VOCATIONS FOR TEENS / TIM O’MALLEY

CHURCH LIFE:
A JOURNAL FOR THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

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MUSINGS FROM THE EDITOR, TIMOTHY P. O’MALLEY

WELCOME, DEAR READERS, TO THE FIRST ISSUE OF CHURCH LIFE: A JOURNAL FOR THE NEW EVANGELIZATION
This online, quarterly publication, edited by the Notre Dame Center for Liturgy, is a project of the Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame. The scope of this journal comprises all facets of ecclesial life that contribute to the Church’s evangelization, including the proclamation of faith, the celebration of the sacraments, life in Christ, and a spirituality of prayer. In particular, the journal focuses upon the new evangelization of the Church in the United States, especially “the manner in which the Church assumes and fulfills her responsibility and task of transmitting the faith today; and the actual means at the Church’s disposal to be utilized, in today’s world, to generate the faith (Christian initiation, education) and to meet today’s challenges” (Lineamenta, XIII Ordinary General Assembly, §4).
Yet, why a journal? The rationale is two-fold. First, the document preparing for the 13th Synod of Bishops (2012) on the new evangelization calls for academic institutes and centers to reflect on the theme of this synod, developing the theoretical and methodological foundations for the Church’s evangelizing mission. This journal provides these foundations, at the same time that it serves as a resource for parishes, schools, and dioceses to consider what it means to participate in the mission of the Church. Our publication of this journal fulfills the Institute for Church Life’s mission to animate the University’s direct service to the Church through outreach in theological education, research, faith formation, and leadership development. And thus, we present to the University (for deeper study) the central concerns and insights that the Church herself is contemplating. Second, the methodology of the journal strives to re-invigorate the field of pastoral theology by considering aspects of life in the Church in light of the well-springs of the Catholic theological Tradition. Pastoral theology is never “theology-light” but a return of theology to its source in the very life of the Church. As Yves Congar notes in his *The Meaning of Tradition*,

…the Church’s faith in the mystery of the Redemption is not reached by reading and studying the Gospels or apostolic texts in which the mystery is expressed, just as the apostles’ faith was not the result of listening to the few words of formal instruction in which Jesus expounded it. They saw him in the guise of a suffering servant, without, at first, understanding the meaning of what they saw; they saw him on the Cross. The Church saw him—she contemplates him each day—on the Cross: gazing not with curiosity, avid only for information, but gazing with love, eager to understand, as only love can, and bringing her gaze continually back to the object of her love. By baptism, the Eucharist, even the humblest sign of the Cross, ceaselessly the Church celebrates the mystery of our Redemption. While light is shed, by her doctrine, on the reality of this mystery that she transmits, her teaching is illuminated reciprocally by the same reality, believed, loved, celebrated, lived, and possessed.
Pastoral theology is the theological art of analyzing how we believe, celebrate, and live the Gospel in our parishes, schools, and dioceses in such a way that all are called to contemplate the wondrous love revealed in the Christ. It includes a methodological examination of how the Church manifests her faith in Christ through catechesis, liturgy, spiritual formation, and service to the poor, all of these carried out in the context of contemporary culture and society. Thus, the field of pastoral theology encompasses a continued enrichment of our knowledge of Christian revelation (the Scriptures and Tradition), an opening up of our imaginations to the mystery of love revealed through these signs (especially in liturgy), and a re-commitment to the life of self-gift made possible through this intimate knowledge of God (the vocation of mission intrinsic to Christian life). We believe that a renewal of a robust pastoral theology, particularly in ministerial formation among both the ordained and lay, may become a catalyst to the new evangelization.

Thus, the primary audience for this journal includes those charged with developing the Church’s pastoral care in light of evangelization, whether as a catechist, director of religious education, a liturgist or music director, a youth and young adult minister, a deacon, a priest, or a bishop. Because of the journal’s scope, it is our intended hope that we will also foster a readership among those who teach pastoral ministers in seminaries and universities. The journal also intends to reach those Catholics interested in considering what it means to believe, celebrate, and live Catholic faith in the contemporary world.

The journal will feature the following parts. First, each issue will commence with a series of regular columns based on themes from the four pillars of The Catechism of the Catholic Church. John Cavadini considers how to form the Church in Christian doctrine through the homily (beginning next issue). Fr. Jeremy Driscoll, O.S.B. comments on a liturgical theology drawn from the Catechism (and how this theology might affect liturgical celebration). Deacon James Keating situates morality within the context of life in Christ. And, Larry Cunningham reflects on the heart in the spiritual life. In addition to these four columns, Christian Smith addresses the pastoral implications of his sociological analysis of the National Study of Youth and Religion (NYSR). And lastly, Fr. Virgilio P. Elizondo offers a reflection on the role of Mary in the life of the Church.

In the second part of the journal, the reader will encounter a sequence of thematic articles on the new evangelization. In this first issue, these articles touch upon the theme of the new evangelization itself. First, John Cavadini, the director of the Institute for Church Life and regular columnist, provides a theological analysis of the catechetical writings of Blessed John Paul II, arguing for the intimate link
between catechesis and evangelization. Second, Timothy P. O’Malley, the (acting) director of the Notre Dame Center for Liturgy and editor of this publication, considers three obstacles to the new evangelization through a theological, pastoral, and cultural analysis of the American parish. Third, the Cardinal-Designate Timothy Dolan (the Archbishop of New York and President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB]) offers five observations on the Catholic doctrine of human dignity. Fourth, the blogger Elizabeth Scalia (a.k.a. The Anchoress) writes about the vocation of the blogger as an evangelist, one who through the art of blogging discovers again and again the call to continued conversion. The first volume of Church Life will continue in the spring with an issue on Evangelization and the Imagination; in the summer with Evangelization and Rites of Return; and conclude in the fall with Evangelization and Catholic Social Teaching.

Each issue of Church Life closes with a book review essay (including classic texts, as well as recent publications) on topics relevant to the new evangelization. And lastly, a concluding word offered by a current or former apprentice of the Institute for Church Life’s Echo Program on the art of the new evangelization in the parish today. Of course, because we abide in a digital age, the themes from Church Life will continue to be engaged through a recent initiative of STEP, the ICL’s online program in theological education: ICL Conversations. And, of course, additional articles related to the themes of Church Life will appear on the Notre Dame Center for Liturgy’s blog, Oblation: Catechesis, Liturgy, and the New Evangelization.

So, happy reading. And may this new publication enrich your own understanding of the hidden beauty of life in the Church. For when we come to perceive the beauty of a life believed, celebrated, and lived in Christ, we ourselves become living signs of this new evangelization.
ABOVE

Giotto's Crucifixion
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It is well known that the reforms of the liturgy associated with Vatican II had as their goal greater participation on the part of all. Many things changed in the external celebration of the rites designed to facilitate this, and those changes have borne abundant fruit. But the renewal of the liturgy also wished to provide a fresh understanding of the meaning of the rites, a deeper theological grasp of what the words and the signs mean. And ultimately of what God does, what God accomplishes when the sacred liturgy is celebrated. Deepening this theological grasp is of immediate pastoral relevance, for it means greater interior and conscious participation in the rites themselves. This theological renewal is a work that we can take up anew, a question that continually needs our attention.
This is the approach that The Catechism of the Catholic Church takes, and in this regular column I would like to show how useful some of its formulations are for a deepened understanding of the liturgy. After ten brief paragraphs that deal with preliminaries (CCC §§1066-1075), the first major section on the liturgy (CCC §1076) begins with an immensely profitable paragraph for those seeking to develop a fuller, more conscious, and active participation in liturgical prayer. I want to comment on this paragraph here.

Strikingly, the section begins with the mystery of Pentecost. “The Church was made manifest to the world on the day of Pentecost by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.” The significance of such a beginning should not be missed. Pentecost is the culmination of Jesus’ Paschal mystery, where the crucified and now risen and ascended Lord lavishes on the world the Spirit with which he himself was anointed. We could say that Pentecost is the point at which Jesus wished to arrive, as it were, so that what he did in one time and place could be extended to every time and place through his Holy Spirit. This extension is the Church, that is, the assembly of all that Jesus draws to himself when he is lifted up. (See, Jn. 12:32).

After Pentecost, Jesus is active in a new way through his Spirit: “The gift of the Spirit ushers in a new era in the ‘dispensation of the mystery’— the age of the Church…” The expression “new era” is especially helpful, for it indicates that our communion with Christ and conformity to him will not come about through some imaginative leap backwards in time. We are not trying to picture ourselves encountering a first-century Jewish rabbi. No, this new era is a realm appropriate to the new condition; namely, his glorification at the right hand of his Father. This new era is “… the age of the Church, during which Christ manifests, makes present, and communicates his work of salvation through the liturgy of his Church, ‘until he comes.’”

So this is where and how and why the liturgy appears. Jesus, having lived the particular circumstances of a single earthly existence that culminated in his crucifixion, is now glorified and will come again in glory. Between the one coming and other, as the many centuries pass, Christ is constantly doing three things through the liturgy. He is manifesting and making present and communicating to every time and place his work of salvation accomplished in one time and place.

These three actions are consequential for our active participation in the liturgy. They describe what we are to discern and grasp. They are a clue to the meaning of all the words and gestures and signs. In fact, among everything that happens in the liturgy, it is nothing less than Christ himself at work. Through the liturgy’s words, gestures, and signs, the mighty deed of Christ’s death and resurrection is displayed before us (Christ manifests) as the very content of liturgy. By means of words, gestures, and signs the past event becomes a present event (Christ makes present). Through them all, the power of the saving deed is delivered to us in such a way that we are saved by it (Christ communicates).

But why is it that this should happen through the liturgy? “In this age of the Church Christ now lives and acts in and with his Church, in a new way appropriate to this new age.” In fact, liturgy is a consequence of Jesus’ glorification, and it is “appropriate” precisely because the realm of words, gestures, and signs pulls us into the domain of faith, without which we could not detect his presence as risen Lord. For “risen” does not mean that Jesus is simply “up and running again” and so has returned to the ordinary human
“AND I, WHEN I AM LIFTED UP FROM THE EARTH, WILL DRAW ALL PEOPLE TO MYSELF.”

JOHN 12:32
existence that he shared with us before his Paschal Mystery. If that were all it meant, then one would have to—I can only speak somewhat facetiously—go to Jerusalem and stand in a long line waiting to meet Jesus. But no. “Risen” means filled with divine glory. “Risen” means a body once crucified now placed in a realm entirely beyond death. “Risen” means present in the Spirit, filling all material things with a sacramental presence in which matter is used to communicate this new life, yet never in such a way that the fullness of this life is available here and now. This is the “new way appropriate to this new age.”

“He acts through the sacraments in what the common Tradition of the East and the West calls ‘the sacramental economy’…” “Economy” here means a divine arrangement of things; in this case, God’s own arrangement that the life of the risen Lord should be delivered to the Church through the sacraments, that is, through the material elements of the liturgy. The next part of the sentence says it this way: “… this is the communication (or ‘dispensation’) of the fruits of Christ’s Paschal mystery in the celebration of the Church’s ‘sacramental’ liturgy.” The fruits of Christ’s Paschal mystery—his death, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Spirit are all for our sake. All this is communicated to us, “dispensed” to us, in the celebration of the liturgy. The fruit of Christ’s Paschal mystery is the Church herself, which comes into being as the fruits are communicated through the words, signs, and gestures of the liturgy.

Rightly then, we must attend to the external forms of the liturgy and enact them well. The ultimate reason for this is not in order to pull off some event, which in virtue of the force of its performance, moves the participants, pleases them, and stirs them up. Rather, these external forms are a divine economy through which Christ manifests himself as present and acting to save us. Every time the liturgy is celebrated, Jesus, in effect, is present to the assembly saying, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows him. But you know him because he remains with you and will be in you.” (Jn. 14:16-17).
Our faith in Christ bids us to become “perfect” as our Heavenly Father is perfect (Mt 5:48). Such an invitation to perfection is often perceived as an “impossible” (Mt. 19:26) goal, since the moral life is perceived as a burden, an unbearable weight.
This burden is felt even more acutely if we notice ourselves being “told” what to do or how to behave by an authority. In Western civilization, when one is confronted with a law and a lawgiver, the natural response is to first analyze circumstances in order to ascertain if there is a possible exemption from the regulation. This notion, that moral living is an avoidable burden even manifests itself in expressions of sympathy and promises of intercessory prayer to those who announce that they are going to university to study ethics or moral theology!

No doubt, to be purified of our beloved sins is a painful process, so painful that we may be tempted to remain in the artificial consolation of sin itself rather than venture toward “perfection.” Our fear that living according to this divine perfection may require too much of us often leads the Christian to make our own moral weaknesses (e.g., co-habitation, hatred of the immigrant, divorce and remarriage, an inordinate delight in material goods, family dysfunction, contraception, etc.) the new norm.

From the depths of Catholic moral doctrine, however, there is a more liberating view of the moral life. It is one that carries the prospect of personal freedom, not the endless bearing of burdens. Such a view rests upon a vital prerequisite, that we first suffer the coming of Christ into our consciences. To suffer this coming entails emotional pain, for Christ will call us away from the sinful habits that we have grown to love. Once, however, this threshold of the call is crossed and we rest our reason, will, and affect upon the Christ, upon His heart (Jn. 13:25), then the moral life is panted after; and sin, not virtue, becomes repulsive. Or to paraphrase St. Francis of Assisi: that which was once bitter is now sweet. What then does Christ bring to our moral life? As The Catechism of the Catholic Church makes clear: “He who believes in Christ becomes a son of God. This...transforms him by giving him the ability to follow the example of Christ. It makes him capable of acting rightly and doing good. In union with the Savior, the disciple attains the perfection of charity, which is holiness” (§1709).

Even though human reason can grasp moral truth (natural law), it is knowledge born of love that carries one’s will and desire into holiness. Truly, the Catholic moral life is one of mystery before morality (Henri de Lubac). It is a life based upon hospitality toward God’s life, His Paschal Mystery. For a believer who wants to seek the good, what appears is not a set of rules but a set of eyes. Does one dare look into them? Like a little
child averting his eyes from his mother who has caught him in a lie, one looks to politics, entertainment, economics, and media for “truth” but not to the only place where it resides and from which it springs, the face of Christ. Like Adam and Eve hiding from God among the trees (Gn. 3:8), we are accustomed to hiding from God in ideology, expediency, and rationalization. Instead, the Church invites us to look into the face of Christ. This face that bears the light of communion with the Father, the Source, and expresses the love between the Father and the Son, the Spirit. In looking upon Christ, we know what is really good for us since Christ is “the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, making man fully manifest to himself and bringing light to his exalted vocation” (CCC §1701).

To look upon Christ is not a burden too heavy to bear. Yes, to allow him to affect one’s conscience may be a source of real pain but never a matter of meaningless suffering. This is the pain of nostalgia for our beloved sins, for we miss our favorite hiding places, in the same way the Hebrews pined for slavery after beginning their journey to freedom. We pine for our past artificial consolations until Christ’s beauty takes up residence more deeply in our hearts. To be affected by Christ is to begin to see truth, a truth that will guide the conscience to choices that free us to love, to serve, and to witness. When we form our consciences according to the Person of Christ, who is the Truth that encounters us anew in the Church’s proclamation of divine revelation (Scripture and Tradition) and teaching authority (magisterium), we affirm that our conscience will judge actions not out of fear but out of confidence. As Jesus says, “For all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (Jn. 15:15).

The Catholic moral life begins and ends with one question: Do we have the courage to let Christ be the light of our conscience, to no longer hide in the darkness of sin? The pastoral, sacramental, and spiritual power of the Church, that is Christ’s own power made manifest through the mystery of the Bride and the Bridegroom, provides all the assistance needed to embark upon the pilgrimage of moral conversion. If we entrust ourselves to the power of the Paschal Mystery, the moral life will not be a burden but will become one’s whole life, one led entirely in Christ.
The Catechism begins its discussion of prayer with a flat assertion: “...humility is the foundation of prayer” (§2559). Many people resist the term “humility” either because they mistake it for humiliation or they consider humility a sign of weakness or, to borrow a cliché much in use today, a symptom of low self-esteem. Humility, however, is that virtue by which, as Saint Thomas Aquinas rightly says, we recognize the correct relationship between a person and God. Let us, for a moment, consider a person who has the explicit intention to pray.

Think of that instant when, before even articulating words or thoughts, this person kneels down or sits in a church or stands quietly in a garden with the desire to communicate with God. What does that gesture mean?
At a minimum it signifies that the person desires to address an Other. In that simple gesture, the person also indicates a longing to surrender his or her self-sufficiency to that Other. It is in that very act of self-surrender that humility is made manifest. Because by calling on God, one simultaneously speaks a word in which personal autonomy gives way to relationship and communion with God. Before even the first word is uttered in prayer, we turn away from self-autonomy through a new commitment of our heart and mind to God. Humility, thus, is not groveling or self-hatred but an acknowledgment that we are radically dependent on God. Thus, the intention to pray is in itself a prayer.

In this same opening section on prayer, the *Catechism* links humility with the heart. The word “heart” is used over a thousand times in the Bible, and almost never is it used to refer to the muscle that pumps blood through the circulatory system. Rather the heart functions as a metaphor to describe the inmost part, the locus of the deepest desires of a human being. Jesus taught this intimate character of the heart perfectly: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Mt. 6:21). What we most desire, what we most want to achieve will tell us exactly who we are. Earlier in Mt. 6 Jesus excoriates the hypocrites who make a huge display of prayer “so that they may be seen by others” (Matt 6:5). Note the point Jesus makes: their prayer, while addressed to God, is not what they most desire. Rather, they seek the esteem of the crowd.

Authentic prayer is expressed “from the heart” in that it is directed to God not for adulation or preservation of the self, but out of a *humble* recognition of our need for the sustaining power of God in our lives. Implicit in every authentic prayer is an act of contrition—a willingness to say that we are not so fully independent and so powerful that we can or should act as if we can sustain ourselves.

