Chapter 10

Handing on the Faith
The Need for Total Catechetical Education
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Other essays in this collection attend to the where and what of educating in faith—the context and content. My assigned task is to reflect on the how, on ways of “handing on the faith” that might be effective in our sociocultural context and true to the tenets of Catholic Christian faith. First, a comment on the subtitle of the essay; it signals a foundational conviction toward my overall proposal, so let me show my hand at the outset.

Many authors make a distinction between religious education and catechesis. They think of the former as teaching the content of religious tradition(s), as more intent on information than formation. On the other hand, they view catechesis as socializing people into Christian identity, as more formative in its dynamic and purpose. Some authors even favor “a divorce” between religious education and catechesis.1 I reject this dichotomy as reductionist for both,2 insisting instead that religious education and catechesis are essential to each other; in practice they must function as symbiotic.

When it helps, religious education and catechesis might be distinguished as dual emphases within “handing on the faith”; a particular context might focus on one more than the other—compare the responsibilities of formal program to family. Yet, we need religious education that lends a thorough knowledge, understanding, and conviction of Catholic faith—enhancing catechesis; and likewise catechesis that socializes and renews people in Christian identity—as well informed. To signal the necessity of both and their partnership, and to avoid awkward repetition, I favor the phrase catechetical education throughout this essay.

Then, the term “total” in my subtitle intimates a comprehensive and community-centered paradigm that forges a coalition of parish, family, and school/program, engaging every member and all aspects of each in sharing faith together. Here I echo a number of other essays in this collection that emphasize the need for a communal approach to catechetical education. As William Dinges proposes wisely, the task of handing on the faith “is a profoundly sociological one”; it requires “handing on the community” as well. The body of my essay will unpack how we might go about it.

The Ground Gained

Contemporary catechetical education has more than its share of critics and criticisms, many justified. This essay describes the inadequacy of the now dominant schooling/program paradigm and proposes that we move beyond it—though without leaving it behind—toward a thoroughly communal approach. Yet, we must retain “the ground gained” by contemporary catechesis and build upon it, rather than jettisoning its achievements. The General Directory for Catechesis3 (hereafter GDC) notes that “Catechetical renewal, developed in the church over the last decades, continues to bear very welcome fruit” (#24). But many aspects of this renewal are but tender seedlings; we need to nurse them along rather than uprooting or trampling underfoot.

The modern catechetical movement might be dated from the turn of the twentieth century (circa 1900) and what was known as the “Munich Method.” This movement amounted to bringing more participative and conversational styles of teaching into catechetical education,4 attempting to learn from what was then emerging as modern pedagogy.5 Its dynamics of preparation (getting learners interested), presentation, explanation, and application were a significant departure from rote memorization,6 and encouraged students to integrate the content of faith with their everyday lives—a hallmark of contemporary catechetical education.7

With the founding of the Religious Education Association (REA) in 1903, a profession began to emerge to lend well-trained leaders to the Church’s educational ministry. At first predominantly Protestant, the ecumenical movement brought many Catholics into the REA, as well as to bond in specifically Catholic organizations, like the National Conference of Catechetical Leaders. In 1971, the Association of Professors and
Researchers in Religious Education (APRRE) was founded and serves as the guild of academic scholars for the discipline in North America (some 350 members).

Religious education continues to develop as an academic discipline, offering graduate programs of study (e.g., at Boston College) and publishing scholarly research. Mediating between theology and education, the discipline also draws insights from the social sciences—the psychology of learning and human development, the sociology of knowledge and community, the anthropology of symbols and culture, and so on. And guilds of scholars have emerged in other parts of the world that work to develop the foundations of catechetical education and lend insights from and for diverse cultures.

Within pastoral practice, there has been a common charge that the textbooks which emerged in the aftermath of Vatican II fell short in presenting the content of Catholic faith. Whatever excesses or deficiencies there may have been during those experimental days, however, have been fully corrected. Anyone who claims otherwise has not reviewed the mainline catechetical curricula currently available for grades K to 8. The half dozen most widely used series may vary a little in style but all reflect a thorough catechetical education in Catholic faith, with sound theology and engaging pedagogy. All employ a scope and sequence that tells “the whole story” of Catholic faith, presented according to developmental readiness and through a spiral curriculum that catechizes core themes (e.g., Eucharist) at each grade level.

