

# c | CATECHETICAL LEADER



Ten to Live By  
Thou Shalt Not VI

The Relevance  
of the Ten Commandments  
in a Modern World

## REVISITING THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

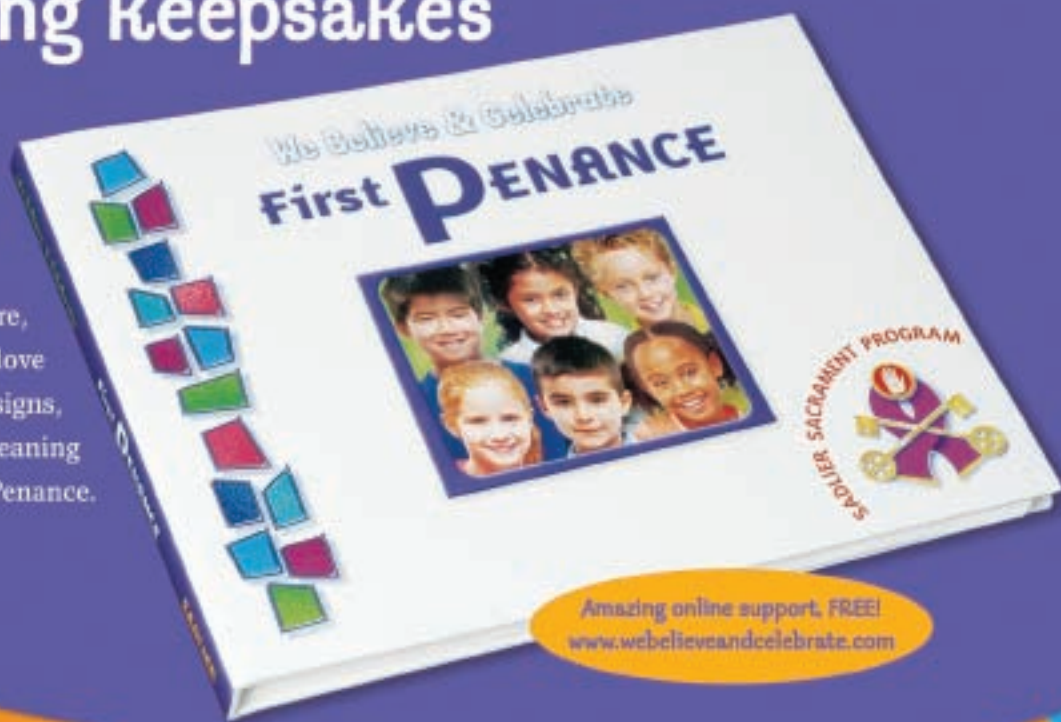
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# FRUITS OF NOVEMBER'S REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL MEETING

Mary Ann Ronan



In preparation for the Representative Council Meeting in November, I looked at the bylaws that list the responsibilities of the Board and I re-examined what we wrote in *Catechetical Leader* in March of 2006 prior to the election in May.

We the Board have been energized by the dedication, energy and time the Council has invested in their work. The Council has reviewed its role in the governance model of NCCL — they set a new direction in the fall of '06 and began to put it into practice in April and November '07. Because the Council changes membership every three years it has been difficult to maintain a clear focus and keep the Council moving forward with their work. I have to compliment the new members in their dedication to review the Bylaws and keep up to date, living up to their role and obligations:

- to articulate the values that drive the Council
- to represent the membership constituencies of the conference (diocesan directors, diocesan staffs, and parish catechetical leaders)
- to serve as a consultative body to and for the Board of Directors
- to elect the at-large members of the Board of Directors
- to exercise those responsibilities established for it in Conference policy

The Council has been diligent in taking their work to the province level and engaging the members. Every province is unique in its membership and how it does business, but the province leaders are bringing the issues to the Representative Council. We recognize that not all provinces have all membership constituencies represented but we are working toward that ideal.

The three forums are also active and trying to assist their membership at our Annual Professional Development Conference. Each forum is working to bring a first-class speaker to Houston. Our '09 conference will have quality time for forums to gather for critical updating for their constituencies.

The Representative Council also elects the at-large members. We will have an election this spring. Members of the Leadership Discernment Committee are Joseph Swiss (Chair) and Forum Leaders: Maribeth Mancini (DD), Carolyn Saucier (DS) and April Dietrich (PCL). At the November meeting, they led us in a prayerful discernment and the Council has brought forth names of many persons to possibly serve on the Board. This is a critical piece of work by the Council in preparation for our meeting in April. Please keep this discernment of leadership in your prayers.

Conference committees are key to NCCL. Committees carry out the work and mission of the Conference. It is one way we are member driven as a conference. Currently we have active Membership, Communication, Standards and Certification, Adult Faith Formation, Catechist Formation (Beyond Echoes), Theoretical Foundations for Catechesis in the U.S., Catechist Formation (Echoes), Bylaws and Policy Review, Rural Catechesis, Annual Meeting for Houston. We have two committees looking for chairs: Technology and Publications. As president I appoint the chairs of committees. I invite you to look at committee work as an opportunity to use your talents as a member of NCCL. Go to [www.nccl.org](http://www.nccl.org) to contact a chair and offer your talents.

**Sixteen months ago we challenged ourselves and you to do the following:**

- Review Board policies and strategic directions in the light of mission so they are properly chosen, justified financially and have well targeted results that can be realized and evaluated. *We are close to this reality and are asking the Bylaws and policy review committee to do some work in this area.*
- Collaborate with episcopal leadership. *The NCCL Board has been collaborating with bishops on many levels. This is your role on the diocesan level as well.*
- Maximize the role of the Representative Council. *This is ongoing but there is a richness now in our Council collaboration with the Board.*
- Continue the NCCL/NCEA Dialogue. *We have engaged each other on the board and the executive level and on design proposal. We are collaborative on all levels.*
- View all communication as a means of enhancing mission. *Minutes to the Council are timely and collaborative; the Executive Director was asked to evaluate web page and improve communication where needed.*
- Recruit new members, especially the young. *The Membership Committee has developed a new brochure for students; we have fifty-six new members.*

**There are two areas that still need work:**

- Commit to excellence of personnel, advocacy and resources at the local and national level.
- Partner with other disciplines such as liturgy, justice, and pastoral and family ministry as well as business, anthropology, and psychology because working with them enhances catechesis.

I am in awe of each member of the Representative Council as they represent you, our members through the dedication, time and energy they give to NCCL. It is hard work we do, enhanced by prayer and faith sharing, that keeps the Reign of God alive and well. Catechesis is richer and so are we as disciples of Jesus. ■

# BLESSINGS TO YOU IN 2008

Leland Nagel



This year promises to be one full of adventure and promise. The big news broke at the Bishops meeting in November. The pope is coming to the United States. Pope Benedict XVI will meet the president, make a pilgrimage to Ground Zero, offer two public Masses and address the United Nations. This is his first visit to the United States as pontiff. He will speak to us and he will speak to the world. It is a good reminder that not only is the church universal but all us are citizens of the world along with being citizens of the United States.

This papal trip, the first to this country since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, follows closely on the heels of our Houston conference where Vatican correspondent John Allen will address the topic of his latest book, *Mega-Trends in Catholicism: Ten Forces Turning the Catholic Church Upside Down*. We recognize things are not the same and we can't go back. The question of how we go forward is at the heart of our conference in Houston.

This is a year when collaboration will be at the forefront of our work. Members of our Standards and Certification Committee will undertake a review of the National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers along with representatives from NFCYM, NALM, and NPM. This partnership finds its roots in the last century. As of this writing, FDLC hopes to join our foursome, commonly known as the "Alliance."

Joe Swiss and I serve on the Standards Revision Task Group. Simultaneously, another body, the Alliance Task Group on the National Certification Process, representing these associations will work to create "ways" in which these standards can be assessed and competencies verified. Carol Jadach and Ken Gleason are our representatives.

We are part of a national collaborative enterprise focused on promoting a comprehensive and contemporary vision of adolescent catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church. The three national organizations comprising the Partnership for Adolescent Catechesis are the:

- National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM)
- National Conference for Catechetical Leadership (NCCL)
- National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA).
- Additional support is provided by representatives from the USCCB (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops).

The Partnership for Adolescent Catechesis (PAC) has received two grants totaling \$525,000 to implement a National Initiative on Adolescent Catechesis, a comprehensive seven-year, six-step process designed to explore how Catholic teens can more effectively be

formed in their faith. PAC will host an invitation-only National Symposium on Adolescent Catechesis this November as part of the National Initiative. The event is designed to create a think-tank setting where national, diocesan, parish and Catholic school leaders and practitioners will gather with bishops, publishers and academicians to critically examine what is and is not working in the current system of adolescent faith formation. Participants will be asked to address the question, "*What is necessary for effective adolescent catechesis in the Catholic Church given the current and emerging environments in the United States?*"

Our Committee on Adult Faith Formation has been given authorization and budgetary approval to initiate an E-Journal. The committee believes that the agenda of adult faith formation could be advanced more robustly by means of a sustained, ongoing conversation between and among parish practitioners, academics, and diocesan staff members. The vision of the committee is that the E-journal will serve as a dynamic vehicle for advancing one of the Board's Ends Policies, "*NCCL members will be outstanding practitioners of the Church's mission of the centrality of adult faith formation in catechetical ministry.*" The search for an editor is currently underway.

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## *This is a year when collaboration will be at the forefront of our work.*

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Starting July 2, members began receiving my Monday Morning Greetings. I have managed to communicate with our members on a weekly basis for the last 27 weeks of 2007. Some have found these thoughts too long, others feel they are too reflective without enough business or substance. There has also been support and appreciation for the regular contact. I admit that sometimes I got carried away and what started out as three pages became five. In 2008, I hope to introduce more association news. At least once a month one of our committees will be featured. The News Bulletin will appear first, followed by the Greeting. As always, your feedback is appreciated.

As we begin this journey, let us remember the words of Neal A. Maxwell, "It is extremely important that you believe in yourselves not only for what you are now but for what you have the power to become. Trust in the Lord as He leads you along. He has things for you to do that you won't know about now but that will unfold later. If you stay close to Him, you will have some great adventures." What is the promise found in these adventures? What is the result of all this hard work? What are the fruits we will bear? The answer is found in Galatians 5:22, "*...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*" |

# The Commandments in the Language of Our Time

by David Loftus

Among a group of people gathered recently for an evening's sharing and conversation on the theme of sin and reconciliation were a number of young adults who are journeying through the RCIA process. They were absolutely fascinated with the ideas of sin, reconciliation, confession, and — naturally enough — the prospect of celebrating sacramental reconciliation for the first time. One asked the innocuous question, "What do I confess?" Another participant in the conversation offered "your sins . . . of course." But with a simplicity to readily challenge any "lifer," the question came back "How do I know what's really a sin?" One of the "lifers" in another part of the room suggested that if the young adult knew their commandments they wouldn't have to ask such a question. I was immediately reminded of the many times I have heard the lament "if they only knew their commandments . . ." And as every catechist worth their proverbial salt well knows, if it was really that simple . . . As this young adult challenges us to consider that knowing the Ten Commandments may not actually be enough to sustain us in the living of the Christian life, how might we begin to consider the Ten Commandments from a fresh perspective?

How might we better articulate the truths communicated in this ancient codex, such that they might be more readily appropriated for a discerning and questioning people of faith in our age?

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us

of another young adult who approached Jesus with the question: "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" The initial response of the Savior which encouraged the young adult to observe the commandments did not satisfy, and Jesus puts before the young person — and before us — the idea that living the commandments brings us to a life of discipleship that costs us dearly. "Knowing" the commandments is obviously not as simple as it first seems. From at least as far back as Augustine the commandments have held unmatched significance in the catechesis of baptismal candidates precisely because the cost of discipleship that is exacted by life in Christ requires a more explicit articulation of the truths revealed in the Decalogue.

Ours is an age of questioning everything. We teach our children to question. We value questions for ourselves. It would be disingenuous of us to say "Everything deserves scrutiny,

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*We need to be able to articulate the eternal truths they convey in the language of our time*

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but when it comes to the *Ten Commandments* (fill-in-the-blank), you may not question!" Such an argument lacks credibility. For those in catechetical ministry, we must articulate arguments we may not have had to articulate in our recent past. The *National Directory for Catechesis* itself acknowledges that the way things were is no longer the way things are. Prin-



ciples once so strongly articulated within the culture concerning the dignity of the human person are persistently being called into question, and even abrogated. Nothing can be taken for granted any more, especially as adults increasingly ask adult questions and expect adult answers. I am not suggesting here that the Ten Commandments are a matter of discerning opinion, but rather that we need to be able to articulate the eternal truths they convey in the language of our time, and in a manner that demonstrates the reasonableness of the divinely revealed truths.

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*To ask questions is not to challenge the truth the commandments present to us, but rather is to engage the truth.*

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The traditional formulae of the commandments derive from both Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. The traditional name for this codex is commandment, but may also be translated as “word.” The “Ten Commandments” or the “Decalogue” are proposed to us as the Ten Words of God for Life.

## FIRST

● In the church’s traditional enumeration of these words, the first attests to the reality and primacy of God.

It echoes the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6 (referred to by Jesus when asked about the greatest commandment), and defines the nature of God (One) as well as the relationship between God and God’s people. This first commandment calls us to a life in which we express who our God is for us, and who we are as believers, in terms of adoration, praise, and worship. In this commandment, God is affirmed as Creator and we as created. We are called to a clear articulation of God as God and the human person as **imago Dei** not only in our churches but also in our workplaces, our homes, and in every aspect of our lives. How might our lives look different if we were to keep God first and foremost in our sights throughout the course of our every waking day?