Let me make a final point as we pursue the theme of praying with a humble heart. Every gesture of prayer is also an act of faith and *vice versa*. Every time we say “I believe” in the liturgy we are, if we are sincere, both confessing faith and uttering a prayer. Thomas Merton in his *Secular Journal* described having a powerful experience of God when he heard school children in a Havana Church sing out in unison “Yo creo!”, I believe. Conversely, every time we turn to God in prayer, we confess the central claims of Christian faith—that God is there, that God hears us, and that God sustains us in our needs. At times it is difficult
...THE HEART FUNCTIONS AS A METAPHOR TO DESCRIBE THE INMOST PART, THE LOCUS OF THE DEEPEST DESIRES OF A HUMAN BEING."

to pray. At moments, it is trying to believe. But in such moments, we can console ourselves with those most powerful words on prayer written by the Apostle Paul: “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (Rm. 8:26–27).

When we scrutinize Paul’s words closely we discover another radical truth: prayer is not a simple act of the will by which we furrow our brow and will our words to God. Like faith, prayer is a grace freely given to us. For the “Spirit intercedes” and “God searches the heart.” This is a remarkable, a startling truth to discover: when we pray it is really God who prays in us. The humble heart turned to God is already at prayer before the first human word comes from our lips.
Was Assumed in Body and Soul
Into Heavenly Glory...
MARY AS ICON OF EVANGELIZATION

QUEEN OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, HOPE OF THE DOWNTRODDEN

BY FATHER VIRGILIO ELIZONDO

When I was a young boy praying the rosary, the title of the fifth glorious mystery (La Coronación de la Virgen María como Reina del Cielo—the Crowning of Mary as Queen of Heaven) led me to visualize a beautiful woman, dressed in royal clothing and wearing a lovely crown of glowing jewels. This was not surprising, since I was formed to imagine the Virgin Mary as an angelic woman, totally beyond our human condition. Even our catechism seemed to affirm this limited view of Mary—she was conceived without original sin and therefore would not have suffered the consequences of such sin, including temptation, disappointment, and suffering. She would not have been human like us.

There was no doubt that she was our loving and compassionate mother, always ready to listen to our lamentations, to console us at any moment. The message of Our Lady of Guadalupe revealed this truth exquisitely. Her compassionate voice “You have nothing to fear, am I not here who am your mother” rang deeply within our hearts, giving us an unquestioned sense of security even in the most devastating circumstances.
Indeed, it was truly wonderful to know that we had a loving and compassionate mother, yet there was so much more to discover about this remarkable woman. Gradually, as I have been growing in my own appreciation of the Incarnation in the context of a humanity corrupted by sin (read Romans 3:9-18 to see how misshapen humanity had become), I have also been developing a deeper awareness of Mary’s role in the process of our salvation. A profound consciousness to the incredible source of hope she is for the downtrodden of the earth. All the powerful and beautiful titles that Christianity has given to Mary across time become even more meaningful when we contemplate her as the young maiden from Nazareth in Galilee. Nazareth was so small and insignificant that it does not appear on any of the maps of the time, while Galilee was a region considered backward and impure by the learned and religious leaders of Judea. The inhabitants of this region were looked down upon and treated as ignorant, impure, good for nothing. They were the rubbish of society. The Gospels witnesses to the force of these negative stereotypes when the opponents of Jesus state: “can anything good come out of Nazareth” (John 1:46) and “No prophet arises in Galilee” (John 7:52). Mary was certainly among one of the millions of the world who live in the painful silence and loneliness of misery and suffering with no one around to notice or care for them. Perhaps, she would recognize herself in the insignificant of our own society—the starving women of Somalia, the Indigenous women of Latin America or the disappearing and murdered women of Juarez.

God chose this unknown and insignificant woman to take on the most important and dangerous task in human history. The God, who Israel cried out to in hope, would become the leaven of a new creation, a new possibility for human history. God, through the angel Gabriel, proclaims the supreme truth that this woman, Mary of Nazareth, is highly favored with God. What the world rejects, God chooses! To the world, she may appear useless but to God she is the favored one called to this all too vital task. God does not impose the divine will upon her but enters into a conversation with her. She, the one who is apparently nothing in the eyes of the world, is invited to become the mother of a child that will be great, the Son of the Most High who will be a King and a Ruler forever.
This sudden announcement of exaltation does not make sense to her. The angelic proclamation seems totally impossible, even dangerous. Would it be a source of scandal to those who did not know the origins of her pregnancy? Would she be cast out of her community? Accused of infidelity? Yet, in the end she freely accepts and in the humanity of her womb the eternal Word of God becomes flesh. Through the “yes” of this simple and unknown woman of Nazareth the work of our redemption is begun. Mary has begun to discover her true dignity when she proclaims to her cousin Elizabeth that God has looked upon her lowliness, done great things for her and all generations will call her blessed. (Luke 1:46ff). And indeed, all generations will call her blessed—but not right away, not before the pain and agony of accompanying her Son through the Paschal Mystery, the cross and resurrection.

In her lifetime, she went though great suffering, yet throughout the life of Jesus she remained the ever-supporting mother accompanying her son in his work. Even at the bitter end of the cross, she was there. Her wounded heart pondered in great pain what all this cruelty could mean. Had all the promises of the angel been nothing but a grave deception? I’m sure the thought went through her mind yet she remained by his side, just as she continues to accompany us with motherly compassion as we undergo our own trials and tribulations.

The more we appreciate the humanity of Mary of Nazareth, the more she appears as an icon of great hope to all the dispossessed, insignificant, falsely accused and downtrodden of the world. The more we appreciate the devastating lowliness connected to her social condition, the more powerful and revelatory the words of the Magnificat become. Her titles take on new signification and her designation as queen of heaven and earth gives hope to all the powerless and exploited of the world. Mary continues to be a source of hope for all the “little ones” of the world—for just as God chose and elevated Mary, God will continue to uplift all the lowly people of today in surprising and unexpected ways.

For poor women and indeed all the marginal who look to Mary as an icon of hope, it is truly good news that the one whom the world judged as lowly and worthless is now the queen of heaven and earth. For those who trust in God, nothing is impossible!

†
EVANGELIZING CULTURE
THE MOST IMPORTANT PASTORS ARE PARENTS

BY CHRISTIAN SMITH

For the last ten years, I have been studying the religious and spiritual lives of U.S. teenagers and emerging adults, in a project called the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR). In the process of conducting our research, I learned many things about youth, including some pervasive ideas in our culture about kids and adults that are simply wrong. Further, I’ve had to revise some of my own views on the matter.

One of these revisions concerns the primary importance of parents in the spiritual lives of their children. Many Americans underestimate the influence of parents on their teen and emerging-adult’s lives of faith. Yet the faith lives of parents, it turns out, is the most important measurable factor influencing the faith of their children. This fact shines clearly in my two books on the subject, Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers (Oxford, 2005) and Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults (Oxford, 2009). More than anything else, hands down, it is the religious beliefs and practices of parents that shape the faith lives of their children, for better or worse. And oftentimes for the worse.

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In one sense, this finding should not be surprising. Isn’t it obvious that parents greatly influence their kids? Yes, sort of. At the same time, our society sustains a very pervasive and powerful cultural script that says that after about age twelve or thirteen parental influences on children start to fade. Instead, the pressures of peers and the media become overwhelmingly important. It isn’t true, actually. Parents of teenagers often think and sometimes say that their kids simply do not listen to them anymore, that they feel their influence on their children slipping away. That is understandable, a feeling any parent can understand. But it also can distract us from a crucial fact.

Simply, over the long run, through the teenage years, and even after kids leave home and become emerging adults, the consistently best predictor of the character of the religious and spiritual lives of young people is the religious and spiritual lives of their parents. This is the empirical reality, even if parents and kids have a hard time seeing it because of the pervasive cultural script operative in society today. Of course, our influence or control of kids is never guaranteed. Parents are not all-powerful or absolutely responsible for the future actions of their children. And sometimes kids turn out very differently from what their parents would guess. So, this is a matter of influence, not determination.

Nonetheless, when viewed systematically, parents clearly remain the most powerful force shaping the faith lives of their children. What parents define in their own lives, in their household, as normal, expected, and important, their children generally end up taking to be normal, expected, and important. Thus, the role of parents in the intergenerational transmission of faith is very powerful, again, for better or worse.

This fact sticks out particularly when it comes to Catholic teenagers. My book, *Soul Searching*, shows that, in general, American Catholic teenagers are much less religiously committed, knowledgeable, and invested than their non-Catholic Christian peers. However, when we use statistics to control for the church attendance and importance of faith of their Catholic parents, that difference disappears. Meaning, American Catholic teenagers are (as a group) less religiously committed, knowledgeable, and invested in their faith than other precisely because their parents are less religiously committed, knowledgeable, and invested in their faith. The difference among the youth is explained by the difference among the parents.

This all means that if churches, priests, DREs, youth ministers, or any other agent of faith formation want to effectively pass on the faith to the next generation, they must get parents on board and involved. The statistical chances of producing a young person of robust faith without their parents believing, celebrating, and living a robust faith are very slim.
So, the challenge of passing on the faith to young people is not only the concern of youth ministers. It is, or should be, the concern of entire churches, of all adults, particularly of parents. Transmitting Catholic faith across time and generations, as a concern and activity, cannot be segregated off as a “youth thing.” Sociologically speaking, it is inescapably a whole church thing. So, those who help build up the faith and practice of parents play just as important and indirect role in shaping the faith lives of those parents’ children as do others who work directly with their children. It is all an interconnected web of community formation, not a set of age-graded tasks that can be compartmentalized.

This fact should be both challenging and empowering for everyone in church, especially parents. Parents cannot slough off the responsibility to raise their children strong in the faith, assuming that DREs, catechism leaders, and youth ministers are the ones “in charge” of that. The latter, our studies tell us, tend only to reinforce the good that parents model and teach their children (or else struggle, usually vainly, against the poor or lack of modeling and teaching by parents). So, if anyone cares what that church will look like one generation later, equipping and supporting parents in the proper raising of children in the faith needs to become a top priority.

At the same time, the good news is this: parents matter. They can and do have a real influence on their kids, even into their teen and emerging-adult years. That should be empowering.

Crucial here, of course, is that the parents be real. No parent can fake a committed, authentic faith to their children. Whatever is real and true of the parents is what will actually influence their children. Children learn mostly not from what they are told, but simply rather from observing and participating in the everyday assumptions, investments, concerns, and practices of their families. Only when the faith of parents is practiced seriously does verbally explaining to children what it means and why it is important have a significant effect.

In short, the role of priests, religious brothers and sisters, DREs, Sunday School teachers, and others is crucial, indispensible, necessary. But when it comes to the formation of young people, one rule still holds true: parents are the most important pastor that young people will ever have.

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EVANGELIZATION, CATECHESIS, AND THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

THE CATECHETICAL LEGACY OF BLESSED POPE JOHN PAUL II

BY JOHN C. CAVADINI

In the United States, the terms “evangelization” and “catechesis” are easily misunderstood. Evangelization is synonymous in the American imagination with proselytization. The “evangelist” cajoles, guilts, and manipulates the co-worker, neighbor, or family member to come to a weekly church service. Often, we envision the person who evangelizes as overly zealous, over-determined, and pervasively sectarian. On the other hand, the word “catechesis” (despite the best efforts of bishops, priests, and devoted lay catechists) sometimes evokes overly restrictive images pertaining to pre-high school classroom instruction of youth and nothing else.
Happily, by evangelization and catechesis, the Church means something much broader in each case. And, it seems crucial, as we publish this first issue of a journal dedicated to the *new evangelization*, that we develop a richer understanding of both terms. And to accomplish this, I suggest that we turn to the catechetical writings of Blessed Pope John Paul II. For John Paul II inaugurates what we could call an evangelical approach to catechesis, with a specifically Catholic understanding, through his *Catechesi Tradendae*, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the 1998 *General Directory for Catechesis*. In the first part of this essay, I describe what might constitute an approach to catechesis, connected to evangelization, which is authentically Catholic. In the second, I offer a way of understanding the personal encounter with Jesus at the heart of this kind of catechesis as mediated by, and not opposed to, the objective structures of sacrament and Church. In the third, I situate *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* within the domain of this catechesis of evangelization. And in the last, I invite us to consider Augustine’s sermon 212 on the handing over of the Creed as a kind of icon of this approach to catechesis.

WHAT IS JOHN PAUL II’S LEGACY?

John Paul II’s legacy in catechesis is embodied in three major documents: the Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesis Tradendae* (1979), *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1997), and the updated *General Directory for Catechesis* (1998). To illustrate the precise nature of this legacy, let us first turn to a quote from the *Lineamenta* for the upcoming Synod on the New Evangelization:

The missionary mandate which the disciples received from the Lord (cf. Mk 16:15) makes an explicit reference to proclaiming and teaching the Gospel… Therefore, the Church’s task consists in realizing the *Traditio Evangelii*, proclaiming and transmitting the Gospel, which is “the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith” (Rom 1:16) and which is ultimately identified with Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor 1:24). In referring to the Gospel, we must not think of it only as a book or a set of teachings. The Gospel is much more; it is a living and efficacious Word, which accomplishes what it says. It
is not so much a system of articles of faith and moral precepts, much less a political programme, but a person: Jesus Christ, the definitive Word of God, who became man…Transmitting the faith means to create in every place and time the conditions for this personal encounter of individuals with Jesus Christ (§11).

For many of us, this sounds extraordinarily familiar, and yet the Church did not always express herself in this way. Unquestionably, the Second Vatican Council uses certain phrases that will become seeds for this way of talking. But, the Council did not speak about the transmission of faith as a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. The initial post-conciliar directory for catechesis, the General Catechetical Directory (1971), emphasizes the Christocentric character of catechesis, but the language of personal encounter is completely missing. Later, Pope Paul VI’s Evangelium Nuntiandi will come to embrace an integral notion of evangelization, which includes (as Archbishop Nikola Eterović preface to the Lineamenta notes) “preaching, catechesis, liturgy, the sacramental life, popular piety and the witness of a Christian life (cf. Evangelium Nuntiandi, §§17, 21, 48ff).” Yet, Evangelium Nuntiandi does not speak of evangelization as a transmission of the faith, as creating the conditions for an encounter with the Person of Jesus Christ.

For many of us, it seems as we look back, that this theme should have been associated with a catechetical style conspicuous in the decades after Vatican II. But, such a way of speaking about both catechesis and evangelization was not prominent until John Paul II placed it squarely at the conceptual center of his Apostolic Exhortation Catechesi Tradendae. Commenting on the Christocentricity of all authentic catechesis, John Paul II gives it a personalist twist:

In the first place, it is intended to stress that at the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, ‘the only Son from the Father … full of grace and truth’ (Jn.1.14), who suffered and died for us and who now, after rising, is living with us forever (CT §5).

This means, the text continues, “the primary and essential object of catechesis is, to use an expression dear to Saint Paul and also to contemporary theology, ‘the mystery of Christ.’ Catechizing is in a way to lead a person to study this Mystery in all its dimensions.” In other words, the object of catechesis is not simply to know an historical personage, what Jesus did and said long ago in the countryside of Galilee, along the banks of the Jordan River, in the city of Jerusalem (as if any person could be reduced to this alone). Rather, catechesis seeks to acquaint us with Jesus Christ, whose
very Person constitutes a mystery which, though rooted in history, transcends it. The purpose of this encounter, as John Paul II notes in the words of the Letter to the Ephesians is: “to make all people see what is the plan of the mystery...comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth...[and] know the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge... [and be filled] with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3.9, 18-19). This approach to catechesis is not limited to knowing a historical figure as such, but rather coming to know the mystery of “God’s eternal design reaching fulfillment in that Person.” (CT §5).

Thus knowledge of this mystery cannot simply be historical knowledge of the life of a person (though it will involve such historical knowledge) or abstract knowledge that provides us information to be mastered. For as the Pope notes, “the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only he can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity” (CT §5).

This approach to catechesis as intimate communion with Jesus Christ is holistic one, which could almost stand in as a way of talking about evangelization itself. As
Catechesis Tradendae continues, John Paul II develops a close connection between evangelization and catechesis, mentioning that, not only is there “no separation or opposition between catechesis and evangelization,” but that the two “have close links whereby they integrate and complement each other” (CT §18). Following Paul VI in Evangelium Nuntiandi, John Paul II locates catechesis as one of the “moments” of evangelization, but he adds a new emphasis. Catechesis, because it is the maturation stage of our formation into life in Christ, can serve as a kind of emblem of evangelization itself, a synecdoche or microcosm of the whole. As John Paul II notes:

Catechesis aims therefore at developing understanding of the mystery of Christ in the light of God’s word, so that the whole of a person’s humanity is impregnated by that word….To put it more precisely: within the whole process of evangelization, the aim of catechesis is to be the teaching and maturation stage, that is to say, the period in which the Christian, having accepted by faith the person of Jesus Christ as the one Lord and having given him complete adherence by sincere conversion of heart, endeavours to know better this Jesus to whom he has entrusted himself: to know his ‘mystery’ …” (CT §20).

And of course, as any seasoned catechist knows, this maturation stage ends up being performed among Christians for whom “initial evangelization has not taken place” (CT §19). In this way (although it is not stated explicitly in Catechesi Tradendae), evangelization comes to have the character of fostering an intimate encounter with the Person of Christ. Catechesis must necessarily be “evangelical” in such situations.

