Catechism

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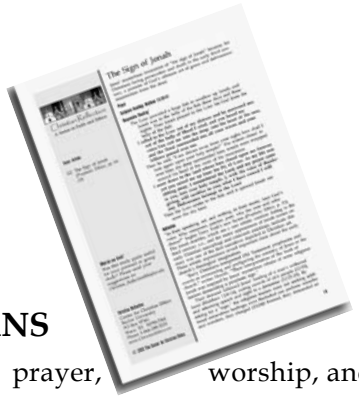

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First Baptist Church in Richmond, Texas, is turning to an historical method of catechesis to help adolescents frame their faith expressions and understand the congregation's historical Baptist identity. The catechism class provides the foundation for their growth as faithful disciples.

Spiritual Direction

In the ancient discipline of spiritual direction, practical guidance for Christians of all ages is offered in the most sensitive and delicate way. The best spiritual directors are both good listeners and active interpreters of God's grace in the life of the individual and of the community.

Introduction

BY ROBERT B. KRUSCHWITZ

A catechism transforms new believers from listeners into discoverers. Answering its questions, we discover what and whose we are. We discover that God calls us into a community of disciples, who together join the drama of God's redeeming action.

As we face the moral complexity of the world, no practice better orients our thinking toward God's truth and prepares us to love as God loves than the Church's ancient practice of catechesis, or formal instruction of new believers in faithfulness. Indeed, this "intentional approach is all the more necessary in a time when cultural Christianity has given way…[and] Christian identity is not secure," George Mason notes.

Catechesis transforms new believers from listeners into discoverers. This is catechism's "secret," its immense value, for the seventeenth-century poet and priest George Herbert. "At sermons, and prayers, men may sleep or wander," he wrote, "but when one is asked a question, he must *discover what he is*." More appropriately, we must *discover whose we are*. We must discover that God calls us into a community of disciples, who together join the drama of God's redeeming action.

Unfortunately, writes Gary Furr in *Stepping into the Drama* (p. 11), we are far more deeply initiated today by the powerful catechisms of media, American culture, and capitalism than by this ancient faith of Christians. "The goal of catechesis," he explains, "is not merely information, but the formation of new believers into the people of God. They enter a spiritual friendship that introduces them to a new conceptual world and fosters a new set of behaviors and attitudes toward life." Distinctive practices—like repentance, prayer, worship, loving service, mutual correction, and forgiveness—enable us to enter God's story, learn our part, and joyfully take up our roles. Upon these right patterns of discipleship we can shape a time-honored yet

personal expression of our faith. The purpose of catechesis, then, is to help new Christians embrace faithful practices of worship and service and to articulate their emerging discipleship in fitting words, art, and music.

To some Christians catechesis seems like a foreign practice that distances new believers from and diminishes the Bible's authority. In *Considering Catechism for Suspicious Protestants* (p. 20), Dan Williams examines how the early Christians carefully instructed recent converts or those preparing for baptism in the story of Scripture. "To introduce new believers to the Church of Jesus Christ," he discovers, "is to open for them the treasures of the apostolic faith and practice—a faith larger than any one denomination's claims upon it—sharpened and transmitted through the ages."

The artistic tradition of manuscript illumination is a time-honored way of pointing believers toward the central themes of Scripture. In *Illuminating the Word* (p. 38), Heidi Hornik introduces *The Saint John's Bible*, the first handwritten and illuminated Bible commissioned since the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century. An inspiring "gift from the Saint John's Abbey to all Christians, to enhance their worship and serve their catechesis for generations to come," the *Bible* employs medieval techniques to convey modern themes and illustrations to "touch the hearts of those who view [it] with the biblical message of forgiveness." She examines three important illuminations that accompany Luke and Acts—*Life in Community* (on the cover), *Life of Paul*, and *Birth of Christ*—and compares the latter to *Nativity*, a stained-glass window from the Chartres Cathedral.

Burt Burleson's worship service (p. 52) celebrates our coming to know what we are and whose we are. "Truth we are professing, / Life we are pursuing, / Love we are becoming, / make us all we're meant to be," we pray in Burleson's new hymn to the Triune God. His friend Kurt Kaiser contributes a simple melody that may be sung as a round (p. 50).

George Mason and Kyle Reese take stock of this central function of catechesis in orienting us toward life's purpose "to glorify God and enjoy him forever," as *The Westminster Catechism* famously teaches. "While Baptists are not creedal people, the creeds or confessions of faith can serve well in teaching the historic faith to young people and adult converts," George Mason admits in *Taking Our Aim* (p. 58). "The Church must retrieve ancient practices that help to shape the people of God into the kind of people that can, as their second nature, glorify God and enjoy him forever." In *Living With Questions of Purpose* (p. 62), Kyle Reese explores the question asked of God in Psalm 8, "what are human beings that you are mindful of them?" We can discover our human identity only as we live with this haunting question and realize with the psalmist that "God is willing to risk God's work and word by sharing power with human beings, even babes and infants."

For practical guidance in instructing new believers, young and old, we can turn to three articles by Debra Dean Murphy, John Lockhart, and Emilie Griffin. Through corporate worship with adults, children are preparing for

their roles in God's drama, Murphy observes in *Introducing Children to Worship* (p. 30). "Worship which is attentive to the gospel's grand story," she trusts, "will transform their lives, will feed their imaginations not their egos, and will help them (and us) learn to order our lives by the gift of God's time." Lockhart's congregation is discovering how a question-and-answer catechism helps adolescents "frame their faith expressions and understand the congregation's historical Baptist identity." As he explains in *Laying the Foundations of Faith* (p. 66), "If we put the right questions into the hearts of children, with answers that guide them toward a faithful dialogue with one another, their teachers, and God, we nurture disciples whose faith continues to mature through life." We often think of catechesis as a group practice, with one teacher for several pupils. But in *The Teaching Power of Spiritual Direction* (p. 73), Griffin shows how "spiritual direction, once confined to religious communities, is now used broadly by laypeople as well." This one-on-one approach to spiritual instruction can help believers of all ages "sustain a regular commitment to prayer and to life of the Spirit."

"To many Christians catechism seems like a set of abstract questions and important-sounding answers, a sort of divinely sanctioned Scholastic Aptitude Test to guarantee entrance into the Kingdom of God," Todd Edmondson admits in *Learning Life-Giving Ways of Life* (p. 81). He reviews two approaches to restoring the tradition of catechism for youth and adults. In *Soul Shaper: Exploring Spirituality and Contemplative Practices in Youth Ministry* and *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life*, Tony Jones surveys ancient practices for Christian growth, ranging from the use of icons and labyrinths to fasting and spiritual direction. And Dorothy Bass has edited two books, *Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens* (with Don Richter) and *Practicing our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, that commend traditional practices like hospitality, stewardship, Sabbath-keeping, and forgiveness. These winsome books address our fears about catechesis, Edmondson writes, by opening "space within the patterns of daily life so that believers might practice the presence of God, not just in the words they say or doctrines they believe, but in the ways they use their hands and feet."

In *Catechism in the Worshiping Community* (p. 86)—his review of Simon Chan's *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community*, Debra Dean Murphy's *Teaching That Transforms: Worship as the Heart of Christian Education*, and Sara Wenger Shenk's *Anabaptist Ways of Knowing: A Conversation about Tradition-Based Critical Education*—Gerald Mast praises this trend toward restoring practices of Christian instruction. Yet he warns us, with Shenk, not to overlook the importance of critically examining those practices and discussing our disagreements. "As the rabbis have taught us, and as Jesus himself showed, there is nothing more intensely liturgical or worshipful than an animated argument about the proper response of the gathered body to the received Word of God," Mast concludes. "Of such drama, too, is radical conversion made."

Stepping into the Drama

BY GARY FURR

Catechesis invites us to assume our roles in the unfolding drama of God's continuing creation and redemption of the world. Yet we are far more deeply initiated by the powerful catechisms of media, American culture, and capitalism than by the ancient faith of Christians. Can we recover the sense that our life with God is an adventure?

The dynamism of art, the novelist Dorothy Sayers once observed, is that it is three-dimensional. It is not enough for an artist to have a good idea. Her art must become incarnated as a completed work and experienced by an audience for it to have its full life—whether as a play that is enjoyed, a book that is read, or a song that is sung and listened to.[1]

As a pastor in a church that struggles to transmit the Christian life genuinely and faithfully to the people God has called into our fellowship, I suspect Sayers's insight offers a clue to what is missing in our congregational life. We intuitively sense the void of Christian catechesis (instruction and training) among our people, who are far more deeply initiated by the powerful catechisms of media, American culture, and capitalism than by the ancient faith of Christians. Have we lost the sense that our life with God is an adventure? How can we invite our people into discipleship that is full-bodied, life-changing, and three-dimensional?

The entire notion of catechesis invites us to better understand and assume our roles in the unfolding drama of the Triune God's continuing creation and redemption of the world. Let's consider four questions that are critical to this issue.

First, how can congregations today help children, young people, and new Christians embody the central texts of Scripture and the Christian tradition in order to step into their roles, discern the present activity of the Spirit, and cherish the practices of the church?

More specifically, how should Baptists (and other free church Christians) embrace the idea of basic instruction in the faith? There are theological resources within our own way of approaching faith that can guide us.

Third, though catechism calls us into a new community with a distinctive way of interpreting oneself and the world, we can never fully escape the habits and assumptions, prejudices and politics of our social location. What challenges do we face in attempting true catechism in our culture?

Finally, what are some practical ways that we can do this work of catechesis today? As much as we might romantically pine for simpler times (though we probably underestimate the difficulties that Christians faced in those times, too), we live now. What theological and practical resources can we bring to bear to accomplish what we know must be done?

HELPING A NEW GENERATION ENTER THE DRAMA

Catechesis, if we understand it broadly, is about how we transmit the faith to the next generation of believers. Richard Osmer identifies three central tasks of catechetical instruction: preserving the normative faith, interpreting those beliefs and practices amid a constantly changing historical and cultural landscape, and creating and sustaining the educational institutions, processes, and curricula needed to complete the first two tasks.[2]

Traditional written catechisms followed a question-and-answer approach to teaching the faith. The strength of this time-honored method is its clarity in communicating essential beliefs and truths; yet, it runs the risk of reducing the faith to cognitive development while it neglects character formation. Learning the Christian faith is not simply about gaining theological information; it is also about transforming all of the dimensions of the person—the will, the affective life, and behaviors.

Catechetical instruction includes *praxis* (worshiping, praying, witnessing, doing mission, helping the needy, advocating justice, and developing spiritual disciplines), *doxology* (prayer and worship), and *therapeutics* (the inner work of healing, growing in grace, and sanctification) as well as *theology*. Learning the faith, then, is less like a child memorizing the list of state capitals and more like an apprentice learning a trade or a music student learning to sing. Foundational theories and essential skills lead us to a higher level of functioning that is grounded in new knowledge, personal experiences, honed abilities, and crafted skills.

When catechesis operates as it is intended, at the heart of the process is an essential human relationship between a teacher and a learner. This spiritual relationship is the irreducible core. The instructional contents conveyed are only the building blocks of this relationship, just as the spoken sentences of care and love connect human beings in friendships and communities.

The goal of catechesis, then, is not merely information, but formation.[3] It is the "socialization" of new believers into the people of God. They enter a spiritual friendship that introduces them a new conceptual world and fos-

ters a new set of behaviors and attitudes toward life.

It is no wonder, then, that teaching the faith is embedded in every single aspect of what the Church does. Indeed, the "art" of local congregational life is helping others to enter this drama successfully. Each congregation is an instrument of catechism, through both formal and informal instruction and mentoring. People learn the faith as they worship, pray, give offerings, hear sermons, and study the Bible together. Adults and youth learn it in conversations as they ride to a mission project together. Parents and children learn it as they talk about what is going to happen on pledge-the-church-budget day or at the annual church reunion.

A formal catechism class is only the beginning of instruction in the faith. We should operate, in a time like ours, with the assumption that those who gather in our churches do not know the essentials of Christian belief and practice. Ours is a time to be the teaching church.

Think of the catechism class as an actor's workshop; just as a workshop is not the whole of the actor's training, the catechism class is not all that trains a disciple to enter the divine drama. This means that we must come to every aspect of our life in a congregation with a certain seriousness and artistic spirit. It may be as simple as adding a few explanatory sentences in worship to invite the "stranger" to participate with understanding. (In truth, we will be helping the member of many years understand as well.)

Our lack of seriousness concerning two central features of the Christian life—baptism and the Lord's Supper, or the "ordinances" as Baptists call them—deserves more attention. We have diminished their role through all sorts of "artistic" decisions about them. In our theological reaction to Catholic and Anglican mystery, we have become theological "minimalists" who can say such terrible things as "It's only a symbol" about the rite of Christian initiation.

The goal of catechesis is not merely information, but the formation of new believers into the people of God. They enter a spiritual friendship that introduces them to a new conceptual world and fosters a new set of behaviors and attitudes toward life.

Too often we have replaced these public and communal acts with personal experience (as in revivalism) as the beginning of the Christian drama. Or, for pragmatic reasons of entertaining television or radio audiences, we have displaced their observance from the heart of public worship. The first and simplest thing we might do to treat them with seriousness is to return them to the center of our theological understanding and a focal point of our worship. In my church, they are included in Sunday morning worship, not in

some other "time-saving" location in the weekly calendar. The congregation stands when a candidate enters the baptistry, to honor the moment. Members sense that in this solemn moment something important is happening.

To these I would add "ordination" to a calling, or vocation, as something we need to approach with greater seriousness. To be true to our theology, we must preach and practice calling as broadly as possible; it is not only the province of the clergy. We need rituals for commissioning mission groups, calling forth Sunday school teachers, selecting deacons, and ordaining ministers. Who we ordain, bless, affirm, call out, and recognize, as well as how we do it, is a great opportunity to teach about the Christian life.

EXPLORING BAPTIST CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SCRIPT

Before moving into the resources Christians have both to invite others to step into the drama and to confront the challenges of today's culture, let's explore how the historical Baptist tradition has contributed to the script. We Baptists (and other free church Christians) already have a catechism—a process of transmitting the faith—embedded in our ongoing practices, beliefs, and congregational structures. We emphasize that the local, gathered congregation is the teaching church as well as the worshiping church and ministering church. Religious education is not simply something we "do" at certain times; rather, it is implied by all that our congregations do. The constant danger, unfortunately, is that we will take this entire process for granted and not be reflective and intentional about what we are teaching through our worship and ministry.[4]

The most intentional aspect of our Baptist catechism is found in the self-conscious "distinctives" we preach and teach. In every generation leading thinkers have articulated key themes of freedom, congregation, Scripture, experience, conversion, baptism, autonomy, and voluntary cooperation.

In a famous essay entitled "Why I am a Baptist," theologian Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918) distilled these to three major emphases. Rauschenbusch's first reason for being a Baptist was that Baptists set "spiritual experience boldly to the front as the one great thing in religion." Practically, this meant that Baptists emphasized the Bible and personal experience on one hand and de-emphasized creeds on the other.

Baptists are most definitely "people of the Book." If we disagree about many particulars regarding interpretation and application of Scripture, there is no question that our reflections begin in Scripture and our applications cannot be disconnected from Scripture. Those who come into Baptist life often notice how we memorize the Bible, study it, pray with its words and concepts, listen to sermons based on it, and think about it.

This importance of personal experience also implies that learning the Bible is not sufficient. Free churches emphasize the centrality of a regenerate membership, which in simpler terms means that we call for personal commitment to Christ from all who are members of the church. Unapologetical-

ly we ask for a personal decision for Christ, carefully assess it in one another, and nurture it in all the life of the church.

Rauschenbusch's second reason was the Baptist understanding of worship, which he believed is bound up in the idea of freedom. This is embodied most clearly in our understanding of a very crucial doctrine, the priesthood of all believers. A free church, worshiping with a free conscience, leads to the truest and most spiritual worship. My friend Glenn Hinson has described this in my presence many times as the voluntary principle of religion—"for faith to be genuine," he once said at my church, "it must be free." We might also say the converse—for faith to be truly free, it must be genuine. Freedom is always in peril in religion, but so is faith's survival.

The Baptist idea of freedom is meaningless without its companion virtue, responsibility. The priesthood of all believers, in fact, implies this. Not only does this doctrine point to God's freedom to relate to human beings without the mediation of institution or cult, it also reminds us that the work of the people of God is the responsibility of all the people, not just a few.

A third reason to be a Baptist, said Rauschenbusch, is found in the Baptist understanding of church. He believed that the voluntary, democratic, non-hierarchical, egalitarian spirit of Baptist congregations equipped them better to carry on the Kingdom work in a modern world. This is because the center of those churches is not institutional structure but heart religion that brings a continual experience of reform and vitality.

As we live out these "distinctives," we demonstrate to new Christians how to be in community with one another in the spirit of the New Testament and without rigid authority structures. As we discern God's leadership, do congregational "business," and work through our differences and conflicts, we bring a new generation into our way of church. This is part of the dramatic role they must learn as disciples in the Kingdom.

In every time and place, Christians have faced specific cultural challenges to becoming the people of God. Today, consumerism, individualism, and the impact of technology present huge obstacles to catechism.

RESISTING CONSUMERISM

In every time and place, Christians have faced specific cultural challenges to becoming the people of God. Today in North America, consumerism, individualism, and the impact of technology present huge obstacles to deepening our relationships to one other, to God, and to ourselves (rightly understood) within to the Kingdom of God. Let us examine how our Baptist practices might be resources for responding to these challenges.

Consumerism is powerfully reducing all of the issues of life in our culture to the economic dimension. We even are tempted to measure membership in a congregation and Christian friendship in terms of their financial usefulness to us. Will these people encourage me, help me find a career, and support my family? With whom can I "network" at church? Though the difficulties of this consumerist attitude are endlessly discussed, the practical responses are not always obvious.

One response, I suggest, is in the Baptist emphasis on stewardship, on the careful management and generous sharing of our financial resources. The biblical mandates for generosity and stewardship are not just about "personal morality," nor about "giving to the church offering," but about the proper structuring of all our relationships. For instance, the abuse of money is a major issue in many marital failures. In the days to come, stewardship will be more important than ever. We will drown in a sea of material complacency and our relationships will dissolve into mere partnerships, unless we learn and live the virtue of generosity.

FACING INDIVIDUALISM

The pervasive individualism of our culture, with the attendant lack of genuine community, is a second challenge to true catechism. Family life, community life, parenting, work, personal vocation, and the Church are fraying from the impact of inappropriate individualism.

It often teams up with consumerism to distort our lives. Our sexual lives, for example, are deeply damaged by both—with consumerism turning human sexuality into a marketed commodity and individualism exalting the hedonistic self above all else. The Christian counter-story calls us into God's Kingdom where we surrender our egocentric self in trust to God and we learn to act against our economic self-interest willingly.

Baptists often struggle to articulate this facet of Kingdom life because our history and theological distinctives have been so deeply couched in the language of modern democratic self-determination. Our unique contribution to the modern Church has been our advocacy of religious liberty for all. Historic Baptist calls for freedom were born in succeeding contexts of resistance to oppression and persecution. So today we rightly resist any form of communitarianism that becomes an authoritarian system of domination.

Yet what can prevent our religious freedom from turning into laissez-faire religion? How can we be free to believe without just believing whatever we want? An appropriate emphasis on "individuality" rather than "individualism" will help us. Community without robust individuality turns into either authoritarianism or collective inertia.

We can connect our lives with the stories of great Christians and the story of the Church. Patterning our lives after the lives of believers has biblical precedent. Not only will we serve someone, we will also pattern ourselves after someone. The object is not to produce docile personalities,

but vibrant and energetic ones. This is precisely what happens to church members in the book of Acts. They do not turn into zombies at all. They fight, struggle, advocate, and suffer, but never lose the sense that they are a "we" in all of this.

