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CATECHETICAL  
LEADER



# CATECHESIS IN A SECULAR AGE

## IN THIS ISSUE:

The Intersection of New Media and Catechesis

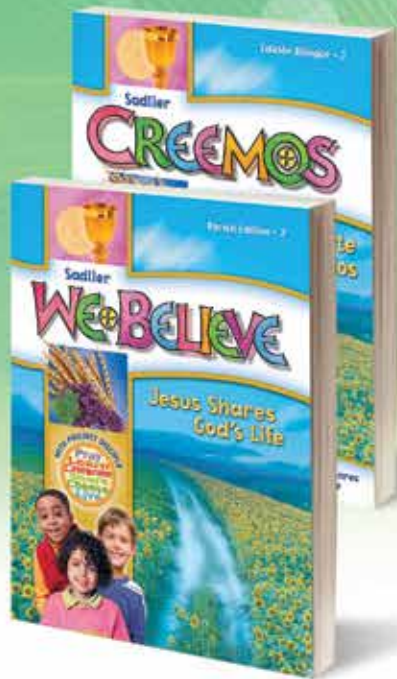
Sunday Preaching and the Catechesis of Young People

## CATECHETICAL UPDATE:

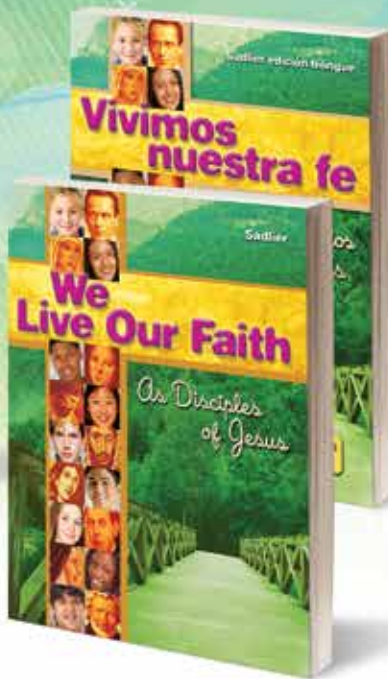
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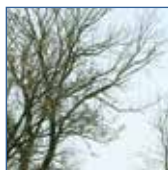
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# A RARE AND BEAUTIFUL GIFT

Bill Miller



## National Conference For Catechetical Leadership



My wife Marilyn and I just returned from visiting the the Roman Catholic Vicariate of Southern Arabia in the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.). The Vicariate (basically equivalent to a diocese) which includes the cities of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, is home to nearly three million Catholics scattered across thousands of square miles and three different countries.

Catholics in that region are expatriates in search of jobs. The largest group of expats in the region (approximately 50 percent) comes from southern India. Others come from the Philippines, various countries in Europe and Asia, as well as the United States.

Marilyn and I traveled with Sr. Angela Ann Zukowski, MSHS, of The University of Dayton. While Sr. Angela Ann presented workshops on using the new technologies to enhance catechesis, I was asked to talk about the Year of Faith and creative methods of catechesis. I was also asked to speak to a group of young adults.

One of the most valuable aspects of this trip was the opportunity to witness both the similarities and the differences between the church in the United States and the church in this part of the Middle East. For example, a large parish in the U.S. might have a membership of upwards of 2,000 families. A large parish in the U.A.E. could have between 50,000 and 150,000 families. Catechetical leadership in the U.S is often (but not always) exercised by a salaried, professionally-trained, catechetical leader. In the U.A.E., almost everyone, including the catechetical leader, the grade level coordinator, and the parish catechist is a volunteer. As you might imagine, the catechetical programs are often very large. One parish was delighted to have 6,000 students enrolled. Needless to say, that program required many classrooms, multiple sessions, and hundreds of catechists.

I was amazed to learn that catechists face challenges similar to those we face here. Many families are caught up in the spiral of trying to acquire everything that the "popular culture" insists they need. Moreover, social net-

working technologies provide the same opportunities and challenges for catechists in the U.A.E. that they present in this country.

Not surprisingly, the most successful, most fulfilled catechists are those who have found creative ways to help people connect their own life stories to the greatest story...the story of Jesus. Everywhere we traveled we met Catholics who radiated a joyful faith in God.

Islam is the religion practiced by native Arabs. I was amazed to learn that native Arabs constitute less than 20 percent of the population of the U.A.E., making expats the vast majority. While the expats are very grateful that they are free to practice their faith, Christian evangelization directed at Arabs is strictly forbidden and can land a person in jail. Being in a country where the faith one practices is not considered a "religion of the state" so to speak, makes that faith even more precious for many of the people who practice it there.

The entire Vicariate has less than 80 priests to minister to nearly three million Catholics. In many of the parishes, Mass is celebrated 10-15 times per weekend, in as many as six different languages. Yet, English is a kind of common denominator in the region. At one such celebration of the Eucharist, I was amazed by the similarity between my experience of Eucharist in the U.A.E. and my experience in my home parish, including the use of the New Roman Missal. Attendance at Mass can be so great on special occasions (Christmas, Easter, etc.) that the Liturgy must be celebrated outdoors because the church building will not hold the thousands who wish to participate.

A trip to another part of the world, and the resulting opportunity to witness the passion and commitment that Catholics have for their faith, is a marvelous gift. It affords the visitor a heightened awareness of the wonderful breadth and depth of the church. Indeed, the marks of the church — one, holy, catholic, and apostolic — have never been so vivid, so meaningful for me. I pray that each of us will have the opportunity for such a trip at some point in our lives. ■

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# NEW WINESKINS

Leland Nagel



It started with a phone message. “Please call Judith Dunlap.” It took me back to my early years in Green Bay and the Catechetical Renewal Network. The religious educators who were a part of this organization were “seeking new and more effective approaches to catechesis.” They were “vividly aware of our contemporary situation which makes effective catechesis all the more difficult and urgent.” Some things don’t change.

The words of Pope John Paul II offer a challenge that is as real today as it was then.

Catechesis needs to be continually renewed by a certain broadening of its concept, by the revision of its methods, by the search for suitable language, and by the utilization of new means of transmitting the message. (*Catechesi Tradendae*, 17)

I remembered meeting Judith and always looked forward to the quarterly newsletter.

The last endeavor of the Catechetical Renewal Network was a working conference on Pentecost weekend in 1999. As Judith writes, “It was a working conference with parish DREs, youth ministers and representatives from diocesan offices envisioning together new models of catechesis.” At that time they had over 600 members and had sent out a newsletter for over ten years. The duplicating, labeling, folding, stapling, and stamping were all a labor of love, all of it before the Internet.

I called Judith and we reminisced. She spoke of how “rewarding it was to ‘dream the dream.’” She recalled the Pentecost experience as “Catechetical Visions for the Future.” They used the ideas put forth in the *General Directory for Catechesis* since the National Directory had not been written. The first presentation focused on evangelization. While their first presenter, Fr. Bob Hater, didn’t use the title of this year’s 77th annual conference — *Ignite the Fire of Faith*, it would have been appropriate.

The dream is to stir into flame the faith that waits to catch fire. In the words of Pope John Paul II, this is a call for “a new evangelization; new in its ardour, in its methods and in its expressions” and we are the fire starters, the responders to the call. This new evangelization expands the continual renewal he wrote about in *Catechesi Tradendae*. Tom Quinlan championed that idea when he served on the NCCL Board of Directors and because of his persistence and commitment

to evangelization, NCCL created the New Wineskins Award. This award, initiated in 2010, is designed to do the following:

- ★ Highlight and celebrate extraordinary achievement occurring in a diocese/parish (or a cooperative effort in more than one diocese/parish) in the ministries of evangelization and catechesis.
- ★ Share successful initiatives that may benefit other dioceses/parishes.
- ★ Encourage continued creative innovation in parish/diocesan catechetical and evangelization efforts,
- ★ Reflect the spirit of the “new evangelization” promulgated by Pope John Paul II and the General/National Directories for Catechesis

The award will be presented for the fourth time at the 77th annual NCCL Conference and Exposition in Cleveland.

Judith had been reminiscing with others as well. One of them was Dan Thomas. In that conversation, Judith shared that there was a little money still remaining from membership dues in the National Catechetical Renewal organization and according to her accountant, it was time to give it away. Dan had suggested NCCL; hence the reason for the call.

She assured me it wasn’t a large amount “but there are certainly no strings attached to the donation.” Nevertheless, “it would be nice if the money could be used to promote new models of catechesis since that was the goal of the network.” And that’s how the conversation led to the New Wineskins Award. It seemed like a perfect match. Judith agreed.

I can’t call this seed money because the New Wineskins Award has already borne fruit. However, the “Network” was created because of Vatican II and inspired by *Catechesi Tradendae*. The author of *Catechesi Tradendae*, Pope John Paul II, also called for a “new evangelization.” Tom Quinlan challenged NCCL to create an award that embraced the “new evangelization” and acknowledged current activities that could be a source of inspiration for others. The networking concept is alive and well.

Let’s continue the networking, let’s *Ignite the Fire of Faith*, whether online or in person at the 77th annual NCCL Conference and Exposition. Let’s come together and give thanks for all those who raise key questions and address critical issues for catechetical renewal and especially those who share their work and their ideas. Thanks, Judith and Dan and Tom and each and every one of you who share your experiences. ■

# Catechetics in the Years After Vatican II

Ed Gordon



In 1971, I was hired as a parish director of religious education. Several months before I had discerned that religious life was not where God had called me to be, and I was unclear where God did want me. While in the seminary, I had led the confirmation program in a parish and it was that parish that offered me the job as DRE. To be very honest, I didn't know many DREs or exactly what the job entailed, but I had a great desire to serve the church in some way.

I had completed an undergraduate degree from the School of Education at Niagara University and had two years of high school teaching experience. Because of the religious order's requirements, I also had at least 24 credits in theology and even more in philosophy. Still, it was a daunting task administering a program with over 1,000 children and youth. This was the year that DREs came into their own in the diocese of Richmond. A good number of parishes hired their first lay directors that year, among them: Neil Parent, Dave Galusha, Gene Skapanski, Maureen Kelley, Karen Murphy, Dan Dolish, and Ron Diss.

The diocesan office in Richmond had an outstanding staff including Edward J. Murray, the first lay person to head a religious education office, James DeBoy, and John Roberto. Later, Chris Villapando joined the team. I was working in a parish in northern Virginia and the Mission Helpers of the Sacred Heart staffed a regional catechetical center. These sisters were brilliant catechists and helped to mentor all of us who were new to the field.

## LINKING LIFE AND FAITH

There were some outstanding teachers among the catechists in our parish. Two of the catechists were piloting new catechetical materials for the National Center at the Bishops' Conference. Carl Pfeiffer and Janaan Manternach were developing materials for what became the *Life, Love and Joy* series. The title of the series will tell you something about the thinking behind the series. It was an attempt to link life and faith and begin with life experiences. It desired to make love the central bond of faith and wished to portray the life of faith as joyful.