By the time of the 1998 General Directory for Catechesis, the Church now uses the language of evangelization quite freely in explaining the purpose of her catechetical ministry. In §53, in a revision of the 1971 GCD (see, §§18 and 22), John Paul II notes that evangelization invites men and women to conversion and faith, and that, “Faith is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ.” Earlier in the GDC and after citing CT §5, the text states, “All evangelizing activity is understood as promoting communion with Jesus Christ. Starting with the ‘initial’ conversion of a person of the Lord, moved by the Holy Spirit through the primary proclamation of the Gospel, catechesis seeks to solidify and mature this first adherence (§80).” And the text continues, going on to cite CT §20’s statement about “knowing better this Jesus.” So, surely one of the major legacies of John Paul II on catechesis, firmly established by the time of the 1998 GDC, is his close association of catechesis with evangelization. And, his understanding of both as fostering and deepening an intimate communion with the Person of Christ, Who is the mystery of God’s eternal plan come to fulfillment.
THE PERSONAL AND OBJECTIVE ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST

Note, however, that I did not say a “personal encounter with Jesus Christ.” For John Paul II, although he could occasionally use this language, treated it as a shorthand for referring to an encounter with the Person of Jesus; not a “personal” encounter in a privatized, individualistic sense, one in which Jesus Christ becomes our “personal” savior, to use the expression of a certain kind of American Protestant evangelicalism. Rather, the encounter with the Person of Christ is at once “personal” in a subjective experiential sense, yet also “objective” and “impersonal” to use two expressions that John Paul II does not use. The encounter with the Person of Christ is “personal” insofar as it is “intimate,” and yet this “intimate communion” that takes place in the “heart” of the individual Christian is not divorced from other more objective encounters with this Person. Encountering the Church, for example, one meets the Person of Christ, such that knowing Christ is not separate from knowing the Church which is His Spouse. Receiving the Eucharist is encountering this Person in a way that is no less intimate for being objective and “substantial.” Encountering the Word of God in Scripture and Tradition is an encounter with this Person, which in fact, is all the more intimate because it is stretching and exhorting us to move beyond our focus on self alone. And encountering the neighbor, especially the poor, is to receive in the heart not just a Christ long forgotten and absent from human history, but all of those whom He loves and in some mysterious way configures to Himself.

The encounter with the Person of Christ is thus personal, because it is an encounter with Jesus Christ, the transcendent Word of God who became a historical person and dwells still in the objective life of the Church (and that is the way it is used, presumably, in the passages from the Lineamenta cited above). But, the personal nature of this encounter cannot be reduced to an individualized and private meeting with Jesus. It is personal because it is an encounter with
the “mystery” of Christ’s person. For example, with regard to Christ as revealed in God’s Word (which necessarily includes Scripture and Tradition), “catechesis aims … at developing understanding of the mystery of Christ … so that the whole of a person’s humanity is impregnated by that word” (CT §20). The “personal” nature of the encounter does not come after listening to the word, as an added on experience. Instead, the word “impregnates” the whole of our being such that our very life becomes defined by that Word. Everything that we do is taken up in the Person of Christ, revealed to us in the language of the Scriptures and the Tradition. And through our contemplation of what is revealed in Jesus Christ, the mystery of the word of God begins to echo in our hearts.

The dichotomy between a “personal” encounter with Jesus Christ and the presentation of the mystery of that Person in Scripture is a false one. For the “Person” we find at the heart of catechesis is “the only Son from the Father … full of grace and truth” (CT §5). And the Scriptures show us the beauty of the Christ, who longs to meet and transform us in our contemplation of the divine plan of salvation revealed in the text. Another false dichotomy revealed as such by the evangelical theology of John Paul II is that between a “personal” encounter with Jesus Christ and the presentation of the mystery of His Person in Tradition. For an intimate knowledge of the Tradition is itself an encounter with the Person of Christ, “who suffered and died for us and who now, after rising, is living with us forever” (CT §5). This paraphrase of the Creed summarizes in traditional form the full dimensions of the mystery of His Person. In fact, it should be emphasized that there is no opposition between encountering the Person of Christ and learning the particulars of traditional Christian doctrine. To put it in the words of John Paul II:

Thus, through catechesis the Gospel kerygma (the initial ardent proclamation by which a person is one day overwhelmed and brought to the decision to entrust himself to Jesus Christ by faith) is gradually deepened, developed in its implicit consequences, explained in language that includes an appeal to reason, and channeled towards Christian practice in the Church and the world. All this is no less evangelical than the kerygma, in spite of what is said by certain people who consider that catechesis necessarily rationalizes, dries up and eventually kills all that is living, spontaneous and vibrant in the kerygma. The truths studied in catechesis are the same truths that touched the person’s heart when he heard them for the first time (CT §23).

The consequences of this are myriad for the contemporary practice of catechesis. For example, the memorization of Scriptural and traditional formulations of Christian doctrine is not an obstacle to facilitating an encounter with Jesus Christ. Rather, again quoting John Paul II:
A certain memorization of the words of Jesus, of important Bible passages, of the Ten Commandments, of the formulas of profession of the faith, of the liturgical texts, of the essential prayers, of key doctrinal ideas, etc., far from being opposed to the dignity of young Christians, or constituting an obstacle to personal dialogue with the Lord, is a real need...The blossoms, if we may call them that, of faith and piety do not grow in the desert places of a memory-less catechesis. What is essential is that the texts that are memorized must at the same time be taken in and gradually understood in depth, in order to become a source of Christian life on the personal level and the community level (CT §55).

The “simple teaching of the formulas that express faith” are included in a catechesis of evangelization. When the catechist takes this approach, memorization is never an isolated act of mastering religious information (see CT §25). For, “information,” if it must be called that, is itself a formation in coming to know more deeply, through human understanding, the mystery of the Person of Christ. Information about Christ is necessarily formative, within this approach to catechesis, because such information mediates to us knowledge of the mystery of God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

Thus far (for the sake of analysis), I have been treating Scripture and Tradition as two aspects of coming to know the Person of Christ in the depths of the mystery he reveals. In fact, an “evangelical” catechesis refuses to separate the two, since the content of catechesis is drawn “from the living source of the Word of God” (CT §26). And the living Word of God includes both the Scriptures and Tradition. As Dei Verbum (the Second Vatican Council Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation) makes clear and Catechesi Tradendae quotes: “sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the word of God, which is entrusted to the Church” (DV §10; CT §27). In other words, a fully vibrant catechesis will be infused with the Scriptures but never the Scriptures alone:

To speak of Tradition and Scripture as the source [note the singular] of catechesis is to draw attention to the fact that catechesis must be impregnated and penetrated by the thought, the spirit and the outlook of the Bible and the Gospels through assiduous contact with the texts themselves; but it is also a reminder that catechesis will be all the richer and more effective for reading the texts with the intelligence and the heart of the church and for drawing inspiration from the two thousand years of the church’s reflection and life. The Church’s teaching, liturgy and life spring from this source and lead back to it, under the guidance of the pastors and, in particular, of the doctrinal magisterium entrusted to them by the Lord” (CT §27).
For evangelization is not a solitary encounter alone with the Scriptures. Nor is it a learning of doctrine apart from the pedagogy of the Scriptures. Rather, evangelization is an encounter with the Word of God transmitted in Scripture and Tradition. As a corollary, this also means there is no dichotomy between preaching a Scriptural or catechetical homily. *Catechesis Tradendae* notes:

...the homily takes up again the journey of faith put forward by catechesis, and brings it to its natural fulfilment…Preaching, centered upon the Bible texts, must then in its own way make it possible to familiarize the faithful with the whole of the mysteries of the faith and with the norms of Christian living” (CT §48; GDC §70).

**THE PEDAGOGY OF THE CATECHISM**

As carried forward into the *General Directory of Catechesis* and, one could say, performed, in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, this full bodied notion of a catechesis of evangelization is perhaps one of the greatest legacies of John Paul II; yet, this approach is rarely acknowledged as the pedagogical innovation that it represents. A full-bodied, evangelical catechesis recognizes, as the GDC puts it, that catechesis “should unite well the [Scriptural] confession of Christological faith, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ with the Trinitarian confession, ‘I believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,” in such a way that there are not two modes of expressing the Christian faith’ (GDC §82). Both the Scriptural and Creedal confessions express the mystery of the same Person, and they are each in their own way indispensable expressions of this mystery. To put it another way, “Catechesis transmits the content of the word of God [can we say, the Gospel?] according to the two modalities whereby the Church possesses it, interiorizes it and lives it: as a narration of the history of salvation and as an explication of the Creed” (GDC §128). Quoting CT 27, the GDC notes:

‘…to describe Tradition and Scripture as sources for catechesis means that catechesis must imbibe and permeate itself with biblical and evangelical thought, spirit and attitudes by constant contact with them. It also means that catechesis will be as rich and as effective only to the extent that these texts are read with the mind and heart of the Church’ (GDC §127).
In these sections, the GDC assumes that *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* articulates the “Tradition” part of the confession. But, I would argue that a catechesis of evangelization is exemplified and performed, both in its Scriptural and Traditional confessions, in the *Catechism* itself. And this is what I believe is the most resounding and enduring innovation and legacy of John Paul II in catechetical pedagogy. The GDC hints at this when it says that the *Catechism* not only replaces the content section from the 1971 GCD (further, there is no content section in the 1998 GDC), but also notes that the *Catechism* “is intended as a methodological norm [my emphasis] for its [the GDC’s] concrete application” (GDC §120). It is a methodological norm precisely because of its performance of the integration of Scripture and Tradition; and because of this, the *Catechism* is a paragon of the evangelical catechesis that I have been describing.

In fact, as I have argued elsewhere (“Scripture, Doctrine, and Proclamation: The Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Renewal of Homiletics”, *Spirit and Letter*, Volume 4) one of the most striking features of the CCC is its use of Scripture. It does not use Scripture primarily to back up or to corroborate doctrinal statements, as though catechesis were not essentially Scriptural but “merely” doctrinal; rather it incorporates Scripture into the very articulation of the doctrine. Scripture is not only cited as a way of authorizing the doctrinal statements but is also actually woven into the text of the *Catechism*, so that Catholic doctrine is articulated in Scriptural terms and language. Like the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, the *Rule* of St. Benedict, or *Lumen Gentium* and other documents of Vatican II, the *Catechism* is a text infused with the Scriptures, where passages, words, phrases and sentences of Scripture are simply part of the text itself. It would be fair to call this a *scriptural catechesis*, a catechesis carried out not simply with the support of the words of Scripture but in the words of Scripture. It is a catechetical narrative that relies on the words of Scripture to address its main points. On the other hand, a truly Scriptural catechesis cannot be performed through the Scripture alone, for the Creeds and formulas of the Councils are meant to ensure that the essence of Scriptural teaching is articulated clearly and brought forward explicitly.

The pedagogy of the *Catechism* is inspired by *Dei Verbum*, a text often cited in CT. In paragraph 9 of *Dei Verbum* we read that “Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture … are bound closely together and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine wellspring, come together in some fashion to form one thing and move towards the same goal.” You could say that the CCC “performs” this “coming together” of Scripture and Tradition, noted by CT as a characteristic feature of an evangelical catechesis, in a textual tapestry whose threads are drawn on the one hand from Scripture and, on the other, from
various traditional sources: from the creeds, from writings of the Fathers, and from formulas and teachings of the Church councils. The teaching authority of the Church, or Magisterium, is, according to *Dei Verbum*, the “servant” of the Word of God, and is present in the CCC as the authorial voice, “arranging and organizing the texts from Scripture and tradition.” The Magisterium “serves” these two streams of transmission of the one Word of God by contextualizing Scripture in the Rule of Faith, and by contextualizing the Rule of Faith in its original primary character as a summary of Scriptural teaching. The exposition of Catholic doctrine is enlivened by the appeal to the imagination that Scriptural texts perform through images and stories, prophecies and proclamations. The Scriptural texts and images have a surplus of meaning that can never be fully reduced to formulas. Further, the use of Scripture keeps the exposition of doctrine from closing in on itself, as though its formulas could ever fully express the lofty mysteries they strive to state. At the same time, unless Scriptural texts and images are contextualized or contoured in doctrinal exposition, the surplus of meaning in the Scriptural text can turn into a kind of indeterminacy of meaning that could not be summarized and “handed on” in any normative way to the next generation of Christians.

But I would like to suggest that accepting this invitation to a pedagogy of evangelization in catechesis, modeled and performed by the *Catechism*, should show us a way of catechizing that offers a persuasive, powerful and beautiful alternative to the truncated evangelical preaching that is now captivating so many of our Catholic believers and attracting them to mega-churches. Such an approach to catechesis may also become a medicine to the secular disdain for Revelation, based on a certain kind of historical-critical exegesis, that engenders agnosticism or atheism in former Catholics. For various reasons, which cannot
be addressed completely here, a chasm has developed in the minds of Catholics between “Scripture” on the one hand, and “doctrine” or “dogma” on the other. Doctrine, or teaching, is seen as a kind of overlay on the Scriptural text—in some fundamental way foreign to it. It is as though Catholics had internalized the dominant American Protestant evangelical critique of Catholic doctrine as “unscriptural.” As though the dominant academic mode of interpreting the Scriptures, the historical-critical, has engendered the reflex that the only proper way of interpreting Scripture is by reading each book in its own individual historical context. It is interesting that both evangelical Christianity and historical-critical scholarship share the presupposition that doctrine is a foreign overlay on the text of Scripture and cannot be used to discover or illuminate its meaning. Now, I am not interested in polemicizing against historical-critical scholarship and its method of contextualization of Scripture. Dei Verbum itself argues that this is one of the ways of approaching the meaning of Scripture, and the Catechism often accepts its results. But interpreting Scripture as the Word of God also involves contextualizing it within the Rule of Faith. If for no other reason, this reflects the fact that the books of Scripture as we know it would not even have been preserved or handed down to us unless the Fathers thought they were united by a common witness to the Rule of Faith and the Creeds that emerged from this rule. In other words, Scripture has a “traditional” form. But one of the consequences of an imbalanced reliance on historical-critical scholarship as the primary way to contextualize Scripture has been an odd convergence with the anti-Catholic view that doctrine is an overlay upon the original truth and meaning of the Scriptural text—that doctrine is nothing but a second order addition at best or distortion of its truth at worst.

Sadly, this separation has generated a kind of dichotomy in the way we think about the teaching ministries of the Church, and, in particular, preaching. Those charged with preaching the Word of God feel especially constrained. The homily is supposed to illuminate the Scriptural readings from the lectionary, to “break open the Word” just proclaimed, and who would argue with that? But my point is that this aim is too often contrasted with preaching doctrinally, as though doctrine had nothing to do with the Scriptural text. The pedagogy exemplified in the Catechism recovers the ancient, patristic balance between proclamation of the Word in Scripture and handing on the teachings of the faith in doctrine. These are one and the same operation. I would argue that failing to take up this renewed Scriptural and doctrinal pedagogy results not only in under-catechized Catholics, but in Catholics who are ripe for proselytizing by the evangelical mega-churches, Pentecostal sects, or the agnostic secular status quo. Once we split “Scripture”
from “doctrine” and preach on the basis of such a split, we are actually teaching and propagating that very split. Catholics learn that the exposition of Scripture has little to do with doctrine—so why not go to the churches where this split is prosecuted in a much more thoroughgoing and unencumbered way? For Catholic doctrine is embodied in the Catholic liturgical action and prayer, and, if such doctrine is essentially unscriptural, then liturgy itself will also seem also to rest on indefensible doctrinal accretions that become an obstacle to an unmediated encounter with the Scriptural truth. On the other hand, if people have already begun to doubt the truth of the Scriptures because of popularized versions of historical-critical concerns (that the true Jesus may be discovered solely through a critical deconstruction of the Scriptural text), they will not receive any corrective from a homiletic practice that accepts the very dichotomy between Scripture and Tradition that is pushing them away. It is important, then, to cultivate within our parishes, schools, and dioceses the Scriptural pedagogy of the CCC not only so that Catholics can be better catechized. If we take our cue from the Catechism, and learn to cultivate a catechesis and homiletics that is as Scriptural as it is catechetical (one that grasps the essential unity of the content of evangelization, and hence catechesis, in Scripture and Tradition), we will begin to perform an evangelical pedagogy that removes the wedge between Scripture and doctrine; a wedge that characterizes both the American Protestant evangelical polemic against Catholicism, and its secular analogue in the anti-religious approach to historical-critical scholarship.
EXPERIENCING A CATECHESIS OF EVANGELIZATION IN AUGUSTINE

In the closing pages of this essay, I would like to attend to a final dichotomy that an evangelical catechesis, drawn from John Paul II’s writings, might heal: a catechesis based on “experience” and one based on “doctrine.” In some sense, this is simply another way of acknowledging the supposed dichotomy between a “personal” “evangelical” encounter with Jesus Christ and the study of Christian doctrines and formulae. As John Paul II remarks in CT §22, “It is useless to to play off orthopraxis against orthodoxy [since] Christianity is inseparably both, [and] firm well-thought-out convictions lead to courageous and upright action.” Equally useless is to “campaign for the abandonment of serious and orderly study of the message of Christ in the name of a method concentrating on life experience,… nor is any opposition to be set up between a catechesis taking life as its point of departure and a traditional doctrinal and systematic catechesis” (CT §22).

Revelation is not “isolated from life or artificially juxtaposed to it. Instead, revelation is concerned with the ultimate meaning of life and it illumines the whole of life with the light of the Gospel, to inspire it or to question it” (CT §22). The “information,” we could say, received in a “systematic initiation into the revelation that God has given of himself to humanity” (CT §22), is not merely information, but is formative, and the proper catechetical instruction will bring out this dimension in relation to the life experiences that people inevitably bring to revelation. Through our contemplation of the mysteries of our faith, an encounter with Christ himself, we grow in our capacity to have deeper, more meaningful experiences.

In demonstrating the falseness of this dichotomy, John Paul II returns us, in the spirit of Vatican II, to the practice of the patristic church. Thus, he in effect recovers a patristic approach to catechesis intelligible for our own time. I want to show this by treating a small homily of St. Augustine’s, one preached at the handing over of the creed on a Sunday about the year 410. It is fascinating,
once you see it with eyes formed by John Paul II’s promotion of a catechesis for evangelization, how the homily comes alive for us, the contemporary reader.

Let us look in and listen (but, coming from 1100 years in the future, try to be unobtrusive): “It’s time for you to receive the Symbol,” Augustine tells them, “in which is briefly contained everything that is believed for the sake of eternal salvation” (Translation from *Augustine, Essential Sermons*, translated by Edmund Hill, sermon 212). The word “symbol” seems to have been recognized even in the Latin West as a word for a business contract, and Bishop Augustine playfully tells the catechumens that they are now spiritual traders, engaged in spiritual business, and that the Creed is the seal of the deal:

> And your association is concerned with spiritual merchandise, so that you may be like dealers looking for a good pearl (Mt. 13.45). This pearl is the charity, which will be poured out in your hearts through the Holy Spirit, who will be given to you (Rom. 5.5). One arrives at this as a result of the faith which is contained in this Symbol, as a result in your believing in *God the Father Almighty*… (s. 212.1)

And then he is off and running, reciting and explaining the Creed as he goes, line by line. Augustine tells the catechumens that the faith found in the Creed will bring them to the charity, or love, which will be poured out into their hearts through the Holy Spirit. Augustine is “informing” his catechumens, explaining the basics of the faith to them; but he tells them that this “information” will bring with it a formation in the love or charity which is the “pearl of great price” for which one must sell everything.