## SECOND

● Closely linked to the first, the second com-

mandment is a caution to avoid abuse of the Lord’s name. It concerns conduct among ourselves before God. We avoid misuse of God’s name — in oath-taking, in promises, in blasphemy — because when we invoke the name of God we enter into a statement of who God is for us, and if we break our promise, or perjure ourselves, or flippantly abuse the divine name, we can all too easily make God out to be a liar and/or unfaithful. This contradicts God’s own nature, revealing an inconsistency of belief and practice which can cause people to turn away from the God so abused by those who profess belief in His name. God is always faithful to the divine promises. God is Truth. To cause anyone to doubt this, or to repudiate this, is a grievous affront to both humanity and God. How well do we witness to a consistency of holiness, truth, beauty in our lives?

## THIRD

● Recalling the creation narrative, the third commandment attests to the liberating power of God freeing

people from the slavery life sometimes imposes. Deuteronomy 5 affirms the observance of the day of rest as a witness to God’s saving power. For the Christian, the observance is not of Shabbat but of the Lord’s Day, and as such it takes on added significance. This day, the first of our week, commemorates the first day of the New Creation when Jesus was raised from the dead revealing to us the life to which we are called by the Father. This is the day when we gather with others who believe as we do, to celebrate our collective salvation, to encourage one another on the way, and to draw support for ourselves should we find ourselves wearied along the path. Sunday is that day when Christians get together with other Christians to celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord. It is a celebration of utterly abundant grace poured out in our lives. As the *NDC* reminds us, it is proper for believers to rest and reflect on such goodness of God in our lives, and to enjoy that goodness in our “familial, cultural, social and religious lives.” How well do we celebrate and attest to God’s saving power unfolding in our own lives and in the lives of those around us?

*continued on page 6*

Luke's Gospel reminds us that our relationship with God and our relationship with our neighbor are inseparable. In the preamble to the parable of the Good Samaritan Jesus affirms the observation of the lawyer that to inherit eternal life one must "Love the Lord your God . . . and your neighbor as yourself."

## FOURTH

● The fourth commandment concerns our participation in the relationships with our family. Honor, affection and gratitude are appropriate values to be expressed between and among kin. These values are particularly appropriate when they are expressed toward our elders. However, the values are also to be fostered beyond the boundaries of our blood relationships, to those relationships with others in our lives who mentor us, who exercise a care for us, who enter into covenant with us for our good, both individual and communal. This commandment seems to concern the quality of our relationships not only within our blood family, but also those relationships we enjoy in a broader society — with civil authorities and structures, with fellow citizens, with church authorities and structures, and with fellow believers. What is the quality of our relationships with family, friends, those with the responsibilities of authority in our lives, etc? How do we foster and nurture these relationships? How do we avoid simply tearing down and rather engage in building-up quality relationships?

## FIFTH

● Human life is sacred, and is not simply to be respected. Life is God's own gift to us, and in it rests the human yearning for the divine. When we listen to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, we find the fifth commandment is not only a proscription against the taking of life, but also against anger, hatred and revenge. Jesus admonishes his followers to "turn the other cheek." This statement seems offensive to our modern sensibilities, and directly challenges us in our society. In a world in which people are killed as a deterrent to killing, in a world in which human life can be too easily reduced to the nature of 'thing' and consequently becomes as disposable as every other 'thing' in our world, in a world in which some seek to justify horrors against humanity, this commandment is under blatant assault. When the fundamental principle of

the sacredness of life is compromised, small wonder we are left scrambling to grasp complex questions concerning the right to life, euthanasia, suicide, cloning, stem-cell research, etc. How consistent are we in living from the principle that human life is sacred and in promoting the consequent dignity of every human person?

## SIXTH

● In no other area of church teaching has the voice of the church been sidelined as much as it has in matters concerning human sexuality. In our (post-) modern society one is almost expected to be dismissive of anything the church has to say about sex and/or sexual relationships. The reasons for this are many and complex, but without attending to the sixth commandment, we risk losing the truth of relationality expressed there. The value of chastity as the integration of a person's physical, sexual, mental and spiritual being is hugely important in a context where sex and sexuality (read person and being) are trafficked in the marketplace. In a world in which relationships are disposable and the idea of covenant for life is the choice and reality for a shrinking minority, this commandment has huge significance for us. The awesome power of our sexual nature, with all its subtleties and complexities, calls for a renewed openness to the wisdom of the lived experience of God's people through the ages. This commandment is about human identity, integrity and integration. How willing are we to engage the tradition of the church to glean from its experience and insight to further develop and grow our own integrity as sexual beings in the world?

## SEVENTH

● The seventh commandment calls us to justice and charity towards others with respect to goods and possessions. Theft is clearly understood in terms of taking goods, possessions or time from another against their will. Abiding by this commandment is to grow in respect of others, their property and the fruits of their labor as well as to grow in what is increasingly well known as the social teaching of the church. This commandment articulates a relationship between personal and social morality. It also serves to preserve the dignity of the human person and the responsibilities we enjoy in our rela-



tionships with one another in terms of goods and possessions, all of which are given for the good of all. How clear are we in our understanding of how theft harms and debilitates people and societies?

## EIGHTH

● In the eighth commandment we are enjoined again from theft, but in this instance

of a person's good name. More than this, however, the eighth commandment commands us to avoid abuse of truth. To offend against truth is to offend against God who is True. To this end, we avoid lying, false witness against our neighbors, detraction of another, and gossip. This commandment reminds us that when one lies, one deprives another of truth which is necessary for good judgment and good decision-making. Lying has a social dimension and is actually harmful to others as well as self. Beyond avoiding untruth, we are motivated to bear witness to truth. As we expect others to respect truth, freedom and justice, how do we uphold and live that same expectation in our relationships with others?

## NINTH

● The ninth commandment returns us to the theme of purity of heart. It admonishes against concupiscence,

that is, against any intense form of human desire. Desires within us can run extremely deep and are foolishly ignored. Once again, integration of the person is lifted up as a most worthwhile value, and is considered in terms of virtue, chastity, intention, and modesty. While lust can drive us toward the illusory and unreal in our life, purity of heart moves us toward the reality of God in our lives. How open are we to confronting lust in our own lives, and to acknowledging the harm it causes?

## TENTH

● While the ninth commandment admonishes against fornication, in the tenth the admonition is against

avarice, or lust after goods. In both instances, lust is recognized as disordering our desire for the divine. Envy of another is understood to be debilitating of the human condition, as it creates disorder in our relationships with others and with God. True happiness and fulfillment is not to be found in the things of the world, another's or our own, but in a detachment

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*We are called to live lives of integrity marked by right relationship.*

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from the things of this world. How open are we to confronting envy in our own lives, and to acknowledging the harm it causes?

### FACING UP TO THE QUESTIONS

Revisiting the Ten Commandments calls us to articulate their values as they are embodied in our lives, and to face up to the questions and longings they raise within us. To ask questions is not to challenge the truth the commandments present to us, but rather is to engage the truth, to wrestle with it and to be shaped by it in our own lives. Whether or not our (young) adult believers can recite the list is of less import than whether or not our (young) adult believers are challenged enough by the truths they hold, such that lives are more deeply conformed to the life of Christ. Life in Christ is more than a list of "do's and don't," as we are reminded in the *NDC*, and involves integration of the person with Christ. When Jesus places before us the Beatitudes, we are faced with responding to his invitation to live the Decalogue with transformed hearts and minds, with renewed spirit and uplifted soul. In any revisiting of the commandments, our hearts must be stirred, our spirits enlivened, our minds lifted up and our souls ennobled. The Beatitudes, with their prescriptive rather than proscriptive sense, call us to Christ's own vision of a revisited Decalogue in which we come to choose a life fully engaging what it means to be human — indeed the best of what it means to be human. We are called to live lives of integrity marked by right relationship. Responding to the questions of our lives which seek answers characterized by truth and meaning, we find ourselves invited to living the Beatitudes of the Reign of God, to living the truest vocation of our hearts, to becoming the very best of ourselves to which we are called by God's grace. ■

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# Commandments in the Spirit of the Gospel

by Richard J. Malone

Unconditional acceptance of the Decalogue is expected of Christians as it was of the people of Israel.



During a recent visit to a sixth grade catechetical session, I was treated to an enthusiastic group recitation of the Ten Commandments. The children were proud of their precise, unfaltering performance, and I applauded them for committing the commandments to memory (more on memory later). When I asked them why the commandments were so important that they should be memorized, the hands shot up. “Anybody should be able to see that the commandments show us the right way to live.” “If everyone obeyed them, the world would be a better place.” “God gave them to us, so we’d better follow them.” “Jesus said that both the commandments and the beatitudes are the law for his disciples.”

## BEDROCK OF DISCIPLESHIP

Needless to say, I was delighted with the children’s knowledge of the Decalogue and their basic appreciation of its significance. As I left the room, I hoped that their future catechists, as well as their parents, would reinforce and deepen the children’s understanding of the commandments, and help them to form their consciences in light of the divine law — in the spirit, of course, of the whole Gospel message. It also occurred to me that the children’s fresh knowledge of the commandments might make its way home with them and prod some of their parents to “revisit” the Decalogue themselves, reflecting on its meaning for their own moral questions.

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*In the face of relativism, our responsibility takes on new urgency.*

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Pope John Paul II in 1993 published *Veritatis Splendor* (*The Splendor of Truth*). This encyclical addressed certain questions regarding Catholic moral teaching on the basis of principles drawn from sacred Scripture and the apostolic tradition. The first chapter begins with Jesus’ dialogue with the rich young man who approached Jesus with the question, “Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?” Jesus answered, “If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” While the Lord would invite the young man to go beyond the observance of the Decalogue in his pursuit of perfection by selling his possessions, giving the pro-

ceeds to the poor, and following Jesus, the Lord’s response to the young man makes clear the centrality of the Decalogue. In his direct answer, John Paul II writes, “Jesus points out to the young man that the commandments are the first and indispensable condition for having eternal life” (VS, 17).

The Lord’s confirmation of the permanent validity and authority of the Ten Commandments establishes the observance of the Decalogue as the bedrock of authentic discipleship living. Unconditional acceptance of the Decalogue is expected of Christians as it was of the people of Israel. Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad wrote, “In the Old Testament as in the New, the offer of salvation confronted those to whom it was made with the question of obedience. That refusal to accept the commandments brought the curse of Yahweh in its train, Israel said many times and in many ways” (*Old Testament Theology, I*, 196).

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, in a homily to the College of Cardinals on April 18, 2005, the day before his election to the papacy, issued a warning about the danger of relativism. “We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of [satisfying] one’s own ego and desires.” Relativism is a characteristic of the post-modern mindset that has affected the thinking of at least two generations and is, simply stated, a cluster of assumptions that hold that there are no absolute truths, no definite rights and wrongs. In the relativist way of thinking, an act is good only if “I decide” that it is good, bad only if “I decide” that it is bad. “My opinion” reigns supreme. It is easy to see that truth itself is at stake.

## RELATIVISM

The relativistic thinking to which the cardinal referred is familiar to catechists, youth and campus ministers, theology and philosophy professors. Perhaps you are leading a discussion about Catholic moral teachings with a group of teens or young adults and the topic of sexual intercourse outside of marriage comes up. You articulate the classic Catholic teaching that sexual intercourse is a beautiful gift of God that finds its proper and exclusive expression only within the marriage covenant. You point out that sexual intercourse outside of marriage is fornication, a grave violation of the sixth commandment and always wrong. This teaching reflects the principle that “there are some concrete acts — such as fornication — that it is always wrong to choose, because choosing them entails a disorder of the will, that is, a moral evil” (CCC, 1755).

Relativism raises its ugly head when the immediate retort is, “But that’s only your opinion. It’s not wrong if you and your boyfriend are truly in love, and you both agree that having sex is right for you.” Replace fornication with abortion or any number of other contemporary moral challenges, and the relativistic mindset will again and again manifest itself. Saint Paul provided a classic description of what we now call relativism when he warned the Christian community at Ephesus lest they be “...tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine that originates in human trickery and skill in proposing error” (Eph. 4:14). In the face of the challenge of relativism, our perennial responsibility as catechetical ministers to form our people to attend to God’s will in their lives takes on new urgency.

## NATURAL AND MORAL LAW

Against the truth-denying force of relativism stand the God-given natural and revealed moral laws. We have access to the Ten Commandments through both human reason and divine revelation. Saint Irenaeus of Lyons summarized it well: “From the beginning, God has implanted in the heart of man the precepts of the natural law. Then he was content to remind him of them. This was the Decalogue” (Adv. Haere. 4, 15, 1).

That sixth grader was referring to the natural moral law when he said that “anybody should be able to see that the commandments shows us the right way to live.” The natural law is written in our hearts by our Creator. Saint Thomas Aquinas defined the natural law as “nothing other than the light of understanding placed in us by God; through it, we know what we must do and what we must avoid” (Dec. praec. I). Natural law, knowable by natural reason, is universal, immutable, and always valid. We know it through the voice of conscience.

The natural law provides a foundation for the revealed law — the law of Moses, including the Decalogue, and the law of the Gospel, which completes and perfects it. “The Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, far from abolishing or devaluing the prescriptions of the Old Law, releases their hidden potential and has new demands arise from them; it reveals their entire divine and human truth” (CCC, 1968). These new demands are apparent in, for example, Jesus’ extension of the obligations of the fifth commandment: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not kill’...But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment” (Mt 5:21-22).