We can emphasize our solidarity with one another through the free-church practice of testimony. For instance, during worship I have interviewed church members about how their faith in Jesus Christ connects with their daily lives. These interviews have been quite profound as members come to know one another.

USING TECHNOLOGY RESPONSIBLY

A third challenge to catechism today is the overwhelming impact of technology in our society. Though family members and friends are more "stretched out" today—separated by miles, life pace, time, and commitments—their yearning to stay connected has not changed at all. In response to this deep desire, many important new technologies are connective and informational in their nature. So we have e-mail addresses and blogs, MySpace and Facebook, cell phones and instant messaging. Today we can communicate across continents much more easily than our ancestors could speak to people living in the same county two-hundred years ago.

Congregations are challenged by the many competing claims for attention that these technologies present. Fifty years ago a church might expect five to eight hours a week of a person's time, but today two hours a week is an enormous commitment of face-to-face contact. How can we utilize and develop these "technologies of connection" to catechize believers? The Internet puts enormous resources of connection and instruction at our fingertips, but how do we use them without unwittingly surrendering some important dimensions of the faith?

These technologies of connection can help us to do the work of "instruction in the faith" in a different way. They should not replace our face-to-face connection, but we can supplement and sustain the relational core of our relationships by the strategic use of these technologies. For instance, I regularly maintain contact with younger members of the church through e-mail, and I am giving thought to how sophisticated, interactive "discipleship" resources could be placed on the Web. Most church leaders are very familiar with the frustration of trying to carry out membership orientation and instruction in the faith in a traditional, long-term classroom setting with a typical weekly schedule, though it is still the best way.

Might "distance" discipleship training sessions on the Internet replace the old hour on Sunday evening? What about creating a "curriculum for new Christians" on the church Web site for those who struggle to be present through the week? Adults on the go these days spend a lot of lonely time in hotels and motels and in "crowded isolation" on airplanes where a chance to listen to something of significance would be appreciated. Laptop comput-

ers, DVD players, CD players, and iPods offer vastly expanded opportunities to teach believers.[5]

Even while we explore increased use of these technologies of connection, we must also work in the opposite direction to maximize opportunities for face-to-face relationship in the context of faith. Believers need intensive and unprogrammed occasions to talk to and learn from one another. A spiritual retreat can offer quiet, unhurried times for reflection and renewal, where we can work our way through our deepest dilemmas in the presence of God.

While we use laptops, DVD players, and iPods to teach believers, we must also work to maximize opportunities for face-to-face relationships. Believers need intensive and unprogrammed occasions to talk to and learn from one another.

Instruction in the faith should also provide opportunities to explore our sin and seek reconciliation. (I choose the word "explore" rather than "confess" even though I mean the same thing.) Is not the exploration and understanding of our brokenness, repentance, and sharing the journey of forgiveness part of our vocation? In worship, discipleship, and instruction, we need to be about the work of reconciliation, not of improved perception. "Looking well" is sometimes more important in the middle-class American congregation than "being well." We desperately need, through spiritual direction, confession, sermon, and worship, a fellowship where we can "be ourselves" in order to be better selves.

CONCLUSION

If the Christian life is like an unfolding drama that we are invited to enter, then growing in discipleship is less like reading a play than it is practicing our part with a master actor. We are not learning merely to recite, but to live and act. This is a beautiful analogy for catechesis.

Too often we approach our life as a series of problems to be solved, Dorothy Sayers noted, though the harder we try to "fix" things the more problems we seem to have. The artist can help us here, "since the artist does not see life as a problem to be solved, but as a medium for creation."[6]

Like a budding actor in a play, our life becomes our medium for creation. Life has certain possibilities within it, and our goal is not to make it do everything, but to bring out what it contains as its potential. There is always something we can "make" of our life, whatever problems we encounter or limits that we have; there is always the possibility that, through imagination and hope, something wonderful can be made of it.

Our work is not to master, to control, or to fix our life, but to explore life as a wonder and a possibility and "to cooperate with it in love."[7]

The same is true of the Christian life. Catechism is far more important and far more demanding of our best efforts than we imagine. We have only begun when the baptismal class is finished. What faces us is the nurturing of a spark into a life aflame—one that has learned by lived experience how to love, serve, suffer, and sacrifice so that we might live in God's Kingdom that has come to pass.

NOTES

1 Dorothy L. Sayers reflects on this Trinitarian structure of art throughout *The Mind of the Maker*, new edition (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004; originally published by Harcourt Brace New York, 1941), but especially chapter three, "Idea, Energy, and Power."

2 Margaret A. Krych develops Osmer's view in "The Future of the Catechisms in Teaching," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 21 (October 1994), 333-339. Also see Richard Robert Osmer, "The Case for Catechism," *Christian Century*, 114 (April 23/30, 1997), 408-412.

3 See Robert Mulholland's fine discussion in *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

4 In *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), religious educator Maria Harris emphasizes that the church does not *have* a curriculum, it *is* a curriculum. Each congregation forms new members through *koinonia* (common life), *leitourgia* (worship), *didache* (teaching), *kerygma* (proclamation), and *diakonia* (ministry). They are not always aware of doing this. Thus, Harris helpfully distinguishes the explicit, implicit, and null curriculums in every congregation—i.e., the things they *try* to teach, things they convey invisibly that sometimes contradict what they explicitly espouse, and things they are unaware of and therefore miss out on teaching.

5 Identifying, creating, and pulling together the appropriate written and recorded discipleship materials will be much less difficult if like-minded churches and organizations "link" their resources through the Internet. For example, churches can link to this article and other materials from the *Christian Reflection* series through the "Ethics Library" of the Center for Christian Ethics at *www.ChristianEthics.ws*.

6 Sayers, p. 188.

7 Sayers, p. 186.

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Considering Catechism for Suspicious Protestants

BY DANIEL H. WILLIAMS

To introduce new believers to the Church of Jesus Christ is to open for them the rich treasures of the apostolic faith and practice—a faith much larger than any single denomination's claims upon it—sharpened and transmitted through the ages.

One of the stranger ancient citations of the Nicene Creed appears on a small piece of papyrus placed in a magical amulet from the later fifth century.[1] Evidently the wearer thought that the creed possessed power such that merely wearing it could invite God's blessing or ward off misfortune! We have no way knowing whether the wearer actually understood the creed and therefore thought its meaning was powerful, or if the creed was merely a token or emblem of the Church's power, rather like hanging a "Christian" rabbit's foot around your neck.

Similarly, reading a Bible passage or reciting one of the Church's major creeds today does not guarantee that a Christian will be grounded in the truths about God—in God's incarnation through Christ and plan of redemption. The print on the page of the Bible or the sounds of the creed in worship only approximately inform a believer in the task of understanding what the Bible teaches or what the creed is supposed to mean. While Protestants have been quick to point out the importance of the Bible's inner perspicacity—that many parts can be read and basically understood by anyone who shares in the life of the Spirit[2]—it is still true that arriving at a Christian interpretation of the central truths of the Old and New Testaments must be taught.

Likewise, a creed, which in very few words offers the chief principles of the Christian faith, does not interpret itself. As church history has shown countless times, there have been many who have read the Bible (or a creed)

from which they derived bizarre or heretical conclusions. This happened in antiquity; it still happens today.

While faith is something we experience through a gift from God, faith is no less about the content of what Christians believe. Both kinds of faith are learned, but the second kind is based on "loving the Lord your God with all your *mind*." That is, "the faith" has a particular substance that must be taught to believers. The Apostle Paul talks about this faith in the form of the Church's tradition as something "handed over" to those who would rightly understand the gospel. For understanding the historic Church's teaching is "not a matter of one's own private interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20), but of "receiving" that teaching and preserving it.

ARTICULATING THE CHRISTIAN MIND

The earliest developments in Christian education emerged out of situations of need. On one hand, the early Fathers speak most directly of the Church's tradition in apologetic contexts, when they are defending catholic faith against its detractors. On the other, they draw up summaries of faith for the purpose of instructing new converts. We must not underestimate the importance which the preservation and transmission of the apostolic memory had for the churches of the post-apostolic period. The impartation of Christian teaching to inquirers and learners was a constant in the life of these churches. Allusions to this process of instruction in ethical and theological exhortations demonstrate that catechesis "served as a control with considerable effect on the understanding of the Christian faith."[3]

We ought to bear in mind that there were no systems yet designed for presenting the Christian faith, certainly no theological textbooks or "Sunday school" type of materials offering a rudimentary outline of Christian belief and practice. The practice of a catechumenate—a series of steps that leads the new believer to baptism and a deeper knowledge of the faith—was created by the early Fathers. It was, in effect, the first version of "Sunday school," though a temporary schooling with specific aims.

What little we know about the mechanics of catechetical process in the second and third centuries is that the actual teaching of catechumens was done by those who were specially appointed to serve as catechists. Given that most "congregations" were house churches, the work of catechizing new believers took place in the catechist's own dwelling or some designated spot. When Justin (the Martyr) was arrested in his apartment in Rome, it turns out that there were with him six others whom he was teaching, presumably preparing them for baptism. All seven were executed shortly thereafter for their faith. Likewise, the arrest of Vibia Perpetua took place when the authorities suddenly burst into a catechetical "class." Perpetua was imprisoned and later martyred with four other catechumens and their catechist in the amphitheater at Carthage on March 7, 203. Simply being taught the Christian faith was no less hazardous than outwardly professing Christ.[4]

Many other well-known Christian intellectuals of the era were catechists. Clement of Alexandria was a leading catechist for the church of Alexandria, as was his most famous pupil, Origen. Almost as renowned was Didymus, the chief catechist of Alexandria in the early fourth century, who was made blind by disease at the age of four. Probably the otherwise unknown Marcianus, to whom Irenaeus wrote his *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* (see below), was a catechist.[5] This early practice of "farming out" the training of new Christians to local Christian philosophers differs from later practices when bishops usually handled this task, or at least the last stages of it. While the earliest evidence for the process indicates that it varied from place to place, a basic structure seems to run throughout.

Through Bible commentary, creedal statements, doctrinal explanations, and hymns that articulated a basic understanding of the Christian Bible, the Church from the earliest moment of its existence was a teaching church.

ORIGINS OF CATECHETICAL INSTRUCTION

For the early Christians, theology (or what the ancients called "the true philosophy") was not a metaphysical exercise detached from the intellectual, spiritual, and liturgical needs of congregations. It was an organic phenomenon; it grew out of the communities which heard the Scriptures and professed the faith. The seed of the Church's early faith bloomed into various expressions of Bible commentary, creedal statements, doctrinal explanations, hymns, and so on, which articulated in a few words a basic understanding of the Christian Bible and its profession. For good reason we may characterize the Church from the earliest moment of its existence as a teaching church.[6]

The earliest known catechism is a Jewish-Christian outline of ethics known as the "Two Ways." Jewish in origin, it was immediately adopted in Christian circles by the early second century. Three versions of it have come down to us in the *Epistle of Barnabas* 18-19, the *Didache*, and much later in book VII of the *Apostolic Constitutions*. It begins with the words, "There are two ways, one of life (or light) and one of death (or darkness); and between the two ways there is a great difference." What follows is a series of ethical injunctions, based on the Sermon on the Mount, directly quoting from Matthew 5 and Luke 6. Jesus' teaching on the lifestyle for the Kingdom of God is taken at face value and embraced as authentic Christian living. The catechetical nature of the these injunctions is made clear from that fact that

they are issued within the context of a congregation: among other things the reader is urged to honor those "who preach God's word to you" (*Didache* 4.1), all forms of schism among believers are condemned (4.3), and the confession of sins in the church assembly before offering prayer is said to be "the way of life" (4.14). Seeing how the "Two Ways" is immediately followed by baptismal instructions in both the *Didache* and the *Apostolic Constitutions* underscores its adaptation by churches as part of a catechism.

An acknowledged handbook of catechetical instruction from this period is Irenaeus' *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, a late second-century work that survives today only in a sixth-century Armenian translation. The addressee of the work, the same Marcianus mentioned above, is told that its aim is to "set forth in brief the preaching of the truth" by providing "in brief the proof (or exposition) of the things of God," i.e., a concentrated explanation of God's unfolding plan for salvation. This condensed narration of God's redemptive activity was in keeping with a didactic format that naturally lent itself to catechetical purposes.

Irenaeus begins by declaring that our faith "admonishes us to remember that we have received baptism for the remission of sins in the name of God the Father, and in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became incarnate and died and was raised, and in the Holy Spirit of God" (c. 3). Doctrinal elaboration immediately follows this baptismal formula, evidently drawing on the profession of faith that was accepted in the Gallic churches. Irenaeus here lays out the basis "of our faith, the foundation of the building, and the consolidation of a way of life":

> God the Father, uncreated, beyond grasp, invisible, one God the maker of all; this is the first and foremost article of our faith. But the second article is the Word of God, the Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord, who was shown forth by the prophets according to the design of their prophecy and according to the manner in which the Father disposed; and through Him were made all things whatsoever. He also, in the end of times…became a man among men, visible and tangible, in order to abolish death and bring to light life, and bring about the communion of God and man. And the third article is the Holy Spirit, through whom the prophets prophesied and the patriarchs were taught about God…and who in the end of times has been poured forth in a new manner upon humanity over all the earth renewing man to God. (c. 6)

The Trinitarian pattern, or "three articles," is not fashioned by Irenaeus, but more likely comes from baptismal confession of faith already used in the West at that time.[7] It becomes the doctrinal anchor for the rest of the catechetical manual, and Irenaeus concludes the work by warning readers against doctrinal errors about "God the Father our maker…and the Son of

God and the dispensation of his incarnation which the apostles transmitted to us…and the gifts of the Holy Spirit" (c. 99).

The *Apostolic Tradition* (ca. 220), one of the numerous works attributed to Hippolytus, provides unique insight into the worship and organizational practices of the church in Rome. It is intentionally conservative and even recalcitrant since Hippolytus seems to have been writing against what he considered to be recent innovation in the church's teaching; as a result, we cannot be exactly clear whether it represents the instruction given in the church at Rome or the idiosyncratic views of one man. When comparing the *Apostolic Tradition* with the content of other Christian confessions and liturgies we are probably justified in thinking that this document reflects the broader spectrum of Christian teaching, just as it claims explicitly to be recording only the forms and customs already long-established.

Catechumens, when they were standing in the waters of baptism after a three-year period of instruction and probation, were asked to confirm their faith by responding to the following questions (21.12-18):

> Do you believe in God the Father Almighty?
> Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God,
> who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,
> who was crucified in the days of Pontius Pilate,
> and died [and was buried],
> and rose the third day living from the dead,
> and ascended into heaven,
> and sat down at the right hand of the Father,
> and will come to judge the living and the dead?
> Do you believe in the Holy Spirit in the Holy Church, and the resurrection of the flesh?

This type of interrogatory format is more characteristic of baptismal formulas than of catechetical summaries. The latter were more fluid formulae of the faith and they became the predecessors of the Rule of faith that was being used by the middle of the second century as a test of orthodoxy.

EVOLUTION OF CATECHETICAL INSTRUCTION

The instruction of new believers became more sophisticated in the fourth century with the convergence of several trends: greater doctrinal sophistication due to the Trinitarian and Christological debates, the rise of several generations of highly educated and erudite Christian thinkers, and the influx of very many new Christians now that the persecutions were over. The structures for Christianizing converts were more carefully and consistently defined.[8]

A new stage was added in the catechetical process. "Catechumen" became the term for anyone who had enrolled for baptism but had not yet begun the actual period of instruction. In theory and in practice persons

could be regarded as catechumens for years before they took the next step. Many Christians in military or imperial positions took this route, putting off their actual baptism until they were near death because the demands of office required acts of killing, torture, limited participation in old pagan rites, and so on, that were inconsistent with the life of the baptized believer. Emperor Constantine availed himself of this flexibility. Once catechumens proved the intentional sanctity of their life and began to attend the weekly and then daily meetings of instruction (usually held in the period before Easter), they became *competens*, that is, were qualified to go on to the next stage.[9]

The seriousness with which Christian leaders took pre- and post-baptismal instruction is evident in how meticulously they formulated and taught the faith. The anonymous writer of the *Apostolic Constitutions* makes clear that *competentes* should become acquainted with the truths about God's identity as Father, Son, and Spirit, and that the one God is truly a Trinity. It is this God and no other being or force who made and orders the world and whose laws have given guidance throughout history, tailored for each stage. The convert should discover both the truth about his own created nature and that he stands responsible before God for freely following after the good and the true according to catholic faith.[10]

Augustine (354-430) offers a review of the fundamental elements of the Christian faith in *On Catechizing the Unlearned* and the *Enchiridion*. Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335-after 394) does much the same thing in his *Address on Catechetical Instruction*. Without ever mentioning the creed, Gregory presents a theological narrative of salvation history, supported by scriptural references and allusions, defending a pro-Nicene/Constantinopolitan position on the Trinity. He calls this narrative the "gospel revelation," and its overall end is to show both how "[God] is united to us in so far as he sustains existing things [as creator]" and that "he united himself with our nature in order that by its union with the Divine, it might become divine."[11]

A number of sermons and addresses from this period show that the catechizing process was becoming more formalized and unified as the Church received an ever larger number of converts. A female pilgrim to Jerusalem named Egeria in the later fourth century alludes to the elaborate preparatory steps which catechumens had to undergo during the forty-day period before Easter.[12] She observes that not only the creed but also instruction on doctrinal and moral issues were imparted to the new believers. The actual course of instruction is outlined in a set of addresses delivered by Cyril, the Bishop of Jerusalem, to baptismal candidates during Lent (probably in 350).

> Now the one and only faith that you are to take and preserve in the way of learning and professing is being committed to you by the Church as confirmed throughout the Scriptures. For seeing that not everyone can read the Scriptures, some because they lack the learn-

> ing [i.e., they are illiterate], and others because, for one reason or another, they find no opportunity to get to know them, we can acquire the whole doctrine of the Christian faith in a few articles and so prevent any soul from being lost by not learning the faith.
>
> At this stage listen to the exact form of words [i.e., the Jerusalem creed] and memorize this faith, leaving it to the appropriate time when each article it contains may be built up from Holy Scripture. For these articles of our faith were not composed out of human opinion, but are the principal points collected out of the whole of Scripture to complete a single doctrinal formulation of the faith. And just as the mustard seed contains many future tree branches within its tiny grain, so also this faith embraces in a few phrases all the religious knowledge contained in the Old and New Testaments together. Be sure, brothers, to "hold the traditions" [2 Thessalonians 2:15] which are being imparted to you, and "write them on the table of your hearts" [Proverbs 7:3].[13]

Cyril shows the catechumens that nothing in the church creed is contrary to the biblical message. Being schooled in the creed's particularities was the first step not only in learning what the Bible means, but also in preparing to read the Bible with insight.

He urges his listeners to persevere with the intensive classes of instruction because the goal is to arm them against error and provide a solid foundation for the Christian life. Cyril proceeds to lay forth "indispensable teachings" on God, on Christ's divinity, incarnation, and passion, on the Holy Spirit, on the soul and body, on bodily resurrection, on the centrality of Scripture, and on the catholic church. Besides the sessions of instruction, the catechumens were required to renew their repentance, to show the purity of their intention, and to take seriously their preparation for baptism.

STEPS IN CATECHESIS

Integral to the catechumenate process was confiding the local church's creed to the candidates' memory and understanding. For this very reason, the creed was not something for writing down. It was to be handed over to the mind and dwelt upon in the heart so that it became a part of the believer's spiritual formation. As Augustine commented to catechumens in North Africa, "The creed builds you up in what you ought to believe and confess in order to be saved."[14] This process of giving over and explaining the creed to catechumens was called *traditio symboli* (*symbolum* being the Greek word for the Latin *creditum* or creed, and *traditio* meaning literally handing over or delivering up, whether documents or concepts).