It is instructive to listen just a little more, to see how closely and consciously Augustine makes this connection between the “information” offered in the Creed and the way in which, once handed over and received, it “forms” the believer. There is no jargon in the sermon—Augustine knows he is not talking to a learned elite or a company of theologians or philosophers. The Latin is plain, straightforward and always playful. But he takes up even the most difficult or seemingly abstract issues presented in the Creed, for example, the relation between the Father and the Son in the Trinity. Continuing from the passage just cited above:

> …believing in God the Father Almighty, invisible, immortal, king of the ages, creator of things visible and invisible…Nor must you separate the Son of God from this absolute perfection and superiority. These things, you see, are not said about the Father in such a way as to be inapplicable to the one who said, *I and the Father are one* (Jn. 10.30).
Bishop Augustine might seem relentless in his pursuit of the point of the equality of the Father and Son. But he pursues it, using biblical passages, for another paragraph or so, and then we see why he is so interested in the point, as he moves on to the second article of the Creed, speaking of the Son:

But since he emptied himself not losing the form of God, but taking the form of a servant (Phil. 2.7), through this form of a servant the invisible one was seen, because he was born of the Holy Spirit and from the Virgin Mary. In this form of a servant, the almighty became weak, because he suffered under Pontius Pilate; through this form of a servant the immortal one died, because he was crucified and buried.

The reason Augustine wanted to pause over the equality of the Son with the Father in the Trinity is so that he could make sure we, the listeners, would properly receive the impact of the story the Creed tells. The one who “suffered under Pontius Pilate” is the Almighty—become weak for us. The one who was crucified and died is the Immortal one who never need die, but he “emptied himself,” and in that emptying we can see a love which is unimaginably great. That one who never need die chooses to die, himself personally and not through a lesser surrogate, in solidarity with us and our suffering. The Almighty subjects himself to our hands, “becomes weak,” submits to all of us in the person of Pontius Pilate. Augustine the Bishop is trying to explain that unless we understand the doctrine of the Trinity, the inseparable equality of the Son with the Father, we will not see the “pearl of great price,” the love beyond all loves, because you will not realize fully just who it is who was “crucified under Pontius Pilate.” We will not have a personal encounter with the Lord because we will not even realize who he is! Understanding the Creed makes the Scripture it summarizes able to speak with even more power than it would have if left without thematization in this way. And conversely, using the Scriptural references to help exposit the Creed makes the rule of faith come alive, rescuing us from understanding it as a potentially dry formula. Is not this exactly the practice of The Catechism of the Catholic Church, as it performs John Paul II’s evangelical catechesis?

We have to eavesdrop just a little more to hear Augustine make his final point, one which might seem curious to us initially. He warns the catechumens that when the Creed is handed over to them, probably by being recited to them by their catechists in smaller groups later on, that they are not to write it down:
So now, [he says.] 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 this sermon of mine briefly summed up in it. 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 not write it down either when you have it by heart, but keep it always and go over it in your memory (s. 212.2).

Most likely, this prohibition of writing the Creed down is a holdover from an earlier period when Christians kept a discipline of secrecy, not passing on Christian teaching except to the initiated. But Augustine uses this custom or practice to make a theological point:

But the fact that the Symbol, put together and reduced [from Scripture] to a certain form in this way, may not be written down, is a reminder of God’s promise, where he foretold the new covenant through the prophet, and said, *This is the covenant which I will draw up for them after those days, says the Lord; putting my laws into their minds, I will write them also on their hearts* (Jer. 31.33). It is to illustrate this truth that by the simple hearing of the Symbol it is written not on tables, or on any other material, but on people’s hearts (s. 212.2).
The only proper place to inscribe the Creed is on your heart, Augustine says. This claim means that to “receive” the Creed is to have it written on one’s own heart—it means that the way that we should “read” the Creed is to see how it changes the identity or character of the person who has received it. The Creed, Augustine has explained, proclaims the unimaginably great love of God in Christ, so great that something truly unimaginable has happened. The Almighty has put himself into solidarity with our weakness and chosen to be, as a human being, vulnerable to all that we are vulnerable—false testimony, injustice, suffering death. Write this on your hearts, Augustine is saying: be formed by this love so that when people see you, they will see in practice the love, the pearl of great price, which the Creed talks about. Augustine is saying, the only interpretation of the Creed that matters is a life conformed to the mystery of Christ. The intimate and inseparable connection between what we would now call “experience,” or “life,” and the systematic treatment of revelation, is obvious here. As he says at the end of the sermon:

The God who has called you to his kingdom and his glory will ensure that the Symbol is also written on your hearts by the Holy Spirit, once you have been born again by his grace; so that you may love what you believe, and faith may work in you through love. … So this is the Symbol which has already been imparted to you as catechumens through the scriptures and sermons in church, but which has to be confessed and practiced and made progress in by you as baptized believers (s. 212.2).

The image of the Creed written on the heart is the paradigm of “information that forms.” The image of the person with the Creed written on their heart is an icon of someone who “loves what they believe.” Who is so “formed” by the pearl of great price, the love of God in Christ as expressed in the Creed, that they are “practicing” it, “making progress in it,” that is, being ever more fully conformed to it, one must say—“formed” by it. Actually, what we are formed by is the love of God poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, but Augustine’s point is the Creed mediates this love of God; it is not something separate or independent of it. God’s grace in Baptism writes the Creed on our hearts so that we can confess it with our lives, with the way we love, with our striving for progress.
In conclusion, the image of the Creed written on the heart is an excellent image for the kind of catechesis for evangelization that is the abiding legacy of John Paul II. The Creed written on the heart is, in the language of CT, an image of what catechesis aims at: “developing an understanding of the mystery of Christ … so that the whole of a person’s humanity is impregnated by that word,” so that one’s whole humanity, one’s very heart, becomes formed by and in the Mystery of Christ’s Person, and so participates fully in the Love which is nothing less than the very life of the Holy Trinity. And it is this that the Church means by both evangelization and catechesis.
THREE OBSTACLES TO THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

A THEOLOGICAL, PASTORAL, AND CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF PARISH LIFE

BY TIMOTHY P. O’MALLEY
Consider for a moment the nature of the parish. The very particular place where we learn to believe, to celebrate, and to live the mystery of Christian faith. In the parish, we come to hear the Word of God proclaimed in the Scriptures, in our study of Christian doctrine, in the homilies that echo not simply within the confines of the building’s walls but in the depths of our heart.

In this very same dwelling, we also celebrate the sacraments of initiation; practice concrete acts of charity and justice; attend a weekly choir rehearsal or meeting of a building committee; pray for those among us who are sick; offer perpetual vows of love to our husband or wife in the context of the sacrament of love—the Eucharist; engage in chit-chat with our fellow partakers of the body and blood of Christ; mark the seasons of the liturgical year through prayer, fasting, retreats, and festivals; share the joys and sorrows of a human life with others—the adoption of a child, the loss of a job, the death of a spouse. The beauty of the parish, particularly vis-à-vis other more prominent institutions in society, is not its power, its prestige, its status. It has no particular “use”; nor for that matter is it a place of efficiency or profit (just ask a bishop or pastor awaiting the annual Christmas and Easter collection to make ends meet). Rather in the parish, all aspects of our humanity from the most mundane to the most extraordinary are taken up into the mystery of the Incarnation. The parish is the school of Christian faith where the lofty mystery of the divine-human exchange accomplished in Christ takes flesh in our lives, sending us forth to manifest the Good News for the life of the world.

For this reason, the creative revitalization of parish life is essential to the new evangelization. By new evangelization, the Church means:

...renewed spiritual efforts in the life of faith within the local Churches, starting with a process to discern the changes in various cultural and social settings and their impact on Christian life, to reread the memory of faith and to undertake new responsibilities and generate new energies to joyously and convincingly proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Lineamenta, XIII Ordinary General Assembly, §5).
Importantly, the new evangelization is not about bunkering down with our fellow sectarians and condemning the world to hell. Nor for that matter is it assuming a dour face, getting serious about religion, and in the meantime denying the very Good News that Christ has conquered death and sin through the instrument of our humanity. Instead, the new evangelization is:

synonymous with mission, requiring the capacity to set out anew, go beyond boundaries and broaden horizons. The new evangelization is the opposite of self-sufficiency, a withdrawal into oneself, a status quo mentality and an idea that pastoral programmes are simply to proceed as they did in the past...[it] is the time for the Church to call upon every Christian community to evaluate their pastoral practice on the basis of the missionary character of their programmes and activities (Lineamenta, §10).

Therefore, in the case of the parish, the new evangelization requires a discernment of how deeply the Word of God echoes within us; how splendidly our liturgical celebrations effect a renewed communion with God and one another; and, how we manifest through mission the depths of love made possible through the contemplation of the Word of God and reception of the Body and Blood of Christ.

Yet, where do we begin such an evaluation? What questions might a parish ask as it seeks “to set out anew, go beyond boundaries and broaden horizons”? The inevitable temptation of an American parish, in particular, is to turn to previously packaged programs that will facilitate this process. Let’s do a weekly intergenerational catechesis, rather than a traditional classroom approach. Let’s start a social justice committee or young adult ministry to attract the next generation of parishioners. Let’s begin perpetual Eucharistic adoration. All of these may be very fine ideas, the sort of leaven that will revitalize parish life. But, a programmatic approach to the new evangelization is a risky enterprise. Pre-packaged programs, even ones well-designed, cannot break down every social or cultural obstacle to a fruitful proclamation of the Gospel. And further, the new evangelization is not about increasing productivity or efficiency in ministry but transforming the heart in such a way that we begin to proclaim the Word more truly, more beautifully, and thus more persuasively.

In some ways, this insight is the driving force behind the journal Church Life; simply, there is a theological, pastoral, and cultural task to the new evangelization. And this means that our investigation of how to perform the new evangelization in particular contexts requires theological wisdom, pastoral savvy and cultural awareness.
So, in this cornerstone article for our new journal, I would like to perform an exercise to assist parishes in their own preparation for the new evangelization. In subsequent pages, I offer a theological, pastoral, and cultural analysis of American parish life. I do so by diagnosing three potential obstacles to the new evangelization. And the medical metaphor is no accident. Think for a moment of going to the doctor with an illness. The doctor (at least, the nice ones) first speaks to you, asking for an account of your symptoms. After a brief discussion, the physician begins an examination—a series of diagnostic tests intended to point toward an underlying cause. Upon diagnosis, a medicine will be prescribed for you to take, one that will both alleviate the symptoms, as well as treat the root cause of the illness.

“SO TOGETHER, LET US COMMENCE OUR DIAGNOSIS OF OBSTACLES TO THE NEW EVANGELIZATION IN OUR PARISHES.”

The themes surfacing in our examination will be ones that this journal will pick up throughout its publication. And I hope that this periodical may offer some medicine for parishes seeking to bring “the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence [to transform] humanity from within and [make] it new” (Evangelium Nuntiandi, §18). For evangelization is healing precisely because it is an encounter with the mystery of Christ through the Church’s proclamation of the Gospel, one that sinks into “the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieus which are theirs” (Ibid.). If our parishes are to become agents of this sort of evangelization, then we ourselves must seek to deepen our own healing encounter with Christ.
OBSTACLE 1: THE CATECHETICAL CRISIS

As a catechist of junior high, high school, and now college students (insofar as I teach theology), I often notice the “thinness” of the God that is described in class by students. This God is nice, pleasant, not asking too much of us, mostly pleased with following the logic of our own desires. This is the God that Notre Dame professor and *Church Life* columnist Christian Smith refers to under the credo of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD), one he found operative among a majority of adolescents and emerging adults—passed on through the faith (or lack thereof) of adults. MTD confesses the existence of a God that has created the world and watches over human existence, at least to some extent. This God desires us to be good to one another, the foundation of all morality. Further, the ultimate meanings of life are happiness and personal well-being. God only becomes involved, when there is a particularly difficult problem to be solved. And those who are good (not a high bar) eventually end up in heaven (Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 162-63). In some sense, MTD is evidence of the success of the liberal Protestant project in the United States in which religious leaders of the early twentieth century capitulated to certain features of modern thought, including individualism, freedom, pluralism, tolerance, democracy, and at least among intellectuals, the elevation of scientific inquiry to religious status (Smith, “Introduction”, *The Secular Revolution*, 35-36). Thus, the religious ethos that Americans inhabit is defined by “individual autonomy, unbounded tolerance, freedom from authorities, the practical value of moral religion, epistemological skepticism, and an instinctive aversion to anything ‘dogmatic’ or committed to particulars…” (Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 288).
These features of American culture make it extraordinarily difficult to pass-on the particulars of Catholic faith. Yet, as long as we do not think too deeply, or have anything terrible happen to us, then this “thin” creed functions well enough to maintain a marginal faith. Still, what about the young person who studies science and has no adequate conception of Christian faith to hold onto when told of “the superstitious quality of Christianity’s belief in creation from nothing”? What about the adult who undergoes immense suffering through the death of a parent, such that the thinness of the God collapses under the weight of sorrow? Can this incredibly thin God assist the lawyer, who suddenly recognizes that his whole career has been an exercise in achieving fame and profit, and that the result of this experiment in consumption and production has been the loss of wife, of child, or ironically the job itself?

In many ways, the catechetical pedagogy operative within our parishes has facilitated a thorough ignorance regarding the particular claims of Catholicism. In the midst of the Second Vatican Council, religious educators began to emphasize the importance of “experience” in catechesis. At first, the turn to experience was healthy for catechesis, since it reminded catechists that the memorization of doctrine was not the singular purpose of faith formation. But gradually, human experience itself became a locus of catechetical revelation. The catechist would start a lesson with a story or narrative from human life, and then draw from this story certain themes relevant to the catechetical content under discussion. A lesson on the resurrection would begin with a trip to a garden in the middle of spring to facilitate a conversation on how new life can only commence with death. Thus far, this is an acceptable pedagogy (an analogical approach used in patristic preaching) as long as the catechist is able to communicate the distinction between Jesus’ resurrection and the spring thaw.

The problem emerges when experience becomes the privileged criteria by which we communicate the particulars of the Gospel. Think of the priest, who begins each of his homilies with a story about his own life and only draws out those themes from the Gospel that are relevant to his experience. After a while, the assembly will have a cursory knowledge of the Scriptures but an intimate awareness of the preacher’s own biography and psyche. Likewise for the catechetical textbook that starts every lesson with a story drawn from human experience, and only slowly moves its way toward the proclamation of Christian faith. Undoubtedly, we learn a method for interpreting religious knowledge from this approach. If the priest uses his own experience as the primary way of interpreting the Gospel, maybe I can too. If catechists treat doctrine as secondary to their understanding of the Gospel, perhaps I should too. And after a while, the
attentive listener or student may start to wonder if Scripture and Tradition is really important to faith in the first place. Maybe faith really is about trusting in God, not stealing, and being kind to those in need. And of course, one need not be Catholic to develop these virtues.

This failure to know the particulars of Catholic faith has been true in almost every parish or school in which I have served as a catechist. In Boston, on the first day of Confirmation class, I had to teach high school students how to look up a passage in the Scriptures before we commenced our reading of the Bible. When giving a lesson on the Ten Commandments, I have been told frequently by junior high students that the purpose of each one of these laws is to teach us to be nice. Most shockingly, college students (ones who speak about how important theology is to their faith) are often incapable of articulating why it is essential that Jesus Christ is fully human and divine. And if for a second, we say to ourselves, “Is that really important,” then we have verbalized the root of the problem. If the particulars of Catholic faith are not essential, if the truly important religious category is being a good person, then why attend Sunday Mass? Why have your child baptized, or be married in the Church? Why waste time contemplating the image of Christ in the Scriptures, or praying daily the rosary? The irony is that by attempting to make parish programs of catechesis more relevant to life, we have failed to tell the only narrative that makes everything relevant in the first place. The genius of catechesis is that the particularity of the narrative interrupts us, causes us to wonder at its beauty, and then makes us more capable of authentic human experience—one shaped by the narrative of faith itself. For revelation, communicated through Scripture and Tradition, is not a separate category from experience. Rather, our appropriation of the Word of God through a developing familiarity with the Scriptures and Tradition enables us to perceive what is true, good, and beautiful in human experience in the first place.

In order to cultivate the conditions for the new evangelization, we will need to undertake a formation into Catholic particularity across the whole life of the parish. We must learn to once again tell the narrative of Christianity in such a way that it opens up the mind to the wonder of a God who became flesh in Jesus Christ. For example, creation, as revealed within the Scriptures and Tradition, is a sign meant to be used to enjoy the mystery of God. Contemplating the signs of the doctrine, one may perceive the sheer gratuity of a God, who creates out of nothing, who shares this creation with human beings through an act of vulnerable love. Because the doctrine of creation is a sign in relationship with other signs, it cannot be read alone. To those Christians whose memory is formed in the Scriptural imagination of Christ’s birth among us, the divine condescension of creation is recapitulated in the doctrine of the Incarnation, *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us* (Jn. 1:14).
Consider how an intimate knowledge of the doctrine of creation as a sign of God’s self-gift might inform a parish’s ecological commitment, transforming experience in the process. A parish coordinator of peace and justice may want to foster within the community and neighborhood a deeper ecological consciousness. This consciousness must be understood in light of the fundamental narrative of our salvation. Creation is a loving gift from God, and human beings through the sin of pride rebelled against this divine gift, introducing disharmony into relationships, including our attitude toward the created order. In this sin, we became less capable of gratitude. We stopped wondering at the beauty of the mountains, at the cleansing water of the stream, at the violent strength of the ocean’s crashing waves. Through Christ’s self-gift upon the cross, made available to us through the Eucharistic life of the Church, humanity is offered the possibility of re-creation, relationships of love, of peace, of unity. We become capable of true gratitude, of receiving the world as a divine gift. As Benedict XVI notes:

Engagement with the world, as demanded by God’s word, makes us look with new eyes at the entire created cosmos, which contains traces of that Word through whom all things were made (cf. Jn. 1:2). As men and women who believe in and proclaim the Gospel, we have a responsibility towards creation. Revelation makes known God’s plan for the cosmos, yet it also leads us to denounce that mistaken attitude which refuses to view all created realities as a reflection of their Creator, but instead as mere raw material, to be exploited without scruple (Verbum Domini, §108).