The sixth grader who noted that Jesus required his disciples to follow both the commandments and the beatitudes was correct. The third part of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “Life in Christ,” begins not with the commandments, but with an article entitled “Our Vocation to Beatitude.” After noting that “the beati-

tudes are at the heart of Jesus’ preaching” (CCC, 1716), the *Catechism* then goes on to give a lengthy (115 pages) exposition of the Ten Commandments, presented within the context of the entire Gospel and the constant tradition of the Church, and addressing many contemporary issues. As John Paul II wrote in *Veritatis Splendor*, “...there is no separation or opposition between the beatitudes and the commandments: both refer to the good, to eternal life...” (VS, 16).

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## Pope John Paul II compellingly extolled the importance of “learning by heart.”

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I remember studying in one of my seminary Old Testament courses the similarity of the Decalogue with other ancient Near Eastern collections of law, the Code of Hammurabi in particular. While parallels exist between Israelite law and the legal traditions of Israel’s neighbors (e.g. the Canaanites), the critical point for catechesis is that the Decalogue, attributed as it is to Moses, was accepted by the people of Israel as revealed by God as the terms of the Sinai Covenant. To obey the commandments was to honor the covenant relationship God had established with his people following their liberation. The Decalogue paves the road to freedom that began with the exodus from Egypt and continues for Christians through the paschal mystery.

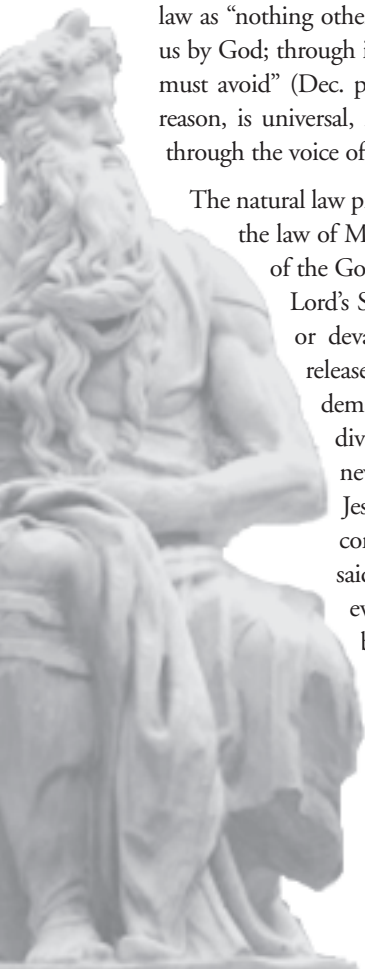
## CATECHESIS ON THE DECALOGUE

The *National Directory for Catechesis* is very clear in the importance it gives to catechesis on the Decalogue. “Those being catechized not only should know the Ten Commandments and the beatitudes by heart but should also understand how the spirit of the beatitudes permeates the Decalogue” (44). The *Directory* offers specific guidelines for this catechesis. I offer two examples here in summary form, and invite you to study the *Directory’s* complete treatment in pages 173-184.

The First Commandment: I, the Lord, am your God. You shall not have other gods besides me. Catechesis on the first commandment arouses belief and hope in God, and invites believers to love God above everyone and everything else. This catechesis helps those being catechized to reflect on the evidence of reason and faith for belief in a loving God, and to know that they have been invited into a relationship with God that is expressed in worship and adoration. This catechesis also teaches that idolatry is still a temptation to be avoided. In a nation caught up in consumerism, we need to hear again the admonition about not “divinizing what is not God, such as power, pleasure money, success, and so forth” (NDC, 173).

The Fifth Commandment: You shall not kill. Catechesis on the fifth commandment teaches the reasons for respect for the sacred-

*continued on page 17*



# Adult Faith Formation and the GDC: Ten Years Later

by Jane Regan

Core themes from the GDC provide a framework for our response to our present socio-cultural context and give insight into how we bring content of faith and principles of catechesis together effectively for this generation of adult believers.

It has been ten years this January since the publication of the *General Directory for Catechesis (GDC)* in the United States. Issued by the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy in August 1997, the *GDC* stands as another marker in the history of religious education and as an important resource for those who have the responsibility for strengthening and deepening the faith of today's believers. From the perspective of adult faith formation, the *GDC* articulates some key themes and perspectives that have served to ground the multiple expressions of on-going, community-wide catechesis coming to fruit in our parishes and dioceses. This essay is an invitation for catechetical leaders to take another look at the *GDC*, situate it within our contemporary social and ecclesial context, and imagine the challenges and possibilities that lay ahead as we look to the future of adult catechesis in the United States.

## SETTING THE GDC IN CONTEXT

Essential to accurately and effectively reading any document — church or otherwise — is an awareness of the multiple contexts that define the writing of the document and its reception at the time of original circulation. For the *GDC*, this involves naming its provenance as a Roman document, intended for the universal church, and a directory, a genre of documents that in catechetical circles came to the fore during Vatican Council II. Although this history has been recounted in more detail elsewhere (see Horan and Regan 1998; Regan 1999), two points are particularly important to our appreciation for and interpretation of the *GDC* today.

First, at the time of the preparatory meetings for Vatican Council II, those involved in catechesis recommended the formulation of a directory rather than a universal catechism, the later being

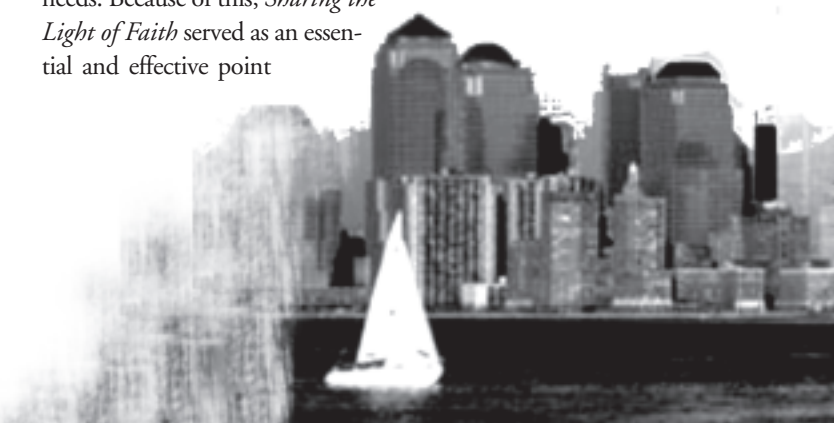
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*Recent “big events” contributed to some significant shifts in how we perceive and know the world around us.*

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viewed by some as important unfinished business from Vatican Council I (1869-1870). The argument was that the directory is the more appropriate vehicle for responding to the pastoral needs of the church in a time of pluralism and rapid change. Without ignoring the content of the faith, the *General Catechetical Directory (GCD 1971)* made clear the fundamental connection between what we teach and how we teach it, between the content of the faith and principles of effective catechesis.

Second, repeatedly within the pages of *GCD (1971)* is the call for national or regional directories that “will have the task of filling out this outline and applying it to the circumstances of individual countries and regions” (*GCD 1*). In the United States the response to this directive was the publication of *Sharing the Light of Faith: The National Catechetical Directory* in 1979. Reflective of extensive consultation and careful rewrites, the *NCD* was rooted in the milieu of its age: attending to the “signs of the times,” recognizing the promise and perils of that era, and setting out a vision of catechesis that responded to the contemporary faith needs. Because of this, *Sharing the Light of Faith* served as an essential and effective point



of reference for the work of catechesis in the United States for many years.

Both of these points — the dynamic relationship between what we teach and how we teach and the necessary focus on the social and cultural context within which the believing community is situated — served as important and helpful interpretive lenses when we first picked up the newly issued *GDC* some ten years ago. And I believe that they are significant issues to keep in mind as we take another look at the document today.

### THE TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGIN' . . .

Most would agree that the socio-cultural and ecclesial settings of Catholics in the United States have undergone significant change in the past ten years. We have been shaped by what we might call “big events” that have shaken our sense of identity and feelings of safekeeping. We share several common “big events:” the violence on 9/11; the headlining of clergy sexual abuse crisis in newspapers across the country; the war in Iraq and its multiple expressions in Afghanistan, Guantanamo, and around the world; the rapidity of communication and the formation of (pseudo) communities through the Internet in general and such channels as Facebook, YouTube, and blogging; the coalescing of financial difficulties with the decrease in number of ordained that lead to significant “parish re-organizing” in many dioceses, large and small; weather-related disasters and the rising consciousness of environmental crises. While these we hold in common, I know that each of us has a particular slant on these events or might name others that have been significant in shaping our own worldview. And that might be a helpful exercise to do now:

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*A postmodern perspective often leads to disengagement from large institutions.*

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#### *For reflection and conversation:*

*How have the “big events” that I’ve listed affected you? Have they had an impact on your sense of yourself as a Catholic? As a citizen? In what ways?*

*Are there some “pretty big events” that have caused significant change in your setting — your parish, diocese, state, region? What impact have they had?*

*In what ways have these events shed light or shadow on your identity as catechetical leader?*

While the origins and contributing factors to these “big events” can be traced far back into the last century and beyond, their coming to the fore in the last ten years have significantly shifted our meaning perspectives. In many ways these “big events” contributed to some significant shifts in how we perceive and know the world around us. At the same time these epistemological shifts also make possible the meaning we make of these events, that is, how we think about our present situation in the world. I also contend that these shifts have repercussions for how we understand both what we teach and how we teach.

Whether we refer to this time as “postmodern” or “late-modern” or “just the way things are these days,” it is possible to name some core characteristics that mark our contemporary way of knowing (epistemology). Others have explored this in greater depth (see Gallagher 1998; Horell 2003); here I simply want to bring to our attention three characteristics that have implications for catechesis and particularly for the faith formation of adults.

#### . . . REALIZING THAT WE CONSTRUCT MEANING

The first is the recognition that we construct the meaning we give to reality — or said more clearly, we construct reality. The way we make sense of the world around us, the way we name and understand essential symbols or concepts, the way we perceive and respond to the people and events in our lives: we construct these from within our “situatedness.” That is, we perceive and give meaning to our experiences based on our personal, social, cultural, and historical place in the world. We know this is true: two people seeing the same movie, reading the same book, or hearing the same homily can arrive at strikingly different interpretations. People having similar life experiences — promotion at work, death of a loved one, positive relationships — engage with and understand those events in distinctive ways. Taken at full measure, this means we can never really say, “I know what you mean.” or “I know how you feel.”

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# Adolescent Catechesis: An Unfinished Agenda

by Michael P. Horan

This is the last article in a series on adolescent catechesis sponsored by the Partnership for Adolescent Catechesis.



In an effort to consider the state of adolescent catechesis today, national leaders in three Catholic organizations formed an alliance called the Partnership for Adolescent Catechesis (PAC). The Partnership includes the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM), the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) and the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership (NCCL), with additional support provided by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). By aligning all three professional groups to address adolescent catechesis, this partnership seeks to marshal the pastoral experience and collective wisdom of the adult community that ministers to and with youth. PAC represents the interests of thousands of ministers, lay and ordained, who daily commit to forming the faith of young people in Catholic parishes and schools in the United States.

As a first step, these partners commissioned and published a series of articles analyzing various facets and issues that impact the present state of catechesis. The series appeared in the publications and

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*The tension between these two dimensions of knowledge — cognitive and relational — will not disappear.*

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on the Web sites of the organizations, promoting wide readership and shared reflection on the present state of youth catechesis. (A listing of the Web articles and of those in *Momentum* appears at the conclusion of this essay.)

The nine articles not only summarize the thinking of their authors, they also represent the wider concerns of many practitioners, church leaders, parents and interested adults who welcome the challenges of catechizing adolescents and who strain to improve the practice. How might these Catholic religious educators isolate the themes and concerns that are proper to

adolescent formation and re-imagine the aims and tasks of this ministry? The essays of these nine authors form a first step forward on a longer journey to answer this essential question. In his helpful article, Jeffrey Kaster reports the findings of other studies about youth, contextualizing the effort in the larger conversation among social scientists, researchers, theologians and pastoral leaders. His conclusion is apt: We need more research and more reasoned reflection on the practices we now undertake in service to youth.

As a contribution to the next step, I isolate and underscore three foundational insights culled from the nine essays that may be helpful as the national effort to renew adolescent catechesis continues and develops. Following the insights, I address questions to practitioners and theorists, pastoral leaders and parents, in order to promote collaboration between and among them as the effort of PAC moves forward.

## FOUNDATIONAL INSIGHTS AND UNADDRESSED QUESTIONS

### 1. Catechesis is deeper, richer, wider and more complex than instruction in “things to know” about faith.

Several authors make clear — and, at times, go to great pains to shore up the argument — that catechesis aims at discipleship, convincing us that a disciple is one who enjoys an intimate relationship with God in Christ (Hagarty, Mulhall, Henderson). This resounding theme, contained subtly or overtly in virtually all the articles in the series, is also central to the message of every official ecclesial document on the subject, including the *National Directory for Catechesis*.

Relational knowing includes knowing the background and facts that comprise the person’s history as well as the subtleties of spirit and personality that make this person unique in the entire world. Catechesis aims at both these kinds of knowledge, as these authors note. While catechesis aims ultimately at a relationship, that relationship is hollow without knowledge of the background and context that shape the person’s history. Knowing Christ, then, is to be steeped in two aspects of knowing (Theisen, Hagarty).