As the final stage of preparation before the actual baptism, the *traditio* was held off in many churches until Holy Week, and given on the Sunday before Easter. This is how it was in Milan during the time of Ambrose

(c. 340-397), who described the creed as a "spiritual seal, which is our heart's meditation and, as it were, an ever present guard."[15]

But the culmination of the delivering the church's faith was the *redditio symboli*—the believer publicly giving back (reciting by memory) the creed before the congregation. Augustine calls the act of personally professing the church's creed a "holy martyrdom," "a holy witness to the truth of God."[16] What had been received from God was now being offered back to God as a symbol of the believer's commitment. Without this part of the process, the catechism was not complete. For this *redditio* was also an act of worship for the new believer; it was his vocal response to God, affirming the truths received before the congregation. In Sermon 215 Augustine explains the future implications of *redditio* or this last stage of catechesis:

> So you have received and given back what you must always retain in mind and heart, what you should recite in bed, think about in the streets, and not forget over your meals; in which even when your bodies are asleep your hearts should be awake. (215.1)[17]

CATECHETICAL INSTRUCTION TODAY

We need to take note of the ancient church's focus on catechesis, that is, on carefully instructing recent converts or those preparing for baptism about the biblical and doctrinal fundamentals of the Christian faith. In the preface to his manual of Christian instruction, Gregory of Nyssa declared that "religious catechism is an essential duty of the leaders 'of the mystery of our religion' (1 Timothy 3:16). By it the Church is enlarged through the addition of those who are saved, while 'the sure word which accords with the [Church's] teaching' (Titus 1:9) comes within the hearing of unbelievers."[18]

Cyril shows the catechumens that nothing in the church creed is contrary to the biblical message. Being schooled in the creed's particularities was the first step not only in learning what the Bible means, but also in preparing to read the Bible with insight.

We are acting in accord with Gregory's remarks when we insist that new Christians or new members be taught much more than the congregation's leadership structure and polity, stewardship plan, and mission statement, or be given a brief denominational summary. Too often we assume potential church members already know the fundamentals of their faith, whereas in reality they are incapable of explaining even the basics of "the pattern of sound teaching" (2 Timothy 1:13).

To introduce new believers to the Church of Jesus Christ is to open for them the treasures of the central points of the apostolic faith and practice—a faith that is larger than any one denomination's or church's claims upon it—sharpened and transmitted through the ages. This need for equipping cannot be displaced in favor of simply giving one's own testimony anymore than to imagine personal experience of the faith can be substituted for a reasonable grasp of that faith. To do so would be like handing out magical amulets for new believers to wear simply as emblems of a faith being used, but not grasped.

If it is the case that the Church, as the Apostle phrased it, "is the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15), then ecclesiastical leadership must not shirk from the critical and time-consuming job of imparting Christian truth or catechizing those who profess to be Christian. Sunday school may or may not succeed at this task, and it cannot be left to sermons alone. In this information age where so many claims to religious truth compete in print or cyberspace, the need for imparting the Church's historic tradition is just as critical as it was for ancient Christianity. Nothing can replace the formation of a theologically and biblically literate people. Nothing is more essential.

NOTES

1"Fragment of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed," in G. H. R. Horsley, ed., *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* (Sydney, Australia: The Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, 1981), 103-104.

2 A doctrine formulated by Augustine and augmented by Martin Luther a millennium later.

3 E. Glenn Hinson, "The Apostolic Faith as Expressed in the Writings of the Apostolic and Church Fathers," in Hans-Georg Link, ed., *The Roots of Our Common Faith* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1984), 117.

4 For translations of *Martyrdom of Justin* and *Martyrdom of Perpetua*, see Herbert Musurillo, ed., *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

5 E. Ferguson argues that Marcianus, the recipient of the *Proof*, was not a catechumen, but a catechist and was therefore receiving further guidance as a teacher from Irenaeus. "Irenaeus' *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* and Early Catechetical Instruction," *Studia Patristica* 18:3 (1989), 131.

6 R. P. C. Hanson, *The Tradition of the Early Church* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 52.

7 In chapter 100, Irenaeus refers again to this passage as the "three articles of our seal," a clear indication that it was used as part of the pre-baptismal instruction.

8 William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 51-56.

9 This period of instruction was called the *Quadragesima*, or the "fortieth," because it occurred in the forty days before Holy Week (though some areas took a longer period of time for instruction and others much shorter). By the end of the fourth century this pattern of instructing catechumens for (what was later called) Lent had become generally established. Augustine uses the term *competens* when he describes his excitement in anticipating his baptism: "Do we silence the testimony of our own experience, do we go so far as to forget how intent, how anxious, we were over what the catechists taught us when we

were petitioning for the sacrament of the font—and for that very reason we were called *competentes*?" (*On Faith and Works* 6.9).

10 *Apostolic Constitutions* 7. 39, 1-4. The final compilation of this text appears to be from the latter half of the fourth century.

11 *Address on Catechetical Instruction,* 25.

12 One English version is *Egeria: Diary of a Pilgrimage*, translated by G. E. Gingras (New York: Newman Press, 1970). For the specific passage where she describes the details of how the church applied the process, see D. H. Williams, *Tradition, Scripture and Interpretation* (Baker Academic, 2006), 85-88.

13 *Catechetical Addresses*, 5.12.

14 Sermon 214.1.

15 *Explanation of the Creed*, 10-11.

16 Sermon 215.1.

17 Cf. Sermon 212.2. "So now, I have paid my debt to you with this short sermon on the whole Symbol. When you hear the whole of this Symbol, you will recognize my sermon briefly summed it up. And in no way are you to write it down, in order to retain the same words; but you are to learn it thoroughly by hearing it, and by heart, but keep and go over it in your memory. For everything you are going to hear in the divine Symbol is already found in the divine documents of the Holy Scriptures."

18 *Address on Catechetical Instruction*, preface.

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Introducing Children to Worship

BY DEBRA DEAN MURPHY

We don't introduce children to worship to make them good but rather that they will know who they are. We trust that worship which is attentive to the gospel's grand story will transform their lives (and ours), will feed their imaginations not their egos, and will help them (and us) learn to order our lives by the gift of God's time.

Popular opinion about children in worship usually tends toward one of two extremes: children are naturally spontaneous, vulnerable, and filled with wonder, and thus are often better disposed to worship than are adults; *or* church does not come naturally to children and so training for worship, ideally undertaken outside of the worshiping assembly, is a must. As with most starkly opposed observations the truth lies somewhere in between. I will chart a middle path, one which assumes that children bring good instincts and often profound insights to the practice of Christian worship, but that preparation for their participation—and ongoing catechesis as they mature in it—are essential. As will become evident, though, I part company with those who believe that a certain level of training is necessary before children can meaningfully participate in the Sunday service.

It will also be important to say some things about worship generally, since what we mean by that word has everything to do with what we believe we are introducing children to. Only when we are clear on the nature and purpose of worship can we say something useful about what it means to initiate and habituate children into the practices, the discipline, and the joy of Christian worship. To do this, I'd like to use the following terms as markers or guides for our discussion: *story, imagination,* and *time.*

Each of them has something important to communicate about worship, and each is also a term associated in various ways with children or childhood. For example, I will note that worship which follows the church year is shaped by an alternative ordering of time—one that is counter to the secular calendar and to the Hallmark holiday schedule—and which forms the identity, habits, and dispositions of worshipers and congregations *over time.* And even though they often appear resistant to time-bound practices and rituals, children also negotiate the world through a series of time-related activities (story time, nap time, supper time, bed time) that help to order their understanding of who they are and how the world works. In exploring these connections, I hope to illuminate the practices of the Church's worship in ways that might be enriching for the work of initiating children into the Christian life and for sustaining their interest and involvement as they grow into mature followers of Christ.

TELL ME A STORY

Christian worship is, in a most basic sense, the enactment of a story. In acts of praise and thanksgiving—prayer, song, sermon, sacrament—we tell and tell again the grand cosmic narrative of God's redeeming activity in the world: the story of how God's overflowing love created the world and all that is; how a people (Israel) were called into covenantal relationship with God; how God was made known in the person of Jesus, mending the breach created by human waywardness and infidelity; how God birthed the Church as a sign, servant, and foretaste of the reign of *shalom* intended for all of creation; and how, in God's time, that reign will be realized, utterly and joyfully. In telling this story in worship, we do certain things: we baptize, which is a way of incorporating persons (and their stories) into this cosmic drama. We eat a simple meal together, in which consuming bread and wine makes possible the transformation of a people into sharers in the divine life and bearers of God's mercy and justice. As we enact this drama week to week, year to year, we realize that this story takes practice, for there are other stories and storytellers seeking to incorporate us into *their* narratives, insisting that *their* plotlines are definitive for our own identity and self-understanding.

In the current ecclesial climate, however, *story* is not a term or category exerting serious influence in most congregational discussions about worship. Instead, as we find ourselves at least a decade into what have bleakly been dubbed the "worship wars," *style* not *story* is the evaluative category of choice. Style-driven worship is planned, promoted, and produced with a straightforward question in mind (whether or not it is articulated this straightforwardly): What is the basic worship *preference* of today's discriminating congregant-consumer? Quiet, contemplative worship? "Rock and roll church"? Hymnody, liturgy, vestments, and choral singing? A mixing and matching of all of the above? Accommodating these wide-ranging prefer-

ences seems not only reasonable but faithful, as many worship leaders understand their primary task to be that of "meeting people where they are." But a preoccupation with style and preference puts the wrong subject at the center of the discussion (and indeed of worship itself), for the proper question to ask when planning and executing worship is not "What do people like?" but "What is God doing?" *Style* customizes worship and compartmentalizes worshipers. *Story* does something else.

Good stories, as children know, evoke compelling worlds. They draw us in, invite us to linger, make it hard for us to leave. The Church's story, Christians believe, does even more: it tells us who (and whose) we are.

Good stories, as children know, evoke compelling worlds. They draw us in, invite us to linger, make it hard for us to leave. The Church's story, Christians believe, does even more: it tells us who (and whose) we are. Thus the Bible's rightful home—the place where it becomes the Church's normative rule for faith and practice—is worship, for that is where the depth and breadth of Scripture, its complexity and ambiguity, its world-making and life-changing power, unfolds over time, drawing us into its story-world, bidding us to linger in it, to take it on as our own habit of being in the world. This occurs in profound ways when, say, a deep saturation in the Lenten scriptures (preached, prayed, and sung every year in worship) educates our desires, helping us to resist the temptation to power (or status or comfort) and to embrace the cross and suffering for Jesus' sake as the way of discipleship. And it occurs in simple (but perhaps no less profound) ways when a three-year-old parades around the house for weeks after Palm Sunday shouting "Hosanna! Hosanna!" using any object at hand as a make-shift palm branch. With attentive guidance, her parents can help her claim this gesture of praise and adoration as constitutive of her Christian identity, even as they help her to grow into a more mature understanding of the story's thornier context and questions.

Children need to hear the Bible's stories in worship—not because they will understand them better there, but because that is where the stories do their formative work, shaping a *people* week after week, season after season, year after year, for work and witness in the world. When we use the Bible's stories to impart pious moralisms to children ("be good," "be helpful," "be nice to your brother") we minimize Scripture's real purpose and power, and we fail to teach our children that they, along with us, are called to enter its narrative world and to be shaped by God's desire for communion with all of creation. In worship—in the hearing of the Word, the preaching of it, and

the performance of it through gestures, postures, and holy sign-acts—children and the rest of us enter that world and have the hope of being transformed by its vision. Yet all of this is moot if we are more concerned with style and personal preference than with the story. And if we are, our children will learn to be, too.

USE YOUR IMAGINATION

In his book *Wishful Thinking*, Frederick Buechner says this about the Lord's Supper:

> It is make-believe. You make believe that the one who breaks the bread and blesses the wine is not the plump parson who smells of Williams' Aqua Velva but Jesus of Nazareth. You make believe that the tasteless wafer and cheap port are his flesh and blood. You make believe that by swallowing them you are swallowing his life into your life and that there is nothing in earth or heaven more important for you to do than this.[1]

For those who look upon worship with great seriousness, Buechner's description may seem a little impertinent. The solemnity with which generations of Christians have come to regard the Eucharist makes it difficult to approach the holy meal (literally and figuratively) with much humor or light-heartedness. But Buechner's playful depiction is on target, I think, for in the Eucharist, as in worship generally, we see and describe things differently. We imagine a different world. *Imagination* understood this way does not refer to the imaginary—to subjective flights of fancy or whimsical dreaming—but to a community's practice of construing reality according to a particular vision, in full awareness of other options, other visions, other ways of seeing.[2] *Imagination* names the capacity of a people who in their worship together perform and give life to a story that subsumes all other stories. And so we might say that Christian worship is neither about preparing us for life in the "real world" nor for giving us refuge from it for a little while; instead, worship is, as Jacques Maritain once said of poetry, "the 'recomposition' of a world more real than the reality offered to the senses."[3]

In the Eucharist we enact an alternative set of practices and patterns for living, and imagine a different way of being in the world and in relationship with others. Where the so-called real world prizes autonomy and independence, Christians at the Lord's Table practice mutuality and dependence on God and one another. Against a culture shaped by the alienating forces of consumer capitalism, the Eucharist forms a community constituted by forgiveness, reconciliation, and a radical sharing of the goods that make our life possible. In the context of an economic system based on scarcity and lack and a political system driven by suspicion, distrust, and the will-to-power, eucharistically shaped Christians imagine and practice an economics of abundance and a politics of peace.

Children, we know, have a great capacity for imaginative engagement with the world around them. As already noted, children readily enter the world created by a good story (and they usually know a good story from a not-so-good one). When we communicate with confidence and conviction that Christian worship invites us to inhabit this world of God's extravagant grace and goodness, most children will be eager for the adventure and challenge of living in such a world. And because most children are keen observers of what goes on around them, appropriate, ongoing catechesis at church and at home will help them discern the disconnect between what occurs in worship and the workings of the world around them. As they mature, they will need continued guidance as they reflect on the implications of this disconnect for the Church's witness and for their own efforts at faithful living.

And since repetition is the key to effective pedagogy, we must regularly communicate to children (and their parents) that they are integral to the whole worshiping body gathered weekly to imagine and practice God's world into being, and that their presence and participation are not merely tolerated but happily anticipated. When we "dismiss" children from the worshiping body (say, for "children's church"), no matter how well-intentioned our efforts at teaching them *about* worship, we convey to them and to all others present that dividing the worshiping body is an acceptable norm. More importantly, we rob children of the gift of being formed by the regular habit, discipline, and joy of corporate worship—which is really how they learn it and learn to love it in the first place.

All of this, of course, takes work. It takes patience, preparation, flexibility, much good humor, and a great deal of creativity and resourcefulness. It requires that those in positions of leadership possess a deep theology of worship and the necessary skill to impart it persuasively and consistently and graciously to adults and to children. It recognizes that for adults in the pews, worship may be less serene than they would wish since children can be noisy and demanding. (It may mean, in fact, that the adults in a congregation, more than the children, will need to be "introduced to worship.")

But it is also important to insist that worship should not cater to children, since to do so is to give in to the pressures of accommodating style and preference and the temptation to appeal to a target audience. Rather, worship that seeks above all else to enact God's story of redemption and to imagine God's politics of peace invites and expects the participation of the whole household of faith—young and old, rich and poor, the able and the infirm—with the understanding that, in regard to young children especially, there are privileges reserved for their maturity, and mysteries and riches of the worshiping life that reveal themselves as rewards for years of practice and perseverance. Children should never be the center of attention in worship (God alone is the object of our devotion) but as children learn about worship by regularly participating in it, we hope and trust that they will come to reap those rewards.

WHAT TIME IS IT?

If all of this takes work, it also takes time. In worship, thankfully, we are given the gift of time—the opportunity to be formed as God's holy people over the course of our lives. The gift of time reminds us that the end of worship—its goal or *telos*—is not entertainment or even personal edification, but a life transformed by the habit of praise and thanksgiving. In his novel, *Jayber Crow,* Wendell Berry's title character recalls this exchange with a wise old Bible professor:

> "You have been given questions to which you cannot be given answers. You will have to live them out—perhaps a little at a time."
> "And how long is that going to take?"
> "I don't know. As long as you live, perhaps."
> "That could be a long time."
> "I will tell you a further mystery," he said. "It may take longer."[4]

In undertaking the task of introducing children to worship we recognize this gift of time: that we don't have to do it all at once or say it all at once—indeed we cannot; and that if we ensure our children's regular presence in the worshiping assembly, and couple that commitment with substantive catechesis, the Spirit will do its transforming work with the passage of time.

We can also communicate to children the ways in which, as worshipers of God, our personal and corporate lives are ordered by a different sense of time. Whether our children have been baptized or are looking forward to it in the future, we can help them come to understand that in baptism we join the communion of saints through time—past, present, and future—and that the saints live in God's time, time redeemed by the saving work of Jesus Christ and measured by the rhythm of feasts and fasts that orders the Church's common worship. We can make the most of our children's natural curiosity about time (their desire to learn how to tell time, for instance) by teaching them that Christians mark the passage of time differently through the liturgical calendar. (Frequently referring to an actual liturgical calendar at home, positioned prominently alongside the secular calendar that marks family birthdays and soccer games, is a tangible way to help children learn what it means for the Church to inhabit time in counter-cultural ways). When we habitually (though not slavishly) follow the church year in worship, children, like the rest of us,

The end of worship—its goal or TELOS—is not entertainment or even personal edification, but a life transformed by the habit of praise and thanksgiving.

come to realize that resistance is often called for. The season of Advent, as we know, takes place as Christians find themselves besieged by the consumer culture's frenzied Christmas countdown. Yet the scriptures of Advent and the season's historic themes and practices encourage not revelry and guilt-ridden overspending, but a keen alertness to the multiple comings of Christ in our lives. In the "time" of Advent we enact our opposition to the wider world's rush to frivolity that would have us deny the call to prepare for the joy of Christmas with waiting and watchfulness. Practicing this resistance with our children is an enormous challenge, but the hope for success begins as we worship regularly with them, and as the whole worshiping body imagines faithful ways to witness to God's story in God's time.

We who seek to have the lives of children formed and transformed by participation in corporate worship may ourselves need to be converted, to have our own vision of worship sharpened, tested, and transformed.

CONCLUSION

Introducing children to worship is an act of faithfulness on the part of the adults who nurture and care for them. It is an act of welcome surrender in which we trust that the God who claims them in baptism and the Church that nurtures them through the pilgrimage from birth to death will form their character and transform their desires, that they might grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. This faithful surrendering often brings with it the sobering realization that we who seek to have the lives of children formed and transformed by participation in corporate worship may ourselves need to be converted; we may need to have our own vision and understanding of worship sharpened, tested, and transformed. I have suggested that style-driven worship presents the danger of training children to be consumers of worship "experiences," rather than deep adorers of God who, over time, develop an awareness and appreciation of historic Christian worship even as they recognize the dynamism and flexibility inherent in tradition.

And, finally, we engage in this act of introducing children to worship—and overseeing their ongoing participation in it—not in an effort to make them good but that they will know who they are. And we do this with the hope that worship that is attentive to the gospel's grand story will do its transforming work in their lives (and ours), will feed their imaginations not their egos, and will help them (and us) learn to order our lives by the gift of God's time.

NOTES

1 Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC,* revised and expanded (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 63.

2 Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 140.