When *Life, Love and Joy* was published, it wouldn't be the first catechetical series to break from the catechism approach. In the 1960s, Sr. Maria della Cruz Aymes and Fr. Johannes Hofinger had pioneered *On Our Way*, a revolutionary textbook series published by Sadlier. It reflected the newer understandings of catechesis that had been promoted by Josef Jungmann and others beginning in the 1930s. Jungmann called for a renewal of the content of catechesis. He wanted it to be Christ-centered and rooted in Scripture and the Liturgy. During the 1960s, Hofinger, a disciple of Jungmann, helped organize a number of international study weeks on catechetics, with the last one held in 1968 at Medellin in Latin America. It was these gatherings that gave tremendous impetus to modern catechetics.

Catechesis was addressed in the preparatory work for Vatican II. Some favored the development of a universal catechism, while others favored a directory that would establish general principles for the development of national directories. In the end, the fathers of the Council asked that a directory on catechetics be published following the Council, and the General Catechetical Directory (GCD) appeared at Easter time in 1971 and became available in English at the end of the year.

Looking back, catechetics placed great emphasis on the psychological development of the child and the developmental readiness of the child to grasp and understand faith. William Goldman from England, and others had been writing in *The Living Light* about the implications of developmental learning for catechesis. One of the practical implications of this approach had been the sequencing of the sacraments of the Eucharist and penance. In his commentary on the GCD, Fr. Berard Marthaler, OFM, Conv., stated that this development had begun in Europe in the 1960s and spread quickly to other countries. When I came to the field, it was already accepted practice. However, it was a practice that had been brought about with some resistance.

## INCLUDING THE PARENTS

This was the period of time when parents were being brought into the preparation of their children for the first reception of the sacraments. Not only did the parents need to be included, which many resisted, but it had taken quite a bit of education to explain to parents why first penance no longer preceded

first Communion. In this country, there were a number of moral theologians suggesting that a child of six or seven could not commit an act that met the conditions for a mortal sin, thus no necessity for reconciliation at so early an age. The works of Piaget and Kohlberg were having a great influence in the thinking about the moral development of children and it appeared to many that the best age to introduce the sacrament of penance was about eight or nine.

It was a great surprise and disappointment when the General Catechetical Directory (GCD) published an Addendum to the document insisting that “new experiments” with the order of reception of first sacraments were to end. Many religious educators and pastors had worked very hard to separate first Communion and reconciliation preparation from each other and to place penance preparation in third or fourth grade. This was the time when the first DREs were being hired by parishes, and it was a real struggle to gain credibility when it wasn’t “father” speaking. So, to have to explain why we would need to change back to a practice we had just left behind for very good reasons caused a lot of consternation in the field. Some fought a rear guard action over several years before restoring the penance-first Communion sequence.

The furor over the Addendum to the GCD delayed for some time the reception that the document deserved. Berard Marthaler’s *Catechetics in Context* published in 1973 was a wonderful commentary on the document and exposed the riches it contained. The Directory’s statement that “catechesis for adults, since it deals with persons who are capable of an adherence that is fully responsible must be considered the chief form of catechesis” (20) pushed all of us to expand our efforts in adult faith formation. By situating catechesis in the Ministry of the Word, it gave it a pastoral home, beyond academics and the classroom.

## INFLUENCE OF THE RCIA

During this period, I was attending Catholic University working on my graduate degree, and I took a course in adult education taught by a recent doctoral graduate, Fr. Jim Dunning. In the course he introduced us to a new document that had been promulgated in Rome, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. Jim told us that this was going to become one of the most important post-conciliar documents and that it would change the way we would be church. In many ways, he was a prophet. When comparing the GCD with the General Directory for Catechesis (GDC) published in 1997, the influences of RCIA, initiation, and evangelization on catechesis is obvious.

If I were to use one word to describe the catechetical ministry in the post Vatican II church, I would say “exciting.” We had to create programs where none existed. It was obvious that we needed more than religious education classes to address the needs of adolescents, and youth ministry was born out of this need. The Bishops’ Conference published its first document on youth ministry, *A Vision for Youth Ministry*, articulating

a comprehensive approach to youth. It was about this time that John Roberto and Brian Reynolds were founding the Center for Youth Ministry and piloting programs to train the first generation of youth ministers. In the early 1970s, we still had great numbers of teens in our parish religious education programs all the way through 12<sup>th</sup> grade! We could easily fill weekend retreat programs when we offered them. Each year DREs from several parishes came together to plan two weekend retreat models, one for freshmen and sophomores and another for juniors and seniors. With this cooperative planning and by sharing the staffing of the weekends, we could offer six or seven retreat opportunities each year.

Another new development at the time was the explosion of prayer groups and of the charismatic movement. In my first parish, we started three prayer groups; eventually one of them became a charismatic community and the other two remained more “traditional.” In these early post-conciliar years, DREs were the first of the new generation of parish lay ministers. Most parishes didn’t yet have youth ministers, liturgical, or pastoral ministers, so if these programs were to begin, it was up to us. However, we weren’t alone.

## NEW POSSIBILITIES

Vatican II challenged and invited the laity to take a more active role in the church and many persons responded enthusiastically. In my first parish, I had almost 100 catechists and aides and it wasn’t difficult to get them. Of course, fewer women worked outside of the home and there were fewer single parent households. Still, my memories are of joy-filled women and men giving generously of their time and talents. They were as excited as we were about the new possibilities opened up by Vatican II.

The GCD had called for every country to develop its own directory to enculturate the principles of the universal document. The U.S. bishops responded enthusiastically. Msgr. Wilfred Paradis and Sr. Maryella Frye were hired to guide the process for developing a national directory. A draft was prepared and a “newspaper” quality draft was printed and distributed to every parish in the US asking for comments and input; it included a response form. I can remember sitting down with our Christian Formation Committee and going through the document section by section. We sent in pages of suggestions. This was in the era before computers became ubiquitous. Sr. Maryella described how they coded all of the responses by hand and filed them under various categories for those working on the revision. The second round of consultations elicited over 75,000 responses. It was no wonder that so many people felt ownership for *Sharing the Light of Faith* when it appeared in 1978.

Compared with its successor, the *National Directory for Catechesis* (NDC), it was a much more modest document bringing together the developments in the field between the 1960s and the mid-1970s. The NDC, published in 2005, reflected the publications of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, The



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Synod on Catechesis, and the revision of the GCD, as well as 30 years of experience. One of the unique characteristics of the first national directory was the first section that gives a cultural context for catechesis. This was an affirmation of what we were attempting to do in the parishes — adapt catechesis to the ages and cultures of those we were catechizing.

## OBSERVATIONS

Reflecting on those early years of post-conciliar catechesis, I would make the following observations:

**Solid Theological Foundations** — many of the first generation DREs were either religious, former religious, or former seminarians. They came to the ministry with strong backgrounds in theology and pastoral thinking. They had imbued the spirit and directions of the Council and wanted to share its vision with the people.

**Rooted in Education** — A great many of the first generation of catechetical leaders came to the ministry with a background in education and brought these skills to the catechetical task. In one sense, catechesis has always been about teaching and learning and this generation knew a lot about both.

**Innovation** — We were in a new era and we were encouraged and challenged to adapt to new times. There did not seem to be a penalty for failing or not getting it quite right the first time when enculturating catechesis.

**Enthusiasm and Support** — We were young and full of energy and passion for the mission. We truly supported each other in the ministry. Collaboration was sought and found. This was the period when many of the diocesan DRE organizations were born. There was also a great response from many

of the laity who experienced the same exhilaration brought by the Council.

**Attention to Catechetics** — Diocesan and parish leadership responded to the challenges of the 1970s by committing time, talent, and treasure to the catechetical ministry. This was supported by the publication of that first generation of catechetical documents.

At the same time, I don't believe we were aware enough of the huge cultural shifts taking place that would sweep away so many of the bonds and relationships which had held the Catholic community together for so long. Our catechesis was still academic and focused on what the directories call ongoing formation in the faith when it should have been shifting to a more evangelical approach. Of course, that same critique could be leveled against the church in the U.S. as a whole. Freedom to innovate can lead to some experiments that are not rooted in common sense or the Tradition. I know there were a few of these, but not many. How far do you push the boundaries without losing your way?

Today, there are richer resources and 30 plus years of experience available to guide us. There is also a new generation of catechetical leaders. I hope and pray that they have the passion and the courage to “put out into the deep” as Pope John Paul II suggested in his letter on the “Coming of the New Millennium.” Catechesis needs leaders who can adapt catechesis to the challenges of today. ■

*Ed Gordon is the Secretary for Catholic Education and the Director for Religious Education in the Diocese of Wilmington, Delaware. He has been a member of NCCL for more than 30 years.*



# Embrace New Methods: The Intersection of New Media and Catechesis

Jonathan F. Sullivan



A wise, Dominican sister I studied with in graduate school once described theologians as the “scouts” of the church; part of their task is to run ahead, discover what is over the hills in the distance, and report back so that the church can be prepared for what lies before us.

With that in mind, I write as a “techno-theologian,”<sup>1</sup> someone who has forged ahead, seen what lies before us in the intersection of faith and technology, and has returned to report on his findings. And I am here to tell you that we are not prepared.

The purpose of this article is not to examine specific platforms such as Twitter or Facebook. Nor is it to discuss the latest gadgets and gizmos we can bring into our catechetical programs. Instead, I want to pick up on some of the threads from Sr. Angela Ann Zukowski’s 2011 address at the NCCL conference in Atlanta. In that address, Sr. Zukowski spoke of the need to understand and engage the emerging digital revolution underway in our culture. This call has only taken on more urgency in the time since her address and remains one of the great challenges facing the church’s catechetical ministry in the near future.

## A STORY: #CATHOLICRULESFORTWITTER

I want to begin with a story that illustrates just what opportunities and dangers await us as catechists in the digital continent. On Friday, April 1, 2010, I inadvertently started a minor Internet meme.<sup>2</sup> A friend of mine on Twitter, who had made a sarcastic comment about another Catholic institution’s inappropriate use of Twitter, had been called to task for her complaint. Frustrated, she tweeted out “I didn’t know Catholics couldn’t be sarcastic online. Could someone please send me the Catholic rules for Twitter?”

Being a somewhat impertinent and snarky individual myself, I immediately replied, “Never tweet anything from the NAB w/o express permission of @USCCB #CatholicRulesForTwitter.” Using the hash sign (#) before the phrase

“CatholicRulesForTwitter” created a “hashtag” — a simple way for topics and conversations to be found and linked together. Soon my friend responded with a few clever rules of her own, including the same hashtag.

Because I included the Twitter name for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (@USCCB) as an “at” reply, whoever monitors their Twitter feed noticed that I had mentioned them. At first they thought we were being serious, but soon realized it was all in jest. And that’s when it got interesting.

As their last tweet of the week, the USCCB pointed their thousands of followers to the fun we’d been having: “If you want a good laugh, check out #CatholicRulesForTwitter.” And that’s when the whole thing went viral.

Soon, Catholics from around the world were tweeting their own rules and sharing funny rules from other people. Some of my favorites included:

@CatholicDan: “Tweets posted on Saturday night count as being written on Sunday. #CatholicRulesForTwitter”

@JonoShea1: “On fasts, only one full tweet is allowed. 2 smaller tweets permitted, if they do not equal a full 140 characters #CatholicRulesForTwitter”

@blueberries4me: “Married couples should not block the act of tweeting, but may abstain from tweeting on certain days if necessary.”