The authors of these essays understand and esteem what speakers of the Spanish language might summarize as the distinction and inherent tension between *saber* and *conocer*. These two verbs in the Spanish language translate in English as “to know.” The first, *saber*, is the verb used to indicate that one knows facts. A disciple can make the claims: “I know the stories in the Gospels and the messages contained in the letters of the New Testament; I know the words of the Eucharistic prayer and can participate in the responses; I know the tradition of moral theology and moral reasoning that will help me to arrive at good decisions.” All these require a knowledge that is cognitive — in Spanish, *saber*.

But, according to the authors, a disciple also can make these claims: “I know Christ as the son of God and encounter this reality in prayer, I know that God is love poured out in Trinity, saving the world; I know the Holy Spirit as the ground and motivation of a meaningful life.” These senses of knowing result from personal encounter, and in Spanish that word for knowing is *conocer* (Henning, Theisen).

As a modest proposal for renewed practice, theorists and practitioners need to consider, in light of the two dimensions of “knowing” Christian faith, the following questions and concerns:

- Why would these authors go to such lengths to communicate the two dimensions of knowledge inherent in catechesis?
- Is this not clear and obvious in the minds of the practitioners and leaders who commit themselves to catechesis? The implicit message is that it is not clear or that it is not accepted fully by the community of scholars, pastoral leaders and ministers who seek to serve youth. The history of Catholic catechesis — adolescent or any other kind — is fraught with the tension between the two dimensions of knowing and the theological “camps” that can be formed by privileging one kind of knowing over another. As pastoral leaders and ministers develop and renew catechetical efforts, the tension between these two dimensions of knowledge — cognitive and relational — will not disappear.
- Can pastoral leaders in parishes and dioceses working in concert with bishops, theorists/academics, and volunteer catechists honestly acknowledge and thereby illumine the tension without seeking to “resolve” it?

## **2. Mature Christian faith, practiced in a healthy community, is never forced or centripetal; it is joyful and uncomfortable.**

Various authors among the nine concur that the Gospel calls disciples to live a free and active life that points to the reign of God and serves the world that God loves (See especially Henderson, Henning). Living as a disciple leads inevitably to both joy and discomfort. Consequently, catechesis is a sham if it does not carry forward a Gospel message that makes us simultaneously at home and uncomfortable. The authors persuade us that catechesis

makes us at home and even joyful because the community, the *ekklesia*, that forms us (and to which we, in turn, contribute) is based in the values of the Christ proclaimed in word and sacrament. But this cuts both ways. The authors of the essays send a subtle and consistent message about invitation and joy, often observed when a community worships.

Where word and worship are vibrant, community life and formation of disciples thrive. Where word and worship lack vitality, community life languishes, making it easy to imagine why adolescents (or anyone) flee the parish scene in search of something authentic (Warren). Joy is different from and richer than simply feeling good, but formation that does not introduce adolescents to a joyful community will not convince them in the short run, or sustain them in the long haul, to perceive or pursue the deeper Gospel injunction to take up the cross.

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*Catechesis is a sham if it does not carry forward a Gospel message that makes us simultaneously at home and uncomfortable.*

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A corollary to joyful community and worship are uncomfortable questions and practices that make disciples much more than club members. Ironically, formation that aims only to welcome and nourish, acting like a centripetal force, will not compel teens to encounter the Gospel at its core (Warren). The discomfort that comes with taking up the cross both attracts and challenges disciples to share with the world a joy that defies surface comfort and transcends church walls. How else will disciples serve the world that God loves and make Christ known in the world (Warren, Henderson, Henning)? Catechesis aims at behavioral change as well as cognitive and affective conversion. But behaviors are not only a desired effect; practices furnish the conditions for encounter, because people learn the Gospel by practicing it (Lee, Henning, Hagarty). Service and justice education function as the way to encounter, as well as share, the truth of Jesus’ message. Uncomfortable questions and Gospel practices of humble service, hard witness and acts on behalf of social justice should shake up comfortable lives, consumerist assumptions, and sedentary mindsets (Warren, Dinges, Lee).

Additionally, catechesis involves a *free decision*; this feature of catechesis is particularly interesting and challenging to those who minister to and with youth (Warren). Therefore ministers who seek to form a new generation of disciples will need to work in concert with developmental psychologists and educational theorists to pursue the following questions:

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- How does a genuine invitation read like an invitation and not a summons? Honesty demands that all the adults acknowledge the tricky and sometimes clumsy ways in which adolescents need to be invited without feeling forced. To coerce within a culture of choice (Dinges) is to lose them before they can even consider the merits of becoming a disciple.
- What practices actually promote an invitation to experience Christian joy and the heart of the Gospel message of the cross?
- Catechetical leaders often imagine that the works of service flow from a grateful heart that has been formed through worship in a vibrant community. Has the learning sequence changed, such that young people first encounter the heart of the Gospel through service, and confront through service the need to encounter a community of joy and genuine worship?
- Are parents and other adults willing to share their faith through service and works of justice, so as to form the next generation, even to the point of their discomfort?

**3. Ours is not our ancestors' world or culture. The tasks proper to adolescent formation occur on an Internet-linked planet and in a nation informed by a postmodern approach to religion and culture.**

The authors of these essays know that something is amiss with the current state of youth catechesis, but they do not give into the temptation to bash and blame postmodern culture so much as to describe and more fully understand it.

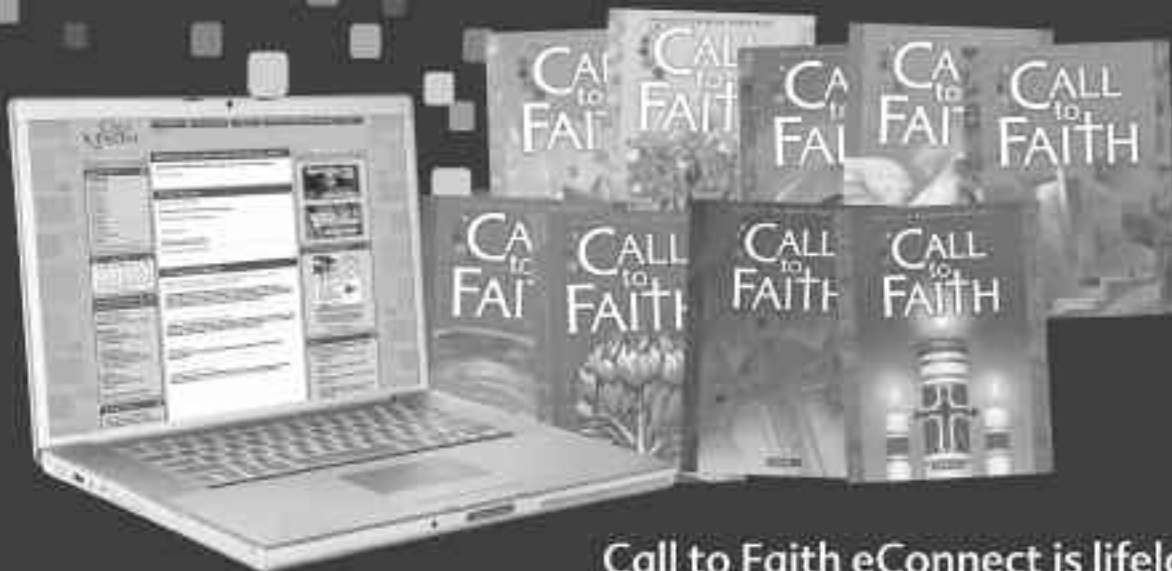
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*People learn the Gospel by practicing it.*

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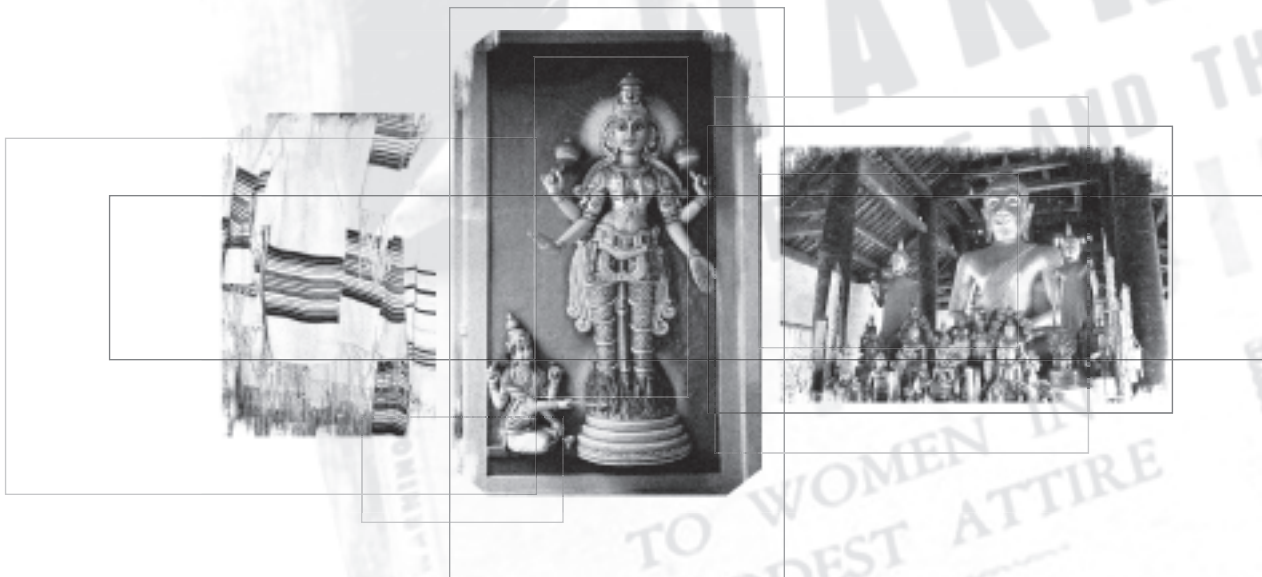
# CATECHETICAL UPDATE

A publication of the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership

## CATECHESIS AMIDST RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

OUR CHALLENGE IS TO GROUND PEOPLE IN THE PARTICULAR WITH OPENNESS TO THE UNIVERSAL.

by Thomas H. Groome



Since the dawn of history, humankind has practiced multiple expressions of faith, beginning with the native religions of aboriginal ancestors, and more recently in the great world religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, adding Sikhs, Jains, Shintos, and many smaller ones besides. Until recently, however, we could think of America as a “Christian country” — with some Jewish presence in our cities. Other religions remained largely located in geographic areas, indigenously intertwined with their local cultures. Now, however, the ashram and mosque that were once “over there” are on the same block as our local church. The unfolding drama of globalization, with its supporting cast of population migration and post-modern communications, means that America “has become the world’s most religiously diverse nation.” (See Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America: How a “Christian County” has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001). How should our catechetical education respond to this reli-

gious pluralism that is now in our midst?

We need an appropriate catechetical response for both spiritual and social reasons. Spiritually, and as participants are developmentally ready, an effective catechesis can mediate an enriching encounter with the religiously “other” — one that can inspire and deepen people’s own Christian faith. Personally, when I see Muslims pause for prayer throughout the day, I’m reminded to sanctify my own time with a prayer pause as well. My Christian consciousness of the sacramentality of life has been sharpened by the Buddhist tradition of “mindfulness” as taught by Thich Nhat Hahn. I’m ever inspired by Jewish brothers and sisters by the way they cherish Torah and consider its study a way of worshipping God. Such examples could be multiplied.

On the other hand, we cannot be naïve about the potential threat to Catholic identity posed by religious diversity, and especially for our children and youth. Without effective catechesis, they can readily fall into a religious relativism or syncretism with diminished sense of belonging to their

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Catholic home within God's family. Young people need to be well prepared for encountering and studying other religions, beginning with religious literacy in their own. If they "cross over" too soon to encounter "the other" they may not find their way home.

Socially, too, there are urgent reasons for coming to interfaith understanding and respect for other traditions. Throughout history, religious differences have too often caused hatred and war, or have been used by opportunist rulers and politicians to legitimate what was antithetical to the religious spirit. In our own time, the stakes seem even higher; unless humankind can come to interfaith understanding and appreciation — not just toleration — then religiously motivated terrorism and counter-terrorism will define our future. For the fact remains — all claims by the theorists of secularization to the contrary (Marx, Freud, etc.) — that religion remains deeply embedded in political, social and cultural life and may well determine the welfare of the human family. Religious illiteracy of our own and other religious traditions is now more dangerous than ever (see Diane Moore, *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy*: New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

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*Young people need to be well prepared for encountering and studying other religions, beginning with religious literacy in their own.*

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So, for compelling spiritual and social reasons, it is imperative that we respond with effective catechetical education to this cultural reality of religious pluralism in our midst. To meet this challenge, Catholics must turn to our church teachings for the theological principles to guide a catechesis that can both enrich our own faith and promote interfaith understanding as well.

### **THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE CATECHETICAL EDUCATION AMIDST RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY**

**Universality of God's Love and Law of Love:** It is obvious and yet worth stating: the first guiding principle is to remember the universality of God's love for all humankind — long considered a dogma of Catholic faith. Vatican II declared that all humankind has been "created by God's love and (is) constantly preserved by it" (*Church in Modern World*, No.19); God unconditionally loves every person "with a spontaneous love" (*Missions*, No.12). Further, "all peoples comprise a single community, and have a single origin" — all are united "as one" in our Loving Creator (*On Non Christian Religions*, No.1).