3 Jacques Maritain, quoted in Rowan Williams, "Poetic and Religious Imagination," *Theology,* 80 (May 1977), 179.

4 Wendell Berry, *Jayber Crow* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 2000), 54.

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This photograph is available in the print version of *Catechism*.

With this illumination in a medieval style, THE SAINT JOHN'S BIBLE portrays the community of instruction under the lordship of the risen Christ, reaching from the earliest days in Jerusalem to the current Saint John's Abbey in Minnesota, the manuscript's patron.

Illuminating the Word

BY HEIDI J. HORNIK

In the beautiful *Life in Community*, the calligraphers and illuminators of *The Saint John's Bible* interpret Luke's description of an ideal Christian community in Jerusalem, where "the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them…" (Acts 4:32-34a). The artists portray a community of instruction bound together under the lordship of the risen Christ, reaching from those earliest days of the Church in Jerusalem down to the Benedictine community of Saint John's Abbey in Minnesota, the patron of this manuscript.

This work is not a new endeavor for the Benedictines, whose communities of monks have been the calligraphers and illuminators of Bibles for over fifteen hundred years. Now on the occasion of the second millennium of Christ's birth, *The Saint John's Bible* has been created "to inspire a renewed love of Scripture intertwined with art."[1] The *Bible* is a gift from the Saint John's community to all Christians, to enhance their worship and serve their catechesis for generations to come. As the first handwritten and illuminated Bible commissioned since the invention of the printing press in the late fifteenth century, it is "the one thing we'll probably be remembered for 500 years from now," writes Eric Hollas, OSB, a monk at Saint John's Abbey and Associate Director of Arts and Culture at Saint John's University who has been instrumental throughout the project.[2]

The Saint John's Bible grew out of a meeting between the distinguished calligraphic artist Donald Jackson and Fr. Hollas in 1995. Jackson, a native of Lancashire, England, decided at a young age that he wanted to do two things with his talent—to become the "Queen's Scribe" and to inscribe and illuminate the Bible. He achieved the first goal when he became scribe to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth's Crown Office at the House of Lords at age twenty-six, and he will achieve the second in 2009 when *The Saint John's Bible* is completed.

The patron raised four million dollars over eight years from individuals, groups, and corporations. Then, on Ash Wednesday in the year 2000, Jackson penned the first words of *The Saint John's Bible*; they were the opening

verses of the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, the Word was God."[3]

Jackson calls this project his "Sistine Chapel." In the medieval workshop tradition, he oversees the work of ten designers, illustrators, and illuminators at a scriptorium in Wales. Some of the artists return to their own studios with the pages after receiving direction from Jackson.[4]

The original manuscript of *The Saint John's Bible* will be bound in seven volumes (15 ¾" wide by 23 ½" tall when closed) with a total of 1150 pages and 160 illuminations. The lettering was devised by Jackson and replicated by the scribes. The *Bible* is inscribed on vellum (calf skin or parchment) using swan, goose, and turkey quills, natural handmade inks, hand-ground pigments, and gold leaf. Over 250 skins have been rubbed and sanded; on thinner pages lines were drawn for writing, and thicker skins were prepared for the illuminations. The volumes of the original manuscript will be a source for religious, artistic, educational, and scholarly programming and exhibitions. Selected pages are currently on tour throughout North America.[5] Reproductions of the *Bible* are being produced at sixty-two percent of actual size (9 ¾" x 15") for purchase by congregations and individuals.

The text is carefully arranged on each spacious page to encourage readers to notice the lettering and ponder its meaning. In contemporary artistic jargon, this is truly a project of "mark-making." The illuminators use egg yolk to bind the colors together and give the images great luminosity, a technique borrowed from the tempera panel paintings in the Renaissance. In another ancient practice, thin slices of gold leaf are placed on gesso (sugar, fish glue, whole lead powder, and slate plaster) and then on to the vellum. *The Saint John's Bible* also incorporates modern themes, contemporary illustrations, and production technology of the twenty-first century. The pages of completed volumes may be viewed in their entirety online.[6]

In a significant departure from medieval practice, the words of Scripture are presented in English rather than Latin. The use of the New Revised Standard Version translation shows the influence of the project's Protestant and Jewish advisors. Its predecessor, the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, had the distinction of being officially authorized for use by all major Christian churches—Protestant, Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox. The NRSV is a modern English translation that maintains traditional references to God but uses gender-inclusive language for humanity in an unobtrusive manner.

I will discuss three images—*Life in Community*, *Life of Paul*, and *Birth of Christ*—as examples of the wonderful artwork in *The Saint John's Bible*.

LIFE IN COMMUNITY

This illumination based on Acts 4:32-34 is medieval, almost Byzantine, in its style. The perspective is splayed and hierarchical. In the uppermost register the risen Christ is positioned within a *mandorla*, an almond shape

that was used through fifteenth-century Christian art to indicate supernatural status. His right hand is raised in the traditional gesture of blessing, but in his left hand the open book displays not the expected Alpha and Omega letters, but the English words "I AM." On either side is an attending angel.

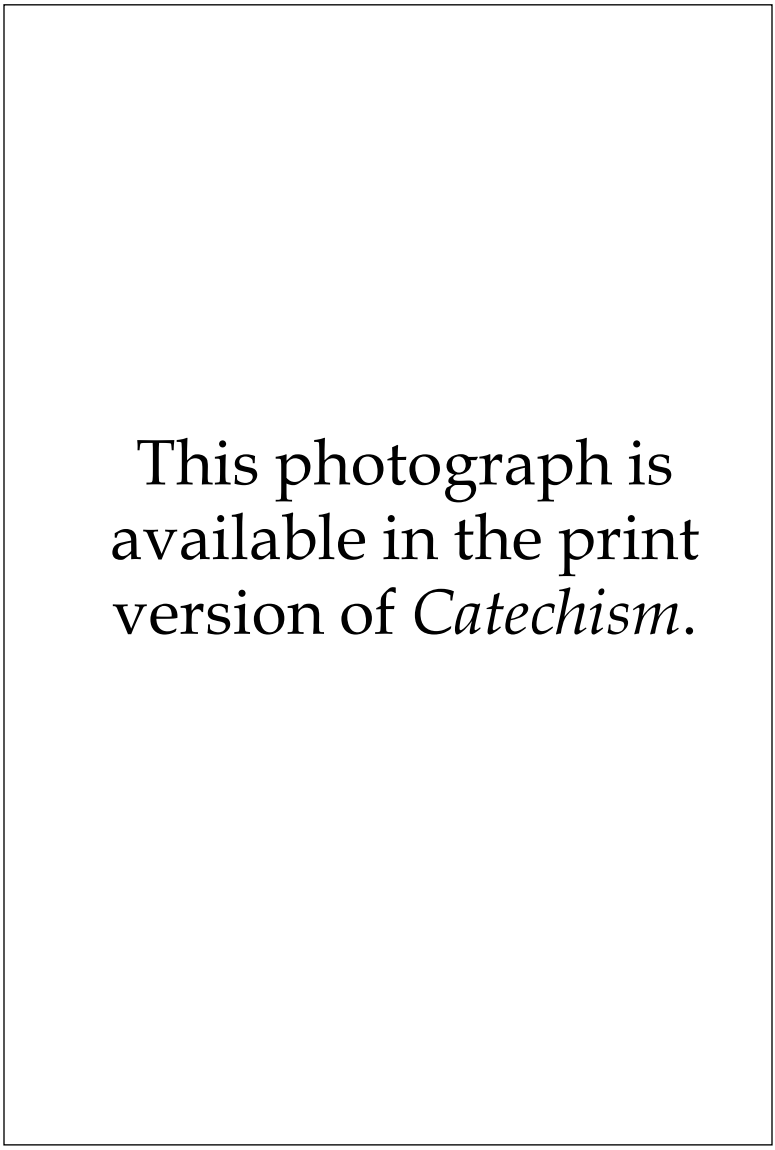
On the next level, the steepled modern church building on the left side is balanced on the right side by the signature bell banner of the Saint John's Abbey church.[7] This acknowledges the Abbey community as the manuscript's patron. An inverted U-shape aligns both the seated group of men and women and the table at which they are to dine. In the center foreground is an altar table on which a single candle, Gospel book, loaf of bread, and chalice holding red wine are present. The flatness of the composition becomes evident when you think about how the feet seem to just be sliding down towards the table and what would happen if the figures were to stand.

The text of Acts 4:32-34 is written in the four quadrants defined by the circular figural area. The triangular shape of these corners is reminiscent of pendentives, the structural features in a Byzantine church building that support the weight of its massive circular dome over the square space where the altar is located. The pendentives unify the most basic geometric shapes, the circle and the square. Here, too, the words unify the figural illumination with God; they tell the story that is visually depicted in the illumination and inspired by God.

The action of instruction, or catechism, in this image centers upon a meal (the Eucharist) within a meal. The Virgin Mary sits at the middle of the table. The twelve Apostles surround her, six on her right and six on her left. In addition, five women (one holds a child) and two men in garb of different ages are seated around the table. Some figures raise their hands about to speak, while others listen attentively.

The action of instruction, or catechism, in LIFE IN COMMUNITY centers upon a meal (the Eucharist) within a meal. Mary, the Apostles, and other believers through the ages are seated around the table.

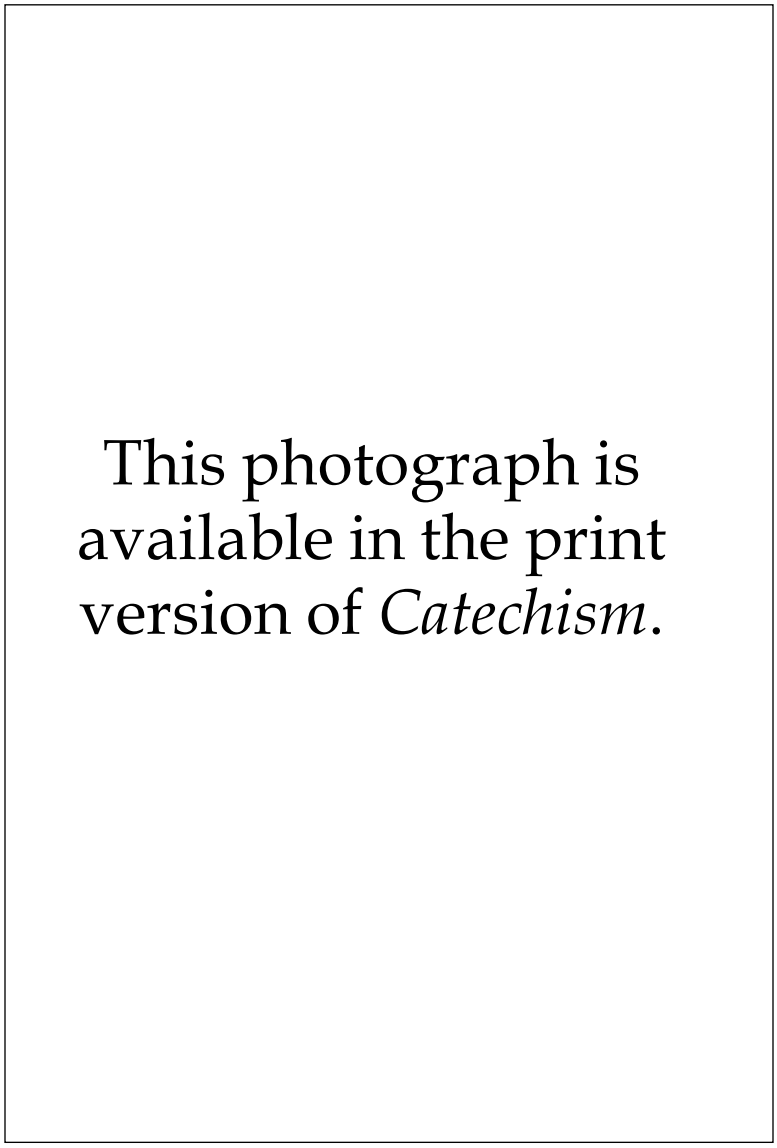
Luke presents the early Christian church in Acts 2 and 4 as debating its common life; the "ideal community" is one that exchanges ideas in order to reach a point of agreement. This is mirrored in the community that sponsored this image. "For the better part of a year, the Saint John's Board of Regents and the monastic community engaged in a spirited debate (yes, monks do debate) about the wisdom and value of embarking on this journey," reports the Web site, before the Abbey would decide, "Yes, we want to embark on this monu-



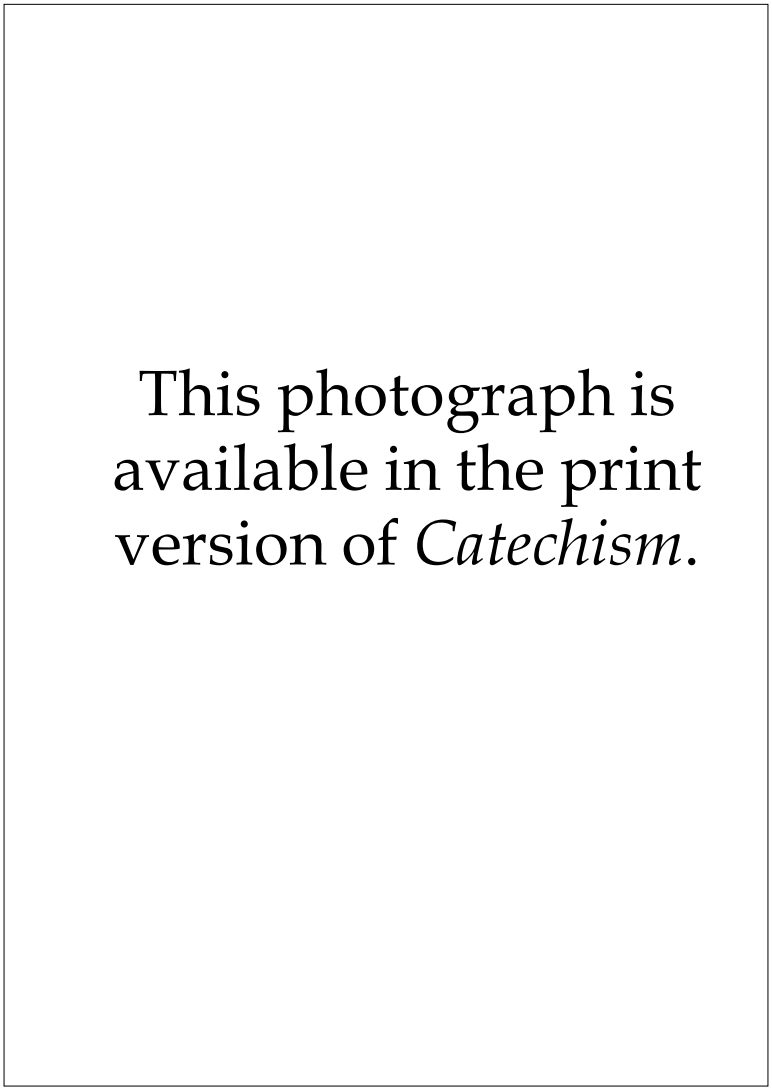
Acts 4:25–6:2, Sally Mae Joseph (Scribe) and Life in Community, Aidan Hart with contributions from Donald Jackson (Illuminators), © 2002 The Saint John's Bible and the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota

mental project. We want Donald Jackson to bring the Word of God to life on vellum for the next 500 years."[8]

Occasionally an illuminator is identified in the online pages of the *Bible*. Aidan Hart, the creator of this image, was born in England and raised in New Zealand. He completed a degree in English literature and zoology but



began painting and carving icons after becoming a member of the Orthodox Church at the age of twenty-five. He studied Greek for two years in Mount Athos, Greece, as part of a twelve-year period of testing a vocation to the monastic life.[9] Hart's spiritual calling and artistic training are visible in his blending of eastern and western church imagery.



Life of Paul, Aidan Hart with contributions from Donald Jackson, © 2002 The Saint John's Bible and the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota USA. Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Catholic Edition, © 1993, 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

LIFE OF PAUL

A highlight of the artwork in the Book of Acts is the full-page illumination, *Life of Paul*, which blends traditional method and iconography with contemporary imagery and symbolism. Usually when the Apostle is depicted in art, the subject is his dramatic encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6). The text above Paul—"I saw a light from

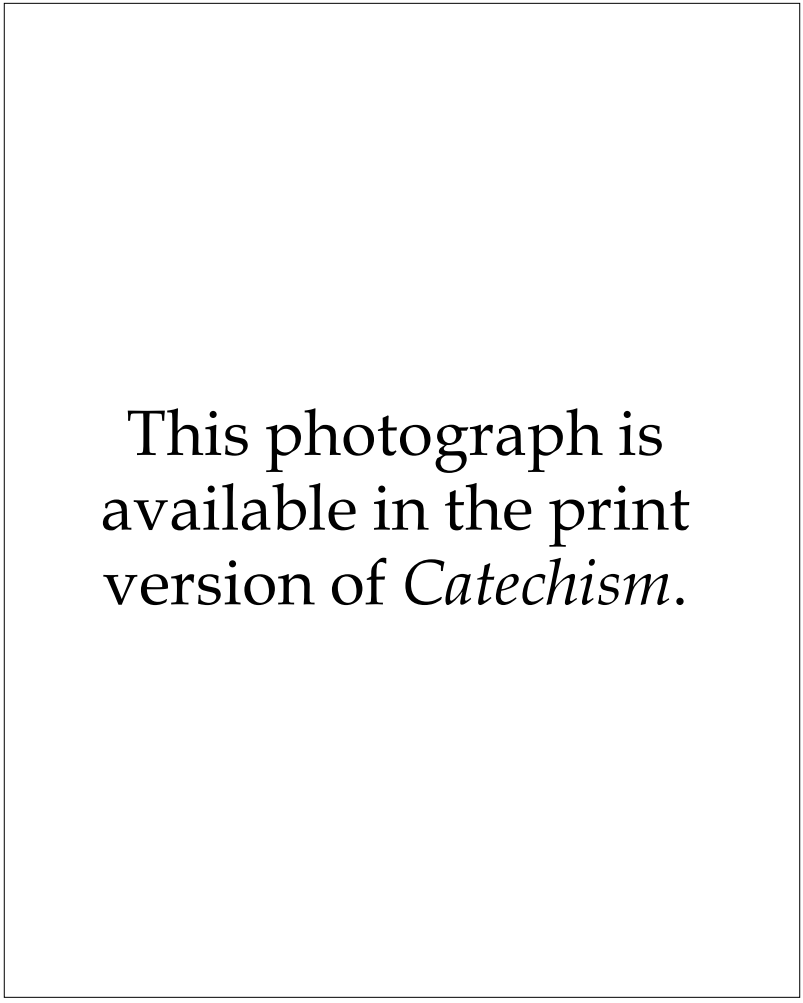
heaven" (Acts 26:13; cf. 9:3 and 22:6)—refers to that event, but the symbols painted around him reference his later journeys and ministry. Traveling by the boat on the blue seas beneath his feet, Paul communicates the *koinonia*, or fellowship of the Christian community, to the great cities of the world. These cities, ancient and modern, are represented by a mélange of Turkish, Byzantine, Near Eastern, French Romanesque, Italian Renaissance, and contemporary buildings. Integrated into the sea waves at the bottom are the words of Paul and Barnabas's call, "I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47). Though he is clothed in first-century robes, Paul is holding models of two later church buildings: an Italian Renaissance dome in one hand and an Orthodox style building in the other. The Apostle literally holds the Church, West and East, in his hands.

