeen years. He is the founder of faithAlivebooks.com and works part-time with the Pflaum Publishing Group in bookstore and distributor sales. Contact: danpierson@faithalivebooks.com.

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- 11 6th sense
- 12 Dwell in
- 13 Blue
- 14 CST principle
- 17 Hydrogen or nitrogen
- 18 CST principle
- 25 Choose for political office
- 26 Political district
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