So we begin to garden, to create a compost pile, to reduce energy costs and increase recycling as a consequence of our own renewal through the contemplation of doctrine of creation in light of the Eucharist. Our experience of the created world, our capacity for gratitude, for self-gift to all creatures, comes to be shaped by this teaching.

The same is true for the claim that Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully human. If one thinks of Jesus as half-way human and half-way God, or human in the body but divine in the soul, then the “experiential” potential of this doctrine is reduced. For, when Jesus is born in Bethlehem in a manger, hungers for his mother’s milk, is lost in the temple, lunches with outcasts, dies upon the cross, it is the Word made flesh who performs these deeds. God hungers as an act of love, dies as an act of love, and in the process transforms what it means for humans to hunger, to die, and to love. And now this same God is seated at the right hand of the Father. In the Ascension, the humanity of Christ is not left behind. The wounds of a human life are never erased. Rather, they are taken up into the very life of God,
and the pain and sorrow of our own wounds are whispered into the ear of the Father. Further, the Spirit comes to dwell among us through the sacraments of the Church, healing and efficacious signs of God’s own love for the world. And so our joys, our sorrows, all that it means to be human is taken up into the Triune life of God and transformed in an act of love.

Now, that’s the Christian God, one worth teaching. That’s the God who is going to be with us through the ups and downs of human life and commitment, the disappointments and mundaneness and sudden joyful moments that school us in the art of love. This sort of evangelization is healing. It’s the type that convinces high school students that God does not measure us by beauty or waistline or G.P.A. or socio-economic status but a love that comes as total gift; the type that makes college students question whether their assumed life plan is necessarily how it must be.

So then, if we are to respond to the catechetical crisis, to become a place where the Word echoes, the parish must learn to present the narrative of salvation unfolded in the Scriptures and Tradition as the center of its life. And consequently, we will need to practice learning the signs of Christian faith, memorizing them, contemplating them as mysteries revealing the fullness of what it means to be human. Then, everything the parish does will be shaped by its meditation upon and appropriation of the mysteries of faith.
OBSTACLE 2:  THE LITURGICAL AND SACRAMENTAL CRISIS

In 1964, Romano Guardini (1885-1968), a leader of the liturgical movement, wrote a letter to the third German liturgical congress addressing the nature of the liturgical act. For Guardini, the primary liturgical problem of his own era was not textual but spiritual. Namely, how might a person engage in the art of prayer in the technological context of the modern world (Romano Guardini, Letters from Lake Como, 16-17)? In light of his concern about the Western capacity for meaningful liturgical action, Guardini expressed his desire for the meeting of German pastoral leaders to consider the next stage of the liturgical movement, liturgical formation. He writes:

The question is whether the wonderful opportunities now open to the liturgy will achieve their full realization; whether we shall be satisfied with just removing anomalies, taking new situations into account, giving better instruction on the meaning of ceremonies and liturgical vessels or whether we shall relearn a forgotten way of doing things and recapture lost attitudes (“A Letter from Romano Guardini,” Herder Correspondence [August 1964]: 239).

The effect of good liturgical formation meant that one not only understood the historical rationale of the offertory procession but that the Christian learns to engage in all human activity as an offering to God. Guardini believed that a liturgical education could transform the very meaning of human existence. As he eloquently asks, “How can the act of walking become a religious act, a retinue for the Lord progressing through his land, so that an ‘epiphany’ may take place?” (Ibid., 240).
In the years since Guardini’s death, it is safe to say that his hope for a liturgical renewal that transforms human life itself has yet to bear fruit in many of our parishes. As a liturgical and sacramental theologian, I often wonder at the deep chasm separating the theology of liturgical prayer from its practice. The Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium) reminds us that the sacred liturgy, particularly the Eucharist:

...is supremely effective in enabling the faithful to express in their lives and portray to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true church. For the church is both human and divine, visible but endowed with invisible realities, zealous in action and dedicated to contemplation, present in the world, yet a migrant, so constituted that in it the human is directed toward and subordinated to the divine, the visible to the invisible, action to contemplation, and this present world to that city yet to come, the object of our quest (see Heb. 13:14). The liturgy daily builds up those who are in the church, making them a holy temple of the Lord, a dwelling-place for God in the Spirit (see Eph. 2:21-22), to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ (see Eph. 4:13). At the same time it marvelously enhances their power to preach Christ and thus show the church to those who are outside as a sign lifted up among the nations (see Is. 11:12), a sign under which the scattered children of God may be gathered together (see Jn. 11:52) until there is one fold and one shepherd (see Jn. 10:16) (§2; Flannery, 118).

This description of liturgical prayer paints a vivid portrait of a liturgy in which God comes to transform the member of the body of Christ through visible signs:

- In which the Church performs her truest identity as the Bride of Christ, one who waits with joyful longing for the imminent approach of her beloved.

- In which our celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice forms us in the depths of divine love for “The celebration is not just a rite, not just a liturgical “game”. It is meant to be indeed a logikē latreia, the ‘logicizing’ of my existence, my interior contemporaneity with the self-giving of Christ. His self-giving is meant to become mine, so that I become contemporary with the Pasch of Christ and assimilated upon God” (Joseph Ratzinger [Benedict XVI], The Spirit of the Liturgy, 58).

Liturgy is to mediate this encounter with Christ’s self-gift through the signs of the Church’s celebration of these mysteries. Through the music that is sung both in mind and heart; the tone of voice by which the prayer is performed; the silence intentionally cultivated at moments in our prayer; the homily that nourishes us
with the bread of the Scriptures; the stained glass by which the light of Christ bathes the building in holy glory; the incense that rises up into the heavenly places and sweetens the air; the cross of Christ inscribed upon our bodies, now lifted up above the altar, and recalled in the Eucharistic prayer; the grains of bread now become the Body of the Lord, an image of the unity to which we are called; the wine poured out now become the cup of salvation, the intoxicating fruit that is the Blood of Christ. As the liturgy is celebrated, our hearts are opened more deeply to conversion, to the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit. Our whole bodies enter into the divine pedagogy of salvation. In his remarkable description of the purpose of Eucharistic sacrifice, true of all liturgical celebration, Augustine of Hippo notes:

Our heart is his altar when it is lifted up to him; we plead to him by his Only-begotten priest; we offering bleeding victims to him, when we strive for his truth even to shedding blood; we burn the sweetest incense to him when we are aflame with holy and pious love in his sight; we consecrate and we return his gifts in us and our own person; by solemn feasts and dedicated days, we render sacred and proclaim the memory of his benefits, les, by the passing of time ingrate forgetfulness might creep upon us; we sacrifice to him a victim of humility and of praise on the altar of our heart kindled by the fire of love (The City of God 10.3; CCL 47A: 275.14-23).

The truth, beauty, and goodness of the signs of liturgical celebration become a part of our hearts, our very identities, and they allow us to offer anew that sacrifice of praise that defines the Christian life. This is an “evangelical” liturgy in the truest sense of the term, an “awareness that one’s life is being progressively transformed by the holy mysteries being celebrated” (Sacramentum Caritatis, §64c), in which delightful signs are used to enjoy a foretaste of heavenly life with God, an “experience” that overflows into an offering of our very selves to one another in love.

And perhaps, this is where some parishes tend to go astray in liturgical celebration. It is tempting for us to forget that the purpose of liturgy is not to broadcast a message or to communicate an ideology. Well-intentioned priests and choir or liturgy directors may want to explain the meaning of what is done at Mass, the history of the feast being celebrated, but verbosity in liturgical prayer does not allow for contemplation, for the spiritual insight that comes in the silence of the heart. We go to Mass not for instruction in meaning but for celebration of that ultimate meaning defining of our lives; to practice a form of self-giving bestowed to us by God.
Music, too, can become an obstacle to a liturgical evangelization. At its best, liturgical music cultivates the sacramental imagination, inviting the Church to use her voice to taste and see the goodness of the Lord (Ps. 34:8). The power of music in ecclesial worship is remarkable. As Augustine notes after his baptism, “How copiously I wept at your hymns and canticles, how intensely was I moved by the lovely harmonies of your singing Church! Those voices flooded my ears, and the truth was distilled into my heart until it overflowed in loving devotion; my tears ran down, and I was the better for them” (The Confessions 9.7.15; Boulding, 220).

But, so often our hymnody is short on Scriptural and theological imagery, on poetry that captivates the imagination. We may have an affinity for a hymn tune, such as Beech Spring, but is it not detrimental to the imagination of the Church to sing, “As a fire is meant for burning with a bright and warming flame, so the church is meant for mission, giving glory to God’s name. Not to preach our creeds or customs, but to build a bridge of care, we join hands across the nations, finding neighbors everywhere” (Ruth Duck, “As a Fire Is Meant for Burning”). Is it not the case that our practice of Christian love (care) is integrally linked to what we believe and celebrate (our creeds and customs)? The physiology of singing is such that the words become a part of us, we sing them in our heads as we walk about the grocery store, in the halls of the office, as we put our children to bed each evening. It is inadequate for us to enjoy the tune, while singing words that are false.

“AS A LITURGICAL AND SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGIAN, I OFTEN WONDER AT THE DEEP CHASM SEPARATING THE THEOLOGY OF LITURGICAL PRAYER FROM ITS PRACTICE.”
This concern, of course, signifies an additional problem for those seeking to carry out the new evangelization through the celebration of the liturgy: in an age in which the first sign of boredom is soothed through the keystrokes of the smartphone, we seek to conduct ever-more exciting, creative, emotionally powerful liturgies that capture the attention of the assembly. Americans like this. Think of the mega-church phenomenon in the United States—its use of electronic media, of sermons on the power of positive thinking, of emotionally-charged music played by worship bands. Such worship is meant to entertain. But, does entertainment transform? Imagine a parish in suburban Chicago, where every Christmas the choir director sings “O Holy Night” at the front of the church. At the conclusion of her solo, the assembly stands and claps to thank her for the performance. It was incredibly entertaining, a virtuoso interpretation of a classic Christmas hymn. But, did it lead anyone to prayer? Did the performance of this hymn allow the man at the back of the Church, whose wife just passed away weeks ago, to perceive in the Incarnation of Christ a light that shines into the darkness of his now shattered world? Did the suburban, upper class assembly come to recognize in that Nativity Mass the impoverishment of the Word made flesh—a divine love that interrupts any tendency to join in the consumer carnival that has become the Christmas season? Entertainment seeks to distract us from our concerns, to allow us to escape temporarily from the all those tragedies, sorrows, desires, and responsibilities that make us feel incomplete.

What is a parish to do? First, a liturgical renewal for the new evangelization must begin with a renewal of ecclesiology, the theology of the Church. As Americans, we are perpetually tempted by what Notre Dame’s John Cavadini calls a “We the People” ecclesiology. An ecclesiology in which we consider the church as an organization founded upon the will of the people (called by God) who choose to gather together and dwell among one another precisely because we share a common outlook, a view of the world, and assumptions about what is the proper and acceptable way of being human. In this ecclesiology, the liturgy is simply an expression of what we believe, what we hope for, what we desire, what we cherish. I have attended any number of liturgical celebrations where the pastor preaches in his homily about how remarkable this parish is, how beautiful its liturgies are, how welcome everyone feels. Hymns, in a parish like this, are so excessively focused on praising the gathered community for its identity that they leave little room to adore the living God.
To counteract this tendency, we need to cultivate a Eucharistic ecclesiology. The Church is the body of Christ, and despite its visible poverty (including sin), it is a mystery, a sacrament, an image of Christ's own love. The Church's identity is thus never its own but is a gift received from the cross of Christ. The saints, both those who reside in heaven and those who are still in pilgrimage on earth, are members of this Body in which Christ is the Head. So when the Church gathers to pray, when she offers words of consolation and desolation in the Psalms, when she sings a hymn of praise to the Father, it is Christ himself who prays through her. The Church offers a gift in human speech to the Father, which is taken up by the voice of the Son. Our humanity, our words, and our desires are transformed into divine longing through Christ and the Spirit. This ecclesiology has consequences for liturgy. As Jean Corbon notes, “The liturgy is therefore not a component of the mystery of the Church; rather, the Church is the liturgy as this presently exists in our mortal humanity. The Church is as it were the human face of the heavenly liturgy, the radiance and transforming presence of the heavenly liturgy in our present time” (The Wellsprings of Worship, 76). The liturgy of the new evangelization will not seek to communicate information, to gather and rally the troops around a cause, to praise our own identity, or to entertain the masses (pun alert!) but to celebrate and to “effect” this divine-human exchange in Word and Sacrament.

Second, in order to facilitate a full, conscious, and active participation in this “evangelical” liturgy, we will need to cultivate a mystagogical imagination. Mystagogy is a movement from “the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the thing signified, from the “sacraments” to the “mysteries” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, §1075). And it is precisely the neglect of mystagogy that has led to the separation of faith and life. Consider for a moment the adoration of the cross on Good Friday. What a strange instrument to kiss, the very wood upon which the Savior of the world perished. A remarkable mystery is hidden in this visible action. To adore the wood of the cross is to recognize that human flourishing is only possible through self-gift; that the cross is not a sign of failure but of the possibility that all human existence might be transfigured through sacrifices of love. The adoration of the cross is a participation in the life of God in which all true acts of love bear fruit, even those that seem like utter failures to the eyes. And in this contemplation, must we not ask ourselves, do I adore the wood of the cross truthfully in the fullness of love?
This mystagogical imagination is ultimately what cultivates a robust liturgical celebration for the new evangelization in our parishes. Parishes must begin to ask themselves if the signs of their own liturgical celebrations are rich enough to foster this imagination. Are they beautiful, inspiring a sense of awe at the gift of love bestowed to us in the sacramental life of the Church? Do they season the imagination with the rich tapestry of images manifested in the liturgical year? Do the homilies in our parish deepen our desire for an encounter with the mystery of Christ, or do they stultify our affections with a quaint moralism? Is our liturgy a celebration of ourselves, or that of the whole Christ, including the poor, the lonely, the sad, the suffering? For liturgy is never the work of the people, something we construct in order to express how we feel toward God. Rather, “evangelical” liturgy is the Triune God’s slow and patient reconstruction of our memories, our imagination, and our affections as we enter more intimately into God’s own life. And this sort of liturgical celebration transforms our existence, inviting us to present our “bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rm. 12:1). It bids us to perceive the relationship between the sacrifice of the Mass and the offering of our lives in deeds of hidden, often mundane love. As one of my students wrote, regarding this insight, in a final essay for a class on the sacramental life:

It turns out the sacrament of marriage is not comprised completely of its nuptial consummation, but also in taking out the trash. Similarly, our union with Christ…does not occur simply at the moment the Host hits our tongues, but also in the cold winter mornings when we wake up early to attend Mass, in the hungry hours of fasting, and in the scrutinizing conscience examinations that the Eucharist inspires within us (Honora Kenney).

Insofar as our liturgical prayer and formation fosters such insights, it is integral to the new evangelization.
OBSTACLE 3:
THE CRISIS OF SCANDAL

To respond to the previous two crises (catechetical and liturgical/sacramental) will require a significant amount of both pastoral savvy and theological wisdom on the part of ministers both ordained and lay. It will call for the art of persuasion in which the Church’s ministers seek to cultivate the imagination and the desire of each parishioner toward a fuller appropriation of the Word of God. It will necessitate a formation into a renewed mission of the whole Church, in which the whole Body of Christ (lay and ordained) act in concert.

Thus, this third and final obstacle to the new evangelization is particularly problematic: the crisis of scandal. For no matter how truly, beautifully, or “goodly” that we proclaim the Word of God, if our lives contradict the message, then we ourselves become an obstacle to the new evangelization. Of course, we are all acutely aware of the most prominent scandal in the Church’s memory today: the sexual abuse crisis. The sexual abuse of children and the failure of certain prominent ecclesial leaders to respond in a timely manner to accusations have led to the suffering of countless victims; to a veil of suspicion cast upon all priests; to Catholics embarrassed to proclaim their faith in public. The American bishops have strived to respond to the crisis but the wounds will always remain with the Church as she pilgrims through history.

The sexual abuse crisis is not the only scandal that is an obstacle to the new evangelization. In the final part of this section, I would like to consider four additional scandals that I have found operative in most parishes that I have attended, which though less salacious are nonetheless detrimental to the Church’s proclamation of the Gospel: the scandal of mediocrity, of parochialism, of clericalism (both lay and ordained), and of ingratitude. The scandal of mediocrity...
is a prominent one in many parishes. Such mediocrity is manifested in the hiring of ministers, though well-intentioned, without adequate theological or pastoral formation. This scandal is found in liturgies in which the music is poor, the preaching tepid, and those in attendance (including the priest) are simply fulfilling a weekly obligation. One may discover such mediocrity in catechetical settings, as the children are fed lukewarm interpretations of the Scripture and Tradition, the pastor not even sure what the curriculum consists of. The scandal of mediocrity is an obstacle to the new evangelization because parishes infected by this malaise become dull, sad, and unattractive. They fulfill the obligations of parish life but never seem particularly joyful about them, never especially happy to proclaim that Christ is the Risen Savior of the world.