Even the technique of this illumination, reminiscent of both a Byzantine mosaic and a twentieth-century collage, bridges past knowledge with modern experiment. A mosaic traditionally used cut pieces of glass or stone to form (when viewed from a distance) a figure with a black outline around the shape; the heavy linear quality of many of the buildings echoes this type of silhouetted form. On the other hand, the use of color, the overlapping of the figures, and the flatness of the composition are typical of a modern collage method. Light, reflective colors—reminiscent of the Venetian paintings of Titian and Girogione—are used in the upper areas of the painting where the lines are blurred as the buildings shift into abstract forms. The strong, vibrant colors in the middle of the painting are more similar to the more acidic tones of some American realists during the Industrial Revolution.

BIRTH OF CHRIST

The *Birth of Christ* illumines the opening page of the Gospel of Luke, which contains the story of the angels announcing Christ's birth to shepherds (Luke 2:8-20). "Luke features more angels than any of the other evangelists. After these appearances, there are usually marvelous songs of praise and thanksgiving," notes Michael Patella, OSB, chair of *The Saint John's Bible* Committee on Illumination and Text.[10] Immediately above the angels at the top of the painting are their words of praise to God, written vertically in two columns. The gold of their wings guide our eyes down a dense vertical slab of golden light that culminates in the crib of Jesus. Jesus is present but remains unseen in his mystery.

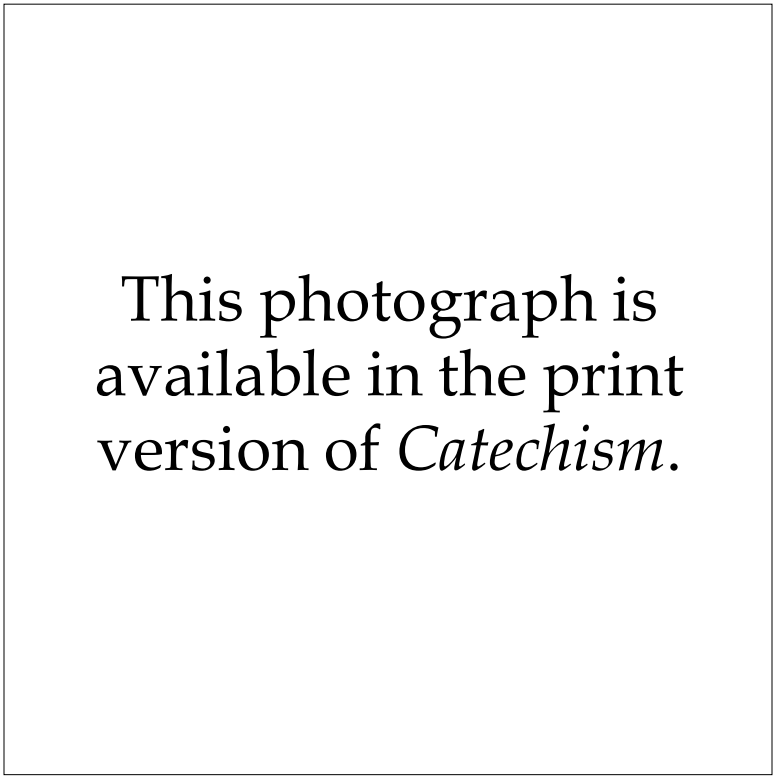
Surrounding the crib on the left are the shepherds—both male and female, and one is holding a baby—and the farm animals. On the right side are Mary and Joseph, and the silhouette of a bull taken from the cave paintings in Lascaux, France. Patella, who assisted the illuminators in the iconography of the images, believes that the shepherds in ancient Palestine (as they are today) were predominantly women and that although they are usually depicted as adolescent boys, it should not be assumed that they were all



Birth of Christ, Donald Jackson, © 2002 The Saint John's Bible and the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota USA. Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Catholic Edition, © 1993, 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

men.[11] The placement of the Lascaux bull (15,000-13,000 B.C.), which is one of the earliest known achievements of human creativity, emphasizes the humanity of Christ in a unique way. Instead of using the traditional iconography of an ox and lamb (often thought now to be anti-Semitic), *The Saint John's Bible* illuminator depicts an animal known to and painted by human beings for as long as we have recorded evidence.

The concluding phrase of Zechariah's prophecy in Luke 1:79—"to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death"— is written



Nativity (from Notre Seigneur), central window of the three lancets in the west façade of Chartres Cathedral, Chartres, France. 1145-1155. Stained glass. Photo: © Bridgeman-Giraudon / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.

above the Lascaux bull in a lyrical, fluid script. Iconographically it connects the birth with the passion of Christ. Across the lower section of the page in yet another style of calligraphy is the beginning of Zechariah's sentence, "By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us" (Luke 1:78). The golden slab of light that bisects the image and radiates from the manger now represents the beginning of a new day for humanity.

The colors and composition of this illumination are similar to medieval nativity scenes in stained glass window cycles, like the beautiful one in the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Chartres, France, which is located southwest of Paris. *Nativity*, one of thirty scenes composing the Infancy of Christ window, was created between 1145 and 1155. It survived the fire that destroyed all but the west façade of the cathedral (and much of the town) in 1194. The entire window is 11 meters wide by 3.8 meters high and there are nine registers with three panels in each. The window is much like a mosaic, composed of small pieces of colored glass that are held together by strips of lead. The odd-shaped pieces require the hand of a master to assemble them into something decorous and useful to the worshiper. Like the illuminations in a

manuscript, the Chartres windows teach biblical stories and convey spiritual messages to the viewer.

The two artistic traditions of manuscript illumination and stained glass worked hand-in-hand in instructing believers during the Middle Ages. Most parishioners were illiterate. Their understanding of the faith was guided by public readings from the beautiful handwritten manuscripts of the Bible and by the interpretations of scriptural themes in the colorful church windows.

Today we are more familiar with the contemporary recovery and development of the stained glass tradition as a way of teaching the central themes of our faith.[12] *The Saint John's Bible* seeks to develop the parallel tradition of manuscript illumination as a visual pathway into the meaning of Scripture. The artistry of its calligraphers and illuminators may once again instruct believers and inspire all people by reflecting the spiritual aspirations of the twenty-first century. As the selected pages from the original manuscript of the *Bible* travel to North American venues, they may touch the hearts of those who view them with the biblical message of forgiveness.

NOTES

1 The Web site for *The Saint John's Bible* is *www.sjbible.org.* This quote comes from a brief history of the project at *www.sjbible.org/discover/discover_chronology.html* (accessed 2 March 2007).

2 *www.sjbible.org/faqs.html* (accessed 1 March 2007).

3 *www.sjbible.org/discover/chronology_timeline.html* (accessed 1 March 2007).

4 *www.sjbible.org/faqs.html* (accessed 1 March 2007).

5 The schedule for The Saint John's Bible exhibition tour, "Illuminating the Word," is available at *saintjohnsbible.org/exhibits.html* (accessed 2 March 2007).

6 On the Custom Prints page (*www.sjbible.org/custom_prints.html*), you may select each of the completed volumes to view in Adobe Flash Player.

7 For photographs and discussion of this church complex (1953) in Collegeville, Minnesota, designed by architect Marcel Breuer (1902-1981), see *www.greatbuildings.com/buildings/St_Johns_Abbey.html.*

8 *www.saintjohnsbible.org/why/dream.htm* (accessed 2 March 2007).

9 *www.saintjohnsbible.org/people/hart.htm* (accessed 2 March 2007).

10 *www.saintjohnsbible.org/educator/birth.htm* (accessed 2 March 2007).

11 Ibid.

12 See, for example, the stained glass windows designed by David J. Hetland at *www.hetland.com*. I have discussed his work in "Joyous Innocence," *The Moral Landscape of Creation*, Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics 2 (Winter 2002), 36-37.

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Make Us All We're Meant to Be

BY BURT L. BURLESON

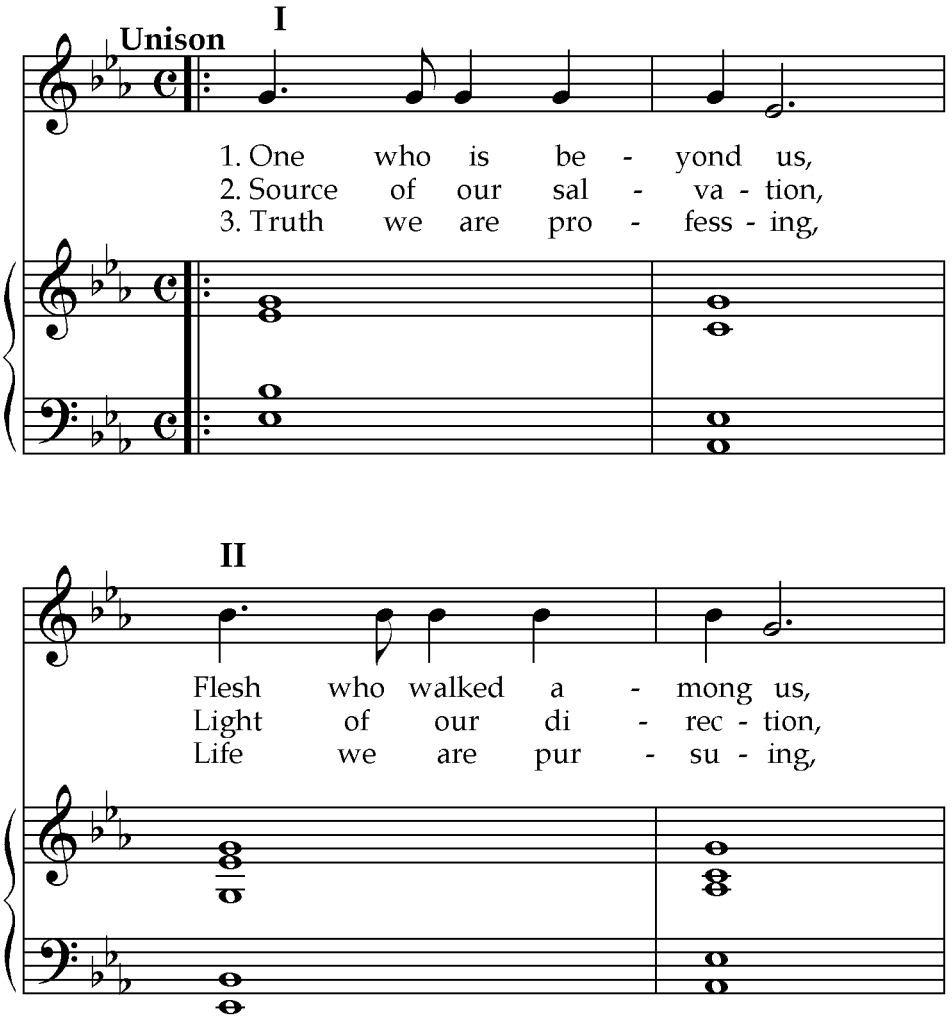
One who is beyond us,
Flesh who walked among us,
Breath that is within us,
make us all we're meant to be.

Source of our salvation,
Light of our direction,
Hope of our perfection,
make us all we're meant to be.

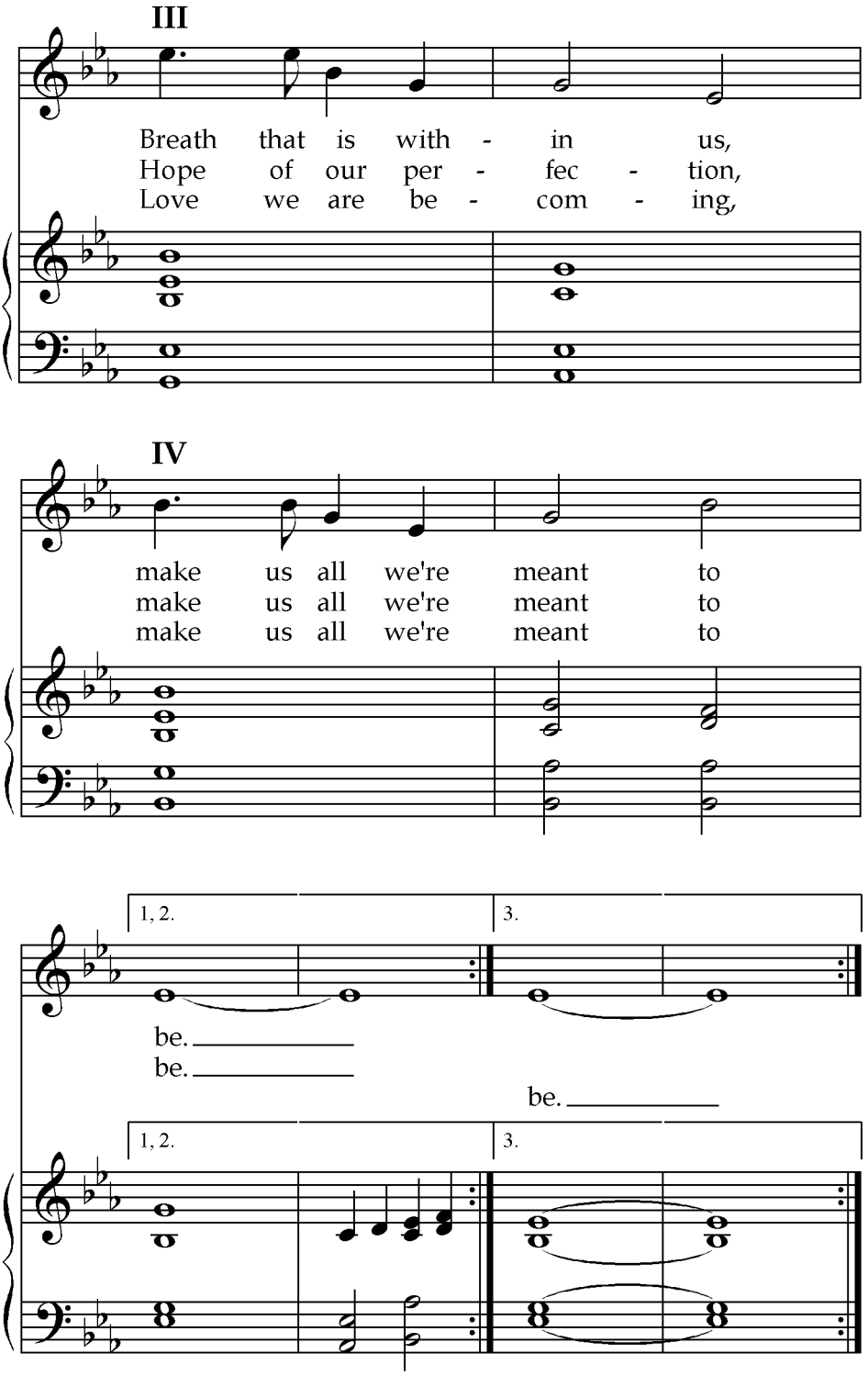
Truth we are professing,
Life we are pursuing,
Love we are becoming,
make us all we're meant to be.

Make Us All We're Meant to Be

BURT L. BURLESON KURT KAISER



MAKE US ALL WE'RE MEANT TO BE
6.6.6.7.


III
Breath that is with - in us,
Hope of our per - fec - tion,
Love we are be - com - ing,
IV
make us all we're meant to
make us all we're meant to
make us all we're meant to
1, 2.
3.
be.
be.
be.
1, 2.
3.

Worship Service

BY BURT L. BURLESON

Call to Worship

Fill your minds with eternal thoughts
and fill this room with praise.
We sing to God, our creator,
redeemer, and friend.
Look into the mystery. Hear the truth.
We listen for the Word of the Lord.
Remember the good news. Believe the gospel.
We trust again in God's grace.
Lift up your hearts.
We lift them up to God.

Chiming

Introit Hymn

"Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing" (verse 1)

Come, thou fount of every blessing,
tune my heart to sing thy grace;
streams of mercy, never ceasing,
call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,
mount of thy redeeming love.

Robert Robinson (1758)
Tune: NETTLETON

Silent Meditation

Our vocation is not simply to be, but to work together with God in the creation of our own life, our own identity, our own destiny…. We are

even called to share with God the work of creating the truth of our identity. We can evade this responsibility by playing with masks, and this pleases us because it can appear at times to be a free and creative way of living. It is quite easy, it seems, to please everyone. But in the long run the cost and the sorrow come very high. To work out our own identity in God, which the Bible calls, "Working out our salvation," is a labor that requires sacrifice and anguish, risk and many tears.

Thomas Merton (1915-1968)[1]

Invocation

O God, Lord of history,
Lord of this hour,
we lift our hearts to you.
As you are present in every place and every moment,
we pray that we might also be present to this time and this place.
We turn aside from all that has consumed us
that we might be consumed by something greater.
Consume us, O God,
consume us with the fire of your Spirit.
Burn away what needs to be no more
and refine that which is eternal.
This is our prayer and our great hope. Amen.

Hymn of Praise

"How Firm a Foundation" (verses 1, 4, 5, and 7)

How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!
What more can he say than to you he has said,
to you that for refuge to Jesus have fled?

"When through the deep waters I call you to go,
the rivers of woe shall not you overflow;
for I will be with you, your troubles to bless,
and sanctify to you your deepest distress.

"When through fiery trials your pathways shall lie,
my grace, all sufficient, shall be your supply;
the flame shall not hurt you; I only design
your dross to consume, and your gold to refine.

"The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
that soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake."

Text from John Rippon's A Selection of Hymns from the Best Authors (1787), altered
Tune: FOUNDATION

The Ten Commandments and The Beatitudes[2]

And God spoke all of these words:
"I am the Lord your God who delivers you.
You shall have no other gods before me."

When Jesus saw the crowds,
he went up on a mountainside and began to teach them saying:
"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
"Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted."

"You shall not make for yourself any idol.
You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God."

"Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled."

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
Honor your father and mother."

"Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
"Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God."

"You shall not murder.
You shall not commit adultery."

"Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God."

"You shall not steal.
You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
You shall not covet."

"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Offertory Hymn

"How Clear Is Our Vocation, Lord"[3]

How clear is our vocation, Lord,
when once we heed your call:
to live according to your word,
and daily learn, refreshed, restored,
that you are Lord of all,
and will not let us fall.

But if, forgetful, we should find
your yoke is hard to bear;
if worldly pressures fray the mind
and love itself cannot unwind
its tangled skein of care:
our inward life repair.

We mark your saints, how they became
in hindrances more sure,
whose joyful virtues put to shame
the casual way we wear your name,
and by our faults obscure
your power to cleanse and cure.

In what you give us, Lord, to do,
together or alone,
in old routines or ventures new,
may we not cease to look for you,
the cross you hung upon,
all you endeavored done.

Fred Pratt-Green
Tune: REPTON

Offering

The Prayers of God's People

O God, we lift our hearts to you.
In your mercy, Lord, hear our prayers.
We have sinned against you and one another.
In your mercy, Lord, hear our prayers.

(silent prayers of confession)

We carry with us burdens for the world.
In your mercy, Lord, hear our prayers.

(silent prayers of petition)

We have friends and loved ones who suffer.
In your mercy, Lord, hear our prayers.

(silent prayers of petition)

We remember again your call to follow.
In your mercy, Lord, hear our prayers.

(silent prayers of commitment)

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Scripture Reading: Colossians 2:6-8 (NIV)

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

The Word of the Lord for God's People.
Thanks be to God.

Hymn of Preparation

"Make Us All We're Meant to Be"

One who is beyond us,
Flesh who walked among us,
Breath that is within us,
make us all we're meant to be.

Source of our salvation,
Light of our direction,
Hope of our perfection,
make us all we're meant to be.

Truth we are professing,
Life we are pursuing,
Love we are becoming,
make us all we're meant to be.

Burt L. Burleson
(pp. 49-51 of this volume)

Sermon

Benediction[4]

Not that we have already obtained all this,
or have been made perfect,
but we press on to take hold of that
for which Christ Jesus took hold of us.
We do not consider ourselves yet to have taken hold of it.
But one thing we do:
forgetting what is behind
and straining toward what is ahead,
we press on toward the goal to win the prize
for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus.