Then, the universality of God's love demands as much of God's covenanted people — emphasized all the more by the life and teachings of Jesus. His disciples are called to love God by loving our neighbor as ourselves, with no exception to who is "neighbor," even enemies. The universal love of God, and its accompanying commandment that we love others as ourselves, surely demands that we approach people of differing faith traditions with great respect, consciously viewing them as fellow members of the one family of God. Christians must embrace the catholic sentiment of Jesus: "In my Father's house, there are many dwelling places" (John 14:2).

**Universality of God's Saving Intent:** Again, a dogma of Catholic faith is that God intends to save all humankind, whether Christian or not. This teaching follows on logically from the universality of God's love; how could God love all people but intend to save only about 20 percent of us — the Christians. Instead, as Vatican II declared, God's "providence, manifestations of goodness, and saving designs extend to all" (*Non Christian Religions*, No.1). As Christians, of course, we always affirm that "there is one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2: 5-6). Yet, this very faith calls us to believe that God's saving grace in Jesus Christ must somehow "work" through people's faithful practice of other religions as well.

One explanation is the time honored proposal (at least since Aquinas) of "baptism of desire"; that all people who do God's will — as best they know it — have a virtual desire for baptism, and thus are saved by their *implicit faith* in Jesus Christ. Essentially, Vatican II took this position (see *Constitution on the Church*, No. 16). However, when it came to explaining *how* universal salvation is effected, the Council appropriately placed this within divine mystery: "For since Christ died for all (people), we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit *in a manner known only to God*, offers to every person the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery" (*Church in Modern World* No. 22, my emphasis).

**Universality of Human Religiosity:** In more recent years, Karl Rahner proposed that our human condition is marked by a "supernatural existential" — he meant an inherent desire for God. Rahner was only dressing up an age-old conviction throughout Christian tradition, and Catholicism in particular, that our human condition is inherently spiritual. Further, this spiritual appetite at the core of our being is by divine design. Made in God's own image (Genesis 1:27), we are alive by the very life of God (Genesis 2:7). So, and echoing Augustine, God has made us for Godself alone and our hearts are ever restless until they rest in God. Or as the philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623-62) beautifully stated: "there is a God-shaped hollow in the human heart that nothing else can fill." Vatican II summarized that our religiosity arises from the "the

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*We can cherish our Christian Story, but avoid the hubris that ours is the only story of value.*

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deepest longings of the human heart. (Church in Modern World, No.4).

In other words, the great religions that humankind has developed out of its spiritual appetite arise from God's very design of our human condition. In this sense, we can conclude that they are "of God" and deserve our respect and appreciation. Further, we should expect to find at least some great divine truths within them, which brings us to the next theological principle.

**Universality of Religious Dialogue:** Let us be clear that interfaith dialogue can never deny, contradict or place in question any truth that is constitutive of Christian faith. Further, all catechetical attention to other religious traditions should be to enhance people's Christian faith and to promote inter-religious understanding. Then, regarding divine revelation, the core Christian sentiment is that what began in the Hebrew Scriptures was brought to "perfection" in Jesus. Vatican II declared that "Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it"; for this reason, "we now await no further new public revelation" (*Constitution on Revelation*, No.4). Here the Council was summarizing a standard Christian conviction — that Jesus is the fullness of divine revelation.

Having said this, we must yet remember the words of Jesus himself in his final discourse. He made explicit to disciples that "I have much more to tell you," and then promised to send "the Spirit of truth" as "guide to all truth" (John 16:12-13). Our human language and constructs will always fall short of the ultimate realities about which we try to speak. The opposite of truth is falsehood; but on the "far side" of truth there will always be more truth to uncover. Again, this was precisely the sentiment of Vatican II.

The Council taught that the church's appropriation of its "deposit of revelation" continues to unfold throughout history. "The tradition which comes from the apostles *develops* in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. For there is *growth in the understanding* of the realities and the words which have been handed down." Indeed, "As the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly *moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth* until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her" (*On Divine Revelation*, No.8, emphases added).

Given that the church is a pilgrim people moving "toward the fullness of divine truth," the Council encouraged genuine openness to learn from the spiritual wisdom of other religious traditions. "The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true

and holy" in other religious traditions because they "often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all people" (*On Non-Christian Religions*, No.2). For this reason, Christians should engage in "truly human conversation" with all peoples of good will and "learn by sincere and patient dialogue what treasures a bountiful God has distributed among the nations of the earth" (*On the Missions*, No. 11).

### SOME CATECHETICAL SUGGESTIONS

Guided by such doctrinal principles, I summarize the catechetical challenge amidst religious diversity as follows: "to ground people in the particular with openness to the universal." In other words, we must craft our catechetical education to give people a thorough sense of identity as Catholic Christians, with real religious literacy — knowing and understanding their own faith with personal conviction and commitment — and yet do so in ways that open them to embrace the "universals" I outline above. I now make some pedagogical suggestions to this end.

1) Honoring the first universal, we must teach explicitly that God loves all peoples equally, that we are all God's favorites. Whether Muslim or Jew, Buddhist or Hindu, Catholic or Protestant, agnostic or atheist, God loves each and every one unconditionally. God's own people in Jesus Christ must do likewise. The last thing in the world we should teach or even imply is that we are the only people whom God loves or that we don't need to love people who are of different or no religion. Such sectarianism is a recipe for hatred and violence. It offers an easy logic; if God doesn't love "them," then we don't have to love them either; in fact, we can buy guns and shoot them — even in the name of God. (I have personally experienced such sectarianism in my own original culture).

2) Honoring the universality of God's saving intent and of human religiosity, catechists must teach that all people who practice their religion faithfully or live the truth "as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience" (*Constitution on Church*, No.16), can all be saved — albeit by God's saving work in Jesus Christ. Further, we must speak of other religious traditions with great respect and appreciation, teaching that these are valid and valuable ways which people have of caring for their souls and living out their spiritual nature.

3) Concerning the special case of Judaism, note that Vatican II heralded "the great spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews" (*On Non Christian Religions*, No.4). We are bonded neighbors in Abrahamic faith and in sharing the Hebrew Scriptures. Our catechesis must assiduously avoid every trace of anti-Semitism and the "teaching of contempt" for Jewish brothers and sisters, as Christians have so readily perpetrated in the past. Further, we must avoid teaching as if the Hebrew Scriptures are merely prelude to the New Testament; our whole Bible is revelatory in its own right.

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4) Regarding our own *particular*, we should remember that Catholicism itself is marked by great diversity; part of its genius is to maintain unity in faith but without uniformity of expression. So, Hispanic Catholicism is its own distinct inculturation of Christian faith, as is Irish, and Polish, and Korean, etc. For a people's faith to be capable of forming their identity, it must be experienced and expressed through their culture, albeit in faithfulness to all the core truths, symbols and values of Catholicism. The most effective Christian faith is the particular one — made indigenous to its context and people.

5) Catechists should never waver or waffle in representing the great truths, symbols and values of Christian faith. We must represent Jesus as “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), that there is no better way to live, no happier path to follow, than as disciples of Jesus Christ. We should catechize people to rejoice in the greatest gift that God could give us — Christian faith. Yet, we must never make it sound as if “we” are all right and everyone else is all wrong. We can cherish and live wonderful lives through our Christian Story, but avoid the hubris that ours is the only story of value.

6) Then, as young people grow strong in their Christian identity — I'm thinking of end of high school and college age — our curricula should include the study of other religious traditions and, as possible, encourage direct encounter with their adherents. This is the time for the field trips to the synagogue or ashram, and for study of their traditions. The intent of such interfaith curricula is not simply to “learn about” other traditions but more to “learn from” them. This means studying them with appreciation, alert for the resonances and differences, seeking for what can enhance our own faith. The “crossing over” must always be for the sake of “coming home” enriched by the encounter. Such “learning from” more than “learning about” can enhance interfaith understanding.

7) We should train young people in the art of spiritual conversation. This, indeed, should mark all catechesis but it seems particularly imperative for interfaith study. Such conversation will include listening with openness to learn from, and then sharing in ways faithful to Christian teachings and practices. Further, we must be honest in recognizing differences. Nothing is achieved by pretense of being “the same, really” when this simply is not so. And yet, we also need to listen and talk “between the lines,” looking out for the deeper meanings and values that lie beneath formulas of belief.

8) Encounter with people of a different religion is not always congenial; in fact, we can often experience hostility or stereotypes and caricatures of our faith. Even today in America, there is a lingering anti-Catholicism (See Mark Massa, *Anti-Catholicism in America*, NY: Crossroads, 2003). Of course,

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## *For Christians, the criterion for evaluating other religions — and the practice of our own — is the Reign of God.*

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the best catechetical preparation for handling religious hostility is to be well grounded in our Catholic Christian faith, having a clear knowledge and understanding of its teachings, and being able to articulate these with personal conviction. It is also an asset to be able to recall from memory its central codes (e.g. Ten Commandments), symbols (e.g. seven sacraments) and dogmas (e.g. the divine and human natures in the one person of Jesus). Beyond this, we should catechize people to maintain Christian charity even in the midst of hostility and not to respond in kind. In time, if we bear living witness to our faith, people of good will are likely to respect it. (See Kevin Taylor, *American Evangelicals and Religious Diversity*, Greenwich, CT: IAP, 2003, esp. Ch 13).

9) Catechists, and indeed all Christians, should avoid a soft liberalism toward other religions as if all of them are equally fine and their every aspect to be treated with deference. Indeed, there are aspects of Christian history to be repented (e.g., crusades, inquisition, anti-Semitism, racism, sexism and misogyny); likewise there are problematic aspects to all of the great world religions, and some have more than others. All of them deserve discerning evaluation, even as we must tread softly as outsiders. So, practices like holy war, widow burning, cliterodectomy, honor killings, the abandoning of twin babies, etc. are horrendous practices that Christians must always condemn, even through practiced by various religions. And it is certainly not true that “one religion is as good as another.” For Christians, the criterion for evaluating other religions — and the practice of our own — is the Reign of God. Whatever promotes justice and peace, love and freedom, holiness and fullness of life for all people and the integrity of God's creation should be appreciated; whatever does not, should be rejected.

Some twenty eight hundred years ago, God spoke through the prophet Isaiah, “See I am doing something new” (43:19). Perhaps this will be true in every age. In ours, it seems, God is calling us to a deeper appreciation that God's wisdom “deploys herself from one end of the earth to the other” (Wisdom 8:1). May we be open to the spiritual wisdom that can come to us from other faiths to both deepen our own and promote the *shalom* that God desires for us all. ■

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# THE FIELD THAT IS THE WORLD

## CATECHESIS IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

by Gerard F. Baumbach

An artist putting to canvas a blended picture of world populations has numerous colors from which to choose. So does the painter of social structures. Beauty and awe come together with each succeeding stroke.

Living in a society rich in ethnic, cultural, and religious pluralism makes interacting with others inviting and invigorating. The broad sweep of religious traditions alone in this country is extraordinary. Ecumenical and interreligious conversation is increasingly focused on issues that only a few decades ago might have been impossible to discuss.

From a catechetical perspective, participating and catechizing in a pluralistic society raises fresh awareness of the underlying reality of opportunities and challenges emanating from “The Field That Is The World” (*General Directory for Catechesis*, 17ff). Our modes of inter- and intra-societal communication have shifted dramatically. Distinctions of urban, suburban, and rural do not always hold as global communication grants instantaneous access to geographically-dispersed networks. Computer chip development continues to result in smaller and smaller products, making one wonder when electronic gadgetry will become unrecognizable to the naked eye.

This broad and wide open field is measured more by influence than by acreage. In some quarters, spiritual is “in” and religious is “out” due in part to the latter’s connection to structures held in suspicion. Gradual dismantling of historically-rooted identities can occur as people drift toward non-communal approaches to spiritual growth in search of personal happiness, security, and contentment for today. Fundamental differences in traditions and practices, including non-specific and safely-generalized moral perspectives, can strain serious and respectful dialogue among persons and groups across the societal spectrum.

The field that is the world is fertile soil for efforts to catechize in a pluralistic society, including that influential part of the landscape called the United States. With global and regional wars on poverty, oppression, hunger, and terrorism, there is no shortage of oppor-

tunities “to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ” (*Catechesi Tradendae*, 5).

The catechetical leaders I know embrace hope, a virtue for all humanity. Indeed, the maturing of lay ecclesial ministry, including the refinement and expansion of catechetical leadership, is resulting in renewed commitments to promote and implement catechesis for all.

I have met with numerous catechetical leaders during the past four decades. Though it is admittedly unwise to generalize, I believe that a prevailing interest among many of them is one of eagerly shaping and enthusiastically promoting opportunities for catechesis in a pluralistic society.

How are we to catechize in this pluralistic society? What compels us to live and propose “the Way” (cf. *Acts of the Apostles* 9:2; 18:26) we profess on Sunday to others on Monday? I propose for reflection the following four approaches.

### A LIVING CATECHESIS

Catechesis in a pluralistic society is a living catechesis. Granted, I am overdoing the obvious here. But the point is worth making. Catechesis is not simply about the Christian way of life but is itself an expression of the Christian life. Catechesis occurs within culturally rich environs and “involves an invitation to conversion” (*National Directory for Catechesis*, 21C). We cannot underestimate the importance of this witness. Catechesis thrives when it appeals to gifts and loci of inculturation and when each of us seeks support from another along the way of conversion.

Residing in the heart of the communion of faith, “catechesis is a pivotal dimension of the Church’s pastoral activity and a significant element in *all* the Church does to hand on the faith. *Every means* that the Church employs in her overall mission to *go and make disciples* has a *catechetical aspect*” (NDC 19C; italics added).