The second scandal is that of parochialism. Every parish must exist in the tension between supporting the activities of the parish and manifesting the Gospel for the life of the world. The scandal of parochialism forgets that the parish is made for mission, for the transformation of life in Christ, not simply for self-preservation. Examples of this scandal include an excessive focus on the quality of one’s Catholic school, such that those without children in the school are sometimes excluded from the life of the parish. Such parishes widely publicize school events but are maybe lukewarm about the spiritual formation of the elderly and neglect the childless. Parochialism can also manifest itself through an overreliance upon parish committees. These committees, inviting parishioners into the planning and governance of parish life, become sects within the parish. They carry out events or make decisions apart from the rest of the parish, and rarely are committed to a common vision. And gradually, as this committee work becomes a source of pride in the parish, those who engage in hidden ministerial efforts (the sacristan, the catechist, the Eucharistic minister to the home-bound) are relegated to second-class members of the parish. Finally, parochialism is particularly evident in the failure to connect the parish’s spiritual life to concrete acts of love. In its bulletin, a parish that I attended asked for more volunteers to commit to the practice of Eucharistic adoration so that everyone in the community might more deeply appreciate Christ’s presence in the Eucharist; on the next page, the Knights of Columbus advertised the sale of gift cards to the local grocery store, ones that no one would confuse with food stamps. In this small, even negligible announcement, a message was given: we care about the Eucharist but do not want to be confused with the poor. Of course, the danger of this parochialism is that the poor also attend Mass, that they also read the bulletin, and soon they know that this parish (perhaps, the Catholic Church as a whole) does not consider them. The influx of immigrants into already existing parishes that do not welcome them, refuse to take-up the Catholic devotions dear to their homeland, and perceive them as a threat to the American way of life, is the most dangerous form of parochialism today.
The third scandal is lay and ordained clericalism. Contemporary clericalism has little to do with ordination and more to do with how the ordained and lay ministers view their role in the life of the Church. A director of liturgy, who tells the Eucharistic minister in an angry voice that she has stood in the wrong spot and needs to pay greater attention, can be “clerical” in the pejorative sense. A priest, who perceives his primary job as enforcing obligations, who is reluctant to collaborate with anyone (ordained or not), instituting his own rules and regulations apart from the diocese can be “clerical.” The director of catechesis, who creates undue hoops for children to jump through for the reception of the sacraments, who treats parents as necessary obstacles to the formation of children, and who finds young people generally annoying, can be “clerical.” Fundamentally, clericalism is a kind of hostility, an undue sense of the importance of our status in the life of the parish. And, it is a particularly perilous obstacle to the new evangelization.

Focusing on the priest first, the Sacrament of Holy Orders sets him apart so that he may become an image of Christ himself, devoting his whole life to “the service of the common priesthood” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, §1547). Indeed, he receives a special grace “so that he may serve as Christ’s instrument for his Church” (CCC, §1581). The priest’s whole life is to be lived out in persona Christi et ecclesiae (in the person of Christ and of the Church). So, when the priest ignores the expertise of his staff, when he views parishioners as nuisances, when he speaks disdainfully to the couple coming to prepare a child for baptism, when he habitually chooses his own comfort over that of his flock, he himself becomes an obstacle to the new evangelization. He fails to live his truest identity, choosing power and prestige and comfort over the self-emptying love of Christ.

The lay minister, on the other hand, does not share in the ministerial priesthood of the ordained. Rather, through baptism, lay ministers “carry out responsibilities rooted in their baptismal call and gifts” (Co-Workers in the Vineyard, 12). Because of their particular importance in the life of the parish, their theological training and expertise, lay ecclesial ministers can easily fall into the scandal of clericalism. Whenever lay ministers perceive that their gifts set them apart from the rest of the Church, when they mistakenly believe that they are capable of greater holiness and insight than the ordinary lay person, they fall into the scandal of clericalism. The scandal of clericalism is so problematic because it injures the bonds of love. It understands the role of ministry not as building up the Body of Christ but as increasing one’s privilege and status. And of course, in an age in which authenticity matters most of all, an ordained or lay minister with an inflated ego quickly alienates parishioners, inviting some to levy the charge of hypocrisy against the Church herself.
Lastly, there is the scandal of ingratitude. Those of us reared in the Catholic Church expect a remarkable amount of things from our parish. We expect that our children will be formed in the faith. We want homilies that inspire us, liturgical celebrations that facilitate an encounter with Christ, and evening activities in which we are schooled to live the Gospel. My wife, who has been a lay minister for eight years, has encountered a remarkable amount of ingratitude. Parents have yelled at her without cause. She has been underpaid for her work. She has planned events at the insistence of parishioners, only to have no one show up. Parish priests have it equally difficult, consistently balancing competing interests in the parish, administering sacraments, visiting the sick, ensuring that the parish has enough money to cover operational expenses, stopping by the parish school, and being available for counseling. Yet, how grateful are we for their work? At precisely the moment in which we need vibrant, talented, theologically and pastorally trained young priests and lay ministers, we have created conditions that result in burn-out and deep loneliness. As parishioners, all of us have to awaken to our own ingratitude toward those who spend so much time seeking to cultivate within us the virtues of faith, hope, and love necessary for the new evangelization. This renewal of gratitude will come with a cost. Financially, we must give money to our parishes to hire, sustain, and support a pastoral staff talented enough to carry out the new evangelization. Spiritually, we have to recognize that our ingratitude toward priests and lay ministers is a simply a symptom of a deeper malaise; a failure to appreciate work that is hidden, small, nearly inconsequential vis-à-vis careers of profit and prestige.

In conclusion, the parish seeking to cultivate conditions for the new evangelization must attend to the threat of scandal. And, it must be the whole parish that recognizes its guilt in this regard. A scandal-less proclamation is not the responsibility of the pastor or lay ecclesial minister alone. If we truly believe that the parish is a visible manifestation of the Body of Christ, then all of us may become obstacles to the new evangelization. Our actions (or those that we fail to do) may obscure the truth, goodness, and beauty of the Gospel. But, the beauty of Catholic faith is that it is never we alone responsible for our preaching, our teaching, and our celebration of the mysteries of Christ. Rather, even in our sinfulness, God can use us for good. Nonetheless, the new evangelization will require more from us than a firm hope in the effectiveness of God’s Word, even in the midst of human failings. It will necessitate a constant conversion, a continued openness to the ways that we remain closed off from becoming living saints, examples of what is possible through the grace of God.
Concluding, the splendor of the parish is not in its worldly power. Rather, it is the place where the Word of God takes flesh in our lives through catechesis and through liturgy. It is where we practice the virtues of faith, hope, and love, receiving a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. It is where baptisms, first communions, weddings, and funerals are celebrated. And yet despite its incredible beauty, the parish—like all institutions that include human beings—is capable of sin. For this reason, we must continue to cast ourselves upon the healing grace of Christ, the Good Physician, who seeks to heal our memories, bind our affections, and place soothing balm upon our mediocrity, our smallness, our pride, our ingratitude. And of course, the genius of parish life is that this whole array of medicines is available to us through a richer appropriation of the Word of God, if only we enter ever more deeply into the sacramental, evangelical life of the Church.
If perchance there might be a person in this audience from Wisconsin, Missouri, or New York, whom I had the honor of confirming, be patient with me, please, for, odds are that I used this same story during my sermon that day.

In July, 2002, I led a group of about three hundred young people from the Archdiocese of St. Louis, where I was then serving as auxiliary bishop, to Toronto for World Youth Day. These events originated twenty-five years ago, the genius of Blessed John Paul II, who, every two-or-three years would invite young people from all over the planet to join him for five days of prayer, catechesis, faith sharing, and friendship at different locations throughout the globe.
So, there I was in Canada with a million young folks. And it was my happy task to offer a catechism on three different days to about three hundred young people from Canada, Ireland, England, Australia, India, and the United States at a parish setting in the suburbs of Toronto. Hundreds of other bishops were doing the same at other sites. We were at the parish each morning for song, witnessing, adoration, the opportunity for confession, my teaching, and the Eucharist.

On the third day, at the close of our final catechism, I asked my group if anyone wanted to speak publicly about if or how this World Youth Day had transformed his or her life. After a pause of a few seconds, a young woman in the back corner stood up and approached one of the two available microphones. She began:

“Yes! This event has not only changed my life. It has saved my life!” Well, she sure had our attention. She continued...“See, I was living on the streets of Detroit, under a highway overpass. I ran away from home seven years ago, when I was thirteen. I’m addicted to alcohol and heroin” -- with that she showed her bare arms so we could see the bruises and scabs from the needles – “and have been a prostitute for years to support those habits. Been in jail on and off for shoplifting...Anyway, the youth group at my parish kind of adopted me...Took me in, got me some counseling and treatment, even a room, and invited me to this World Youth Day. I came on a dare, nothing better to do, figuring I’d come up here, break from the group, stay in Canada, and go back to my old way of life. But something happened here. I’ve met an old man who tells me he loves me. Oh, I’m used to men telling me they love me, as they give me $50. But this old man seems to mean it. This old man tells me God also loves me. This old man tells me I’m the apple of God’s eye, His work of art, made in His image, redeemed by His Son; that I’m so special that God wants me on His lap for all eternity.”

Well, there wasn’t a dry eye in the house by now. She wrapped it up:

“This old man has given me a reason to live. My life has not just been changed, but saved.”

Of course, “the old man” was John Paul II who, although already stooped and shaky, unable to walk, quivering and drooling, was there at World Youth Day, and had spoken such words to the millions of young people.

That twenty-year-old addict-prostitute had just confessed her belief in the Catholic Doctrine of the Dignity of the Human Person, the topic of my talk this evening. And, if I were smart, I would sit down right now, because she explained it far more eloquently than I ever could.
When we list Catholic doctrines, we usually mention the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Redemption, the Eucharist. Fair enough. . .

I wonder why we never include the Doctrine of the Dignity of the Human Person? It is pivotal; it is way up there; it is normative. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches (§356), “Man alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God’s own life . . . This is the fundamental reason for his dignity. Being in the image of God, the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone.”

As I used to comment to those assembled for the Sacrament of Confirmation, if we really believed it, think of what a difference it would make in the way I treat myself, in the way I treat others. It would be lifesaving. Ask my friend in Toronto.

Yes! God made me in His own image and likeness; I am worth the precious blood of His only-begotten Son; I am God’s work of art; He calls me by name; He knows me better than I know myself; He loves me so powerfully, personally, and passionately that He wants me to spend eternity with Him; I have come from Him and am destined to return to Him forever. As St. Irenaeus chanted, “The glory of God is man fully alive.”

There is the Catholic Doctrine of the Dignity of the Human Person, and would that we would imbibe it and memorize it the same way we veterans used to with the old Baltimore Catechism!

I am hardly here as a theologian but as a catechist, not as a professor but as a pastor, to speak of a central doctrine of our faith. When you think of it, this Doctrine of the Dignity of the Human Person so cleanly fits in with the other core dogmas of our religion. The human person mirrors the eternal love of the Most Blessed Trinity; the human person is of such worth that God Himself took on our nature at the Incarnation; the human person has such dignity that God’s Son died lest he or she perish in what we call the Redemption.

As Gaudium et Spes (§22) reminds us:

The truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of the human person take on light. For Adam, the first man was a figure of Him who was to come, Christ the Lord. Christ...by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals us to ourselves and makes our supreme calling clear.
St. Josephine Bakhita, the ransomed, abused slave of Dafur, adopted and freed by an Italian family, wrote, “I am definitely loved, and, whatever happens to me, I am awaited by His eternal love. So, my life is so good.” This Doctrine of the Dignity of the Human Person should be taught our children along with the sign of the cross, for it is at the very essence of our Catholic faith.

On my first day as a brand new parish priest at Immacolata Parish in St. Louis, I accompanied the renowned saintly pastor, Monsignor Cornelius Flavin, on his rounds in the school, just to watch how it was done. With the little first graders he asked, “Children, does God know who you are?” “Yes, Monsignor!” “Does God know your name?” “Yes, Monsignor!” “Does God see you?” “Yes, Monsignor!” “Does God see you all the time, wherever you’re at, even when you’re all by yourself?” “Yes, Monsignor!” “Why does God watch you all the time?” “To see if we’re being bad,” one of the children replied. “Oh no,” whispers Monsignor Flavin. “God watches you all the time because He loves you so much He can’t take His eyes off of you!” Here—The Doctrine of the Dignity of the Human Person! Perhaps Monsignor Flavin had taught them the best catechism lesson of them all.

A NOVEL TEACHING?

Let me mention five observations about this fundamental belief. The first is hardly an observation but an inquiry: Why does this Catholic Doctrine of the Dignity of the Human Person seem so novel? After all, it is as venerable as the wisdom imparted by the creation narrative of Genesis, the core of what we call the Judeo-Christian tradition. True enough, the dignity of creature and creation itself was gravely ruptured in this normative narrative, but, as we recall on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, even then God already has in mind a grand restoration of the pinnacle of His creation, the human person.

It is so tenderly evident in the Law and the prophets, in the teaching of Jesus and St. Paul. It has given rise to Christian morality that startled the brutality of the Roman world with its emphasis on the protection of life, respect for the person, care for the vulnerable, defense of women, babies, children, family, elders,
and even slaves. It gave rise to the greatest system of healthcare, education and charity the world has ever known, giving us a saint like Nicholas, as we gather on his feastday, whose solicitude for the “little ones,” the oppressed and struggling captures our imagination to this day. It inspired a Bartolomé de las Casas, a Martin Luther King, a Dorothy Day, as they recognized the human person as a reflection of the Divine, and led them to the radical claim that even the slave or the Indian has an immortal soul, deserving what Roger Williams called a “soul freedom.”

Recently, I received one of the more surprising invitations I ever have: to come to England for the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta in four years. “Why an American?” I asked the organizer. “Because the United States is an inheritor of the tradition begun by the Magna Carta,” he replied. “But why invite me, a Catholic archbishop?” I went on. “Because the Magna Carta was composed by an archbishop, and because it flows from the teaching of the Church on human rights and justice.” It did? I’ll be!

The caricature of the Church is that it had to be dragged kicking and screaming into the noble enterprise of defending human rights. Historians realize that some of this is due to the fact that the Church was on what the entrenched script of our textbooks would call the losing side of the Enlightenment and the French revolution, branding the Church as opposed to “liberty, equality, and fraternity.” More sober voices now conclude that the forces of the Enlightenment and of the French Revolution, untethered to this Catholic Doctrine of the Dignity of the Human Person, are partly the cause of horror such as the Gulags, camps, and killing fields of last century. But, we must admit, we would have been better off listening to the likes of Lacordaire, Montalembert, and Lammenais.

The stereotype continues, leading Richard John Neuhaus’ to comment twenty-years ago that “Voltaire is rolling over in his grave as it is now clear that the world’s most dramatic defender of human rights and the dignity of the person is the Pope of Rome and the Catholic Church.” Such should hardly startle one versed in the Catholic Doctrine of the Dignity of the Human Person.
Observation number two is similar to the first. A faith that has as one of its primary tenets that every individual is a reflection of the divine, that when our heavenly Father looks upon us He sees His Son and smiles, that every human life beams with the transcendent and hints at the beyond, is a faith that affirms everything that is decent, noble, and uplifting in the human drama.

To put it another way, the Catholic Doctrine of the Dignity of the Human Person prompts a thumping yes! to whatever affirms the truth, beauty, and goodness inherent in us and in our world. This is the Christian Humanism of giants sent as Erasmus and Thomas More, such a brilliant part of luminous Catholic universities such as this one. So, the history of the Church has been one producing the poetry of Dante and art of a Caravaggio, the sculpture of a Michelangelo and the music of Mozart, the research of Mendel and the discoveries of Columbus, the charm of a Francis and frescoes of Giotto. The Church is into affirming, not denouncing; raising up, not putting down; encouraging, not condemning. As Father Robert Barron claims in his marvelous and exciting new Catholicism series, the Church is all about a “yes” to all that is true, beautiful, and good in the human project; the Church only says “no” to something or someone that would negate the true, the beautiful, or the good in the human person. And, a “no” to another “no” results in a yes!

The Church which has as a primary doctrine the Dignity of the Human Person is not a shrill, crabby, nay-saying nag, but a warm, tender, gracious mother who invites, embraces, and nurtures her children, calling forth from within the truth, beauty, and goodness she knows is within them.
A NEW PERSPECTIVE

A third observation on the Church’s premier Doctrine of the Dignity of the Human Person is that, well, “ideas have consequences.” So, this conviction of faith results in a moral imperative. As I used to wonder aloud to those whom I had just confirmed, at the end of the worn-out homily that had begun with the story of the young woman in Toronto, as did this talk, “If we really believe that we are temples of the Holy Spirit, that we are vessels of the divine, and icons of the Trinity, that, when God the Father looks at us, He sees the face of His Son, Jesus, can you imagine how differently we would treat ourselves and other people?” That is morality, it is it not? As Pope Benedict XVI recently remarked during his apostolic visit to his homeland, this is the transition from the “is” to the “ought” upon which our moral decisions and actions are grounded.

- If we are “divinized,” reflections of God, created in His image and likeness — there’s the is — then we ought to treat ourselves and others only with respect, love, honor, and care.

- If the pre-born baby in the womb, from the earliest moments of his or her conception, is a human person — an is that comes, not from the Catechism but from the biology textbook used by any sophomore in high school -- then that baby’s life ought to be cherished and protected.

- If an immigrant from Mexico is a child of God, worth the price of the life of God’s only begotten son, then we ought to render him or her honor and a welcome, not a roar of hate, clenched fists and gritted teeth in response to the latest campaign slogan from a candidate appealing to the nativistic side of our nature.

- If even a man on death row has a soul, is a human person, an is that cannot be erased even by beastly crimes he may have committed, then we ought not to strap him to a gurney and inject him with poison.

From the is to the ought...the moral journey.
Number four, a further corollary is that our identity is a given: We are a child of God, His creation, modeled in His own image, destined for eternity. That’s our identity. We are not, then, identified with our urges, our flaws, our status, our possessions, or our utility. Blessed Pope John Paul II taught that the great heresy today is that we stress having and doing, over being. My identity, my personhood, my is-ness, and the respect such as is-ness ought to engender, does not depend on whether or not I have a green card, a stock portfolio, a job, a home, or even a college diploma. Nor does my identity depend upon to whom I am sexually attracted to, or to race, religion, gender, social status, bank account, passport, or health insurance, but on my essence as a child of God. So, to the recovering alcoholic crying in the confessional at Saint Patrick’s Cathedral after a two-day binge back in Manhattan, “I am a hopeless drunk,” we reply, “No, you are a child of God, made in His likeness, loved passionately and personally by a God who claims you as His own, but who happens to have an addiction to alcohol.” So, to the protestors outside St. Patrick who, disagreeing with the Church’s defense of traditional marriage, yell at me “I am gay, why do you hate me?” we respond, “Nice to meet you. As a matter of fact, I love you; you are God’s work of art, the apple of His eye, embraced by a God who passionately loves you, who happens to have a same-sex attraction.” Because who we are is of infinitely more significance than what we have, do, drink, or are sexually attracted to.