NOTES

1 Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, revised edition (New York, NY: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1972), 32-33.

2 This reading, based on Exodus 20:1-17 and Matthew 5:1-10 (NIV), may be read responsively by a reading group or the congregation. Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright© 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

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4 Based on Philippians 3:12-14 (NIV).

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Training Our Aim

BY GEORGE MASON

Catechism molds the soul of the believer for a life of faithfulness in the world. We must retrieve ancient practices that can shape us into the kind of people who will, as our second nature, glorify God and enjoy him forever.

To his young disciple Timothy, the apostolic mentor Paul writes, "Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and suffering" (2 Timothy 3:10-11). Buried in this list is the cogent phrase "my aim in life." Other translations render it "purpose," but the point is the same and plain: to live the Christian life one needs to know what one is striving for, living toward, or aiming at. What is the goal, the ambition, the target?

The first question of *The Westminster Catechism* puts the matter this way: "What is the chief end of man?" The answer to be memorized and recorded in the soul of the disciple is, "To glorify God and to enjoy him forever."

This answer, however, is not self-evident to every human being. It must be learned and adopted, lest some other aim in life govern a person's direction. For example, the American *Declaration of Independence* declares that the Creator has endowed all human beings with certain "unalienable Rights," among which are "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Happiness, unhappily, has become the chief aim of many, even at the expense of the true pursuit of it. The present possession of personal happiness has become the secular substitute for the spiritual aim of enjoying God forever. The consequences of this shift in aim are deadly to the soul that is made for satisfaction only by glorifying its Creator.

A youth minister found himself counseling a high school football player in his church youth group after the teenager had been suspended from school for being drunk at a party. The young man was chronically abusing alcohol; his grades were suffering and his play on the field declining.

"What do you want to do with your life," the youth minister asked.

"I want to be a lawyer," the boy replied.

"And just how do you think you are going to get from here to there on the path you are going?"

Our conduct in life reflects our true aim, whether we are conscious of it or not. If we are primarily interested in immediate pleasure, our behavior will feed that aim. But if we fix our aim on some higher purpose, we will more likely train ourselves to live toward that end.

The Christian life does not happen willy-nilly. "Men are made, not born, Christians," the early church Father Tertullian famously claimed in *The Apology* (XVIII). He did not mean by that one could not go to heaven unless one is a finished product. He meant that if one's aim in life is more than simply salvation, if it is instead to be shaped into the image of Christ in order better "to glorify God and enjoy him forever," then some construction must take place to build the character and better the conduct of the believer.

We Baptists have paid less attention to the matter of Christian formation than they have to eternal salvation. In fact, Tertullian's dictum might strike us as very odd, since the experience of being "born again" predominates in our language when it comes to making Christians. We might easily see that being born into a Christian nation or to a Christian home or onto the cradle roll of a Christian congregation does not make one a Christian. Yet we do not seem to see that being born again is only the beginning of an intentional life of transformation into the likeness of Christ.

This aim of learning to glorify God requires work, and yet this training does not invalidate the agency of divine grace in the human work. Christians are made by an ongoing process that can be viewed from one side as grace to grace, and from the other as work to work. Churches that take seriously this grace-work of making Christians will devise means to pass on the faith and form the character of Christians from generation to generation.

Catechisms are examples of ways the Church has tried to do just that. A catechism is a systematic plan of education that involves information and formation. It presupposes a people—the Church—who live in such a way that the Christian life is recognizable among them. Catechism requires a Christian who will model that life to one who is observing it—the way Paul did for Timothy. And finally, it demands a serious and studious disciple who wishes to know intimately the "life that really is life" (1 Timothy 6:19).

Catechisms have been common in churches that baptize infants and rare in churches that do not. Children that grow up in sacramental churches have been baptized as infants and then go through catechetical instruction as part of their confirmation experience in late childhood or early adolescence. By learning the faith in a conscious way, they are better able to take for themselves the faith that was pledged to them and shaped into them by parents, godparents, and church leaders. Adult converts similarly undergo catechetical instruction as a means of putting off the "old self" and putting

on the "new self," as the Apostle Paul put it (Ephesians 4:22-24). This traditionally has taken place before baptism, but has sometimes followed it.

The Baptist emphasis on Sunday school for all ages and faith stages has functioned catechistically. Curriculum in children's departments during the school-age years includes the main themes covered in typical catechisms: Who is God? Who are human beings? Who made the world? What is the purpose of life? How do we please God? What rules should conduct behavior? What is the Bible and how does it function? How are we to pray?

An intentional approach to catechism is all the more necessary in a time when Christian identity is not secure.

The story of Jesus being tempted by the devil in the desert right after his baptism has a catechetical ring to it (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). The devil plays devil's advocate, posing questions to Jesus that probe the identity and mission of the Son of God. He even uses Scripture to trip up Jesus in his messianic identity and mission. Jesus uses Scripture right back to clarify his sense of whom he is in relation to God and what his aim is in life. This private spiritual encounter in the wilderness serves as a training exercise that prepares Jesus for his public ministry to follow.

In the same way, the intentional instruction in the faith that catechism represents shapes the soul of the believer in a way that prepares her for a life of faithfulness in the world. Normally, catechisms address faith, ethics, and prayer by teaching the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer, respectively. A question-and-answer format is customarily applied as the disciple learns that her role in life is to be responsive and accountable to the call of God and the authority of the people of God.

While Baptists are not creedal people, the creeds or confessions of faith can serve well in teaching the historic faith to young people and adult converts. In fact, some such intentional approach is all the more necessary in a time when cultural Christianity has given way to religious pluralism, wherein Christian identity is not secure. The Church must retrieve ancient practices that help to shape the people of God into the kind of people that can, as their second nature, glorify God and enjoy him forever.

If an American moves to Italy and wants to become as at home in that country as a native, careful attention to mastering the history, the culture, and the language is necessary. Just living in Italy does not an Italian make. To serve the learning better, an accomplished and learned Italian might serve as a guide. The learning might take a question-and-answer format, and be structured around routine personal exchanges in various locations and cultural settings. And, since children learn faster and easier than adults, the earlier the process begins the better.

In the same way, Baptists who wish to form the gospel into people in the most effective way will do more than announce the good news and introduce them to the Christian faith. To make Christians that are at home with God and true citizens of the Kingdom of God will take assimilation efforts. The Church will find ways to acquaint converts deeply with the faith: teaching the history of faith (doctrine), training in the codes of Christian conduct (ethics), and speaking the language of the Spirit (prayer).

Evangelization will lead to initiation, an initiation into the "life that really is life." Christians will learn to train their aim on the chief end of human beings: "to love God and enjoy him forever."

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Living with Questions of Purpose

BY KYLE REESE

"I wonder what sort of tale we have fallen into," Sam asks in THE LORD OF THE RINGS. As the people of God, are we willing to live with questions of purpose that arise in our lives? Will we walk with each other as we discover answers that lead to our vocation in God's world?

A daughter catches the last available flight, arriving at her parents' home early in the morning. Her grief-stricken father who has just returned home from the hospital greets her. A few hours earlier he called his daughter with the tragic news. The doctor spoke of a massive heart attack. His wife, her mother, died instantly. Now as the father and daughter stand face-to-face, they must address the questions arising from their tragic loss.

A husband and wife are still in shock. The news came quickly and unexpectedly. When the couple completed the required paperwork, the caseworker said it could take up to a year. Yet, here they are, traveling to the agency to meet their new child. Leaving home, their minds are filled with all kinds of questions: Will he like us? What kind of parents will we be? Are we really ready for a son?

The starting point for questions of meaning is always in the middle.[1] In the middle of a family loss, we wonder how we will live without her. In the middle of receiving an unexpected gift, we question how life is going to change.

O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.
Out of the mouths of babes and infants
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.
When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?
Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Psalm 8

The psalmist asks a question of meaning directed to God: "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" (8:4). The psalmist's question does not arise in a vacuum. Instead, it comes in the midst of God's creation, surrounded by the celestial bodies that are a result of God's hands.

Psalm 8 will not allow us to move too quickly to address its penetrating question. Before we consider the place of human beings in the divine order of things, we first must learn something about this God who created the heavens and "established the moon and the stars" (8:3).

In introducing God, the psalmist tells of a God whose name is sovereign over all the earth. Yet the greatness of God is not only seen in the works of creation, but also in the transformation of words, uttered by helpless babes and infants, into defense against God's own foes.

Cassie was a member of a congregation I served. Each Sunday, our group of sixty worshipers gathered in the tiny sanctuary. Cassie sat on the sixth row from the front, on the right side, next to her mother and grandmother. At the time, Cassie was still learning the difference between her "inside" and "outside" voice.

One particular Sunday, I shared what I thought was a very clever children's message. I could tell that Cassie was less than pleased with the content of the message. She went back to her seat between her mother and

grandmother. She showed her displeasure by quickly crossing her arms in anger. Cassie's mother asked her what was wrong. Cassie, despite her mother's best efforts, used her outside voice so all of us could hear, and said, "He didn't say one thing about Jesus!"

Another time, our congregation lost a beloved member who happened to live next door to Cassie. The family scheduled visitation at the local funeral home. When I arrived, Cassie was waiting for me at the front door. She grabbed my hand and we walked to the casket together. Pointing to the corpse, Cassie said, "I'm too young to understand this." She then waited for a response from her pastor.

God is willing to risk God's work and word by sharing power with human beings, even babes and infants. Here we find our identity and answer the question, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them?"

Cassie's simple faith gave her the freedom to ask any question which came to her mind. In a very profound way, Cassie also viewed the church and its ministers as those charged to hear her questions, while at the same time helping her fashion a faithful response. Her words were so meaningful to me that I continue to tell her story thirteen years later.

Psalm 8 introduces us to a complex God. God is the sovereign Lord whose name is known throughout the earth. At the same time, God seems willing to risk God's work and words by sharing power with human beings, even babes and infants. What a risk!

By exploring the risk taken by God, as described in Psalm 8, we begin to find our identity and answer the question, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them?" (8:4).

In my brief ministerial career, I have had the privilege of following two ministers who invested most of their careers in one congregation. I remember the first time I met with each one of these ministers. While each conversation was different, the theme was the same. Each minister shared his love, admiration, and good wishes for the congregation he served. As my predecessors shared their pilgrimages with me, I tried to put myself in their shoes. One gives the very best years of one's life to a local church and then hands the role of pastor to someone new. I was overcome with a sense of humility as I attempted to carry on the work of those who had gone before me.

In a sense, Psalm 8 describes a similar conversation between God and humankind. Human beings are reminded of and even surrounded by the works of God. In this conversation, God seems to hand over a portion of God's work to human beings. The psalmist says it this way: "You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet" (8:6). It is in this charge that human beings find their call, vocation, and ultimately an answer to the psalmist's previous question. What is articulated in these few short verses takes a lifetime to fulfill.

I love the scene in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* where hobbits Frodo and Sam talk about the nature of adventures. Prior to their perilous journey, Sam had believed adventures were something that famous heroes or heroines went looking for in order to cure their boredom. Now he has learned that rather than looking for their adventures, these individuals landed in the midst of their tales, which brought with them a host of unsettling questions. Sam's insight leads him to this pressing question in the midst of his and Frodo's journey, "I wonder what sort of tale we've fallen into?"[2]

Questions of meaning and purpose are asked in the middle of life's troubles and opportunities. Are we, as the people of God, willing to live with those questions? Are we willing to walk with each other as we discover answers that lead to our vocation in God's world?

NOTES

1 Dow Edgerton, "Asking About Who We Are," *Theology Today,* 50:4 (January 1993), 564.
2 J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.,1994), 696.

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Laying Foundations of Faith

BY JOHN D. LOCKHART

First Baptist Church in Richmond, Texas, turned to an historical method of catechesis to help children frame their faith expressions and understand the congregation's historical Baptist identity. The catechism class gives a foundation for their children's growth as faithful disciples.

The story is often told (at least, within childhood education circles) about an itinerate missionary who ministered in rather remote communities by teaching the children and their families. One day the missionary entered a new village, gathered the children together, and asked if they knew what prayer was. Most of the children excitedly raised their hands, indicating their eagerness to answer. Calling on one of them, the missionary was pleasantly surprised, if not shocked, at the child's sophisticated answer. It was concise and doctrinally correct. The child's few words were well chosen and well expressed. The missionary invited another child to share his answer to the question about prayer, and the same simple, direct answer was given, word for word. A third child offered the same answer. The missionary quickly realized that this village had been given the gift of a catechism and the people had a foundation for their faith.

It is apparent within congregations across North America today that our pews are full of people who cannot give such clear and precise answers to many questions about doctrine and the history of our faith. The breakdown is obvious. How do we fix it?

Especially within my own Baptist denomination there has been much discussion (and division) over the last three decades concerning our identity—what doctrines we should believe, what practices we should follow, and how we should live with one another and before the world. Some interpreters of this Baptist squabbling have concluded that we have lost our identity

and do not know whom we are or what we believe, that we do not know our historical relationship with one another or within the Church.

At First Baptist Church in Richmond, Texas, we turned to an historical way of teaching our children the faith in order to address these two needs—to help them frame their faith expressions and gain an understanding of our historical Baptist identity. We developed a program of catechesis in order to lay a foundation for their future growth as disciples.

Minister to Children and Education JoAnn Daugherty worked with me to write and edit the 171 questions and answers in our catechism. She also developed activities and lesson plans for each class session. Dr. Curtis Freeman, who was a professor at Houston Baptist University and a member of our church at the time, guided the development of our catechism.

FINDING OURSELVES AMONG FRIENDS

Because the church had been open to using diverse literature and curriculum for several years, the suggestion that we form a new children's class around questions and answers of our faith was readily accepted. We began to explore our options.

The first catechisms that came to mind were those that have stood the test of time—*The Westminster Standard Larger Catechism* and the *Shorter Catechism* of 1647, and the questions and answers found in books of worship, like the most recent edition of *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979). Most Baptists are familiar with parts of these historical catechisms, like the opening question in *The Westminster Standard*, "What is the chief end of man?" and its answer, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever." Catechisms from other denominations were explored: our Lutheran friends shared their books of instruction and local Methodists offered us ideas.

Then another source came to light. We discovered that Southern Baptists have had catechisms from their beginnings! One of the first documents printed in 1863 at the newly formed Sunday School Board was *A Catechism of Bible Doctrine* by James Boyce, the founder and first president of Southern Seminary.[1] With more research we discovered other Baptist catechisms. We reviewed Henry Jessey's *Catechism for Babes, or Little Ones*, (Benjamin) *Keach's Catechism*, and *A Catechism of Bible Teaching* by John A. Broadus.[2] A friend shared a copy of *Joining the Church*, a pamphlet written by W. A. Criswell who was the pastor for many years at First Baptist Church of Dallas. In this catechism (though he does not use that term), Dr. Criswell offers questions and answers about the meanings of salvation, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and church membership that he felt important for young inquirers to have before them as they began their discovery of faith.[3]

We found many catechisms currently used in the Baptist family. For example, John Piper, pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1992 revised *The Baptist Catechism* first developed in Great Britain in 1689. In his new introduction Piper explains what a catechism

is, why it is important, and how it can be used. The word "catechism," he notes, comes from a Greek New Testament word, *katecheo*, which means to instruct or teach. "It simply means to teach Biblical truth in an orderly way. Generally this is done with questions and answers accompanied by Biblical support and explanation." Piper reveals his motivation for revising *The Baptist Catechism* when he urges readers, "Make [its questions and answers] part of your family routine…. I am excited about being a partner with you in building a 'stable and firm' generation who hopes in God."[4]

First Baptist Church found itself with many friends as it sought a way to teach children about our biblical and historical faith.

DEVELOPING A RICHER VOCABULARY

We began by searching for the words that could help us discern and share the fullness of our faith. Gaining the words we need to articulate our faith, to express our thoughts and desires about God, and to grow in our relationship with God is a treasure of utmost importance. We gain this language of faith as the words of Scripture become personal for us and as we learn hymns and spiritual songs.

These carefully chosen words of faith allow us to share with another generation the hope we have in God. The right word at the right time, Solomon taught us, "is like apples of gold in a setting of silver" (Proverbs 25:11). Indeed, we lean toward profanity, vanity, and emptiness when we use words carelessly (at the wrong times or in the wrong ways) in communicating the intimacy of our relationship with the Triune God.

Catechesis is about sharing the gift of this language with new believers. As babies begin to grow, we measure their maturity by they way they use language—by how many words are in their vocabulary and how they put those words together into sentences. We watch for when our children begin to use certain words and expressions, and when they can ask us more intimate questions. It is the same with maturity in Christian faith. New believers can be taught the right words to use, maybe before they understand them all. This language of faith will help children in the faith to frame their most intimate experiences with God in profound, rather than profane, ways.

Many adult believers, even those who have "grown up in church," have a limited understanding of what they believe and an inadequate vocabulary to express their faith. Their beliefs are still framed in terms of emotional experiences that have never been measured through theological reflection. Since they have not learned a creed, they have no clear channel for learning how to express what they believe, and they are left to discover or develop their own language of faith. Though these expressions may be genuine, they are inadequate for voicing a mature faith.

This often comes out, for example, when I am planning a funeral service with people of faith. Some have said to me, "I believe in 'the old rugged cross,' pastor. That's my faith." Or, "'Amazing grace that saved a wretch

like me' is my story." When I ask for further clarification, often they can give none. "Oh, he walks with me, and talks with me, and tells me I am his own," and other snippets from the church hymnal, may be the only creed and the most significant biblical commentary they have studied to learn a language to express their faith.

As helpful and expressive as the words of these hymns may be, our church has chosen not to limit our faith to that one form of language.

UNDERSTANDING OUR CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT

Any congregation that seriously commits to a ministry of catechism must really believe in its children. Why teach them the words of faith if they cannot learn or if their learning is not important?

Teaching children about faith, fortunately, can be much easier than teaching adults. This is so because many adults are deeply entrenched in the religious views they hold, and often these are opinions based on emotional connections to experiences, rather than thought-out truths grounded in their study of Scripture. When an adult's views are challenged, especially when they are held with limited reflection, the results can be tragic. Children are not yet invested in these emotional connections as deeply as the adults. They are easier to teach; they are eager for reflection. By the age of twelve, Jesus knew the importance of asking questions and seeking answers from the teachers in the Temple (Luke 2:41-52). What an exciting future we open for our children when we teach them the language of faith as those gifted teachers taught their language to Jesus.

As they enter adolescence, our children need expanded categories and a framework for thinking in theological ways. In middle school and high school, they are being taught to think about complex personal, political, and moral issues. In the novels they must read, they are introduced to every major philosophy of life that they will be asked to interpret. They will explore chemistry, physics, and biology at levels that leave their parents in the dark. Yet, have we introduced them to a theology that will help them evaluate and dialogue with these other ways of understanding their lives?

> Gaining the words we need to articulate our faith, to express our thoughts and desires about God, and to grow in our relationship with God is a treasure of utmost importance.

The middle-school years are not too early to begin teaching our children about systematic theology. That is why we introduce our catechism to our fifth- and sixth-grade students. They need to know that they can think, and think hard, about their faith, for they are entering a significant season when

they are being introduced to competing narratives (or, stories of life) the world offers.

FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS

During the time when our church developed its catechism, various Southern Baptist groups were struggling to find the right words about the Bible, Christ, and living the Christian life as individuals and in community. Many Baptists had worked over the years to find good words, full of meaning, to articulate their beliefs in confessions and covenants. One of the best efforts was *The Baptist Faith and Message of 1963* (hereafter, *BFM*). Believing that the *BFM* was accurate for understanding and expressing our Baptist faith, we included in our catechism the text of many of its "articles," including the doctrinal statements on The Scriptures (The Bible), God, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, Man (God's People), Salvation, God's Purpose of Grace, The Church, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, The Lord's Day, and The Kingdom and Last Things. To accompany these articles we constructed 132 questions and answers that reflect their wording as closely as possible.