@iTh0t: “Mary turned to the disciples & said, ‘RT<sup>3</sup> whatever he says.’ #CatholicRulesForTwitter”

In fact, within 24 hours over 400 “rules” had been posted, and small spin-offs began to list similar rules for Methodists, Lutherans, and other religious groups.

## LIVING IN A TIME OF TECHNOLOGICAL DISRUPTION

This story, as amusing as it is, points to the ways in which new technologies are disrupting traditional methods of communication. That these technologies are disruptive should not surprise us; it occurs anytime a culture experiences a transition

1 “Techno-theologian” is a phrase originally coined, to the best of my knowledge, by Richard Drabik of the University of Dayton.

2 A meme is a small idea – be it a catchphrase, joke, or image – that is easily and rapidly adapted and reproduced. Online, memes are often said to have “gone viral.”

3 “RT” stands for “retweet” and indicates that something is being quoted from someone else.



to new communication methods. Indeed, the 1960 *Confraternity Teacher's Guide* includes this sage advice regarding “new media” and catechesis:

The catechist will find that catechetical material in filmstrips, both black and white and in color, is steadily increasing in volume. He will find satisfactory filmstrips which correlate with courses of study and with the catechism.... The number of catechetical subjects available on sound motion-picture film is comparatively limited. *The teaching value of the silent movie is greatly reduced by the fact that today pupils are accustomed to sound movies.* (Emphasis mine.)

While this appeal to sound movies may seem quaint today, it does make the point that the message we proclaim can only be heard if we use the methods employed by the hearer. As younger generations grow up with new ways of interacting with one another we would do well to ask to which methods of communication are today's youth accustomed? What methods are we using that may be losing their effectiveness due to the adoption of newer ones?

Bishop Ron Herzog, in his 2010 address to his peers at the November meeting of the USCCB, echoed the *Confraternity Teacher's Guide* when he said,

Although social media has been around for less than ten years, it doesn't have the makings of a fad. We're being told that it is causing as fundamental a shift in communication patterns and behavior as the printing press did 500 years ago. And I don't think I have to remind you of what happened when the Catholic Church was slow to adapt to that new technology.

While these new technologies are disruptive in a variety of ways, they will be especially challenging to catechesis due to three factors: their democratizing tendencies, their subjugation of geography, and their cheapening of information.

First, new digital technologies democratize the tools of communication. In the past, mass communication was in the hands of very few people. In the ancient and medieval worlds, it took years to reproduce a book. Even after the advent of the printing press, mass production of books and newspapers was only available to those with the capital to invest in expensive and immobile machinery.

Today anyone with an Internet connection and something to say can have a blog up and running in a matter of minutes. Communicating “on the go” — a staple of science fiction as late as the early 1990s — is now so ubiquitous as to be unremarkable, including textual, audio, and video media. Mass communication tools are no longer in the hands of a few, but the many, and people are participating in them in a way Gutenberg could only have dreamed.

Second, these tools overcome what Sherry Turkle has called the “tyranny of geography.” In the past, people had a limited pool of contacts with whom they could communicate easily. Today we can easily connect with people from across the globe. As a result, it is easier than ever before to find people with whom we share passions and interests. I can just as easily discuss the latest news from the Vatican with my colleagues down the hall as with a catechist in South Sudan, something I do regularly via an online forum.

Finally, new technologies — and the Internet in particular — have made accessing the world's knowledge extraordinarily



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cheap and easy. Gone are the days of long library searches and endless cross-referencing. The answer to any question, whether complex or trivial, is little more than a Google search away. As a result the participants in our programs will have little need for an “expert with the answers” since their questions regarding the content of doctrine and dogma will be easily satisfied. Helping people find good sources of information will become more important than helping them find the answers.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR CATECHESIS

These three trends — the democratization of communications tools, the defeat of geography, and easy access of information — produce a powerful confluence of social and cultural forces; they will have some important implications for the future of catechesis.

Catechists and catechetical leaders will no longer be able to function simply as overseers of programs and classrooms, as the “sage on the stage.” Rather, we will need to view ourselves at the hub of a network of relationships. Catechetical leaders will need to become adept at helping make connections across these networks by introducing parishioners to authors and experts who can answer their questions or further their interests in particular subjects. Social media is already facilitating these types of connections and there is every indication that this trend will only continue.

Catechesis will also need to adapt to the particular needs of discrete communities and interest groups, replacing the “one-size-fits-all” approach of many programs. Catholic blogs are one model for this diversity; it’s possible to find blogs targeting very specific groups and interests, from Catholic mothers (CatholicMom.com) to professionals (IntegratedCatholicLife.org) to the intersection of faith and beer (CatholicDrinkie.com). Because of the low start-up costs for these sites, it’s possible to target small but passionate groups of followers.

The church would do well to encourage these types of “micro-communities” by helping Catholics with similar interests to connect with one another online or face-to-face for fellowship and support.

Finally, we need to give the faithful access to the tools of the faith in these new formats. For all the cool things I can do on my smartphone, I still cannot access an elegant, easy-to-use version of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* or *New American Bible* without a steady Internet connection. The recently released online version of the *Catechism* is a step in the right direction, but in my rural diocese we have areas — including one of our major population centers — that have no wireless data from my carrier. Giving faithful Catholic app developers access to the text of the *Catechism* and *NAB* would help to fill this gap and provide the church with a needed digital tool for catechesis and evangelization.

I’m not going to pretend that navigating the digital culture will be easy or without its pitfalls. Catechetical leaders will make missteps and mistakes as we seek to learn these new tools and apply them to the work of evangelization and faith formation. Yet the work we do now to acclimate ourselves to these new technologies will pave the way for greater innovation and engagement in the future. The church cannot afford to fear these new technologies or ignore their impact on our work of evangelization. We must embrace new methods if we are to fulfill Christ’s call to make disciples of all nations — even on the digital continent. ■

*Jonathan F. Sullivan is the director of catechetical services for the Diocese of Springfield, Illinois. He blogs on catechetical topics at [www.JonathanFSullivan.com](http://www.JonathanFSullivan.com). This article is adapted from his TED-style keynote address at the 2012 NCCL Convention and Expo in San Diego.*



# CATECHETICAL UPDATE

A publication of the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership

## THE NEW EVANGELIZATION FOR THE TRANSMISSION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Tom Rinkoski



It seems clear enough that there is a call for a *new* evangelization. We have papal statements as well as a stream of bishops' letters on the subject. With more ink spilt, there is less agreement about the defining adjective, "new." Some would suggest that because this is a new time, marked by new circumstances,

they require us to respond in a new way. There is much to be said for that. As a teacher, I am witnessing a new generation of students who actually think differently than my own, and previous models do not work. It is also intriguing to examine those who hesitate about the implementation of a "new" evangelization. I think some of it has to do with future fears and painful memories. I am one of the many catechists from the 1970s and 1980s who implemented a "new" approach to catechesis, which today remains the bad child contemporary catechists like to blame and shame. History can be a harsh judge, and despite the maxim that the church moves slow, it has been swift in its judgment about the "love movement" of that period of catechesis. Some of us remain hesitant to welcome a "new" catechesis because being innovators in the Roman Catholic Church is a harsh risk.

Nonetheless, I concur a need for a "new" evangelization evidences itself in the front lines of catechesis in parishes across our country. I do believe the times have significantly changed and not all to the detriment of the dynamic of history or faith. In fact, I think it is part of our writing a new chapter in our continuing story.<sup>1</sup> My challenge for a "new" evangelization is a call for a deeper listening. I believe the essence of the new evangelization does not lie in any novel insights or technologically savvy approaches on how to proclaim the gospel, but rather in how we hear the gospel in the story of one another. As I journey through my catechetical ministry, I often wonder if we would be more "successful" in ministering to the people of God, if we listened to them with our whole hearts, minds,

and souls. As I continue my work with people in poverty, I am becoming convinced that if, instead of marching into their neighborhoods with bags of aid, we first sat in their encampments and listened to their stories, we would be much further ahead in breaking the cycle of poverty than we are. Attentive listening requires strong action both on the part of the listener and the listened. As Dr. Karl Menninger stated, "Listening is a magnetic and strange thing, a creative force. The friends who listen to us are the ones we move toward. When listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand."

Pope John Paul II was quoted in a recent article in the National Catholic Reporter by Christie Billips as saying, "For the disciple of Christ, the duty to evangelize is an obligation of love. 'The love of Christ impels us' (2 Cor. 5:14)."<sup>2</sup> I propose that listening is an act of love. This is the title of a book by Dave Isay who is one of the co-founders of the StoryCorps Project, which is an enormously successful venture of listening to people's stories all across the United States.<sup>3</sup> My contention is that by listening better — deeper — to the "joys and hopes, griefs and anguish of the people of our time"<sup>4</sup> we can better build Christian community, reinforce the idea of holiness in everyday life and living, and build a stronger Christian identity. If we can do that, the people may not feel such a vast canyon between them and religion; they may not feel the need to make distinctions between spirituality and religion. They may feel the connection more solidly between God and their lived reality.

However, we need to significantly alter the way we listen. I suggest that we examine the impediments that hinder effective listening between the People of God and we who represent the institutional church. There are four steps we need to take. First, we must become more aware of the lens through which we see and judge each other. In the past, we have named these paradigms, lenses, or frameworks. Instead, I would like to use

<sup>1</sup> "We continue in our day to write the next chapter of that story by serving people in these various ways — we call them ministries — not because they are Catholic, but because we are Catholic and this is what Christ wants." Excerpt from America Magazine (March 5, 2012), written by Most Rev. Blasé Cupich, Bishop of Spokane, Washington. The article is titled "Staying Civil."

<sup>2</sup> "New Evangelization and True Evangelization" by Christie Billips. National Catholic Reporter, March 2-15, 2012. She is citing a quote from Ecclesia in America.

<sup>3</sup> Isay, Dave; *Listening is an Act of Love: A Celebration of American Life* from the StoryCorps Project; 2007; Penguin Press; New York. Also see <http://storycorps.org>.

<sup>4</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Preface #1



Photo by Kirainet

the term, “mental models,” coined by Ruby Payne.<sup>5</sup> Mental models are rules that operate underneath consciousness, which affect not only our perspectives, but the judgments we make about each other.

Second, we need to become more aware of how our language differences block effective communication. Often groups on each side hurry to snap judgments about the intentions of the other based on reactions to language differences; I am not talking about the variety of tongues we use across the world like Spanish, English, and Tagalong, but the differences in register within in each of those languages.

Third, I think we need to re-evaluate and alter our listening skills. Thankfully, we have access to huge amounts of research in this area that we can use to critically examine the ways in which we pretend to listen, but really don't.

Finally, it is worth spending time checking out theories of change and motivation which drive people to move from one position to another, whether it has to do with economic status, family life decisions, or spiritual advancement. This brief article cannot fully justify each of these four steps, but it is important to critically examine ourselves so that we can move

forward in a “new” evangelization that is both meaningful and effective.

Because it is difficult to examine this proposition with an all-encompassing perspective, I am going to apply these four points to the listening gap between the domestic church and the institutional church. Not only do I have personal experience in family life ministry and catechesis, but there are also considerable church documents in the field. Although this is limited in scope, I think most will immediately see applications in other areas.