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Catechesis in a pluralistic society is at home with Scripture and tradition, word and sacrament, doctrine and the experience of faith and life, culture and community, and mission and magisterium. Catechesis is at home with people and practice, orthodoxy and orthopraxis, ministry and mercy, justice and hope, and region and roundtable. Emerging from Gospel and life, catechesis is foundational to communion within diversity and promotes unity within such diversity. All through this process, catechesis remains grounded in Christ, not in some stagnant way but as dynamic witness to Christ's presence, especially around altar and ambo in the unifying sacrament of the Eucharist.

My use of the term *diversity* within a catechetical context presumes fundamental unity in matters of faith. That is one reason why diversity remains such a wonderful gift for the ecclesial community. Multiple generations and varieties of programs enliven the church's mission to evangelize and catechize within a pluralistic society. "Indeed the primordial mission of the Church is to proclaim God and to be his witness before the world" (*GDC*, 23).

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### *There is not too high a price for sincere and genuine dialogue.*

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We witness as a people "born of water and Spirit (John 3:5). As the baptized, we welcome people of various interests or loyalties, invite those who may differ to trust the movement of the Spirit in their lives, and recognize the reality that there is not too high a price for sincere and genuine dialogue, regardless of background, prior experience, or upbringing.

*Ask yourself: With whom did I communicate today who exemplifies "a living catechesis"? Why is this person my choice? Will I let him or her know?*

#### **A CATECHESIS THAT VALUES ADAPTATION**

"I don't understand. Can you help me see what you mean? How does this apply to me? What value are my life, history, and experience in coming to faith? What might I (we) do now to live what I (we) believe?"

Catechesis in a pluralistic society demands expertise at appropriate adaptation. Catechetical adaptation, a necessity recognized long before educational advances of the past few centuries (e.g., see Augustine's *The First Catechetical Instruction*, ch. 10ff.), demands heightened attention to the message professed without fear that Catholic teaching will be expressed weakly, incompletely, or erroneously.

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### *Our efforts to reach out to others must be wrapped in gentleness.*

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To adapt is to adjust for a particular purpose or audience while maintaining, clarifying, and enlivening the fundamental meaning of the topic at hand. Wise catechetical leaders/adaptors rely in part on their "human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral" formation (cf. *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, p. 34) as they participate in shaping and promoting the parish's catechetical agenda. Each of these areas is crucial to the formation of catechetical leaders.

Catechetical adaptation is not synonymous with "theologically light" catechetical education. Catechesis shares a comfort zone with a variety of partners. Through sound pedagogy and methodology, catechesis relates to, relies on, and integrates such dimensions as evangelization, conversion, faith and life, liturgy, sacraments, and prayer, creed and doctrinal formulations, moral formation (including Catholic social teaching), and spirituality. The six tasks of catechesis (cf. *NDC* 20) foster dynamic theological application within the community of faith. Finally, catechesis benefits from the awareness that "the Magisterium is the servant of the word of God" (*NDC*, 18).

A half-century ago, Vincent Ayel, F.S.C. noted that catechesis "is not miniature theology." The catechetical context for his statement had to do with children's and adolescents' "intellectual assimilation" and "possibilities of vital assimilation," that is, opportunities for living the mysteries of faith.

I would have liked to have been able to meet Brother Ayel and probe his passion for catechesis. I think I would have been in for a lively discussion. In any case, he goes on to say, "Woe to the knowledge which does not turn to love nor become transformed into life" ("Progressive Nature of Catechesis," *Lumen Vitae*, XII [1], January–March 1957, pp. 74-75).

Catechetical practice linked to appropriate adaptation holds part of the answer to shaping a full and robust catechesis in this age of pluralism. Vital to the catechetical enterprise, the gift of adaptation becomes an agent, so to speak, of transformation.

Far from being a miniature of anything, catechesis is its own doorway to comprehension, action, and societal transformation. But it is not a doorway just for me. Catechetical ministry's identity within the whole church is strengthened in programming decisions reviewed periodically and confirmed persuasively, in addressing creatively the compelling need for sustained planning for eradicating religious illiteracy, and in affirming in word, deed, and budget the urgency of catechesis for all generations.

*Ask yourself: What actions of mine enrich catechesis in the life of the church? How?*

## A CATECHESIS THAT RECOGNIZES HIDDEN AND FAITHFUL VOICES

Catechesis seeks to recognize and listen to voices of faith in a pluralistic society. For catechesis to flourish, catechetical leaders need to continue to offer with vigor wide varieties of catechetical opportunities. Enabling others to experience, learn, assimilate, and practice the faith we cherish necessarily requires a good dose of listening. Listening attentively sharpens leaders' own dispositions to foster a holistic and comprehensive catechesis.

In a pluralistic society, some segments of the population go voiceless and unrecognized, cordoned off in a world not of their own making. Who listens to them? None of these people is nameless. Think of Hurricane Katrina and its thousands of victims. Or the suffering people of Darfur in Sudan or Gulu in Uganda. Or victims and families directly impacted by 9/11 or, during the last century, by Pearl Harbor, Hiroshima, or Nagasaki.

Mounted on a wall outside Malloy Hall's Chapel of Mary, Seat of Wisdom at the University of Notre Dame is a lengthy reflection by Barbara M. Szweda called "Road to Emmaus" (Luke 24:13-35). It traces the story of Gerardo, a young man whose suffering was horrendous on the way to eventual asylum in this country. Among the many thought-provoking statements within this catechesis on a wall is this one: "Christ is in each of us waiting to be recognized."

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*Catechetical adaptation is not synonymous with "theologically light" catechetical education.*

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Parishes that seek to recognize Christ both on the "inside" of parish life and on the "outside" in the broader society do not limit their listening only to predictable voices, that is, those people whom we see most often or who represent the largest numbers of people.

The *National Directory for Catechesis* states that "Persons with disabilities should be integrated into ordinary catechetical programs as much as possible" (49). The *NDC* also indicates this about specialized catechetical opportunities:

"Some of the groups of persons in special situations for whom catechetical programs might be developed in certain circumstances include (but are not limited to) groups of professional people, workers, artists, scientists, the marginalized

(e.g., immigrants, refugees, migrants, the chronically ill, drug addicts, prisoners, school dropouts, the illiterate), the socially and economically disadvantaged, college students, young adults, military personnel, unwed parents, married couples (with or without children), couples in mixed marriages, the divorced, the divorced and remarried, the widowed, homosexual persons, and so forth" (50).

Sometimes some of the people just identified represent hidden and unrecognized voices, both within society and within the parish. But each of these people has a name and a voice to be heard and each can benefit from catechesis that "is integrated into a comprehensive pastoral ministry with and for them" (*NDC*, 50).

Broad-based programs enable a parish to be attentive to the church's bold documentation on catechesis for all (See, for example, "Catechizing the People of God in Diverse Settings," *NDC* Chapter 7 and *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States*). The challenge to accommodate all age levels of the community must be addressed with precision even as flourishing programs are maintained and enhanced (e.g., family programs, adult faith formation efforts, parish catechetical programs for children and young people, Catholic schools, etc.).

Parishes that work to ensure that their programs and ministries support together the mission of the church (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 738) in parish life are able to avoid "ministerial individualism." Parish life is not the setting for jockeying for "first place" by major programs. Rather, parishes incorporate programs and ministries that share in diverse ways a common witness to faith professed and lived.

Catechesis in a pluralistic society must resonate beyond programmatic boundaries and find a home where people do their living. Shared faith is a treasure to be given away, a light that cannot be dimmed (cf. *Matthew* 5:15-16).

*Ask yourself: Who or what is a hidden and faithful voice in my life? How might I listen more attentively this week?*

## A CATECHESIS THAT EMBRACES YOUNG ADULTS RIGHT NOW

Catechesis in a pluralistic society promotes intergenerational harmony and resists intergenerational judgment. I hear periodically the voice of lamentation about the lack of faithfulness of different generations. Often this means one generation's assessment of another's knowledge of church teaching, commitment

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## Catechetical Update Is Now Available Online

*Catechetical Update* is a valuable resource for our members. You can now access the pages free of charge from the NCCL website ([www.nccl.org](http://www.nccl.org)) under the "resources" tab. You must login as a member in order to view the page and download the articles.

to social justice, or faithfulness to weekly worship. But how does such a generalized critique advance the church's catechetical mission in a pluralistic society?

My thinking here is influenced by my work with young adults and my participation in a summer 2007 colloquium at Chicago's Catholic Theological Union. The colloquium, whose lead sponsor was the ACTA Foundation, addressed the ways catechesis can promote and sustain the engagement of young adults in the life of the Catholic community. Much of the remainder of this article is drawn from and adapted from my written reflection on that event for the ACTA Foundation.

The spontaneous remarks of the small group of young adult colloquium participants testified to catechetical experiences that can best be described as "effective, insufficient, or in-between." Though some participants praised effective and sustained learning — teaching moments born of their own history, others expressed frustration over well — intentioned but weak attempts to hand on the faith.

In my experience, young adults who are excited about handing on the faith are not seeking a quick-fix antidote to perceived spiritual malformation. Rather, they are seeking opportunities for dialogue with others and ways to deal with the complexities of a pluralistic age. They welcome insights and experiences of older generations as they offer their own.

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*Young adults are seeking dialogue and ways to deal with the complexities of a pluralistic age.*

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Young adults are impressive in their commitment to faith, to their own generation, and to the church in need of their vigorous participation, problem-solving skills, and renewed approaches to catechetical leadership.

Those of us representative of a highly experienced older generation cannot fail to recognize the gifts offered by this new millennium's first wave of young adult leaders, young adult churchgoers, young adult questioners, and young adult seekers, some of whom may no longer find a home in the Catholic church. They have lived virtually all their lives with visible dimensions of pluralism as a given. Some need to hear from within the church the voice of "welcome" and others that of "welcome back."

The potential impact on catechesis for a pluralistic age is obvious. As young adults engage their contemporaries, including those of other religious traditions, and as some serve catechetical ministry, they need all the skills at their disposal for understanding, applying, and handing on the teaching of the church right now.

For the church's catechetical efforts to move forward unencumbered, all generations will need to continue to seek mutually supportive relationships that enhance their witness to the gospel in a pluralistic society.

*Ask yourself: What will I do to engage a person of another generation in a deliberate and focused catechetical conversation? How long will it take me to make that first contact?*

#### AFTERWORD

In conclusion, I propose four exercises for shaping catechesis in a pluralistic society.

First, remember our relationship with Jesus Christ: "only he can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity" (*Catechesi Tradendae*, 5). Jesus is both the source of our hope and the goal of our catechetical efforts.

Second, realize that our efforts to reach out to others must be wrapped in gentleness. Befriend a young adult *as an adult* or an older adult *as a source of spiritual nurture* and see where such a relationship leads.

Third, assert the power of acceptance. Recognize the gifts of others and welcome the gift of wisdom from among those who are not yet approaching the twilight moments of this life.

Fourth, imagine the language of the smile. Boundaries are easily crossed with this innocent display of openness to the other. And we may even come to realize that such openness is actually a catechesis built from within that search within the human heart whose beginning and end is God (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 27).

May we continue to "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call him while he is near" (*Isaiah* 55:6).

*In closing, ask yourself: Where might I see Christ now in a pluralistic society? What am I called to do?!*

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# AMIDST SECULARISM, A GRACIOUS PRESENCE

*Secularity and the Gospel: Being Missionaries to Our Children* by Ronald Rolheiser, OMI. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2006. Paperback, 240 pages, \$18.95.

Reviewed by Dan Thomas

Fr. Ron Rolheiser is one of the profoundly exciting and truly relevant spiritual writers of our time. He is interested in finding a language that both speaks to our culture and is faithful to the Gospel. He wants to help liberals and conservatives dialogue with one another respectfully and accurately. In his newest book, *Secularity and the Gospel*, he wrestles with one of the challenging tasks of our day, “being missionaries to our *own* children.”

Rolheiser’s book synthesizes the results of a series of four symposia organized by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, which brought together an outstanding group of presenters and reactors, which included John Shea, Richard Rohr, Michael Downey, Mary Jo Leddy, Joan Chafe, Robert Barron, John Allen, Walter Bruggeman, and several others. The theme was preaching the Gospel to our secular culture. “We, as Christians in the secular world, are having trouble passing the faith on to our own children. Our churches are graying and emptying, and many of our own children are no longer walking the path of faith . . . with us.” (p. 16)

His analysis of secularity is an insightful presentation of both its positive and less positive aspects. Secularism, he points out, came from the Enlightenment, which itself arose out of our Judeo-Christian heritage. Thus it is, in a sense, our child, and “your own children are never your enemy, even when they are hostile.”