The *BFM* brought order, structure, and focus to our catechism; it provided language that Baptists had developed over several centuries of growing in understanding and voicing their faith. Working with the 1963 statement allowed us to address issues related to Baptist identity that were being challenged in later revisions of this statement of faith.

We added almost forty questions and answers concerning the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer, which are important topics covered in most traditional catechisms. And we borrowed other wonderful questions and responses from classical Baptist catechisms. For example, we would fight less about our opinions if we truly understood this insight from James Boyce's catechism:

> Q. Does (the Bible) teach us every thing about God?
> A. It does not; no language could teach us the full glory of God, nor could we ever comprehend it.

Wouldn't it be refreshing to be in a study group where members humbly shared their comprehension, knew they could not be too dogmatic about a conclusion, and eagerly awaited your insights? How might Southern Baptist identity have been transformed during the last thirty years if just this one question and answer had been lived out?

LIVING WITH VITAL QUESTIONS

The Apostle Paul was confident that one day we would know spiritual truths "fully," but he reminded the Corinthian Christians that "now we see in a mirror, dimly" and do not have all the final propositions settled (1 Corinthians 13:12). Indeed, grasping this fact about the human condition is a sign of thinking like an adult and putting away childish ways (13:11).

Though many people today hunger for a type of scriptural certainty, learning to live with vital questions and dynamic answers will better prepare us to grow in faith. In our catechism we have suggested that asking the right questions is important, though the answers are unfinished. If we can put the right questions into the hearts of our children, with answers that guide them toward a dynamic and faithful dialogue with one another, their teachers, and God, we will nurture disciples whose faith continues to mature throughout life.

The brightest times in the catechism class, reports our first teacher Sandy Bills, occur when students discuss the questions. Sandy worked very hard to develop the discussion aspect of the catechism class. The students, she observes, already have some of the questions rolling around in their heads and they are waiting for a safe place to ask them. They are excited about working together and with an adult who takes a child's thoughts seriously. Sandy testifies, as do many teachers of children, that she learns much from her students; indeed, her discussions with these young theologians transform how she thinks about her faith.

The students need a framework on which to hang the truth they are discovering. Cindy Salch, our second teacher, has emphasized the memory work that can provide them a structure for many years of thinking.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

We have learned several important lessons over the years as we have taught "Foundations, Questions and Answers of Our Faith."[5] For one thing, children love to be considered and treated as important to adults. Some students said they were pleased that they were studying their first theology class! They were grateful that we did not just give them another set of stories, but called them to reflect more deeply on the stories of their faith. They were pleased that we gave them "adult things," such as *The Baptist Faith and Message*, and invited them to share their thoughts on God, the Bible, and other significant matters of faith. Our prayer is that they will continue to approach learning in this way, that they will remain active in questioning and discussing and not just passively receive others' thoughts.

We have found that there is too much material in our catechism for a one-year study during the Sunday morning Bible study hour. One option that we are considering is to enrich the program with short retreats focused on a *BFM* article, the Ten Commandments, or the Lord's Prayer. Another option is to extend the class to a two-year study, which would allow more time for discussion that makes for good students and for the memorization that helps build the foundation for so much future thought.

Our methods are not without their problems. For instance, we offer the catechism class on Sunday morning because this is when most families come to church and we have found that children need to attend class regularly to grasp the material. Yet many families today, even those who are active in a

variety of church programs, attend only two Sundays or less each month. Children are increasingly mobile on weekends, sometimes because their parents are separated, but often because they enjoy more opportunities for family travel. Some might attend more regularly if we scheduled the catechism class at another time during the week.

Though we introduce the parents to our catechism, we would like to include them more often in the class discussions of the material. Most of our parents are not familiar with a Baptist catechism, so they do not truly understand the learning process that their children are experiencing. If they were more active in the class, parents would have a wonderful opportunity to learn theology with and from their children, and they would be more accountable for helping their children memorize and discuss the catechism questions and answers outside of class.

As we continue to teach the catechism to our children, we are considering how we might study the catechism through the whole congregation. Just as the *Heidelberg Catechism* in one edition is divided into sections to be considered each Lord's Day throughout the year, our catechism could be incorporated into worship services for a year's study and celebration of faith.

Too many Christians over the years have recognized the value of memorization and organization of theology through a catechism for us to ignore this form of discipleship training. We have found that catechesis is a marvelous way to lead our children into a lifetime of learning.

NOTES

1 Tom J. Nettles, ed., *Baptist Catechisms: "To make Thee wise unto salvation"* (Tom Nettles, 1982), 3.

2 These and other important Baptist catechisms were collected by Broadus in *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms*, Library of Baptist Classics 11 (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1996), edited by Timothy George and Denise George. John A. Broadus (1827-1895) was the first professor of New Testament at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the second president of the school.

3 W. A. Criswell, *Joining the Church* (Dallas, TX: First Baptist Church of Dallas, 1964).

4 John Piper, *A Baptist Catechism* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethlehem Baptist Church, 1992), 2.

5 I gathered these lessons from personal interviews I recently conducted with the catechism teachers, Sandy Bills and Cindy Salch, and the writer and editor, JoAnn Daugherty.

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The Teaching Power of Spiritual Direction

BY EMILIE GRIFFIN

In the ancient discipline of spiritual direction, practical guidance for Christian living is offered in the most sensitive and delicate way. The best spiritual directors are both good listeners and active interpreters of God's grace in the life of the individual and of the community.

The ancient Christian discipline of spiritual direction, once confined to religious communities, is now used broadly by laypeople. One-on-one meetings with a trained director, weekly, monthly, or at longer intervals, may help us to sustain a regular commitment to prayer and to the life of the Spirit.[1] In these meetings we describe our prayer experiences, our joys and difficulties, and gain perspective on how our spiritual practice may be shaping us. A spiritual director helps us to develop confidence in God, to relax in prayer, to deal with trouble spots of any kind. Spiritual direction is not entirely professionalized, but there are now many trained directors. The director should be a person experienced in prayer and able to listen.

Spiritual direction can become a deeply valued aspect of our prayer-lives. Sometimes these relationships take on the character of friendships. However, as long as the direction is in progress, it is good to maintain a certain holy distance. It is wise for both parties to keep confidentiality for everyone's protection. As with retreats, spiritual direction is a work of the Holy Spirit, to be honored and treasured as such.

A FORM OF CATECHESIS

At first glance it may seem odd to describe spiritual direction as a form of catechesis. In Christian history, catechesis, that is to say, Christian instruction, mostly employs a structured format for teaching fundamental

doctrine and belief. Such formats have been used to good effect both by Catholics and Protestants. Though the word "catechesis" and its adjective "catechetical" are more often used today by Catholics, the development of a catechism for teaching Christian belief is longstanding among Protestants as well as Catholics.

Martin Luther developed two catechisms, one designated as "large" and the other as "small." For the Reformed Churches the *Heidelberg Catechism* and the *Westminster Catechism* are well known. Anglicans as well as Roman Catholics have used a catechetical format. Today, many older Roman Catholics remember fondly *The Baltimore Catechism* from which they were instructed as children. This has been supplanted by the recently published *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Certain popular books, like *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis, may be, practically speaking, catechetical. Many published Christian works serve as teaching instruments for conveying and instilling the fundamentals of Christian belief and practice. Yet by and large we do not think of spiritual direction as an aspect of catechetical teaching.

Is God speaking to us through the smallest and most commonplace events of our lives? We must become willing to interpret the events of our lives in the light of grace.

In Christian spiritual direction, guidance is offered for the very practical business of Christian living, but in a most sensitive and delicate way. The best spiritual directors are essentially listeners. They wait for the questions posed to them by the directee, the person who comes seeking such guidance. They remind themselves not to be overly opinionated and never to lecture or pontificate. Even so they are active interpreters of God's grace in the life of the individual and of the community.

RAISING OUR AWARENESS OF GOD'S GRACE

One good reason for taking on the practice of spiritual direction is that it may help us to become more discerning about God's work in our lives. In fact, the entire spiritual life (sometimes referred to as Christian formation) is grounded in a willingness to interpret events in the light of grace.

A good example of how God's grace may be seen in our lives is through published spiritual autobiographies and personal accounts of Christian conversion. C. S. Lewis articulates his life story in *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*. In that narrative of his youthful search for God, Lewis names and describes a number of intense experiences. One of these is in early childhood, when he feels a keen sense of pleasure and nostalgia which he is almost powerless to name. Eventually he comes to call this experience "joy." He spends much of his early life chasing this experience, until it

eventually leads him to the acknowledgment of God, and finally devotion to Jesus Christ. Yet it is easy to see, in his narrative, the difficulty which the young Lewis experienced in interpreting his various intense religious experiences. Although he had been raised a Christian, still he lacked a full vocabulary of grace. He could not connect his life experience with his knowledge of Christianity as a religious and philosophical system. This difficulty, wherever it may occur, could conceivably be bridged by the practice of spiritual direction.

In my own Christian practice, I have come to understand the vital importance of interpretation in the Christian life. Is God speaking to us through the smallest and most commonplace events of our lives? Often we are unsure how to listen to and discern the leadings of God. What stands between us and the experience of God's grace? Sometimes we are short on imagination; we have difficulty supposing that God is actually dealing with us. Just as often our willingness is what is at stake. We must become willing to interpret the events of our lives in the light of grace.

An event may occur. It may be large or small. But the magnitude of the event is not what matters. What really counts is the interpretation we may place on events, the specific ways we see how God communicates with us.

When I was in my early twenties I moved from my native New Orleans to New York City in hopes of pursuing a career. I began to look for a job, but for many weeks I had little success. Finally, out of a desperate sense of need, I went into St. Peter's Lutheran Church on Lexington Avenue and prayed for a job.

Within the next twenty-four hours I had a line on a job, a job which was offered to me within the week. But I was hesitant to interpret this event as the answer to prayer. I began to think that such a quick "answer to prayer" might be an aspect of superstitious thinking. I refused, at least for a time, to interpret this event in the light of grace.

A few weeks later I had a second notable experience. The man who had hired me (with whom I had never had any religious exchanges) organized an office lunch at a nearby restaurant, with the whole staff in attendance. As part of a light and friendly conversation, he suddenly said, "Have you ever noticed that people pray for things, but they fail to thank God for the answers they receive in prayer?" I was frankly astonished. It sounded like a direct message from God to me, a sort of a reminder to be grateful, even a reproof for the thanks I had failed to extend.

In such a situation, spiritual direction could have been helpful. But in those days I did not know that such a spiritual practice even existed, nor how to avail myself of it.

On my own, however, by careful reflection on what had happened, I got the message. I had prayed, I had received an answer to prayer, and I had been too proud to admit it. Finally, on my knees, I expressed my sorrow and went to God thankfully in prayer.

Many events in our lives—I would venture to say most events—are capable of a spiritual interpretation. When we hold back from this interpretation, we are underestimating God, and we are depriving ourselves of a full appreciation of God's grace.

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IS THE FRAMEWORK

Churches and theological institutes exist to provide us with a framework for our faith. They aim to teach us about the nature and the love of God. Not only do we turn to the Bible as an authority in the life of the Spirit, but also to trained interpreters—pastors, professors, spiritual writers, and teachers whom we regard as trustworthy witnesses to the nature and action of God. These interpreters guide us, through courses of formal instruction or one-on-one mentoring, to profess our faith, deepen our understanding of the gospel, and grow as disciples.[2]

In one sense, the profession of faith is one of the most fundamental aspects of our Christian practice. While this varies among denominations, almost every church affords us some way to proclaim our faith. Such a profession may occur when we stand up in church to read Scripture, when we preach, and when we testify to what God has done in our lives. Many informal and familiar phrases are really affirmations of what we believe about the nature of God: "God is so good," "God is good, all the time," and "Our God is an awesome God." We profess our faith when we pray the Lord's Prayer—"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen."—or the Gloria—"Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen."

The more liturgical churches encourage the recitation of a creed as a profession of the faith of the community. These creedal formulas are what remain of a lost Christian unity. All recite the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and even the Athanasian Creed, even though they may not agree on what constitutes "one holy catholic and apostolic church." But there is still a shred of Christian unity in some of their affirmations: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, and in Jesus Christ his only son, Our Lord."

Yet, as many believers have noticed, more is needed to apply these essentials of Christian belief to our day-to-day experience. How should we relate to God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) on an ongoing basis? How do we live for God and others? What, to use William James's expression, is the "cash value" of our belief? How do we respond to the call of Jesus to take up the cross and follow him?

Volumes have been written to answer these questions. But the learning that takes place in spiritual formation is God's grace mediated through living persons who are our spiritual friends and counselors. This living and active application of Christian teaching can be invaluable.

Sometimes a person comes into spiritual direction wrestling with specific problems. The director may help him or her to apply the teaching of Jesus or other biblical wisdom. How do I deal with irritating people who intrude on my life and make unfair demands on my time? How do I deal with a person in my congregation who is constantly against me? *"But I say to you, love your enemies."* How do I appropriate the spirituality of my parents and grandparents and apply their life lessons to my own experience? *"Honor your father and mother."* What do I do about unanswered prayers? *"Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart…. And he said, 'Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them?'"*

In the last several years I have been serving as a spiritual director in a two-year training program entitled "The Path of Spiritual Direction and Spiritual Formation in the Congregation." This series of retreats, sponsored by the Academy of Spiritual Leadership of the Louisiana Conference of the United Methodist Church and directed by the Reverend Carole Cotton Winn, is now being offered for the fourth time. In its brochure, the program is described as follows: "the scope of the retreats includes the art of training in spiritual direction, and takes a broader look at bringing the practices of spiritual formation to the congregation. It is for those who want resources and skills which invite persons and small groups into the presence of God and which deepen the spiritual life of the congregation." Each person enrolled in these sessions is expected to have regular contact with an experienced spiritual director.

I have not attended these training retreats, but I am acting as a spiritual director for several who have gone through, or are now going through, the training. My task, in these sessions, is twofold: to do what spiritual directors should do, and do it well; and to help the directees reflect on the process in ways that will strengthen them for their own work in spiritual direction. Is this also a form of catechesis? I suspect so.[3]

How do we take up the cross and follow Jesus? Volumes have been written to answer this question. But the learning that takes place in spiritual direction is God's grace mediated through living persons who are our spiritual friends and counselors.

A NEW EXPERIENCE OF FAITH

Certainly, part of my task as a director in this program is to help form opinions on what a spiritual director is like. I need to do just what good directors do—that is, listen attentively, ask questions when needed, apply

spiritual principles sparingly and judiciously, and wait for the Holy Spirit.

More importantly, I notice these directees are developing a new vocabulary for spiritual life. They are devout Christians, long time churchgoers, practiced in their own style of worship and devotion. Yet such notions as spiritual formation and spiritual direction demand more of them. And they are entering into this program on behalf of their own congregations. They want to make the spiritual life more widely practiced and better understood. (Not all of them, by the way, are laypeople. Some, both men and women, are already ordained ministers who have been theologically trained.)

J. B. Phillips described faith as a faculty that becomes stronger in practice. The spiritual life, heightened by spiritual direction, is a way of enlarging and strengthening our Christian faith and practice.

One way that some of these directees are expressing and capturing their new experience of faith is through writing. I am always careful not to assign writing, but rather to offer it as a one of many options for spiritual discipline**.** This desire to write is not stemming from me or from my direction. But the directees sometimes keep journals and refer to them as ways to prepare for their sessions in spiritual direction.

In some instances, the directees write more organized reflection papers as part of the training course. I was particularly struck by one of these, in which the writer reviewed some of the devotional literature that had influenced her parents and showed its influence upon her own life. She also drew together the spiritual writers who had influenced her, finding the commonalities between generations.

Surely this is a learning experience, and one which has benefits both for the writer and for others who read her paper. Such an exercise is both devotional and instructive.

Henri J. M. Nouwen, in speaking of the spiritual value of writing, said: "Writing is a process by which we discover what lives in us. The writing itself reveals to us what lives in us. The deepest satisfaction of writing is precisely that it opens up new spaces within us of which we were not aware before we began to write."[4] This is, of course, a form of learning, a faith-learning in which we may discover the truths of our faith as part of lived experience.

In a similar way we learn from our devotional reading, which is often a real undergirding of our spiritual practice. In addition to the Bible, which is intimately connected to our spiritual living, many devotional texts, works of reflection, and faith-narratives nurture our understanding of God.

After many years in the spiritual life, I must take note of the various factors that have formed me, and how I have progressed spiritually over time. By and large I cannot calculate this in terms of an increase of virtue, though I have sometimes hoped for that. Instead I am conscious of a deepening of knowledge, not so much on the intellectual level but rather as a kind of wisdom. Many factors contribute to this. Prayer, worship, reading, reflection, writing, and spiritual direction are among them.

To list here all of the books which have instructed and nurtured me would be impractical. As an illustration I will mention just one: *Teach Us to Pray: Learning a Little About God,* by the Belgian contemplative and scholar Andre Louf. This small volume came into my hands in the 1970s, and I have read it countless times. Intended as an instruction on prayer for his fellow Cistercian monks, Louf's book has been read with great profit by a large audience of laypeople, who have been blessed by his vital consciousness of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Louf says of the Holy Spirit: "God's Holy Spirit has taken us over, has assumed complete possession of us; he has become breath of our breath and spirit of our spirit. He takes our heart in tow and turns it towards God." He adds that prayer, this knowledge given by the Spirit, is like a hidden treasure we always carry about with us. To explain all this he draws especially on Paul's encouragement, "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:15) and "Because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Galatians 4:6). Prayer, he adds, is a heart that overflows with gratitude, thanksgiving, and praise.[5]

Such devotional reading is a vivid encouragement to the spiritual life. For me, this passage is a splendid footnote to that statement in the Profession of Faith: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and from the Son."

The practice of the spiritual life, including the practice of spiritual direction, serves to enlarge our knowledge of Christian faith and practice. J. B. Phillips, the British spiritual writer, once described faith as a faculty which becomes stronger in practice. So, the spiritual life, heightened by spiritual direction, is a way of enlarging and strengthening our catechesis.

NOTES

1 Group spiritual direction is also practiced, and it observes many of the same sensitivities and constraints. But the historic method of spiritual guidance is one-on-one.

2 Among the programs of catechetical training, under Protestant auspices, is Alpha, an interdenominational training course in the essentials of Christian belief. The Alpha course, based on a program which originated in Britain, offers ten weeks of training to provide a "nonthreatening introduction to the Christian faith" (*www.alphausa.org*). Recently a new

program, "Why Catholic?" has been launched in American Catholic Churches at the behest of the RENEW International movement (*www.whycatholic.org*). In a structured small-group process, participants will read and reflect upon the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which explores the essentials of Christian belief in the Catholic tradition.

3 One thing that strikes me about this program is the depth and breadth of devotional literature being recommended and in some instances required. Especially I noticed the readings from John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Origen.

The reading list also included a number of modern teachers on the spiritual life: William A. Barry and William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*; William A Barry, *Discernment in Prayer: Paying Attention to God*; Thomas Green, *Weeds Among the Wheat* and *Drinking from a Dry Well*; and David Regan, "Mystagogy and Experience," chapter three in *Experience the Mystery: Pastoral Possibilities for Christian Mystagogy*.