### STEP #1: MENTAL MODELS

We begin by drawing a map of our mental models of both the domestic and institutional church in order to expose ourselves to ourselves. Currently, families, as well as educators, cry out for partnership, but each insist on their own terms so as to meet their agendas. Bringing our mental models to the light of day is important because no effective change can happen until we acknowledge these frameworks, and willingly set them aside in order to facilitate moving toward the common good.

I suggest clearly imaging our mental models as a small group exercise. Because I am a teacher/trainer, I would begin by passing out color markers and a large sheet of newsprint. Draw a large circle; inside the circle, identify the many places, jobs, and tasks that take up the energies and time of members of that circle. Let's begin with the domestic church, the family.

<sup>5</sup> Payne, Ruby and Philip E. DeVol and Terie Dreussi Smith. *Bridges Out of Poverty, Strategies for Professionals and Communities*. See also <http://www.bridgesoutofpoverty.com>

(See addendum 1.) This is very general and may well vary according to economic demographic, ethnic background, and education. But it provides a generalization useful for our purposes. Each of the categories placed within the circle are necessarily broad; each has been expanded and studied in social science research. Generally speaking, what this does is paint a word picture of where the contemporary family spends most of its energies and time. Addendum 2, illustrates the same mental model for the institutional church. In beginning to brainstorm the categories, I utilized Cardinal Avery Dulles *Models of the Church* as a starting place, substituting “evangelization” for Dulles’ term “herald,” and “administration” for “institution.” I tried to focus on the idea of parish church when performing this analysis. Again, any one of the categories in this model can be broken down into many sub-parts, but basically the model speaks of the complexity of the contemporary parish’s goals, puzzles, and hopes.

My hope in making these maps was to assist people in clearly identifying the differences in the two worlds of family and parish. Lots of dialogue needs to happen about what we draw. Between these worlds huge jumps are required that folks traverse on a daily basis. Because these mental maps reflect models we hold dearly in our subconscious, we make judgments about the effectiveness and meaning of others who reside in a different mental model, based on our own. Often we lapse into judgments about the family as being non-cooperative or non-affiliated because they do not meet the hidden rules of our mental model. All mental models have hidden rules that govern their dynamics. In order for us to move forward, we need to recognize our mental models and place them aside. No genuine change can happen without that action.

## STEP #2: REGISTERS OF LANGUAGE

Every culture develops a language to facilitate its operation; this not unusual or surprising. Even though our doctor may

speak English or Spanish (like we do), we usually end up interpreting his or her analysis of our condition. In this step, I will build on the work of many socio-linguist scientists whose research names *registers* within language as key differences.<sup>6</sup> They state that institutions generally speak in the “frozen” or “formal” register. Frozen register is what the Catholic Church uses in its sacramental rites. It is language that is set and usually remains the same. Formal register is the language of business and “professional” exchange. The institutional church, primarily operates in both “frozen” and “formal” registers. Families, however, primarily move in what is called “casual” register; this is also the language of friendship. This happens when we speak without complete sentences, often with gestures. Think of any typical morning in most households as kids are going to school and adults are off to work. The intimate register is even “casual” with depth and intensity, usually limited between lovers or extremely close partners.

Too often we lapse into judgments about each other because of register differences in language. As a catechist, I spend a large amount of time teaching my charges the vocabulary and syntax of the Catholic Church, which they believe they will minimally use in the world in which they live. Calls to holiness are usually situated in a formal register that employs a theological framework which is basically inaccessible to folks who live in casual register. The most successful youth ministers have been those who are bi-lingual in several registers. We in the institutional church may rail against the “new age” religions, but they are successful because they speak in a language that people can hear.

We have a long and storied history in the Catholic Church of saints and sinners speaking in casual register. That is why their

<sup>6</sup> For instance, see Montano-Harmon, M. R. “Developing English for Academic Purposes.” California State University, Fullerton. Or Joos, M., *The Five Clocks*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World



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stories remain so loved and cherished. There are places where we can meet in the middle, and we need to listen to find where those are. We discover them by listening attentively.

### STEP #3: EXAMINING OUR LISTENING SKILLS

Living in an era of amazing communication devices does not seem to have revolutionized our ability to listen. Thanks both to the gifts of the social sciences and the contemplative tradition, we have access to strategies and techniques that have the potential to improve our listening abilities. Because the world has changed, we have to learn to listen differently. As a family life minister and marriage educator, I have been blessed to study interpersonal listening skills. There are an abundance of techniques from which more of us could learn, such as the Speaker-Listener technique laid out by PREP<sup>7</sup>, or *Prayerful Listening*<sup>8</sup> as JustFaith calls us to do. Within the contemplative tradition, masters such as Thomas Keating labor hard at opening us up to listen well to the voice of God. I am fascinated in how the StoryCorps project has facilitated people's willingness to share intimate stories of their wishes, dreams, and hopes. We have much to learn, and there is a wealth of information to guide us.

For this to be a “new” evangelization, we need to re-learn the basics and change our approach so there can be significant change for all of us. Couples and families are learning and practicing these techniques in the midst of marriage and parenting. We, on the institutional side, need to make them necessary elements of our training and practice.

### STEP #4: STUDYING WHY PEOPLE CHANGE AND MOTIVATIONS FOR CHANGE

There are some in the Catholic Church who believe its theory of change has not changed over the course of its story. That may be true, but I am not sure it matters because people's motivation for change and perception of change has shifted. Msgr. Jack Egan tried hard to teach me that Saul Alinsky and other community organizers did not try to change people, but rather listened carefully to their desire and reasons to change, and walked with them from that point. He framed that as a respect for basic human dignity. I do believe it is true that people seek God, and that they fully realize that to “come closer” to God, they need to change. But we need to listen more carefully to their perception of what this means *in their context*, and facilitate the change in a way that is meaningful for them, not us. We will know we are successful when we hear them argue for the change, not us. I point your attention to the success and stories of the base Christian communities in Latin and South America as testaments.

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7 *Fighting for Your Marriage: Positive Steps for Preventing Divorce and Preserving Lasting Love*; Howard Markman, Scott Stanley and Susan L. Blumberg; Jossey-Bass Inc; 2010. See also prepinc.com

8 JustFaith. I came in contact with this method in JustFaith's Engaging Spirituality component. For more information contact Just Faith at <http://www.justfaith.org>.

There are many significant theories of change that should be studied. Many of them arise from the business world. We should not dismiss their ideas just because they deal with the world of capitalism and commerce. In fact, the parallels between their language and ours are eerie! “For change to occur, we must suspend our mental models” (Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*). “Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt. 10:39).

It is not necessary to adopt one theory of change. It is important for us to be willing to be attentive to the fact that just being Catholic does not mean we all share a common motivation or willingness to change. No increase in the amount of preaching or teaching will critically affect that. I do believe, however, a greater leaning into listening may.

### CONCLUSION

This listening project is not meant to gather new data, but to build meaningful and significant relationships. No change can happen without that. I am not suggesting we abandon all traditional catechetical practices and just listen to each other; although I do believe this listening strategy needs to take a privileged place in the course of the new evangelization, it cannot be a sole approach. In this, I propose we return to core elements within our tradition. Our world is filled with thousands of people like the blind beggar at the gates screaming (at least inside), “Jesus have mercy on me!”<sup>9</sup> It is our first task to walk over to them and listen to what it is they want. I know well how many things stand in the way of our taking time to listen. Church work is not what it was when I started just shy of 40 years ago. I spend an ocean of my appointed hours doing paperwork, background checks, as well as the mundane work of cleaning blackboards and sweeping floors. Caught in the tyranny of this and that, I understand that no significant learning can happen without a relationship. In order to have a relationship, you need, as the Little Prince said so well, to be willing to “waste” time on the people you love.<sup>10</sup>

In another passage on curing a blind man, this time in the Gospel of John (Chapter 9), it ends with a warning about the state of our listening skills. Jesus unabashedly renders a judgment about false “seeing” that I think may equally apply to false listening. “You say you listened? If you did, you would not be guilty, but since you proclaim it, your guilt remains” (line 41, adapted).

To summarize, a prime movement of the “new” evangelization should be listening. I suggest it be a “new” listening — not burdened by our mental models — done with new skills and open to a “new” outcome. ■

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9 Mark 10:48

10 *The Little Prince*, Antoine de Saint-Exupery.

# MENTAL MODEL OF THE DOMESTIC CHURCH/THE FAMILY





# MENTAL MODEL OF THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH/THE PARISH



# Teaching Against Capital Punishment

Vicki Schieber



Our daughter Shannon was murdered in 1998. Shannon was a brilliant person — a young woman of goodness and wisdom. At 23 years old, she already was making a difference in the world. Coming to terms with her violent death has been a long journey that will continue for the rest of our lives.

As part of our journey, my husband Sylvester and I have been guest speakers for countless parish groups and programs since 2000. I also have had opportunity to speak before lawmakers and bishops. I am the Education Coordinator of the Catholic Mobilizing Network to End the Use of the Death Penalty (CMN). CMN was announced at a press conference on January 25, 2009, by the Office of Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and also works collaboratively with the Pro-Life office to implement the Bishops' Campaign to End the Use of the Death Penalty and to promote restorative justice. It has been a wonderful opportunity to educate Catholics on the church's belief in the sanctity of all life. But it has been difficult more often than one might expect; Catholic laypeople and clergy are sometimes resistant to the church's teaching, and it is important and imperative for catechists to integrate the church's opposition to the death penalty into their work.

## SELECTIVE VISION

On one occasion, when Syl and I told Shannon's story to a parish group, we explained the church's position on capital punishment only to be rebutted by a man who stood up and read from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. He read selectively and stopped before he would have to read that use of the death penalty should be "very rare, if not practically non-existent" (2267). Although he misrepresented the *Catechism*, he did reveal a significant truth — that many laypeople assume, without much thought or personal experience, that the death penalty is right and good. From our point of view — from our experience of losing our daughter — it is unthinkable that killing anyone could be so easily considered good. Suffice it to say that we catechists have important work to do.

To aid the catechist, Liturgical Press recently published *Where Justice and Mercy Meet: Catholic Opposition to the Death Penalty*. I edited the book with two faculty members from Mount St. Mary's University in Emmitsburg, Maryland. We at the CMN and Sr. Helen Prejean asked the faculty at Mount St. Mary's to write a book that deals with the kinds of questions and issues that Syl and I respond to when we visit parishes.

## QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CHURCH

One set of questions has to do with the teachings of the church. Christian Brugger from St. John Vianney Seminary in Denver and Msgr. Stuart Swetland from Mount St. Mary's develop two main points. First, since the Middle Ages, the church has gone deeper and deeper in its understanding of the intrinsic dignity of the human person as the image of God. Our dignity cannot be destroyed even by our acts — even if one were to commit murder. Because it is God's initiative, our dignity cannot be forfeited, and redemption is always a possibility.

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*It is important and imperative  
for catechists to integrate  
the church's opposition to the death  
penalty into their work.*

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Second, the logic of capital punishment has shifted from retribution to self-defense. For this reason, the *Catechism* and John Paul II (in *Evangelium vitae*, no. 56) call recourse to the death penalty "very rare, if non-existent." The use of capital punishment hinges, not on the brutality of the crime (and there are countless brutal murders), but on the possibility of incarcerating those who commit murder, for life without parole. Consistent with a deep understanding of human dignity and the logic of self-defense, the church is — in a clear and practical sense — against capital punishment.