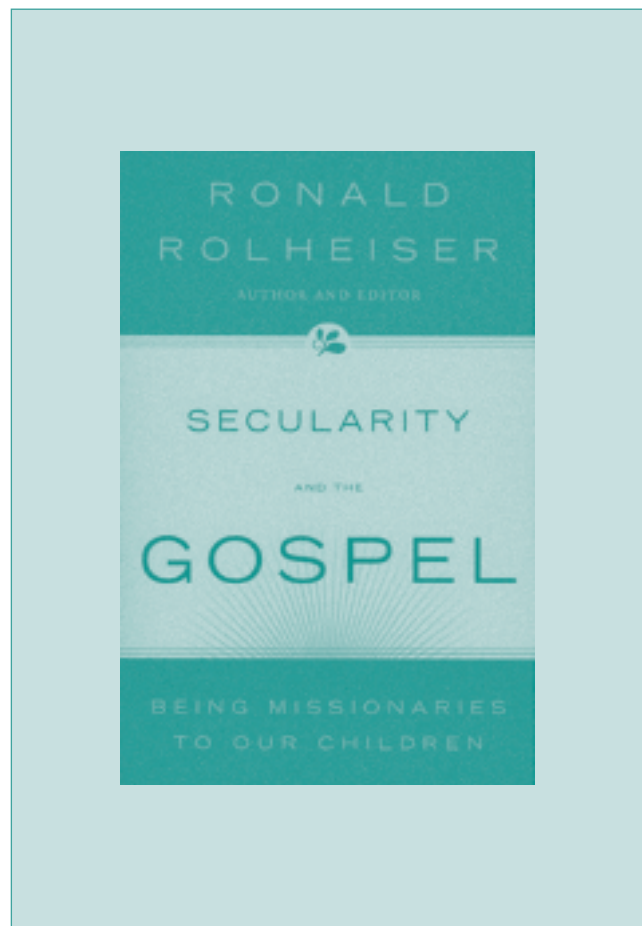
Speaking to NCCL members in 1998, Rolheiser said, “If the church wants to convert the world, it must be for it.” What this book is trying to do is show the way. We must “dialogue with secularity” by creating “a new vocabulary for the faith that will speak more convincingly to the present generation.” We must “be a gracious rather than a cursing presence.” What is most needed is “a re-inflaming of the romantic imagination within religion.”

And how do we do that? Chapter three suggests these ways: we need to be “non-proselytizing and non-combative,” “in solidarity with the poor, the vulnerable, the powerless,” “witness to fidelity

and stability,” and “incarnate a fuller maturity, a new inner-directedness, and a wider inclusivity.”

In his discussion on vocations and the renewal of religious life he describes in a fanciful and even fantastic way what a re-imagined religious community would look like (and perhaps a re-imagined parish as well):

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# LOYALTY, OBEDIENCE AND THE TEACHING OF MORALITY

by Ken Ogorek



For diocesan directors, the Decalogue calls to mind several key ideas including loyalty, obedience and the process of catechesis on the Catholic moral life. Loyalty and obedience to whom? Why might teaching morality in particular be noteworthy?

## LOYALTY TO YOUR BISHOP

Bishops are the sorts of people that nearly everyone has opinions about — opinions often not based in fact. Wounded by original sin as we are, at the water cooler and elsewhere people can tend toward the negative in their conversations, including when bishops are mentioned.

Diocesan directors should be among our bishops' most positive supporters. When the faithful embrace the reality that they're led by a competent, compassionate Chief Shepherd and Catechist, their ecclesial self-image improves; they feel good about being Catholic.

## "IF IT'S NOT ILLEGAL, IMMORAL OR ABSURD: OBEY!"

So many times in my parenting and ministry of leadership I've uttered these words: "If someone with legitimate authority over me asks me to do something, and that something isn't immoral, illegal or objectively absurd (very few requests are) I am obliged to obey."

Much of our activity as diocesan directors involves asking people to do things. As the first three Commandments concern loyalty to God, the remaining seven start with obedience to those sharing his authority.

Your bishop has catechetical priorities. You faithfully manifest those priorities in the form of policies, accountability and an

affirming pastoral approach. Our human condition is such that we don't always receive direction well. (Adam and Eve had some issues here, and sometimes it seems that we haven't improved much!)

Yet when we help catechists show appropriate compliance with diocesan catechetical guidelines, we see legitimate authority orchestrating by God's grace the great symphony that is pastoral catechesis. When we help those with whom we minister develop a comfort level with authority well-used (and we in turn use our authority well) we do all the faithful — and our culture — a great service.

## DEFICIENCIES AND GROWTH AREAS

More and more diocesan directors that I meet are acknowledging that in the 1970s and 1980s morality could have been taught a bit better. When we revisit the Ten Commandments with adult Catholics and all people of good will, and we do so in ways both doctrinally authentic and compellingly attractive — as the truth always is — we open the door for the Holy Spirit to enlighten minds, fill hearts and change lives.

Our NDC points out the divine pedagogy — that God lovingly reveals truth for our earthly well — being and our ultimate salvation from sin and death by the passion and resurrection of Jesus. With loyalty and obedience to our bishops, as well as a frank yet hopeful focus in teaching morality, diocesan directors can gain life-giving and fruitful energy from the Ten Commandments revisited. |

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“What we’d need today is a religious community which would have no rules, because none would be needed. Everyone would be mature enough to live out a poverty, chastity, and obedience that would not need to be overly protected by restrictive rules and symbols that set one apart. Attitudes and behavior would rather be shaped from within, from strong convictions coming from a mature heart and from a commitment to a community, a vision, and a God that puts one under a deep voluntary obedience. The community would be mixed, men and women living together, but those within it would be strong enough to affectively love each other, remain chaste, and model friendship and communal living beyond sex (and without denigrating sex). The community would live an unsheltered life, be radically immersed in the world, and its members, sustained by prayer to God and community with each other, would be free, like Jesus, of curfews and laws, to dine with everyone, saints and sinners alike, without sinning themselves. This community would give itself to the world, but resist being of the world.”

What an interesting, frightening, intriguing, and challenging vision! Much of this book has a similar tone. It raises profoundly important questions in a format that includes many alternatives from all the “sides” of our church talk today. It is a book to explore with people of all stripes.

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*Secularism is, in a sense, our child,  
and “your own children are never  
your enemy.”*

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Ron Rolheiser is truly one of the great thinkers of our day — one who can touch the deep truths within each of us. The words that open his web site ([www.ronrolheiser.com](http://www.ronrolheiser.com)) capture the power and truth of his vision:

As Christians we believe that we bear the image and likeness of God inside us and that is our deepest reality. We are made in God’s image. However, we tend to picture this in a naïve, romantic and pious way. We image that somewhere inside of us there is a beautiful icon of God stamped into our souls. That may well be but God, as scripture assures us, is more than an icon. God is a fire-wild, infinite, ineffable, uncontainable.

Scary, perhaps? Challenging, yes? ■

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ness of human life from the moment of conception to natural death. While teaching that abortion and euthanasia are intrinsically evil and always wrong, catechesis on the fifth commandment also teaches that capital punishment is to be avoided, and that other means for protecting society from criminals are to be used that are more in keeping with human dignity. This catechesis also explains the “evils and injustices that accompany all war, the strict conditions for legitimate defense by military force, the immorality of indiscriminate use of weapons, the danger of the excessive accumulation of armaments, and the risk of unregulated production and sale of arms” (*NDC*, 175-76). In a world torn by war and scarred by the taking of millions of unborn human lives, the fifth commandment is more relevant than ever.

### LEARNING BY HEART

I promised a word on memorization. The decreased emphasis in recent decades on the role of memorization in catechesis has been a serious error. To have moved beyond the rote learning method of the Baltimore Catechism should not have resulted in the elimination of memorization. Pope John Paul II compellingly extolled the importance of “learning by heart” in his encyclical *Catechesi Tradendae* (*On Catechesis in Our Time*):

“The blossoms...of faith and piety do not grow in the desert places of a memory-less catechesis. What is essential is that the texts that are memorized must at the same time be taken in and gradually understood in depth, in order to become a source of Christian life on the personal level and the community level” (*CT*, 55). The *NDC* lists the Ten Commandments, along with the beatitudes, gifts of the Holy Spirit, theological and moral virtues, precepts of the church, and principles of Catholic social teaching as just a few of the formulations that should be learned by heart (*NDC*, 103). The sixth graders’ catechist was doing her job.

The Ten Commandments, interpreted and lived in the spirit of the beatitudes, are our Christian *torah*, our instruction in how to live lives that are fully human, fully alive in Christ. Some years ago, Cardinal Basil Hume, deceased Archbishop of Westminster, said in a conference to the bishops of the United States (here I paraphrase): “Fathers, don’t think of the Ten Commandments as something out there that is imposed on you. Rather, think of them as nothing more than the instructions that the manufacturer gives you when you buy a product. If you want the product to work, follow the instructions. If you don’t follow the instructions, don’t be surprised if it doesn’t work. It is the same with the Ten Commandments...”

Teach the Ten Commandments in the spirit of the Gospel. The lives of those you teach, and so, therefore, the world, will be better for your effort. As Saint Paul exhorted the Ephesians, “Let us proclaim the truth in love and grow to the full maturity of Christ...” (Eph. 4:16). ■

*Most Reverend Richard J. Malone, STL, ThD, is bishop of Portland, Maine.*

# AN EXPERIENCE WITH ECHOES OF FAITH PLUS

by Jo Rotunno



Over the past ten years, most of my experiences with *Echoes of Faith* have been as a producer rather than as a user. Recently, I had the opportunity to conduct an eight-hour session over two days with a group of catechists from the Archdiocese of Chicago at their catechetical conference. Here are three insights I gained about *Echoes* as a result of that experience.

## USE AT CATECHETICAL CONFERENCES

*Echoes* works well in a conference setting. In Chicago, catechists chose a formation track and spent two days on a single doctrinal theme. In Chicago we had the opportunity to explore the Liturgy and Sacraments module in four two-hour blocks. We focused

on one segment in each block and found it allowed participants ample opportunity for reflection and discussion.

## THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY-BASED FORMATION

Our format in Chicago allowed us a limited yet valuable community-building opportunity. The rooms were set up with round tables and we created a center for prayer. Participants learned and prayed and shared faith together and, as they did so, learned the formational value of these activities for their own catechetical settings. What I have always loved about the *Echoes* learning design is the process it offers for just this kind of formation. Even when modules are spaced out over a long period of time, each discrete module serves a formational purpose because of its reflection-based learning design.

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*Those of us who have the privilege of forming catechists live for moments of insight like this in our learners.*

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### THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION

In Chicago, we used the Spiritual Reflection that appears at the beginning of each *Echoes Plus* booklet. Since the new Liturgy and Sacraments booklet was not yet in print, I preprinted the article for the group to share. A reflection on the transforming power of the sacraments began there, and the insights continued later as we explored sacrament and sacramentality. I recall that one man remarked, “I thought I had a pretty good understanding of the seven sacraments, but this idea of the sacramentality of experience and of *being* sacrament for others — bringing Christ to them — these ideas are new to me. This is huge!” Those of us who have the privilege of forming catechists live for moments of insight like this in our learners.

### SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES: LABYRINTH WALK

Because our theme was Liturgy and Sacraments, I made a special effort to provide ritual prayer services that would model for catechists the importance of such prayer in the learning setting. I used and adapted the opening and closing prayers in the booklet and provided several additional prayer moments as well. But on the morning of the second day, we had an experience that I can only describe as a graced moment. I share it, even though it is not a part of *Echoes* per se, but to demonstrate that the *Echoes* process is flexible enough to allow you to make adaptations and to seize opportunities.

The Chicago Conference provided a Labyrinth Room for participants, staffed by a local parish that has created a model of the labyrinth in the Chartres Cathedral in France. I arranged for our group of fifty catechists to walk the canvas labyrinth as their Saturday morning prayer. While fifty people walking together on even a large labyrinth was not ideal, I wanted the group to experience this prayer form. We spent about 20 minutes in the labyrinth room, then walked back to our meeting space in silence.

I asked how the experience had been. A Dominican sister who had experienced many labyrinth walks raised her hand and I held my breath. I fully expected her to express disappointment at the truncated and crowded experience we had just had. Instead, she said it had been one of her best labyrinth walks. “As I walked the labyrinth,” she said, “I was bumped and jostled by others, and I found myself thinking what a wonderful model of church this was. We were all in the circle of church together, sometimes bumping up against one another, but going to God together.” Her sharing prompted others to join in, and soon we were marveling at the variety of insights that all of us had had. Isn’t this the essence of ministry formation, learning to articulate for others what the faith journey is about? Together, we grow so that we can help others to do the same.

### MAKING ADJUSTMENTS

One thing I should point out in closing is that we did not completely cover the module even in the eight hours allotted to us. I had to make adjustments to the booklet process as I went along, but was happy to find that the *Echoes* process offered me enough options to do this. We covered the major content, and used enough of the materials to help me feel that we had made good use of the module. Afterwards, I made adjustments to my outline that would allow things to flow more smoothly the next time.

I hope that you will consider sending us your own experiences of facilitating *Echoes of Faith*. By April, you’ll find an electronic format for submitting your ideas on [EchoesofFaith.com](http://EchoesofFaith.com). More about that next month! ■

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

**. . . DISTRUSTING THE BIG STORY**

A second theme or set of characteristics, which in many ways flows from the first, concerns the perception of a “metanarrative.” A metanarrative is the all-encompassing story we tell ourselves (and each other) to help us make sense of the world. A metanarrative is the overarching amalgamation of images, symbols, and stories through which we organize and interpret the world around us.

From a postmodern stance, the metanarrative is viewed with suspicion; there is a caution about how we delineate and employ the metanarrative. There are two key dimensions of this: first, a group’s profession of a common metanarrative may lead to the conclusion that everyone thinks alike and holds and even understands the metanarrative in the same way. Second, a group’s powerful metanarrative can become so pervasive that it becomes not simply an identity-forming metanarrative for the members of the group; it is seen by that group as the only possible way to make meaning of the world, or at least the best way.