Protestant publishers were well represented on the reading list—Upper Room and InterVarsity Press as well as Westminster/John Knox Press and Pendle Hill Publications. A number of the recommended authors were Anglicans or Episcopalians. Among these authorities were Gerald May, Alan Jones, Kenneth Leech, and Michael Gemignani. The recommended materials were all drawing from well-established and historic practices of spiritual direction and formation.

4 Robert Durbach, ed., *Seeds of Hope: A Henri Nouwen Reader* (New York: Bantam, 1989), 28.

5 Andre Louf, *Teach Us to Pray: Learning a Little About God* (New York: Paulist Press, 1974), 19.

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Learning Life-Giving Ways of Life

BY TODD EDMONDSON

As true catechism challenges us to wrap our minds around the mysteries of the faith, it guides us to more faithful ways of living. The two approaches reviewed here open space in daily life to practice the presence of God, not just in the words we say, but in the ways we use our hands and feet.

Unfortunately, to many Christians catechism seems like a set of abstract questions and important-sounding answers, a sort of divinely sanctioned Scholastic Aptitude Test to guarantee entrance into the Kingdom of God. "Since the Enlightenment, intellectual knowledge, theology, and doctrine have been the primary means by which people come to the religious life," Tony Jones notes in a pair of recent books. If he is right, and if his adverse reaction to this phenomenon is not unique, this might go a long way toward explaining the general ambivalence about the practice of catechism among churchgoing Christians today.

The most committed and faithful practitioners of catechetical instruction think this characterization misses the mark. They know that the value of such instruction is in how it can form Christian character rather than just manipulate ideas. For we are not disembodied souls or fleshless reason, as the ancient heresy of Gnosticism and its modern counterpart of Enlightenment Rationalism would have us believe. We are skin and bone, arms and legs, physical matter on two feet walking through this physical world, wondering not just what we should think, but what we should do. The question, then, for those committed to exploring the benefits of traditional catechetical instruction, is how we might unite the living qualities of Christian prac-

tice without forsaking substantive doctrinal matters. In training disciples, how might we challenge one another to wrap our minds around the mysteries of the faith, while at the same time spurring one another on to more faithful ways of life? Better yet, how might we grow to see the two activities as inextricably connected, or of one piece entirely?

Recently there has been no shortage of books on Christian practice, all of which profess the common goal of helping a Church largely disconnected from its past rediscover some of the regular activities our predecessors in the faith embraced as they sought to grow closer to God. The weakest of these works treat disciplines as mystical formulas, as though simply assuming a certain posture and uttering certain words might serve as a two-step process to spiritual enlightenment. The strongest, however, seek to open up space within the patterns of daily life so that believers might practice the presence of God, not just in the words they say or doctrines they believe, but in the ways they use their hands and feet. Our work and rest, our sharing of meals and stories and embraces and tears with families and friends and church communities, are opportunities for us to learn together what it means to live faithfully under the care of a God who is made known not just to our minds, but to our whole selves.

RECOVERING THE TRADITION

For those seeking to understand how doctrines and practices firmly rooted in the past might come alive in the Church today, and specifically how this might take place across generations of Christians, the work of Tony Jones is a good place to start. Jones, a former Minnesota youth minister and a current doctoral candidate in theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, has something of a vested interest in communicating the significance of Christian practice in language that is easily grasped by younger members of the Church. To this end, in 2003, he published *Soul Shaper: Exploring Spirituality and Contemplative Practices in Youth Ministry* (El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties, 2003, 253 pp., $19.99). This book, geared primarily towards men and women committed to the formation of young Christians into mature followers of Christ, endeavors admirably to bring modern disciples, young and old alike, into conversation with practices from the past that many believers dismiss out of hand as "weird," "outdated," or "superstitious." Eschewing the stereotypes so often heard in Protestant circles especially, Jones manages to ground these practices—which range from the use of icons and labyrinths to fasting and spiritual direction—in theological, historical, and personal contexts that make them seem less alien to us. In short, he gives us eyes to see these things as immensely practicable, even in the midst of a culture that kicks against the goads of the past with all its might.

Consider just one example of how Jones approaches this task. He opens the chapter on pilgrimage by relating a fellow youth minister's reflections

on a recent trip to Ground Zero in New York City. This serves to illustrate that we needn't be mired in medieval images of journeys to Canterbury or Santiago in order for the practice of pilgrimage to make sense. After sharing these insights from someone actively and daily engaging in the process of forming Christians in the twenty-first century, Jones turns to the history behind pilgrimage, and in the process he helps a past full of spiritual wanderers come alive. He describes what a journey to Santiago de Compostela during the twelfth century would have been like, and helps us understand the purpose such a journey would serve. In the third section of the chapter, he explores some of pilgrimage's theological moorings, such as the conviction that we are resident aliens on this earth, "trying to find our way back to that perfect place where our relationship with God is perfectly intimate." Indeed, Jones classifies all of life this side of Eden as a wandering, and he views the practice of pilgrimage as a powerful symbolic reminder of that reality. What Jones accomplishes, then, over the course of five short pages, is to connect what we believe with what we do in a way that seems not foreign, but rather a part of who we are.

Every chapter in Jones' book includes notes on how we might best engage these practices, such as tips on how best to prepare for a pilgrimage (leave the Discman and *Sports Illustrated* at home) or what to expect during a fast (weakness and muscle soreness will give way to clarity).

Another Jones publication, *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life* (El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties, 2005, 222 pp., $12.99), is an updated version of the earlier book, but it is directed more toward the formation of adults. The structure of the book is similar to that of *Soul Shaper*, without the abundant reflections on youth ministry. Otherwise, most of the chapters in the earlier work have simply been reproduced for a different audience. Both books are valuable introductions to ancient Christian practices and fruitful meditations on how these practices might enrich our understanding of who we are as disciples of Jesus Christ. Neither seeks to disengage from the intellectual or doctrinal aspects of our identity as Christians, but rather to map out new ways to live into the realities communicated in the catechisms and creeds of the faith.

Jones gives us eyes to see traditional Christian practices—from use of icons and labyrinths to fasting and spiritual direction—as immensely practicable, even in the midst of a culture that kicks against the goads of the past with all its might.

RELATING PRACTICES AND BELIEF

As the director of the Project on the Education and Formation of People in Faith at Valparaiso University, Dorothy C. Bass is committed to exploring ways in which the Church might participate in the shaping of Christians. Her role as editor of two recent books shows that, like Jones, she believes this business of formation should not be limited to one generation within the Church. It is never too early or too late to begin the process of growing in faith and practice.

Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2002, 310 pp., $16.00), like Jones' *Soul Shaper*, is a book that helps youth and those who minister to them to connect their faith with the struggles, challenges, and opportunities they face every day. Bass co-edited the book with Don C. Richter, and the chapters were composed by teams of an adult and a teenager putting their heads together to think faithfully about prayer, work, time, creativity, play, stuff, and fourteen other pieces of the puzzle called life. Emerging from these myriad parts is a beautiful whole of real-world Christian existence, as well as an encouraging picture of youth and adults developing a common vocabulary as they talk about things that matter. It is a vocabulary of practice rooted in belief that, if engaged, can result in a process of forming disciples that is living, active, and deeply valuable to the Church.

In the chapter on grieving, for example, teenager Tatiana Wilson, 14, joins with her aunt, Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, to reflect on the loss of loved ones, the depth of suffering in the world due to AIDS and other diseases, and the need for healing in the wake of death. The two frame the conversation in the context of Scripture, especially the biblical psalms of lament, so that teens are given an ancient language to express their emotions, a language deeper and more God-centered than so many of the platitudes that pass for wisdom in today's world. Wilson and Kirk-Duggan encourage their audience to find ways to remember, in word and action, through poetry and heartbreak and ritual and honesty, the past they might be mourning and the future they anticipate. Christian doctrines are not forsaken; Christian community is not denied; Christian practice is not ignored. Instead, we are given a picture of a fuller, richer sort of grief than is so often experienced, a grief that young people can embody practically and in the process find true healing, the kind of healing that can only be rooted in the truth and beauty of God.

Another collection of essays edited by Bass, *Practicing our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997, 232 pp. $18.95), sets out, over the course of fourteen essays, a vision for connecting the shared beliefs of Christians with "life giving ways of life." This vision is all about practicing what we confess, through the exploration of such practices as honoring the body, keeping Sabbath, forgiveness, healing, and discernment.

An illustration from the book's essay on hospitality might best articulate how Christian practice and belief, vocalized through catechism, creed, and confession, are inextricably linked. The author, Ana Maria Pineda, tells of a yearly practice in the Mission District of San Francisco known as *Las Posadas*. The ritual unfolds over nine December nights and involves the entire community. For the first eight nights, various men, women, and children assume the role of Mary and Joseph and request lodging from innkeepers stationed at various sites. At each station, those playing the role of the weary father-to-be ask for a place to stay. At each station, those playing the role of the innkeeper answer back, "This is not an inn; move on—I cannot open lest you be a scoundrel." Finally, on the ninth night, something changes. A spirit of grace-filled hospitality enters the proceedings, so that Joseph and his pregnant wife are given lodging for the night, Jesus is born, and the community celebrates with piñatas, song and dance, and feasting. It is a celebration of the ancient innkeeper's hospitality, as well as a call to open our doors, our tables, and our hearts to the wandering strangers in our own midst.

This is what catechism and practice should be about; we enter into a harmonious exchange as belief and action both come alive among us. God's methods are many; throughout our lives, that same God who moved the innkeeper to hospitably welcome a wandering couple into his stable forms us into citizens of the Kingdom, so that through profession and practice we might become the people, and the disciples, we were intended to be.

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Catechism in the Worshiping Community

BY GERALD J. MAST

How much of Christian teaching should be explanation and how much example? Without denying the significance of words, the books reviewed here explore the neglected significance of worship and everyday practices in shaping the hearts and minds of growing believers.

In passing along the faith to the next generation of church members, how much of Christian teaching should be explanation and how much example? Is the faith best described or best performed? Are we most persuaded by word or by deed? Without denying the significance of words, many recent authors of books about doctrine and catechism emphasize the neglected significance of liturgical and everyday practice in shaping the minds and bodies of growing believers.

Perhaps the best explanation for this turn to the performative in theories of catechism can be found in a massive new volume on theological method which argues that doctrine can best be conceived as a drama—a stage on which the enactment of Scripture unfolds in the life of the Church. In his book, *The Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005, 488 pp., $39.95), Kevin Vanhoozer, Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, relies extensively on the work of Catholic theologian Han Urs von Balthasar to develop the claim that "what lies at the heart of gospel is not an idea or an ideal or an experience, but an action" (p. 50).

Vanhoozer positions his work at the edge of changing understandings about the meaning of doctrine. Specifically he seeks to offer an evangelical alternative to postliberal Protestant theology, which, following George Lindbeck, had emphasized the story-shaped nature of doctrine and that

beliefs are shaped by particular cultures where Christians live. While this was a useful corrective to the didactic and propositional theology of the Enlightenment era, Vanhoozer is rightly concerned that the transformative and world-challenging gospel event is compromised by such a relativizing approach. Vanhoozer seeks to recover the sense in which God's actions in the world through Israel, Jesus Christ, and the Church are both events to which members of Christ may witness and also words by which believers may extend those gracious acts.

Much of his book is devoted to working out what it would mean for theological method to understand the Church as a "theater of the gospel" with its members a "company of performers" (p. 413). The diligent and patient reader will discover a profound reorientation to such persistent ecclesial issues such as authority, leadership, tradition, and biblical interpretation. Toward the end of the book Vanhoozer draws on acting theory to sketch out some of the practical implications of his method for those practices of Word and Sacrament by which believers are formed into their roles as members of Christ so that they may become martyrs—witnesses to the grace of God revealed in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet Vanhoozer's greatest gift is his provision of a new conceptual landscape for doing theology, for performing it, and for passing it along to others.

CATECHESIS THROUGH WORSHIP

The drama of doctrine as conceived by Vanhoozer offers a rich theoretical backdrop for reading several other more practically focused books concerned with the relationship between worship and catechism. Simon Chan's new *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006, 207 pp., $22.00), for example, proceeds from a strong doctrine of the Church to an eloquent, if not always elegant, articulation of those practices by which the Church makes visible the will of God. For Chan, who is the Earnest Lau Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Theological College in Singapore, the Church is not merely an instrument for accomplishing God's purposes but is itself the "expression of God's ultimate purpose" (p. 21). In other words, the Church precedes creation and is also the culmination of creation. Chan seeks in this work to correct a weak evangelical doctrine of the Church by highlighting the neglected arts and habits of Christian worship that make the body of Christ visible in time and space. These arts, Chan emphasizes, are not to be seen as tactics for the creation of a certain spiritual experience for members. Rather, the habits of worship cultivated by the Church over the centuries are themselves the doxological fulfillment of the Church's mission (or of God's mission in the Church). Put another way, it is in worship that the people of God become who they are in service to God.

Chan's approach raises questions about a variety of conventional evangelical practices that tend to separate the worship of God from the mission

of the Church. For example, evangelism is often construed as a human-centered, purposive program for saving souls. Church-planters use market analysis to design programs that will attract a certain target audience. And mega-churches design a whole variety of services for their members oriented around therapeutic, social, and physical needs.

For Chan, worship should be shaped less by pragmatic goals associated with evangelism or mission and more by the liturgical norms of Word and Sacrament. This two-dimensional order of Christian liturgy highlights the Eucharistic meal as the culmination of expectations built through the hearing and reception of the Word through the service. The Word proclaims the coming reign of God; the Eucharistic meal makes that reign visible in the present. Such a reevaluation of Communion should be taken seriously by evangelicals who have "created a largely hearing community rather than an aural-tactile community" (p. 67).

Traditional catechism focused on confession of the creeds, following the Ten Commandments, and praying the Lord's Prayer. In this framework many contemporary issues of discipleship can be addressed vigorously.

The incorporation of new members into the Church cannot be separated from this multi-dimensional worship, according to Chan. Catechism must involve basic elements of liturgy and thus prepare candidates for membership to participate rightly in worship of God's people. Traditional catechism has thus focused on three activities: the confession of the triune God in the creed, following the Ten Commandments, and praying the Lord's Prayer. Within such a framework many contemporary issues of discipleship can be addressed vigorously. For example, the creed helps us to address a world of religious pluralism. The Commandments speak to us against the grain of market-centered consumer capitalism. The Lord's Prayer challenges an exchange-focused economy that breeds poverty and homelessness. Chan's book develops practical proposals for both teaching and worship, including a rough outline of contemporary issues to be addressed through liturgy-centered catechesis and a sample order of worship.

CATECHESIS IN A COUNTERCULTURAL COMMUNITY

If Chan offers a provocative critique of much contemporary evangelical worship and teaching, Debra Dean Murphy takes on the liberal Protestant establishment in a book that, like Chan, embeds catechesis in worship, while focusing on catechesis rather than on worship. Murphy works for both the academy and the church—teaching at Meredith College and directing the Christian education program at the 1500 member Fuquay-Varina United

Methodist Church in North Carolina.

Murphy's book, *Teaching That Transforms: Worship as the Heart of Christian Education* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007, 255 pp., $26.00), begins with a critique of modern religious education programs that abstract the values they inculcate from the particular faith traditions in which they had been embedded. She is further opposed to any kind of public theology that seeks to reduce Christian particularity to commonly held civic virtues such as freedom and justice. Instead she seeks to return to the kind of freedom discovered through dependence on the gifts of the Triune God and through the same kind of obedience to the Father that Jesus displayed. Thus, Murphy is critical of the public ethos of liberal Protestant churches that accepts the terms of American civil religion as a basis for social activism and humanitarian giving.

Murphy establishes an agenda for Christian catechesis that instead of making church members into polite and contributing citizens will rather identify them with the countercultural community of the Church and with alternative ways of knowing that are rooted in the counter-story of Jesus—the "way things really are" (p. 92). As Murphy develops those practices of knowledge in the second half of her book, she emphasizes like Chan the engagement of the whole body in Christian formation through worship. Unlike Chan she stresses the centrality of desire in Christian knowing—in the Augustinian sense of human longing that rightly finds its fulfillment in God. This attention to the power of God-directed human desire provides a dimension of intensity and beauty to Murphy's discussion of the bodily actions of the liturgy: proclamation, baptism, and Eucharist. Murphy wants these sensuous liturgical practices to be intrinsic to the training of church members and for the sharp division between basement education and sanctuary worship to be subverted.

Chan and Murphy assume that the best way for the Church to form its members is through the ancient traditions and habits of the Church. Their approach can perhaps best be described as a recovery of orthodoxy against the corrosions of modern and postmodern assimilation. At the same time, these projects give little attention to the corrosions of empire and cultural assimilation that plagued Christianity during the development and inscription of orthodoxy—for example in the third and fourth centuries as well as in the High Middle Ages. It does finally seem unlikely to me that the rituals, dramas, and recitations associated with classical liturgy can by themselves carry the weight of countercultural witness to the reign of God amidst the ruins of the fading world. For Christians to be truly shaped into the life and mind of Christ, they must break down not just the division between basement education and sanctuary worship but also the barrier between the gathered and the scattered body. This might mean that the ritualistic stylizations of classical liturgy might be deconstructed a bit, just as the worship of daily work might be privileged as holy. For example, might the original

meaning of the Supper of the Lord—a shared meal that followed the pattern of Jesus' radical insistence on breaking bread with sinners and tax collectors (and including even the betrayer, Judas, during that last table gathering)—offer clues for a more fitting and accessible initiation of Christian hospitality in daily life? And are there other practices of the Church—the discussions that accompany the development and acceptance of the annual church budget, for example—that might properly be conceived of as liturgical acts?

Rather than the Eucharist and reciting creeds, Shenk focuses on embodied practices of discipleship such as rejection of the sword and oaths, reading and discussing Scripture, faithful family life, and voluntary service.

CATECHESIS THROUGH EMBODIED DISCIPLESHIP

For an orientation to Christian education that assumes that practices of discipleship are as significant, if not more so, than the classical liturgical habits in developing countercultural Christians, readers might turn to the work of Sara Wenger Shenk, who is Associate Professor of Christian Education at Eastern Mennonite Seminary in Harrisonburg, Virginia. In *Anabaptist Ways of Knowing: A Conversation about Tradition-Based Critical Education* (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2003, 211 pp., $21.95), she gives attention to those practices that have been central to Anabaptist self-understanding and social embodiment. For Shenk, theological knowledge cannot be abstracted from embodied discipleship; yet the embodied practices she focuses on are not so much the recitation of classical creeds or the weekly Eucharist but such mundane and practical acts of Christian discipleship as rejection of the sword and oaths, reading and discussing Scripture, faithful family life, and voluntary service (pp. 152-156).

Rather than posing radical Christian knowledge against the modern project, Shenk places Anabaptist traditions of formation in dialogue with feminist scholarship, post-liberal theology and philosophy, and classical Christian orthodoxy. By organizing her book as such a dialogue among conversation partners, she enacts a crucial practice in radical Christian knowing that is largely overlooked by Chan and Murphy: discussion of Scripture by the believing body under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

While Chan and Murphy are rightly concerned that the Church regains the liturgical authority to actually accomplish the conversion of individuals from the cultural power of consumer capitalism and nationalist imperialism, Shenk is also concerned that the Church itself remains vulnerable to conversion and transformation. In this concern for a critical retrieval of ecclesial habits of formation, she shares the stage with Kevin Vanhoozer, who seeks

to make not the Church's reiteration of cultural difference but the Church's performance of Scripture the central act of communication by which the reign of God is made known.

A missing scene of the biblical drama, then, which Shenk's work begins to rescue, is the transformative potential of discussing our disagreements. As the rabbis have taught us, and as Jesus himself showed, there is nothing more intensely liturgical or worshipful than an animated argument about the proper response of the gathered body to the received Word of God. Of such drama, too, is radical conversion made.

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