## "EYE FOR AN EYE" DOESN'T MEAN WHAT YOU MIGHT THINK

A clarification of the church's teaching leads to a set of questions about the Bible. In a discussion about the Old Testament, Richard Buck shows that the often quoted "eye for an eye," does not mean what most of us think that it does; it does not institute a law of retribution. Rather, in the context of biblical law and rabbinic legal practice, an "eye for an eye" emphasizes the grave need for restitution. I know that this

sounds odd given how we are used to hearing “eye for an eye” as a command for retribution, but the command is to offer compensation. An eye cannot be replaced, so that the standard of restitution is high and grave. This standard of restorative justice certainly does not let the criminal off the hook; it is not an easy way out. It is, in fact, overwhelming...but it is not retribution. We are commanded to offer restoration equal to the “eye” that cannot be replaced.

## GOSPEL TEACHING

Sr. Mary Katherine Birge, SSJ, discusses the teachings of Jesus in the gospels. She ends with the actions of Jesus in John 8:2-11 when he stops the stoning of a woman caught in adultery. Syl and I have found that confronting people of faith with the simplicity of Jesus’ actions stirs them to think about their choices. Christ did not argue that the woman who was about to be stoned had not committed the offense with which she was charged; he did not dispute the evidence, nor did he suggest what she had done was right.

His response was not about her or what she had done at all — it was that the would-be executioners who were without sins of their own should cast the first stone. When you have the sort of experience Syl and I have had, the heart, mind, and soul are forced to focus on the words of the Lord’s Prayer in a more concrete fashion than before that experience.

Simply telling people that the hardest thing one of us had to confront after Shannon’s death was saying the Lord’s Prayer aloud has a powerful effect: “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Sometimes it takes a while for the story and its implications to take hold, but it is a profound experience to see it happen.

## STORIES OF REAL PEOPLE

Stories are the life-blood of the moral life. Is it not the story of God entering human life that has changed us? Is it not the story of God’s self-giving and reconciling love that animates our work as catechists? Isn’t it striking that it is our good work to spread

the Word of our Lord, who was executed by Rome? The stories in this book are stories of real people and their real struggles: stories of falsely accused and imprisoned, stories of executioners, stories of murder victims and their families, stories of pain and loss, stories of mercy, conversion, and renewal. I have found that the real story of capital punishment in the United States needs to be told — that it is applied inconsistently and arbitrarily, that its use depends more on the race, poverty, and mental illness of the criminal than on the horror of the crime, that convicted murderers (some innocent) do become scapegoats.

The most profound and moving stories are about murder victims and their family members: People such as Tariq and Azim Khamisa, Ruth and Bill Pelke, Christian de Chergé and his fellow Trappists, John, Nancy, and Antoinette Bosco, Billy and SueZann Bosler, Debbie Thornton and Ron Carlson, Susie and Marietta Jaeger, Michael and Bonnita Spikes. Often, someone will argue that, “if your child was murdered, you would be for the death penalty,” or “you cannot say that it is wrong until you have experienced the loss of a loved one.”

On the first statement, Syl and I and many others can say, from experience, that we are against capital punishment.

We hope that our experiences help catechists answer the second objection: you can say, with humility of course, that it is wrong — on the basis of the facts, our Christian faith, and the experiences of those who have lived through it. We have found a place, although not always a comforting or comfortable place, where justice and mercy meet. ■

*Vicki Schieber is a coauthor of Where Justice and Mercy Meet: Catholic Opposition to the Death Penalty. She runs workshops for state conferences, is a published author, and served on the 2008 Maryland Commission on Capital Punishment. She is now actively teaching Catholic social teaching on the death penalty with the Catholic Mobilizing Network to End the Use of the Death Penalty. Contact her through [catholicismobilizing.org/vicki-schieber](http://catholicismobilizing.org/vicki-schieber)*

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*The most profound and moving stories are about murder victims and their family members.*

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## CATECHETICAL LEADER

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# My Heart Burns within Me: Sunday Preaching and the Catechesis of Young People

Karla Bellinger



Karl Rahner called it, “the silent coming of God.” I saw it last Sunday. In his homily, Deacon Roger asked, “Do you believe in miracles?” Directly in my line of sight beyond him, a ten-year-old altar server caught my attention. The lad’s back straightened; he raised his chin, and his body

language reflected the intensity of his listening. The homily went on, then the rest of the Mass. When I stood facing the altar before going up to the sanctuary as a minister of communion, the boy once again came into my view. His brown bangs hung straight down; he stared at the marble floor. I thought about his family. He and his three young brothers needed a miracle. His mom had just come home from the hospital three days earlier, and not for the first time; the prognosis was mixed. At, “Behold the Lamb of God. Behold him...” he raised his head. His face was radiant. His eyes glowed; something holy was happening; his heart was on fire with a resounding “yes!” His encounter with God was sparked by the simple homiletical question: “Do you believe in miracles?”

The disciples on the road to Emmaus also heard a message that resonated within them. Their response, “Were not our hearts burning within us?” (Lk. 24:32) is used so often in religious circles that it has almost become clichéd. Yet that expression describes an inner experience: a fiery beating of the heart, a swelling of the lungs, a mental exhilaration, which motivates and drives a person to attend, to learn, to listen, and to follow. Each generation rediscovers this silent coming of the Holy Spirit; it is the renewed enthusiasm of faith; it is the inner fire that keeps the church going.<sup>1</sup> This encounter with God is the goal of Sunday preaching within the Eucharistic liturgy.

For the past four years of my doctoral research and thesis, I have investigated “connection” in Sunday preaching and its relationship to the faith life of young people. I offer five pithy points for religious educators to ponder.

## WE HAVE A BLIND SPOT IN OUR CATECHETICAL THINKING

We talk about the role of the family. We discuss the significance of sacramental preparation. We confer about the curriculum in Catholic schools. We reflect on which faith formation programs to use. We encourage youth ministry attendance, retreats, and mission trips. These topics are like the flour, the water, the salt, and the oil — the traditional components of

catechesis. Yet we have a gaping hole in this list of ingredients: the role of Sunday preaching in the discipling of young people. Does it matter? Are they listening? From my study of 561 Catholic high school students from six different regions of the country, I suggest that it does. Fifty-five percent of those who celebrate Mass at least once per month were able to describe an experience of growing in faith

(in the past year) through preaching. Their words are inspiring. However, the other 45 percent who celebrate Mass regularly could not. Their description of sitting in the pew for a year and not growing in faith as a result of the homily is also instructive.

Because of this blind spot, from across regions and ethnicities, youth sense that Sunday preaching is directed toward the adults and not them. They say that it often feels as though they are not really there. When asked to describe her experience of connection in preaching, a 16-year-old Asian-American girl wrote, “None. I find it frustrating. Shouldn’t a man of God be able to connect with us laypeople? Especially us young members? We are the next generation of Catholic/Christians/etc. If we get disconnected, we won’t want to come or listen and eventually separate for good. It saddens me that most people I know turned atheist [because] they were not able to connect.” Young people are listening. Preaching matters to the faith growth (and loss) of teenagers.

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1 Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* (For the Indiction of the Year of Faith), #2.

## THE HOMILY MAKES A DIFFERENCE

The Sunday liturgy is the privileged point of contact for our people. There is nothing that carries as much weight as the Eucharistic celebration. Our best efforts at auxiliary programming fittingly culminate in this communal celebration as source and summit. Yet, for many Catholic parishioners, young and old, especially for those on the margins of faith, this may be their *only* source of input. They base their opinions of the parish and the institutional church on the quality of the homily. For parish-shoppers and those who tiptoe in and out of liturgy, the preaching is a key element in their decision for and against attendance.

From the words of young people, a single homily can stick in the memory. A single homily can connect so well that it changes a life. A single homily can also hurt at a vulnerable moment. Like a mother hen protecting her young, a twelfth grader from Indiana urges caution as she describes the weightiness of preaching: “I would tell them to consider my age group. Our faiths are fragile right now and homilies could either make or break them.”

Religious educators work with parents in sacramental preparation, promote enthusiasm for faith formation sessions, train catechists to be effective teachers, encourage confirmation participation, and foster attendance at youth group. All of those efforts can be strengthened or undermined by the words spoken from the pulpit on Sunday morning.

About one in five priests work 80 hours or more per week.<sup>2</sup> An overworked pastor can dedicate his morning to the family of a dying man, his afternoon interviewing potential teachers with the school administrator, and his evening hours pouring over money issues with the finance council, yet his entire ministry is evaluated by that seven-to-ten minute talk at the Eucharistic liturgy.

The homily is heavy. From both preachers and lay ministers, I hear the same frustrated whisper under the breath: “That is *so* unfair!”

## PREACHING CONVERSATION IS NOT HAPPENING

That whisper under the breath is the norm; most people, both priests and parishioners, are quiet about preaching. It is a sensitive subject. What has surprised me, as I have moved from swaying babies in the pew to sharing homiletical method with the theologically educated, is how much preachers *do not* get

preaching feedback: the handshake at the door, the notorious letter, the complaint to the bishop, perhaps, but rarely (if ever) a casual chat over a cup of coffee about how the preaching is going. One priest that I interviewed said that he had gotten two appreciative notes in the two years that he had been at his current parish. He was grateful for that.

I asked the high school kids in my survey, “In the last year, out of a possible 52 weeks, how many times have you given a preacher constructive feedback or input about his homily (other than “Nice homily, Father...or Deacon?”).” The median, mean, and mode all fell within the category of “0-7 weeks.” When I correlated preaching quality with feedback frequency, of those who did respond, 93.1 percent expressed themselves to a preacher whom they rated as very good or excellent. None of these kids dared to say anything to “Father” or “Deacon” whose preaching they appraised as “poor” (based on ten factors of homiletic excellence). Several preachers who were “excellent” also never got feedback. The vast majority of students said nothing either way.

This silence has not just been between the pulpit and the young pew. Official church documents are also surprisingly quiet. In the youth ministry document, *Renewing the Vision*, preaching is buried within a subsection about prayer and worship on page 46.

The National Initiative for Adolescent Catechesis (NIAC), in seeking to reinvigorate the discipling of young people, does not discuss the influence of Sunday preaching. In the *General Directory for Catechesis*, the homily is mentioned in the context of the Ministry of the Word for Catholic school Masses (#260) and in its role as adult formation (#57). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has one refer-

ence to the word “homily” in its index, which takes the reader to the passing on of magisterial teaching about moral matters (#2033). In the working document for the bishops’ world synod on evangelization (October, 2012), there are two sentences on Sunday preaching (neither in relation to youth). Similarly, priests spend the least amount of time preparing their Sunday homily when compared to other duties.<sup>3</sup> The significance of the homily is a serious blind spot. We have not been talking about it.