As he is wont to do, Pope Benedict recently gave a fresh twist to this approach to morality. Again in Germany, before the parliament, the Holy Father spoke about the need to reverence both the external environment of creation, and the internal ecology of the creator. Thank God, the pontiff remarked, we creatures have learned, albeit the hard way, that the environment of our earth has a built-in balance, a fragile structure and equilibrium. Creation has an order about it, a delicate stasis that should never be tampered with or polluted. The “Green Pope” -- as Benedict has been called -- went on to remind us as well that, just as there is an integrity in creation that must be safeguarded, and a “law of nature” that is evident to us who are
tempted to abuse it, so is there an order, a balance, a coherence innate in creatures, in the human person, that is protected by a natural law which must be heeded.

Listen to his words:

The importance of ecology is no longer disputed. We must listen to the language of nature and must answer accordingly. Yet, I would like to underline a point that seems to me to be neglected...There is also an ecology in man! Man, too, has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will. Man is not merely self-creating freedom. Man does not create himself...His will is rightly ordered if he respects his nature, listens to it, and accepts himself for who he is...

A NARCISSIST’S HERESY?

Last observation, number five, again on this moral journey from the is to the ought: We have been talking about a doctrine, the Dignity of the Human Person. The right teaching of any doctrine is called orthodoxy; the wrong understanding of any doctrine is called a heresy. Hilaire Belloc reminds us that a heresy usually is not a denial of a doctrine, but an obsessive exaggeration of one element of it. So can our orthodox expression, promotion, and defense of this Catholic Doctrine of the Dignity of the Human Person become heretical if we wrong-headedly exaggerate only one of its carefully balanced parts?

The orthodox insistence upon the dignity of the human person, with the logical corollary that every person deserves dignity and respect, becomes as a matter of fact heretical if it sinks into a narcissistic demand for whatever pleasure or right I feel I am entitled to. For the same doctrine that gives rise to a grand tradition of respect for human rights also gives us the call to duty and responsibility. As Blessed Pope John Paul II often preached, “Genuine freedom is the ability to do what we ought, not the license to do whatever we want.”
I started with a young woman in Toronto. Let me conclude with a young man back in St. Louis, my hometown. I grew up with Dan, let me call him, and he was a boyhood buddy who I lost track of during college and seminary. I had heard Dan had gone to Vietnam, came back with a scrambled brain, he was into drugs, living on the street. I often thought of Dan and wondered how he was. A couple weeks after my ordination, Dan shows up at the rectory of my first parish, clean, well-dressed, smiling, with a young woman he introduced to me as his fiancé. During our chat, he brought up his grimy past. “Tim, you may have heard that I’ve been messed-up big time. I was literally in the gutter, drinking, popping, smoking, injecting whatever I could. I had hit bottom.

“Late one night, in a warehouse down off Biddle Street, on the riverfront, another druggie and I had landed a stash of cheap heroin. We were ready to needle it in when the other guy says, ‘Dan, I dare you. You and I are both trash. We’re both done with life. We have no tomorrow. Let’s go out on a high. I dare you! I’ll give you ten seconds to come up with a decent reason why we’re here, or, I dare you, let’s give each other a triple dose of this stuff and call it quits.’”

Dan went on: “Tim, what could I do? I had ten seconds to give him—and me—a reason to keep going. In desperation, all that came to my blurry mind was the third question in the *Baltimore Catechism* that you and I learned in second grade at Holy Infant grade school way back. I blurted it out: “Why did God make you? God made me to know Him, love Him, and serve Him in this life, and to be happy with Him forever in the next.’ “The other guy held the needle suspended, and, looked at me. ‘Say that again...’ I did. He thought a minute, and finally answered, ‘Not bad. I’ll take it.’ And I’m still here!”

That is the *Doctrine of the Dignity of the Human Person*. It saved Dan’s life; it saved the life of our young friend in Toronto. Our creed is nothing less than lifesaving.
Talk to almost any Catholic writer who blogs, and you will hear a similar story:

The blog is gluttonous; it is always hungry; in order to grow your traffic, you must feed it multiple times a day, even on weekends, and after you have fed it, you get to moderate comments, which – between the adoring fans and the snarky haters -- is a roiling occasion of sin just waiting to suck you down into your lowest, most prideful or spitefully deluded self. You spend countless hours reading, studying news stories and documents, collecting fodder you believe will interest your readers, propel a discussion or promote understanding; occasionally, (or, frequently) a political story will pique the interest and – seizing an opportunity to demonstrate the right of the faithful to participate in the civil arena – you will venture a heated opinion that can result in virtual fisticuffs between yourself and any or all of your readers. And the next day, you get to do it all over again!

But when you ask the same blogger why he doesn’t just shut the blog down and get back to the paying work–when you ask her if there isn’t something better she can be doing with her time–you will hear a staggeringly similar reply. The blogger will blush and the voice will take on a note of hushed and awestruck humility, “well, it’s the darndest thing; every time I’ve thought about pulling the plug, I’ll get an email . . .”

The email will say something like, “I left the church 20 years ago and haven’t looked back, but I found your blog while googling about [politics, Irish Coffee recipes, Bryn Terfel, baseball stats, The Vagina Monologues] and noticed your other piece about [confession, the Holy Eucharist, Mary, the Rosary, Humanae Vitae, Saint Catherine of Siena] and started visiting regularly. I have slowly made my way home and recently I received Our Lord in communion for the first time in two decades: don’t stop blogging!”

Emails expressing similar sentiments seem to come, “providentially” to every Catholic blogger I know—nunbloggers, Mommybloggers, doctrine-aficionados, human-interest bloggers—every single time they begin to think about quitting. It is a humbling affirmation that while we do nothing of ourselves, we can be willing to make ourselves a sort of conduit (in my case a very dubious conduit) through which the Holy Spirit, who often uses the most confounding means and methods to work God’s will, has a bit more room to maneuver.
And that is almost the whole point of Jesus’ command “Ephphatha; be opened” (Mk. 7:34) isn’t it? If one were to ask me what nearly seven years of toiling online—writing for several digital “magazines” both secular and religious, editing and organizing and spending entirely too much time promoting the work of myself and others in “fun” social media (by which Satan keeps the whole world willfully, fitfully distracted) and all the time blogging, blogging, blogging, that would finally be my answer. I have learned to stay open, even when one wishes to slam the door closed, because my job online is the same as what all of us are called to everywhere else: to be opened, so the Holy Spirit has one more avenue by which to move around and get the real work done, even using our flub-ups and foibles, to God’s own purposes which are often none of our beeswax. As Bono once sang, “it’s alright, it’s alright; She moves in mysterious ways.”

Does that sound like I fancy myself some indispensable cog in the Divine Whirlygig? Well, I am a cog; so are you. A Jesuit once told me “humility is truth” and the truth is I have no idea whether my particular cog is indispensable. I can’t imagine that it could be. In 7 years at it I have posted nearly 6,000 times on my blog. That works out to roughly 2.1 blogposts a day, but then, I have only recently begun to take weekends off. Most of those thousands of posts are forgettable dross—recently I informed the world that a Canadian marketing scheme for a feminine hygiene product has satisfied my lifelong desire to hear my name in a pop song. Perhaps 150 of my posts involve essays or ideas I think could add something more than mere racket to the general din. I doubt any of those, though, would ever be considered indispensable to anyone at all, myself included, and I sometimes look at my archives and understand the poet’s urge to strike a match on his notebooks and watch it all burn. Or, this being the digital age, installing an overwrite program and watching a portion of one’s life become quietly trashed, one zippy blue line at a time.

But then there is God and his unknowable plans and perspectives. I look at the way I was raised, in a feral, confrontational environment; I look at my lifelong compulsion to consume news and news by-products, both churchy and secular, and the means by which I currently digest it all through a processor and, it seems to me I am precisely where I am supposed to be. I imagine God as the indulgent parent of a hyperactive kid who—all unconcerned that the refrigerator door is already overflowing—keeps handing up one glitter-and-macaroni creation after another for posting. If God eventually allows most of the stuff to line cosmic birdcages while a piece here-or-there speaks to a surprising soul in a surprising way, that is none of my concern; if this is where I am supposed to be, I just want to keep using the paste and scissors and crayons, and let someone else make sense of it all.
I suppose others can blog productively without feeling like their mostly-forgettable pearls are somehow necessary to God, but I am convinced that Catholics who are online and interested in not just making noise but assisting in digital evangelism need only maintain an attitude of openness—both in writing and responding—and God will do the rest. Very recently, on a day when I was once again feeling burned-out and wondering if I wanted to continue, I received one of those “providential” emails, this time from a young “Occupy Wall Street” enthusiast. He had read me out of context and sought me for a Twitter confrontation. Amid fast-moving timelines packed with headlines and hash-tagged manias of a moment, we conducted a three-day back-and-forth that ended on a very civil notion that the world was a mysterious place where human answers were failing, but it was important to keep talking. A week later, out of nowhere, his missive announced that he had gone to confession and assisted at Mass, receiving Holy Communion again for the first time in years. I am not sure why or how that came about, except that Christ wanted it, and in that case, all one can do is throw one’s hands to heaven and say, “well, alright, then, Lord, I’ll keep the lines open! I’ll still make mistakes and offend from time-to-time, but I know now that this has nothing to do with me. It’s all yours.”

That makes me sound a lot holier and more humble than I am. Whatever else it is, a blog is an enormous temptation to egoism, and even the humblest blogger (that would not be me) will admit that the insta-gratification of seeing your freshly-minted thoughts commented upon, argued, “liked” or “followed” and linked-to by other sites means dancing, every day, with one’s own prideful devil. It also means finding a balance between coming off like an arrogant scold, more-Catholic-than-the-Pope or a complete hypocrite.

This is where bloggers often struggle much more than a Catholic writer who is publishing a book every two years or a column once or twice a week. Editors have a way of reminding a writer that they have built an audience with certain expectations; they are able to tell a writer when he or she is veering into objectionable territory; they can pass a note wondering, “did you mean to be this uncharitable?”

A blogger has no editor and is frequently writing on a breaking story while passions are fully engaged; the “publish” button is too often hit before a breath has been taken, with the result the writer realizes that she has let too loose the intemperate tongue; that he has heaped scorn upon another by the steaming ladles-full while standing in a puddle of his own soup.
If a Catholic blogger wants to maintain credibility, and frankly if he wants to continue to live and grow in the faith, an admission of bad behavior must follow.

And oh, how that can sting! I once had to admit that while Nancy Pelosi had said something maddeningly offensive and stupid, I had actually managed to be even more offensive and stupid in my reaction. Oh, yes. It stings! But it teaches, too. There is nothing quite like shooting oneself in public, while aiming at someone else, to help broaden one’s sense of Catholic inclusivity. It is hard to sustain disdain for the careening vapidity of another’s reasoning, when your response has revealed you skidding off your own road.

I am forever traipsing along the fine wire between heaven and earth, valor and vulgarity, that I built into my blog from day one, when I gave it a religious persona (“The Anchoress” – a nod to my shyness) and declared it a spot for the free discussion of “Religion, Politics and Baseball; the important stuff!” Including religion in one’s blog sets one up to be called out and held accountable for content on a different level; while I am ultimately grateful for that, it was not my design.

My blog is unusual in that I did not begin the venture with any particular perspective or sense of mission. Having free-lanced for years, I was enduring a bit of a dry-spell, and had fallen into commenting on news forums to keep my skills honed, and to get a sense of what I thought about all the new questions—and how they related to our old answers—in our post-9/11 world (in saying “a writer writes to find out what she thinks,” Flannery O’ Connor never spoke a truer word!). The blog was a natural outgrowth of that – the headline forum was fun but its participants had often been confused by Catholic stories or downright hostile to them, particularly after our first “Long Lent” of scandal-revelation in 2002.

The blogging started in 2004. Throwing together a site headed with a Catholic reference (my original page was illustrated with a picture of a nun with her back to the camera) but open to discussing almost anything has meant that I have sometimes flirted with unintentionally giving scandal. Shortly after writing a scathing (and yes, vulgar and uncharitable but also rather funny) takedown of The Vagina Monologue, I was “Live-blogging the Lion’s Last Breath” by offering respectful and reverent, minute-by-minute, updates on everything pertaining to the last days of Blessed Pope John Paul II, and I sensed no cognitive dissonance in posting two such disparate pieces. To my mind, I was simply being myself in all of my human and conflicted glory and demonstrating, in a sense, a “catholic” interest in the world around me.
But posting to a blog that carries even a limited Catholic perspective began to form me in the most unexpected ways. The Holy Spirit, again, moving along that dubious conduit. If some visitors tripping into The Anchoress looking for a rant about a headline eventually find their way into a pew, the blog has had a not-dissimilar effect on me, as well. Compelled to explain what I believed, and why I believed it to others, I time and again discovered the depths of my unsuspected Orthodoxy. Though politically I have always identified as a “classical liberal” my rants had others calling me a “conservative,” and I didn’t mind that much, until 2005 brought a brouhaha over illegal immigration and I found myself completely at odds with my readership and wholly aligned with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). This, my departing readers informed me, meant I was a “Conservative in Name Only,” and as I watched my traffic decline by almost 2,000 unique visits a day, all I could say in rebuttal was, “I’m not a conservative; but I am not a modern liberal, either. I am a Catholic.”
Increasingly, as I blogged about the headlines, and prayer and social issues and politics, I began to realize that mature Catholicism cannot comfortably align itself with any one ideology or political party. Further, it seemed to me that all of these things were, in reality, of a piece—that none could be considered completely separable from the other, no matter how much the zeitgeist trends toward compartmentalization. Catholicism is too large, too wide, too nuanced, too small-catholic to permit ideological purity. Whenever a Catholic seems to manage that purity, he or she has tended to betray a tenet of Catholicism to get there. And that, to my way of thinking, is actually becoming one of the best arguments for Catholicism, and Catholic Orthodoxy, in the world. It brings well-reasoned resistance against sophist trends and the sentimentalist’s means of movement, both in the secular world and the sacred.

I do not seem to be the only Catholic blogger to have come to this conclusion; the balkanization of ideas and positions is bringing the world to a stagnant place. People are beginning to notice, like my “Occupy Wall Street” friend, that carping at each other from behind cyber-barricades is not just unproductive but actively destructive, and very often it is the non-Catholic—or fallen-away Catholic who has been too long in and of the world—who will notice this and go looking for a point of view that seems fresh, meaningful, sensible and able to last beyond a news cycle. Increasingly, Catholics on blogs and in social media are pulling away from everything that is kneejerk and unthinking. They’re making a point of discussing headlines through the prism of long-established Catholic understanding, with its entire inviting nuance, and the worldly disillusioned are picking it up.

There is a paradox ingrained within the internet. It is a vast expanse of information, continually being narrowed down, echo chamber, by echo chamber into agenda driven compartments until the broadness of its potential becomes a managed illusion. People find their internet niche and plant themselves there; soon they become part of a safe collective where every thought is validated by fifty voices and new additions are quickly sized up to see if they can be absorbed or must be rejected.

The cyber-world is teeming with intellectual and spiritual dead ends, and that is what makes a Catholic presence within it so imperative. Those collectives will over time prove themselves a bigger challenge to online Catholic evangelization than the doubters and secularly-inclined ever could be. They are full of “devout” Catholics, who have lost touch with the reassuring broadness and humility found within the Church in her depths; they have become stuck in their echo chamber, and find it increasingly difficult to respond to anything but cues and signals. On one end they
are determined to either consign their less-than-perfect co-religionists (and most bishops) to eternal flames of woe; on the other end they are convinced that if the church (and all bishops) would just stop being so churchy and “bishop-y” the world would flock to her pews. Having thus marginalized themselves—and certain that their ideas answer all of the church’s questions— these folks dig in their heels and never, ever allow themselves to hear the whispered “ephphatha!”

Until last year, my blog had “banned” exactly 5 people from participating in the comment boxes. Believing that dialogue, even when frustrating, is better than over-control, I do not remove anyone lightly. In 2011, though, the ban-hammer came down twelve times before we even made it into Advent, and each time it was not the atheist or the shouting progressive anti-Catholic who was kicked out of the forum; it was the collective-dwelling fanatically impassioned Catholic who—to paraphrase Churchill, could not change his mind and would not change the subject.

After new media-using Catholics have evangelized their coasting-but-curious fellows and the trained-to-distrust who are nevertheless to be sought out and invited in, their biggest challenge will be to coax the collectivists out of their corners and into the wider corral.

I believe our good Pope understands this. In 2010, he spoke several times of “giving the internet a soul.” Celebrating the church’s 44th “World Communications Day” Benedict XVI wrote:

> The world of digital communication, with its almost limitless expressive capacity, makes us appreciate all the more Saint Paul’s exclamation: “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel” (1 Cor 9:16) The increased availability of the new technologies demands greater responsibility on the part of those called to proclaim the Word, but it also requires them to become become more focused, efficient and compelling in their efforts.

His message was directed primarily to priests, whom he urged to embrace the internet with blogs, social networking and, where possible, multi-media:

> Priests stand at the threshold of a new era: as new technologies create deeper forms of relationship across greater distances, they are called to respond pastorally by putting the media ever more effectively at the service of the Word. . .

When our savvy pontiff proposed a specifically priestly presence on the web, it was signaled his awareness that active Catholics, “lapsed” Catholics, those who had only the barest acquaintance with their baptisms, and even the wholly unchurched
“THE INCREASED AVAILABILITY OF THE NEW TECHNOLOGIES DEMANDS GREATER RESPONSIBILITY ON THE PART OF THOSE CALLED TO PROCLAIM THE WORD ...”