A quick example: one of the metanarratives that marked American culture during the second half of the twentieth century was that by hard work and good living, one could succeed and share fully in all the best that a capitalist country has to offer. Obviously, the lived metanarrative was more complex than stated here, but its formative role often left unanswered and even unasked questions such as these: Who defines success? What qualifies as hard work and good living? Who benefits and who loses within a capitalist economic structure? Additionally, the metanarrative worked (works?) well for those who shaped it, but those who were outsiders to the story were seldom so fortunate. This was particularly problematic once this view of culture evolved from being not only a story but THE story of what it meant to be an American.

**...DISTRUSTING THE BIG INSTITUTIONS**

The third characteristic of a postmodern perspective — in addition to the recognition of the social construction of reality and the suspicion of the use of metanarratives — is a distrust of and often a disengagement from large institutions. Two elements: on the one hand, large institutions are often the source and beneficiary of the

dominant metanarrative of a group or culture. After all, the large institutions became large and powerful within and because of the prevailing social, economic, and political organization. They generally have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Additionally, the demands of contemporary culture require that we engage with multiple and at times disparate large institutions without the benefit of having one of those institutions serve as the over-arching source of direction and meaning (see Gallagher 1998; Kegan 1994). This easily contributes to a tendency for us to select from the various institutions in our lives only those aspects that meet our needs or reflect our commitments and values.

*For reflection and conversation:*

*Do these three characteristics ring true for you? What evidence do you see of their presence in your parish or dioceses? Or what signs do you see of their absence?*

*In what ways are these present in your own way of making meaning of the world? Have they had an impact on how you think of yourself as a person of faith? As a catechetical leader?*

**IMPLICATIONS FOR ADULT FAITH FORMATION AND THE GDC**

So what? So what do all these “big events” and epistemological shifts have to do with how we read the *GDC* and how it informs our commitment to and approach with adults in the work of faith formation? My thesis is this: I think that core themes from the *GDC* provide a framework for our response to our present socio-cultural context and give insight into how we bring content of faith and principles of catechesis together effectively for this generation of adult believers. Here I simply examine three such themes; there are many others that I invite you to name and explore further.

**I. THE LEARNER**

The writers of the *GDC* consistently invite us to bring *the experience of the learner* into active engagement with the richness of the tradition. According to the *GDC*, reflection on human experience is important to catechesis not simply because through it we recognize our need for God or in light of it the Christian message becomes more intelligible. Rather, “experience, assumed by faith,



*Adult catechesis is oriented toward mission rather than membership.*

becomes in a certain manner a *locus* for the manifestation and realization of salvation, where God, consistently with the pedagogy of the Incarnation, reaches” humans with divine grace and saves them (*GDC*, 152b). It is through reflecting on experience in the light of faith that the reality of God’s loving presence is given shape in our lives.

In these times when the ramification of understanding society and culture as socially constructed, the role of adult believers who have the capacity to critically reflect on human experience with the eyes of faith becomes ever more crucial. Since Vatican II, Catholics have been enjoined to “read the signs of the times” in light of the Gospel message. Effective faith formation provides adults with the opportunity for sustained, critical conversation

though which the skills and confidence for establishing and maintaining effective dialogue between faith and life are honed. This is core to what the *GDC* means when it says that adults “are capable of an adherence that is fully responsible” (*GDC*, 59; *GCD* 1971, 20).

## II. THE COMMUNITY

By looking to the catechumenate as inspiration for all catechesis, the *GDC* highlights *the dynamic relationship between each believer and the community of faith*; it makes clear the importance of that relationship for effectively sharing the church’s teachings and vision. While the experience of each person is central, it is understood and given meaning within a community of

*continued on page 26*

William Dinges rightly draws our attention to the religious “temper” of American culture and the features of postmodern life that pervade the consciousness of the nation and its teenagers. Knowing that individualism and a culture of choice complicate young lives, Dinges shines a light on the tendency to make religion one more “signature” item that individual shoppers choose like cars or clothes. Dinges ends his essay not by condemning the culture of our own making but by exhorting practitioners and leaders to promote a positively constructed Catholic identity as distinct from — not better than — a Protestant or generically “Christian” identity. His exhortation seems particularly important and often lost in conversations about Catholic identity among pastoral ministers. If Dinges is right about the pervasive individualism in American culture and its understanding that religion is no more than a “choice,” then the dual task of naming and promoting a Catholic identity may prove to be both tricky and potentially renewing for Catholics of all ages, including the young.

It likely will be tricky because an identity born from standing in the center and not in the margins of society will be hard to carry off. Catholics have not been skilled in doing this. The first wave of Western European immigrants who came to the Eastern shores of the United States from 1840 to 1920 built the church buildings that became parishes and forged the Catholic school system that sealed an identity for several generations of Catholics. They did so in an America that was at times unwelcoming to these new immigrants from Ireland, Germany, Italy and Poland, to name a few countries. The lack of welcome accorded these immigrant Catholics was not due solely to their religion, but their religion contributed to and compounded the prejudice they experienced. And it sealed their identity as different from the dominant economic and religious culture at that time.

By contrast, today’s second and third waves of Latino and Asian Catholic immigrants meet with considerably less prejudice based on their Catholicism *per se*. Many Catholics of the first wave (and some of the second and third waves) can be blamed or praised for having amassed wealth and grasped the “American Dream” by the throat. A Catholic identity *over against* others, forged as a reaction to overt or subtle forms of anti-Catholicism, is harder to imagine today than in earlier times.

If many Catholics today are integrated in American social, political and economic institutions, non-Catholics also participate in

and benefit from the services of Catholic institutions. For example, the Catholic school system today serves non-Catholic as well as Catholic students and does so out of a deep commitment to a mission that has shifted its weight from Catholic identity “over against” Protestant Christians (and Protestant prayers in public schools). Catholic schools open their doors today to non-Catholics out of a renewed sense of mission to those who are in need of an education. Non-Catholic students and their families find riches in the school’s desire to embody Jesus’ message, to inculcate a sense of community and to commit to serve those in need. (Henderson, Henning)

### POTENTIAL FOR RENEWAL

Attempts at constructing a positive Catholic identity at this time in Catholic history also may carry potential for genuine renewal for teens and all Catholics, because these attempts begin with a distinct advantage. Ours is not our ancestors’ world or culture, but it is not our ancestors’ church either. Committed Catholics who seek to articulate a Catholic identity today will do so from a stronger point of departure because committed Catholic adults have grown in their *Christian* identity.

Success stories about catechetical practices in the past forty years inevitably showcase the catechumenate in its renewed form, and they narrate a conscious commitment to ground people in the Word of God (Mulhall, Henning, Warren). In addition to the catechumenate, small faith-sharing groups, Bible study circles and Advent and Lenten seasonal series in churches across the land attest to Catholic adults’ interest in Scripture as the basis for an integrated adult spirituality. Even the “discipleship” language employed by the authors (who quote or paraphrase official church documents as they use it) derives from a Christian self-understanding not readily overheard in Catholic speech or found in printed word before the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).

Three factors may give youth, and the adults who seek to form them, an advantage in this positive construction project. First, Catholic teens today know none or little of the history of Catholics in America. Second, they inhabit a multi-religious United States where postmodern sensibilities are intolerant of intolerance. Third, Michael Lee’s article notes that specific cultures and the family-based practices within them function like unearthed and long-unread texts that catechetical leaders need to



read and study. These three factors may furnish a distinct advantage in forging a positively constructed Catholic identity that avoids defensive stances and adversarial self-descriptions, and incorporates newly articulated understandings of identity through faith practices within family life.

Pastoral leaders in parishes, dioceses and schools will need to collaborate with academics, catechists and parents in attempting to construct, articulate and reflect upon Catholic identity. The following questions ought to find an impassioned voice and a thoughtful hearing among them:

- Are Catholic adults willing to undertake this project in concert with their non-Catholic spouses, friends and colleagues? What will be the anticipated benefits to a process that brings them together to do this?
- In the course of articulating Catholic identity, will bishops, pastoral leaders and academics — all those with a formal theological education — respect the input of lay Catholics whose language, imagination and experience are, depending on one's perspective, either constrained or freed by less formal theological education and traditional categories than their leaders?
- What sets of experiences can pastoral leaders provide to promote genuine conversation among family members of various generations about those practices that help to reveal God to them? Spurred on by the postmodern perspective of teenagers, Catholic adults may be challenged to become clear and articulate about distinctiveness within ecumenism, positively (and not defensively) forming a Catholic identity in a larger Christian matrix.

Constructing a theologically reasoned and pastorally effective response to the challenges set forth by the nine authors of these essays will require the efforts of theorists and practitioners of religious education, parents and families, adults and catechetical volunteers. We will need to practice humility and to cultivate, rather than compete with, one another in naming any next steps to support the faith of the young. ■

*Michael P. Horan, Ph.D., is professor of religious education and pastoral theology at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, California.*

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*We must promote a positively constructed Catholic identity as distinct from — not better than — a Protestant or generically “Christian” identity.*

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faith that shares common rituals, stories, and understanding of the world, that is, a common metanarrative.

As we look at the process of the catechumenate, described in the *GDC* as well as in the Rite itself, this becomes clear: the Christian metanarrative is not imposed from outside but is brought forward in light of the questions and experiences of the catechumens themselves. As the catechumens (and indeed the whole faith community) are invited ever deeper into the movement of conversion, they come to hold the Christian story not as one told to them by others but as a story — a metanarrative that gives meaning to their own lives.

### III. EVANGELIZATION

With the *GDC*'s vision that sets the entire catechetical enterprise — and ultimately of the life of the church — in the *work of evangelization*, we see that our primary task is to further the reign of God. Obviously, we generally presume that furthering the reign of God and enhancing the vitality of the church are mutually complementary activities. However, the call to be evangelizing in all that we do requires that we switch from a focus on the church to an awareness of our mission to the wider world. In a sense, the goal of adult catechesis isn't simply to enhance or strengthen membership in the Roman Catholic Church but to further the work of Christ in bringing the Good News into every strata of humanity and transforming it from within (*GDC*, 46). Adult catechesis — indeed all forms of catechesis — is oriented toward mission rather than membership.

The call to be an evangelizing community provides a helpful point of entry to those who distrust large institutions because of their apparent cooperation in the hegemony of the prevailing metanarrative. To be the evangelizing force that is its mission and identity, the church — both corporately and as individual members — must offer with gratitude and humility the gift of God's grace given in Jesus Christ. The proclamation of the church's metanarrative cannot be one rooted in power over but must be founded on the call in I Peter "to always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope" (I Peter 3:15). So the work of evangelization is not about perpetuating an institution or imposing a metanarrative. It is about acting in such a way that people actually notice lives lived in hope and then ask for an explanation.

For the *GDC* to continue to serve as a resource for those engaged in catechesis, and particularly those connected with adult faith formation, it is helpful and important to return to the document with the questions of the day. This essay represents just one articulation of that task. In what other ways can a return to the themes and insights of the *GDC* clarify and strengthen our work as catechetical leaders? ■

*Dr. Jane E. Regan is associate professor in theology and religious education at Boston College's Institute of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry. Her research and teaching focus primarily on adult faith formation*

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## Farewell to Sr. Kathy Kandefer



Sr. Katherine Kandefer, BVM, is someone who has always valued NCCL and she has loved working with and serving the NCCL community. Many were saddened to hear that Sr. Kathy will no longer be at the national office of NCCL to answer our calls and solve our problems in her role as Associate Director. As a member, Sr. Kathy, served NCCL as treasurer (1992-1994) and as NCDD Board member from New England (1989-1990). She has also offered workshops since 1982 on numerous topics dear to members. We will miss her and look forward to seeing what new ways she will find to continue to serve. With a track record like hers, we know the future holds promise. God-speed, Sr. Kathy, and stay in touch!

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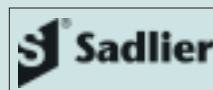


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RCL Benziger is owned by CFM Religion Publishing Group, LLC. CFM also owns Standard Publishing in Cincinnati which is a non-denominational Christian publisher. However, the companies are independent and RCL Benziger continues to serve the Catholic market with Catholic materials. All our catechetical programs are submitted to the USCCB Ad Hoc Committee to oversee the use of the Catechism for conformity review.

## Why is Silver Burdett Ginn Religion not in the new company name?

We regret that we must phase out the use of the name Silver Burdett Ginn. Pearson Education publishes other academic products under the Silver Burdett Ginn imprint.

## What products will continue to be available?

All the current product lines from RCL, Benziger, and Silver Burdett Ginn Religion are and will continue to be available. This includes all three K–8 series: *Blest Are We*; *Faith First*; and *Christ Jesus, the Way*.

## Who is my local RCL Benziger sales representative?

You can find your local representative listed at [www.RCLBenziger.com](http://www.RCLBenziger.com). Each sales representative is committed to providing you with the highest quality service.

## How do I place an order?

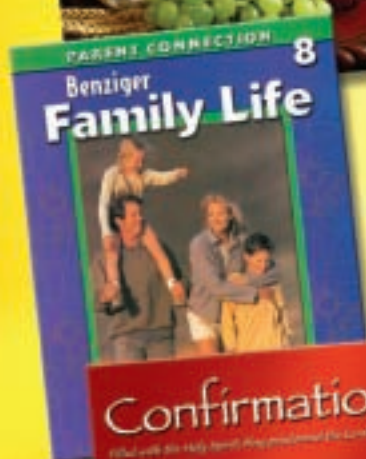
For your convenience, you can now order materials from all three product lines by calling one toll free number—**1-877-275-4725**. Our customer service representatives are eager to help you.



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