## WE ARE ENTERING A NEW ERA

The U.S. Catholic bishops have just published a new document on preaching, *Preaching the Mystery of Faith: the Sunday Homily* (January, 2013). Though the document comes at preaching from various angles, these converge at a single point: the heart of preaching is to foster an encounter with God. At the service of that encounter, the text discusses: doctrinal and catechetical

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2 CARA Working Paper No. 5 *Priests in the United States: Satisfaction, Work Load and Support Structures*. Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Georgetown University, Washington DC, 2002. <http://www.stmsfc.org/WORKLOADFORPRIESTS%201%2024%2010.pdf>

3 Ibid.

preaching; the primacy of the Paschal Mystery; the call for a renewed evangelization for those who no longer find the church's message engaging; reaching out to the Hispanic community; and the deepening of the spirituality of the minister as a path to effective preaching. Pope Benedict states, "Given the importance of the word of God, the quality of homilies needs to be improved."<sup>4</sup> At this 50 year mark of the renewal of Vatican II, this new writing signals a tipping point: the American bishops recognize that preaching matters and that we need help. *Since* the homily is so heavy, the flipside of frustration becomes opportunity — incremental growth in preaching could yield exponential results for the renewal of faith.

How do we know this? First, anecdotally, we hear stories of parishes that grow in attendance and vitality because of effective preaching. Secondly, our seminaries have concentrated on forming good shepherds and strengthening biblical foundations.<sup>5</sup> From the responses of my 561 young friends in the pew, two findings suggest that we are doing well in those two areas: 1) those who celebrate Mass regularly rate "the person of the preacher" very highly: 82 percent consider him to be a positive role model; 93 percent agree that he exudes a love for Jesus; 91 percent can say that he is "friendly to me"; 2) Perhaps contrary to popular presupposition, the age of the preacher shows no correlation with his effectiveness with youth. But one of the ten factors, the ability to "unpack the Scriptures," is stronger among younger preachers in a statistically significant way. Though it is not possible to prove causation from this data, the parallels imply that our focused efforts in formation and biblical studies have borne fruit.

From the outsider perspective of young listeners, we are doing well in developing good men. Those on the inside may castigate themselves about becoming holier (not unlike a family dynamic), but high-school-aged youth suggest that the problem centers more on the homiletical skills of content and delivery. Last fall, I discussed my findings with Archbishop Joseph Kurtz of the Archdiocese of Louisville, Kentucky. I offered him the formula, "spiritual formation + homiletical skill = holy preaching." He made the insightful comment that we are doing better in the more difficult half. Formation takes years and, yes, prayer and holiness are central to effectiveness; growth there is certainly welcome. But our needs in preaching are not so insurmountable: communication skills are highly teachable. Thirty to 40 percent of the preachers evaluated were lacking elements that are taught in an introductory oral com-

munications class: make one point, speak clearly, and do not repeat yourself or ramble. Listeners asked: apply the gospel to my life, help me with my problems, relate to me, and let me relate to you. Those requests were consistent no matter the age of the homilist or the faith level of the listener. Adults in the pew have said the same.<sup>6</sup> If we focus our energies and our resources, continuing education in homiletical skill can also yield results.

The silent coming of God is a mystery. Yet it is not magic. As incarnational people, we believe that the invisible works through the visible. The encounter of a homily is a two-way street: the spiritual formation and homiletical skill of the preacher interacts with the receptivity and theological understanding of the community.

What about the openness of the listener? With so much information coming at us in this wired age, are we learning to tune out? Have we stopped listening? Some suggest that is the case.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, the secular world has determined that sources of influence are coming closer to home. Social impact studies say that this generation trusts human interaction more than any other source.<sup>8</sup> Word of mouth carries more weight than a blog.<sup>9</sup> This faith in those who are local and connected opens up incredible potential for the caring and convincing human touch of Sunday preaching. At this point in history, preaching can make a difference.

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*Ideally, preachers  
and catechists also work together.  
Lay ministers can be a sounding board  
in small and indirect ways.*

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#### PREACHING AND CATECHESIS ARE LINKED LIKE BREAD AND BUTTER

Effective liturgical preaching connects the people to God; it sinks in like good butter melted on warm toast.<sup>10</sup> Communication from the pulpit is a two-way process; therefore, catechesis, by its very definition, is central to the homiletic encounter in "warming up" the receiver. Teaching people to pray, unpacking theological concepts, filling the heart and mind with story, passing on the vocabulary of faith, relating the gospel to everyday living — these are the responsibilities of parish catechists, youth ministers, parents, and school religion teachers. The echoing of the gospel serves to put "people...in

4 Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis [On the Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church's Life and Mission]*, # 46.

5 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Program for Priestly Formation*, #25, 198-200.

6 Katherine Schmitt, "Effective Preaching: What Catholics Want—A Project of the NCEA Seminary Department," *Seminary Journal* 16, no.2, Fall 2010.

7 Al Ries and Jack Trout, *Positioning: The Battle for your Mind: How to be Seen and Heard in the Overcrowded Marketplace* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001), 7.

8 From "Social Impact: How Consumers See It." <http://www.sociablelabs.com//Social-Impact-Study-2012>

9 From <http://www.slideshare.net/zuberance/zuberance-study-three-surprising-findings-about-brand-advocates>, slide 14.

10 Karla Bellinger, "Are You Talking to Me? A Study of Young Listeners' Connection with Catholic Sunday Preaching." DMin thesis, Aquinas Institute, 2012, 19.



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communion...with Jesus Christ,”<sup>11</sup> which is the core of catechesis. The homily builds upon this foundation: “The homily takes up again the journey of faith put forward by catechesis, and brings it to its natural fulfillment.”<sup>12</sup> As stated in the *Catechism*, Sunday preaching and catechesis are integral to the transmission of the Christian faith (425). They work together.

Ideally, preachers and catechists also work together. Lay ministers can be a sounding board in small and indirect ways. Young priests find their most satisfying relationships with the laity with whom they work.<sup>13</sup> One priest told me that he would check in with his youth minister on Wednesdays as he was crafting his Sunday homily to ask, “What are the kids going through this week?” A culture of silence is not fair. Sometimes people are left to guess how they are doing. This can foster the maladaptive behaviors of avoidance, blame, and self-exaltation/ degradation/justification. One 87-year-old former pastor sighed, “When people left my parish, they never came by to tell me why. How was I supposed to know?” Frequent and friendly feedback from the folks in the office can strengthen the culture of listening within a parish. Comments have to be clear, concrete, and specific, within a rapport of trust. The bishops’ new document will surely spur conferences on preaching, but incremental growth begins by opening the conversation at the local level.

Catechesis is also integral to the encounter with Jesus Christ within the homily itself. If the new USCCB document advocates for doctrine and catechesis in preaching, then we have to ask ourselves, what *is* catechetical preaching? Our Scriptures arise from the theological understanding of the early church; our theology is grounded in Scripture and apostolic

tradition; therefore doctrine and lectionary text are intrinsic to each other.<sup>14</sup> Parallel to the 50 year catechetical effort that has asked, “What does effective catechesis look like?” will be the forthcoming homiletical effort to envision, “What should catechetical preaching look like?” Both at the national level and in the parish, catechetical leaders need to be a part of this conversation.

We still have much to learn about the connections between catechesis, preaching, and youth. John Paul II said, “At the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person Jesus of Nazareth”<sup>15</sup> At the heart of preaching, then, we find the same Person. To fall in love with Jesus through the inner reverberation of the gospel is the promise of the Sunday homily and a primary source of our evangelization.

The Holy Spirit comes in unexpected ways. Before sending off this article, I had to make sure that my opening story was accurate. So this morning after Mass, I snagged the altar server’s dad as he headed to the basement for the Scout banquet. “Does [...] believe in miracles?” I asked. “Oh, yes!” he beamed. I told him about the radiance that I had seen in his son’s demeanor last Sunday. He hustled down the stairs, “Not only that,” he shot back over his head, “he *is* a miracle.”

In the midst of all this history,  
at a thousand different times and places,  
in a thousand forms,  
the one thing occurs which produces and sustains it all:  
the silent coming of God.

Karl Rahner, SJ, *Servants of the Lord* ¶

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11 John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (On Catechesis in our Time), #5

12 Ibid., 48

13 Dean R. Hoge, *The First Five Years of the Priesthood*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002, 23

14 John Cavadini, “Preaching and Catechesis: Mending the Rift between Scripture and Doctrine”, paper for “We Preach Christ Crucified” conference, Notre Dame, June, 2012.

15 *Catechesi Tradendae*, #5

# Billy Graham Crusades and Catholic Evangelization

Kristina M. DeNeve



In a recent issue of *Catechetical Leader*, Terrie Baldwin discussed the need, joys, and challenges of family evangelization. Beyond our nuclear family, our parish family, and even beyond our universal Catholic family, the call to evangelization also includes ministry for and with our larger Christian family.

Last year, the Diocese of Green Bay, under the guidance and leadership of Bishop David Ricken, did just that as we participated in a Franklin Graham Festival held in our area.

What did it look like for Catholics to collaborate in this updated version of a Billy Graham Crusade? What lessons did we learn, what contributions did we make, and where might we go from here?

## LESSONS LEARNED

When Bishop Ricken was first approached by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA), he was assured the upcoming festival would be ecumenical in nature; no congregation involved would be allowed to proselytize or speak negatively against any other religious denomination. The BGEA was more than good to their word. Every aspect of their festival was standardized to assure uniformity in message and approach. From the advance training on how to evangelize one-on-one to the printed invitational materials, and from the kick-off breakfast to the color-coded volunteer t-shirts, the BGEA followed a structured, time-tested methodology.

One great example surrounds the church-going Christians from the Green Bay area who “received” individuals after the “altar call.” Each of these individuals had to provide written proof of their current involvement with an area church. They received specific training and instructions on what to do and what not to do during the altar call. Those receiving others could not wear any religiously identifying clothing or jewelry, not even a pastor’s black (or blue or white) collar. During the event, whatever church/denomination a newly committing Christian identified was to be taken at face value and written down. And, if that was not enough, trained supervisors

combed the receiving area during the event to ensure compliance, removing anyone who ventured off-script.

## CONTRIBUTIONS MADE

Church documents indicate there are three “audiences” associated with our new evangelization efforts: ourselves (as we are always in need of further conversion), our Catholic brothers and sisters who have grown tepid in their faith, and the broader culture which is neutral at best and often antagonistic towards Christianity. With Bishop Ricken’s foresight, we were able to work as evangelizers with all three audiences.

First, those of us who participated with the BGEA had several opportunities to deepen our own faith. For example, after attending the evangelization training sessions, area Catholics met and discussed what we’d learned and in what

ways Catholic evangelization is similar to and differs from the Protestant approach. Similarly, any Catholic attending the festival could wear a free t-shirt that said “Catholic Christian” on the front and “Jesus is my Lord and Savior” on the back, offering both a silent witness and a tangible opening to discuss faith matters with other attendees. Facilitating Catholic involvement with this event convinces me that when we

open ourselves to doing the “work” of evangelization, we find ourselves deeply evangelized in return.

The broader culture was also impacted by Catholic participation in the Franklin Graham Festival. For example, at leadership meetings, pastors of other denominations often had spirited conversations with me about why Catholics were involved with this festival and whether or not they thought it was a good idea. Similarly, I participated in several sacred conversations with the BGEA festival director for Green Bay as well as with other individual Christians, grappling with an invisible line that moved from discomfort to full collaboration.