BENEDICT XVI
were visiting blogs, sharing apologetics videos and homilies, reading (sometimes for the first time in their lives) full encyclicals, without media filtration—and they were making arguments and reaching conclusions. Benedict recognized that the new mission front would be broached through a modem, and that the people surfing back and forth through what Father Robert Barron has called “the virtual Areopagus” (“The Virtual Areopagus: Digital Dialogue with the Unchurched,” The Church and the New Media, OSV 2011, 25-44)—from FirstThings.com to dotcommonweal, from Crisis Magazine to the National Catholic Reporter, from EWTN to the multi-faith integrators like Patheos.com and Beliefnet—would very soon be in need of shepherds capable of teaching, guiding and leading not from the rectory but through a router. The pope was perfectly right.

Avid viewers of cowboy films are familiar with a cinematic cliché: a new town has formed and the people are capably managing their day-to-days, but they are aware of encroaching elements—outsiders who visit, look around and interact superficially with the townsfolk. Tensions increase as everyone awaits the inevitable power-grab that is ingrained in human nature. One day, as the settlers and the encroachers prepare to stand-off, someone rides into town, and everyone knows that sooner or later, sides will be chosen and a battle will be engaged. When Benedict urged his priests into wide-open and barely-settled Cyberville Pass, this was precisely the image that came to my mind: here comes the Marshall and his posse, and we’re all in for a surprise.

Seven years into this adventure, I believe Benedict and his priests have moseyed into town at precisely the right moment. And having observed how the Holy Spirit maneuvers when given the room, I am not at all surprised at it.

†
As the first Sunday of Advent in 2011 came to a close, the lengthy process of preparation for the new translation of the Mass also concluded. With rare exceptions, the celebration of the Eucharist on this Sunday was surprisingly ordinary. Indeed, we all stumbled a bit in our first run through the new texts. Still by the third Sunday of Advent, the regulars of the parish had mastered most of their replies, beginning to fall back into the habitual back-and-forth that marked our familiarity with the previous translation.

Pastoral leaders should be pleased with the speedy formation of these new liturgical habits. The Mass is such an effective form of prayer precisely because of its regularity. The greater familiarity we have with our responses and the prescribed actions of the Mass, the more we are capable of entering into the Eucharist as prayer. We do not have to think about what to say or to do. Rather, we perform our parts with the confidence of the concert pianist who no longer needs to look at the keyboard to find Middle C; the driver, who no longer needs to remember that the brake is to the left of the gas pedal; the actor, who no longer has to think about characterization or staging but can simply perform the role of Hamlet. We become performers of the prayer of the Mass.

But, what constitutes excellence in such prayer? What does the Church perform in her prayer? These are questions that deserve constant attention from liturgy committees, liturgical catechists, youth ministers, as well as preachers and presiders. In fact, what was most striking to me, as a presenter on the third edition of the Roman Missal, is how few people understand what the Mass is about in the first place. Many participants in the Sunday Eucharist have learned the language of the Mass, without understanding any of its meaning—akin to a singer who knows how to pronounce the Latin text of the Salve Regina but never understands that the anthem is a hymn in praise of the Virgin Mary.
If the Church is to foster a deeper participation in the Eucharist, she will need to expand the theological imagination of those who participate in the rites. The following books may assist parishes, schools, and dioceses as they strive to develop the next stage of liturgical formation.

**Alexander Schmemann**

**The Eucharist**

Translated by Paul Kachur
Crestwood, NY
St. Vladimir’s, 1987

For those interested in providing a more robust liturgical formation in the Roman rite of the Mass, Schmemann’s *The Eucharist* may seem like a strange choice. A mystagogical commentary on the Divine Liturgy of the Orthodox Church, Schmemann’s *The Eucharist* is at times hostile toward the influence of the medieval Eucharistic doctrine of the West on Eastern Orthodoxy (46). In fact, the genius of Schmemann’s commentary is not in his account of Western Eucharistic doctrine or practice—it is his retrieval of a Eucharistic theology intrinsically connected to the Church’s identity (24). As he attends to the “sacraments” of the Divine Liturgy (assembly, kingdom, entrance, Word, faithful, offering, unity, anaphora, thanksgiving, remembrance, the Holy Spirit, and communion), he discovers the hidden wisdom of the Church’s Eucharistic practice. This discovery, of course, yields rich insight for participation in the Divine Liturgy.

In particular, Schmemann comes to three insights drawn from the *ordo* of the Divine Liturgy vital to a fruitful participation in the Roman rite. First, the Eucharist is the Sacrament in which the Church performs her truest identity. In assembling, “We need to be thoroughly aware that we come to the temple not for individual prayer but to assemble together as the Church, and the visible temple itself signifies and is but an image of the temple not made by hands” (23). For the Eucharist
is not one of many equal actions that the Church performs, rather it is “the very manifestation and fulfillment of the Church in all her power, sanctity and fullness. Only by taking part in it can we increase in holiness and fulfill all that we have been commanded to be and do” (24). The Church is the sacrament of the Eucharist, an identity that is always a gift. And for this reason, the Eucharist is the Church’s sacramental entrance into the kingdom of God, into the heavenly liturgy through the visible signs of the Church’s prayer. Schmemann notes:

What does it mean to bless the kingdom? It means that we acknowledge and confess it to be our highest and ultimate value, the object of our desire, our love and our hope. It means that we proclaim it to be the goal of the sacrament—of pilgrimage, ascension, entrance—that now begins. It means that we must focus our attention, our mind, heart and soul, i.e., our whole life, upon that which is truly the “one thing needful.” Finally, it means that now, already in “this world,” we confirm the possibility of communion with the kingdom, of entrance into its radiance, truth and joy (47-48).

Thus, the Church’s Eucharistic celebration is a “sacramental” sharing in what the Church will one day become. A consequence is that the signs of the liturgy (including architecture, iconography, and music) should refer to this heavenly destiny.

Second, the Divine Liturgy (or the Mass) is Eucharistic in any of its parts. Schmemann is wary of isolating the “consecration” to a particular moment of the Eucharistic prayer (193). He writes:

The sacrament of the assembly, the sacrament of offering, the sacrament of anaphora and thanksgiving and, finally, remembrance, are a single sacrament of the kingdom of God, of a single sacrifice of Christ’s love, and therefore they are the sacrament of the manifestation, the gift to us of our life as sacrifice. For Christ took our life in himself and gave it to God. Man was created for the sacrificial life, life as love. He lost it—for there is no other life—in the falling away of his love form God. And Christ manifested this sacrifice as life and life as sacrifice in the self-giving of his love; he granted it as ascent to and partaking of the kingdom of God (210-11).

Every part of the Eucharist enters us into this logic of self-giving that is revealed in Christ’s sacrifice. And every action that the Church carries out within the liturgy is intended to recall this fact to our memory. The sacrifice we bring in bread and wine is a “sign” of the transformation of all creation through life in Christ (165-66). The purpose of the Eucharist is sacrifice, and every facet of the rite should lead us to a joyful thanksgiving and remembrance of this fact, a recollection of the origins of creation and the depth to which God’s love descended to bring us back to paradise (222). Therefore, entering the Church, praying the Gloria, attending to the Word of God in the Scriptures and the homily, praying the intercessions—these liturgical practices of the Mass cultivate the heart to offer the sacrifice of the Eucharist.

Lastly, the Divine Liturgy is indeed a separation from the world but never as sect or cult. Instead, as Schmemann writes,

…this exodus from the world is accomplished in the name of the world, for the sakes of its salvation. For we are flesh of the flesh and blood of the blood of this world. We are part of it, and only by us and through us does it ascend to its Creator…We separate ourselves
from the world in order to bring it, in order to lift it up to the kingdom, to make it once again the way to God and participation in his eternal kingdom (53).

Liturgical reform does not use the logic of the world, precisely because the world does not know the depth of what it needs in the liturgy. Schmemann is so hard on certain features of contemporary religious practice (the elevation of religious feeling above faith [144], clericalism [89], the replacement of economics for salvation [10]) because only in the Eucharist is the medicine for the world’s ills revealed. And if one creates a passive laity, or forms a person to enjoy religious feeling alone, then the logic of the Eucharist is forgotten: “In offering our life to God, we know that we are offering Christ—for he is our life, the life of the world and the life of life, and we have nothing to bring to God except him” (105). Because of Schmemann’s remarkable spiritual insights, historical knowledge, and theological wisdom, his commentary on the Divine Liturgy is indispensable to those catechists seeking to carry out Eucharistic formation in all parishes.

Edith M. Humphrey
Grand Entrance: Worship on Earth as in Heaven
Grand Rapids, MI
Brazos Press, 2011

If Schmemann’s The Eucharist provides a theological foundation for contemporary mystagogy, Edith Humphrey’s Grand Entrance is an astute analysis of the biblical roots and contemporary obstacles to celebrating “worship on earth as in heaven.” Humphrey begins her book with an observation: contemporary worship is primarily about the cultivation of self (8). Worship that becomes a matter of entertainment, of self-improvement and expression, fails to perform the proper function of worship: “responding to God’s own invitation, that we should see more and more clearly who God is, hear more and more clearly what he is saying, be more and more thankful about his mighty actions, and enter more deeply into his communion with us and his care for the world” (17). In chapters two and three, worship is elaborated upon through a careful reading of the Old and New Testaments. Humphrey argues that worship in the Scriptures is a gift from God, something that the human being enters into through a divine invitation. In the Old Testament, this entrance is a cleansing, an encounter with holiness manifested through God’s involvement in human history (31). In the New Testament, the physical nature of worship is internalized for we “learn that God’s people need not build shrines to hold God’s presence because they themselves will become portable tabernacles of the glory” (45). In both Testaments, there is an emphasis on the corporate invitation by God; and in the New Testament, the Christological and Trinitarian quality of this worship is drawn out. Worship is never about self-cultivation but God’s cultivation of his own people.

In chapters three and four, Humphreys continues to reflect upon the theme of worship as an entrance into heaven through attending to the Eucharistic liturgies of both East and West. For those with a background in liturgy, these two chapters are a
review of the major Eucharistic texts encountered in graduate school. But for parish groups, studying the Eucharist together for the first time, Humphrey offers an introduction to these texts according to the theme of the book: grand entrance.

Chapters five and six are the most intriguing of the book. Using the Scriptural and Eucharistic insights developed in chapters one through four, Humphrey evaluates a variety of experiences of worship including a Roman Catholic Mass, an Orthodox Divine Liturgy on the feast of the Dormition, an Anglican Service of the Word, a Presbyterian service in Lent, a worship service by the Salvationists at Christmas, an Emergent Church “liturgy” with a rough ordo, and two liturgies of the Chinese Church. While noticing that each group understands worship related as a grand entrance into God’s presence, she also found that “for some Christian congregations, worship is more often conceived as an aid to something else, not as a “selfless” expression directed toward the Lord alone” (153). Though each chapter has a series of discussion questions at the end, chapter five’s questions are especially helpful, inviting the parish to examine how truly its practice of worship reflects the robust theology of the previous four chapters. In chapter six, Humphrey concludes with a series of obstacles to heavenly liturgy, including an excessive focus on therapeutic celebration (159), an undue focus upon the community (162), heresy in music and preaching (170), experimentation that seeks novelty in worship (175), and the use of worship for one’s own purposes rather than to give adoration, thanksgiving, and confession to God (179).

Humphrey’s book, written as she was herself leaving the Anglican Communion for Orthodoxy, is a helpful one for parishes and congregations seeking to move beyond the worship wars. She is not arguing for a specific style of worship out of personal taste. Rather, through a robust Scriptural theology of worship, we come to see with Humphrey that worship is not about self-cultivation or entertainment but accepting God’s own song into our lips, a hymn that transforms us (200). I recommend this book in particular to liturgy committees, seeking a deeper background in their own planning of the liturgical life of the parish.

Yves Congar
At the Heart of Christian Worship: Liturgical Essays of Yves Congar

Translated and edited by Paul Philibert. Collegeville The Liturgical Press, 2010

In the last text, Paul Philibert translates for the first time five essays by the great ecclesiologist and ressourcement theologian Yves Congar on the nature of liturgical worship. What is so extraordinary about each of these essays is that despite their age (published in the 1960s), Congar’s writings remain salutary antidotes to the creeping gap between liturgy and life that threatens each parish today. The first essay addresses the way that preaching and liturgy should facilitate an encounter with the reality of God through sacramental signs. In particular, Congar calls for a catechesis that promotes a liturgical realism, which “is the internalization
of worship by the faithful, the development in their hearts of the fruitfulness of their prayer and their love” (9). Such an approach to liturgical catechesis will not simply explain the meaning of the signs but will also elucidate “the meaning that worship can have for their lives in the context of the problems and circumstances that they must live with” (9).

The second and third essays are stunning works of scholarship in which Congar retrieves a patristic and medieval understanding of the Church as offering the Eucharist. These essays are difficult, because they draw on an array of patristic and medieval sources. But, the essays also seem indispensable to a parish’s mystagogical program, precisely because they remind each member of the body of Christ that the Eucharistic offering is only complete in self-offering. The first of the two essays, “The Ecclesia or Christian Community as a Whole Celebrates the Liturgy,” argues that the whole Church is the subject of the Eucharistic offering, not simply the priest. Importantly, this does not mean that the laity consecrates the Eucharist. For this conclusion misses the point of the Church’s celebration of the Eucharist. For, “the eucharistic celebration cannot be reduced to a valid consecration. It is a liturgical act, and it achieves its objective only if it ensures at one and the same time the two ends of glorifying God and of sanctifying the faithful” (59). The importance of the latter is revealed in the next chapter, “The Structure of the Christian Priesthood.” For Congar argues that “In Jesus Christ, the worship that God wants is perfectly realized. This new worship surpasses the entire system of the law still linked to the immolation of external things. It proposes as the only real sacrifice that of persons who lovingly conform their will to the will of God” (77). Every member of the body of Christ is involved in offering the Eucharist, because each baptized Christian is called to this self-offering of the will. And the purpose of liturgical prayer is to assist us in offering ourselves to God, to make possible this gift of self. This is not to deny the validity of the ministerial priesthood, for it is the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood that capacitates, through God’s grace, the People of God in their offering: “The priesthood exists, beyond any sacramental activity, to excite and stimulate participation in the sacrifice of Christ, so as to bring about the sacrifice of human persons united to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ” (95). And the Eucharist, the sacramental sacrifice constitutive of the Church’s identity, could not exist without the ordained priesthood (64).

Congar’s essays on the Church’s Eucharistic offering and the priesthood are necessary reads for those pastoral ministers seeking to catechize on the renewed sacrificial language in the recent translation of the Mass. Such catechesis, as Congar notes, will result in a richer sense of how all Christian action in the world is intended to be priestly, receiving its power from the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist (98). And this seems like an insight, still not yet appropriated, for the new evangelization.

Congar’s last two essays in the book on the sacred and the secular and the meaning of Sunday are in some sense catechetical consequences of chapters two and three and may be skipped if short on time. Yet having advanced through the more difficult essays before it, the reader can simply enjoy the significance of Congar’s insights into the Eucharistic identity of the Church and the priesthood of the baptized. In particular, this book of essays would be appropriate for parish and diocesan groups seeking to link their own ministry to the liturgical life of the Church.
ECHOS OF CHURCH LIFE

BY KRISTI HAAS

After several rings around the rosy with a catechist’s three-year-old son and four-year-old daughter, a book of Bible stories for toddlers made its way from the shelf into my hands. Catechesis was in session in the rest of the building, and I was watching the little ones while their mother taught first grade. As we collected each other from our final fall down to the floor, I could tell the shy little brother was catching a case of the euphoria that spun in his big sister’s eyes. He too yearned to hear a story.

Where in the toddler Bible could I begin? Perhaps because I felt a little seasick, the illustration of the call of Simon the fisherman caught my eye (Lk. 5:1-11). I love the story, and I had recently asked some students in catechesis how they would feel if they were Simon, James, and John—after catching nothing, at Jesus’ invitation to cast their nets into the deep, when the abundance of fish weighed down the boat, when he said, “do not be afraid” (5:10).
The last line of the passage, however, had struck me more than ever as I read it aloud to the students: “When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him” (5:11). After proclaiming that line, I had instinctively avoided repeating, “how would you feel?” The students were already inside the story, in which Christ had stirred up the fishermen’s desire and made his abundance known to them. He was ready to move on. Instead, I had asked, “Do you want to follow him?” It was their turn to respond. Some heads nodded. Some said yes. I do not know all of the complicated causes, nor whether these causes include the idea that when in church, the best answer is the one your catechist wants to hear. But this was a place to start—a simple yes, a simple desire—a moment of evangelization.

Recalling this memory, I read the same story to the toddler siblings. Prepared this time for the stark ending, I read slowly, showed pictures, hoped the kids would say “yes,” and finally pronounced the last words on the page: “filled with fish.” Fish? Where was the rest? I stammered to summarize the ending myself: and the fishermen were amazed, and they followed him. Then I asked the little girl why Jesus wanted them to follow. Visions of Galilean marine life danced in her head. Overflowing with delight, she grinned, “because he wanted to catch more fish!”

My summary of the disciples’ response was not quite satisfactory. Had the book left out that part so important to evangelization, the abrupt ending that invites us to respond in the same way? No, I had simply neglected to turn the page. Too many pockets-full-of-posses, perhaps.

Through her declaration that Jesus was hungry for fish, though, the little girl revealed that the truncated story was missing something else, something just as important as the fishermen’s response. The last few verses also tell what was behind their response: the conversation, the explanation of the desire of Christ for them and their growing desire for him. He hastened to meet them in the midst of their grimy nets, and he made himself known to them in anticipation of their desire.

Evangelization is our participation in his haste. It is pointing out Christ who is already among us, already after us, already revealing God to the world. If he had simply walked away from the boats with no explanation, we would be left with piqued curiosity, a warm feeling, enough fish for a whole Lent—and no companion. We would not know what we longed for. Rather, he invites us to talk with him, to follow him, and to go into “the vast and complicated world” today to announce his invitation into God’s still burning love (Evangelii Nuntiandi §70).

That love is catching.