Last but not least are the Catholics who came forward and (re)committed themselves to Jesus during the Franklin Graham Festival. Of the 792 people, 108 identified themselves as Catholic. That is one in eight people who came forward

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*What did it look like for Catholics to collaborate in this updated version of a Billy Graham Crusade? What lessons did we learn?*

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during the entire weekend!! Slightly more than half of these Catholics were youth and young adults under the age of 25, with approximately ten additional Catholics for each 10-year age-group up to 75. Each adult received a phone call from a trained, active Catholic after the event. Additionally, area parishes were given the information on all of the newly (re) committed individuals who happened to live within their geographic boundary.

#### FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Of the many lessons learned, I offer three suggestions for other dioceses and parishes in locations where large ecumenical gatherings take place. First, show up! Any ecumenical event WILL have Catholics of all stripes and flavors in attendance. If we are not formally and officially present, we risk continued loss of our less active brothers and sisters, particularly our youth and young adults.

Second, develop procedures for responding and reaching out to Catholic youth identified from these events. Even with several months notice, our diocese and area parishes struggled with how to follow-up with our youth. A telephone call or text message is not effective and in-person sessions are difficult due to safe environment considerations. Parish youth

ministers and other teens are well-suited for following up, but they will need special training and specific directives that differ from any other age group.

Finally, use these events to form and evangelize active Catholics in your parish. Of the Catholic adults who came forward, virtually all of them were *already* active in some way with a parish. These adults simply did not know that Catholics commit themselves to Christ every day; every time we go to Mass, every time we pray, study, love or serve others, we re-commit ourselves to our baptismal call.

Catholics are a sacramental, ritual people. Given this, it is not too surprising that so many Catholics came forward during Franklin Graham's altar call. Wouldn't it be great if one day the Catholics coming forward and the Protestants who receive them *both* knew that this response is no more and no less than what we are called to do every day as Catholic Christians? |

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# How to Be Secular: A Call to Arms for Religious Freedom

By Jacques Berlinerblau | Reviewed by Dan Thomas



Author Jacques Berlinerblau is a secularist who believes that his approach to religious freedom has much to offer Catholics and Evangelical Christians in our discussions about religion in the public square. He gives a thorough and interesting history of the role of religious freedom in our democracy,

clarifying how Americans have reached our present situation. He believes in “secularism as a political philosophy about how the state should relate to organized religion” (53). He is not asking for separation of church and state, but rather toleration of diverse views and the choice not to espouse a particular religion.

Our founding fathers’ belief about the relationship of church and state was to avoid making a particular religious faith the religion of the federal government, thereby favoring one religion over another. Some may have desired that the individual states be able to do that, but because of the conflicts that state-supported religions had brought to Europe, they wanted no such federal religions in the United States.

For the founders to have refrained...from invoking the scriptures in which they were so culturally immersed where *absolutely nothing would have stopped them from doing so* is one of the most convincing proofs that they did not have a ‘Christian nation in mind’ (22-3).

Separationism, which was the doctrine of the Warren and Burger Supreme Courts, was not the view of most of America’s founders. Madison and Jefferson expressed Enlightenment views about the wall of separation that were “among the *least* representative of the founders” (29).

Among the more interesting ideas of this book is the author’s admission that the secularists in this country are a small minority and thus can have little impact on political decisions regarding religious freedom. Contrary to the portrait of many on the religious right, the ability of this group to change policies is severely limited. Mr. Berlinerblau believes that it is those who want to limit religious freedom who have the strongest influence in this area because the majority of the American public supports them. What this book wants to achieve is to convince religious leaders and their followers that, “The secular state must tolerate all forms of belief, *but it*

*need not tolerate all forms of action based on those beliefs*” (14). He does believe “[i]n a country with a population, history, and cultural heritage as religious as this one, complete walling off will never be achieved” (40). He doesn’t desire a total separation of religion and government.

In addition, the angry writing of people like Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and their ilk disturbs the author, both because he disagrees with their approach and because it alienates most of the American public. He admits the significance of religion for American society and its positive effects for that society.

There is an interesting and fascinating discussion of Vatican II and its contribution to the religious freedom discussion. As he says, “Whereas a student of church history might expect the document [*Gaudium et spes*] to anathematize the atheist, no such condemnations are forthcoming. Rather what follows is a sober, fair, and intro-

*Here is a book that is on the edges for the Catholic Church, but it can provide some significant food for thought.*

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spective analysis of the significance of nonbelief for Catholic thought” (100). Vatican II “reveals a type of inquisitiveness of the part of the church, a desire to understand the other” (101).

Another figure of the 1960s, Martin Luther King, Jr. has this approach to religious freedom: “The church...must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state” (99).

Here is a summary of what Berlinerblau calls “a secularish world view:

1. A critical self-questioning of religious dogma whose ultimate destination is not necessarily non-belief, but deeper comprehension of the divine;
2. A curiosity about other faiths and what they may teach us; and
3. An anti-authoritarian streak that challenges religious orthodoxy, dogma, and power” (102).

His approach to religious freedom in American is described as follows,

A secularist may be a believer or non-believer, secular and/or secularish, but always someone who rejects

religious establishment. She or he maintains that a good society is one where government permits its citizens the maximum possible degree of freedom of religion and freedom from religion while maintaining order. A secularist is flexible as to how the government may accomplish this goal and is thereby willing to consider options ranging from separatism to accommodationism (156).

Joel Barker, the futurist and a speaker at the St. Paul/Minneapolis NCCL Annual Meeting, has suggested that the best way to get in touch with the future is to look at the edges. Here is a book that is on the edges for the Catholic Church, but it can provide some significant food for thought as it wrestles with the best way to evangelize in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It may be more effective to dialogue and seek alliances rather than attack and make enemies. |

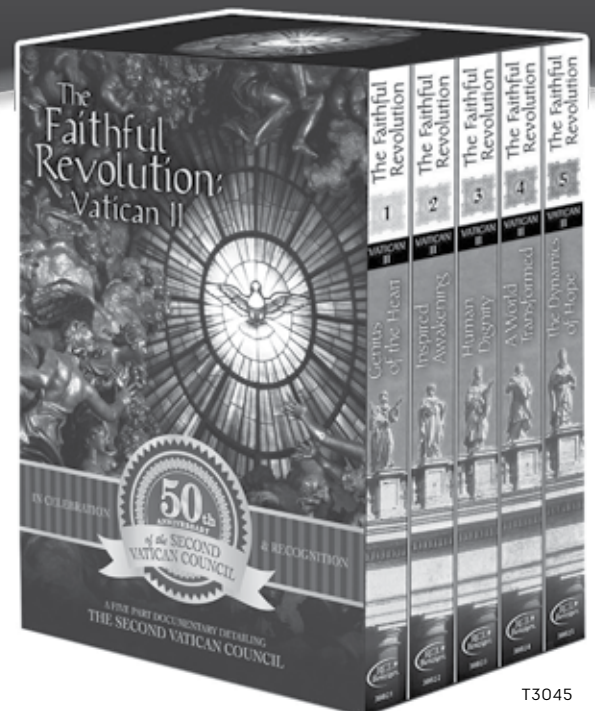
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# The Covenant on the New Continent

Claire M. McManus



There is little doubt that when archeologists reflect back on the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the smartphone will be a defining piece of our material culture. The proper use of these devices has become part of the boilerplate entries in handbooks and policy guides. While we expend so much energy on controlling the use of these devices in our programs, we may be missing the larger point that these provide the lens through which many of our young people view the world today.

This may explain why an article posted on a blog just after Christmas 2012 caused such a national commotion; Janell Hoffman, a mother of five from Cape Cod, Massachusetts, posted a contract she had written for her 13-year-old son that spelled out the rules for his new iPhone. The contract hit the airwaves and soon went viral across the nation. It was as if people didn't know that one could parent with such clarity.

## CONTRACT + LOVE = COVENANT

The fact that this mother used contract language is misleading, since the document will never withstand legal scrutiny. Her 18 rules fit better into the realm of covenant, not contract. Covenants, though similar to contracts with “this for that” language, are infused with love, not law. One need only look at the covenant that God has been making with God's people throughout history. Even though the quintessential symbol of God's covenant is the Decalogue, known to us as the Ten Commandments, these directives were words of commitment to God, not laws that can be negotiated. The Ten Commandments were written in the second person singular, as if God is saying to each person that this is between you and me, kid. These words of love have unfortunately been hijacked by legalism and transported through time as God's strict moral code, absent of emotion.

When Hoffman wrote her set of rules for living with the iPhone, she was really telling her son that she loves him enough not to allow him to harm or be harmed by this new freedom. Sound familiar? God also loves us enough to give us freedom to choose how to live our lives, but knows that with this freedom comes potential dangers that can be avoided if we follow some simple guidelines.

Technology is just one more human creation that tests our ability to either bind or destroy relationships. This may be why so many found Hoffman's contract so insightful. She gave her son some helpful rules to make his way in the world:

The iPhone does not go to school with you. Have a conversation with the people you text in person. It's a life skill; Do not use this technology to lie, fool, or deceive another human being; Do not involve yourself in conversations that are hurtful to others; Do not text, email, or say anything through this device you would not say in person; Do not text, email, or say anything to someone that you would not say out loud with their parents in the room. Censor yourself.

In other words, she reminded her son that no matter what piece of technology he holds in his power, he is in control of his relationship with others.

## THE WORLD THAT GOD CREATED FOR US TO ENJOY

God created us to reach our highest potential, not least of which is demonstrated by such human inventions as the iPhone. Even with the greatest protection we may have against outside harm, God knows that we are most vulnerable to the harm we cause to ourselves. Hoffman expressed this in 21<sup>st</sup> century terms.

Cyberspace is vast and more powerful than you. And it is hard to make anything of this magnitude disappear — including a bad reputation.

No human invention should separate us from the world that God created for us to enjoy. This is the point of Hoffman's contract with her son, and God's covenant with humanity.

Keep your eyes up. See the world happening around you. Stare out a window. Listen to the birds. Take a walk. Talk to a stranger. Wonder without googling.

Pope John Paul II once said, “It is the mission of every family to guard, reveal, and communicate love, and this is a living reflection and sharing in God's love for humanity.” The primacy of a parent's influence in the lives of their children is unparalleled. Hoffman's contract asserts this in its opening statement, “It is my phone. I bought it. I pay for it. I am loaning it to you. *Aren't I the greatest?*” Parents can rest assured that they are indeed the greatest in the eyes of their children, and they should feel empowered by what this mother did for her son. Her contract may not have been handed down from Mount Sinai, but when parental love is articulated in covenantal language, it takes on biblical proportions. ■

*Claire M. McManus, STL, is the Director of Faith Formation for the diocese of Fall River, Massachusetts.*

# The Catechetical Leader in the Third Millennium

Catherine Cornue



A breakfast conversation with Cardinal Timothy Dolan and the New York State Diocesan Directors of Religious Education (NYSD-DRE) led, two years later, to the launch of the document, *The Catechetical Leader in the Third Millennium* and its companion piece, *A Comprehensive Plan for the Formation of Catechetical Leader in the Third Millennium*, in September 2012.

At the meeting with Cardinal Dolan, he shared his concerns regarding catechesis: the importance of family catechesis, the professionalism of catechetical leaders, the centrality of Sunday Eucharist, ethnic concerns, and the issue of children no longer attending parish programs. Following up on this conversation, the diocesan directors met with their respective staffs, and in every diocese, the commitment to the church's mission of evangelization and the vital role of catechesis were affirmed.

## EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IS CRUCIAL

However, as they continued to discuss these topics, the competency and professionalism in catechetical leadership became a clear focus. Citing the *National Directory for Catechesis*, all agreed that "The single most critical factor in an effective parish catechetical program is the leadership of a professionally trained parish catechetical leader" (2). These times, and the inherent challenges faced by our parishes, led the directors to commit to develop a profile which would set forth specific competencies and skills for effective catechetical leadership.

Working in partnership with the pastors, catechetical leaders strive to lead others to a deeper relationship with Jesus and the church. To be a catechetical leader is to be a disciple of Christ. To be a catechetical leader is to take seriously the call for formation. To be a catechetical leader is to continue to grow in the competencies outlined in the USCCB's *National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministry*. To be a competent, contemporary catechetical leader calls for developing new areas of proficiency, to reflect the times in which we minister. The following five areas were discerned and developed.

## EVANGELIZATION

We are called to not only deepen our own relationship with Jesus and knowledge of the faith, but re-imagine the scope and methods of evangelizing catechesis, for all ages and all cultures, the church and unchurched.

## THE CHANGING PARISH LANDSCAPE

Pastors and catechetical leaders in merged and combined parishes are called to respect the heritage and traditions of the

parishes while leading parishioners to look beyond what has been and instead envision what could be. Building community, facilitating conversation, and cooperation and collaboration with all who are responsible for the development and implementation of new models of catechesis, are essential skills for the competent, contemporary catechetical leader.

## THE FAMILY

An awareness of changes in family structure, the effect of today's society and cultures, and the need for evangelizing catechesis are essential as we support and affirm families, the domestic church, while being sensitive to their practical needs and situations.

## CULTURAL REALITIES

The document addresses the wonderful diversity present in many parishes, and calls us to respect the various cultures, while drawing them into the larger community. In addition to the ethnic, racial, and cultural communities, we are also called to be mindful of the challenges inherent in today's American culture.

## THE RAPID DEVELOPMENT OF TECHNOLOGY

Today's catechetical leader is called to develop skills that will communicate the gospel using digital material and methods, and investigate and employ effective social media.

The closing paragraph of CLITTM states, in part, "We, the Bishops of New York State, commit ourselves to prepare today's catechetical leader for the challenges he or she faces. We agree that formation for catechetical leaders must address the challenges noted above.... We pledge our support for all diocesan efforts to address the formation of the parish catechetical leader at the local level" (7). ■

*Catherine Cornue is the Diocesan Director of Faith Formation in Syracuse, NY.*

## ONLINE RESOURCES

The Catechetical Leader in the Third Millennium: A Statement of the Catholic Bishops of New York State: [nyscatholic.org/2012/09/2001](http://nyscatholic.org/2012/09/2001)

Comprehensive Plan for the Formation of Catechetical Leader in the Third Millennium: [nyscatholic.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Millennium-leader-plan-final.pdf](http://nyscatholic.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Millennium-leader-plan-final.pdf)

National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers: [lemcertification.org/docs/ACLEM\\_Final\\_Standards\\_20111115.pdf](http://lemcertification.org/docs/ACLEM_Final_Standards_20111115.pdf) ■

# Don't Forget to Say "Thank You!"

Leisa Anslinger



It is the time of the year in which many catechetical leaders, catechists, and sacramental preparation teams look back at the seasons just concluded and ahead to the "new year" that begins in the autumn. Many have catechetical programs that are winding down (some are just gearing up for summer sessions as well); sacraments have been prepared for and received; and hopefully, gratitude has been expressed for dedication in ministry and time and talent given.

## SAYING AND ACCEPTING GRATITUDE ENGAGES PEOPLE

Our partnership with parents is particularly enriched when we express our gratitude to them for all of the ways in which they contribute to our programs and to the faith formation of their children, and when we acknowledge their thankfulness for our ministry. Our ministerial teams are also strengthened by such expressions of gratitude. The process of engaging others is much more likely to thrive when we ourselves are engaged, and that process includes having a strong sense that others recognize and appreciate our service.

Do not get me wrong! Those of us who have accepted the call to ministry are not "in it" for the pat on the back, continually expecting to be thanked for what we do. We offer our gifts in response to God's love and Christ's call to love, and so do the parents and others who contribute selflessly to our programs. Yet, knowing that we are part of an endeavor that is much bigger than ourselves is enhanced when built upon strong relationships. Those relationships are strengthened when every person knows that his or her contributions are of value. Knowing this is only possible when someone says "thank you!" It's as simple as that. So, no, we do not do what we do in order for others to recognize our service, and yet, receiving the gratitude of others helps us to be engaged in the process of ministry. And recognizing the contributions of others more deeply engages them in the ministry we share.

With these things in mind, let us think about the many reasons we have to be thankful for the parents with whom we partner, and how we might express that gratitude to them as another catechetical season draws to a close.

## WHY THANK PARENTS?

When I served as a catechetical leader, and now as a visitor in parishes throughout the U.S., I usually begin gatherings with parents by thanking them for their presence. Many

initially seem puzzled, and I have had parents later tell me, "I wondered what you were doing at first when you began by thanking us. I thought to myself, 'Doesn't she realize we are here because we were told we had to be?' But then I realized you were talking about something bigger than just this one night." We all know that being a parent is a full-time, lifelong vocation. We also know that parenting can be one of the most thankless of tasks, particularly when children are maturing, testing limits, and striving for independence. Expressing our gratitude to parents for all they are doing to fulfill their vocation as the primary influence in faith development of their children affirms their presence and commitment within their homes as well as at the parish.

Saying "thank you" can build a bond with parents that has far-reaching implications! When we create an environment in which we regularly thank people for their presence, service, and sharing with one another, we are building a community in which people will turn to one another and to us with their needs. This is how we develop true community, in which we experience communion with God and with one another.

## FOR WHAT ARE YOU THANKFUL?

Take a few moments to reflect on all with whom and to whom you minister. Offer a litany of gratitude for their presence, partnership in ministry, and genuine care. Here is a beginning:

- For parents who put God first in their lives and the life of their family;
- For parents who are dedicated to the faith development of their children;
- For those whose faith is weak;
- For parents whose life situations are complicated;
- For those who yearn for peace and security;
- For parents who serve in our programs as catechists, aides, and partners;
- For the people with whom we serve;
- For those who give their time and attention selflessly;
- For those who call us to live the gospel;
- For these, and all whose lives and love touch our own, we give thanks, good and gracious God. We commend them and all to your care this day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. |

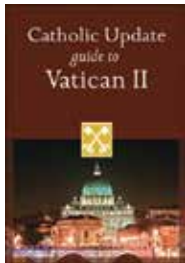
*Leisa Anslinger is the director of Catholic Life & Faith, an online resource for helping leaders engage real people in real faith, catholiclifeandfaith.net. Contact her at leisaanslinger@gmail.com.*

## Books, websites, and media for the enrichment of the parish catechetical leader

Compiled by Dan Pierson

**Catholic Update Guides...**

Many topics from the monthly *Catholic Update* newsletter (Franciscan Media) now appear in small book format, *Catholic Update Guides*. Mary Carol Kendzia, series editor, selects materials by popular authors from bestselling issues to create 54-page books (5 x 7 inch format). Each book contains questions for reflection.



These books are excellent for catechist education and certification and can be used for a parish book discussion on specific topics.

Titles in the series include *Marriage*, *Baptism*, *Communion*, *Confirmation*, *Faithful Citizenship*, *Confession*, *The Mass*, *Sacraments of Healing*, *Vocations*, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and *Vatican II*.

**New Testament for Everyone**

Tom Wright (N. T. Wright) is an Anglican bishop and a leading New Testament scholar.

Tom Wright provides guides to all the books of the New Testament and includes in them his own translation of the entire text. Each brief passage is followed by a highly readable discussion with background information, useful explanations and suggestions, and thoughts as to how the text can be relevant to our lives today. A glossary is included at the back of the book.

The series is suitable for group study, personal study, or daily devotions.

The books are available from WJK (Westminster John Knox Press) as an entire series of 18 books, a six-volume gospel set, and as individual books.

Steve Mueller, Biblical scholar, teacher, and author states,

Wright's books would be extremely useful for catechists and especially for homilists not only for the gold mine of biblical knowledge they provide, but also for their example of how to connect the scriptural message with everyday life. For those who want to grow both in their knowledge of the New Testament writings and in their ability to make connections between these writings and our everyday lives Wright provides a wonderful example of how to achieve the fundamental task of all Scripture scholarship. First, to understand not only what the biblical texts *meant* to their original first century audiences, but then to understand what they *mean* for us today by applying them to our lives.

In this series, then, through his fresh and vibrant new translation, his rich and intelligent explanatory exegesis and his keen and insightful application of the Scripture message to everyday life, Wright adroitly achieves his goal of making available the *New Testament for Everyone*.

**Steve Mueller, PhD**, author of *The Seeker's Guide to Reading the Bible: A Catholic View* (Loyola Press, 1999) and *The Seeker's Guide to Jesus in the Gospels* (Loyola Press: 2001), has taught Scripture, theology and philosophy to college students and helped develop and teach in the renowned Denver Catholic Biblical School program for adult laity.

He is the editor of *Words of Grace* (All Saints Press), a new quarterly booklet of daily reflections and prayers for Catholics that connects the daily Scripture readings from the Mass with the treasury of wisdom found in the church's rich spiritual tradition.

His most recent books, *Reading Your Bible: The Journey that Will Change Your Life* and *Reassuring Visions: How to Read John's Book of Revelation Today* are published in PDF by [faithAlivebooks.com](http://faithAlivebooks.com) and [eCatechist](http://eCatechist.com).

**New and Forthcoming**

*Genius Born of Anguish: The Life and Legacy of Henri Nouwen* by Michael W. Higgins and Kevin Burns (Paulist Press).

*Ten: How the Commandments Can Change Your Life* by Mary Elizabeth Sperry (Franciscan Media).

*Green Leaves for Later Years* by Emille Griffin (InterVarsity Press).

*The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity* by Robert Louis Wilken (Yale University Press).

*The Province of Joy: Praying with Flannery O'Connor* by Angela Alaimo O'Donnell (Paraclete Press).

*Saved by Beauty: A Spiritual Journey with Dorothy Day* by Brother Michael O'Neill McGrath (World Library Publications).

*Isaiah and the Kingdom of Peace* by Alice Camille (ACTA Publications).

*The Monastery of the Heart: An Invitation to a Meaningful Life* by Joan Chittister (Bluebridge).

*The Story Revealed: Homilies that Sustain, Inspire and Engage* by Fr. Bill Bausch (Twenty-Third Publications).

*Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers* by Anne Lamott (Riverhead Books). ■

**Dan Pierson** served as director of religious education for the Diocese of Grand Rapids for 17 years and is the founder of [faithAlivebooks.com](http://faithAlivebooks.com) and [eCatechist.com](http://eCatechist.com). He is co-author with Susan Stark of *What Do I Do Now? A Guide for the Reluctant Catechist* (Pflaum Publishing). Please send suggestions and recommendations to [pierson.dj@gmail.com](mailto:pierson.dj@gmail.com).

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