All the religion curricula now used by Catholic schools and parishes have been judged “in conformity with the Catechism of the Catholic Church” by the committee established by the American bishops to “Oversee the Use of the Catechism.” In fact, there is growing concern that in its monitoring for orthodoxy, this committee is unduly insistent upon technical formulas of faith—often language beyond the readiness of children and impeding their personal appropriation of it. Meanwhile, let us put to rest the stereotype that contemporary catechetical series do not represent Catholic faith; they do, with an engaging pedagogy that encourages children to make it their own in their heads, hearts, and lives.

Of course, contemporary catechetical education is not limited to graded curricula. Think of all its other expressions that have emerged since Vatican II: the sacramental preparation programs that actively engage parents; the RCIA, likely the most effective innovation/revival of this era; the service component now “required” by many schools and parish programs; the initiatives in youth and young adult faith; the increase in parish faith sharing groups, usually focused on Scripture; family-centered programs that correlate catechesis with the liturgy and lectionary; the emerging “generations of faith” approach that engages the whole parish and family in catechetical education and is very resonant with the proposal I make in this essay; and more.

True, young adult Catholics today cannot recite the formulas of faith as could a previous generation. However, Tom Beaudoin, reflecting the social research on young adult Catholics, argues that though many fall short on “linguistic” literacy, they have a far higher “performative” literacy in their faith than previous generations. He refers especially to their commitment to the works of justice and compassion. He may be correct. A recent survey here at Boston College indicated that 75 percent of our graduating seniors have volunteered in some kind of community service during their college years. Today’s young Catholic adults might be stretched to distinguish between the Immaculate Conception and the Virgin Birth, but they likely have a keener sense than my generation had that the works of justice and compassion are constitutive to Catholic faith. Let us build on all of these accomplishments.

Turning toward my proposal, total catechetical education amounts to a paradigm shift beyond schools and formal programs to reclaim the whole Church as catechist educator. I highlight “beyond” because I don’t intend to leave schooling and formal programs of instruction behind; bring them with us but do much more by intentionally engaging the whole family and parish in catechetical education. But to so expand our consciousness and practice toward a communal paradigm, we must first debunk the pervasive myth that education is synonymous with schooling of some kind.

Beyond Schools to Every Christian Person, Parish, and Family

Many times I’ve begun a course at Boston College by asking participants how “education in faith” is typically perceived in their culture. No matter where people come from or how they name it, the reigning stereotypes are fairly universal. A sample from a recent survey: children
in a classroom learning about religion; didactic instruction in religious knowledge; a teacher getting kids to memorize religious answers to questions they never ask; learning religious knowledge from a textbook; sitting at a desk being told what to believe as a Christian; or, a recent clincher, a one-hour, once-a-week drop-off that will "make y'er kids Catholic." Note that all presume some mode of schooling.

Catechist educators roundly reject such stereotypes as does the mind of the Church, and yet we should be sobered by their tenacity. Truth is that our sense of the agency of all baptized Christians to share and grow in faith, of the responsibility of parents to be "the first educators of their children in the ways of faith" (Rite of Baptism), of the community life and ministries of the parish as its most effective curriculum, has been dulled if not nullified by the schooling paradigm for catechetical education.

The notion of universal education emerged slowly in the Western world and represented a major breakthrough in social consciousness. Plato first made the philosophical argument that all citizens should be educated (though "citizen" here included less than 10 percent of the male population). The first real attempt came when the Emperor Charles Magne decreed (circa 800) that the monastic schools must open to all boys of the empire, not only to those interested in becoming monks. Note: that girls should have equal access to schooling would take another thousand years.

The watershed for schools came with the great Reformation catchcry of sola scriptura, calling all Christians to read the Bible, thereby encouraging universal literacy. A particular catalyst was Martin Luther's letter of 1524 to the German nobles urging them to establish and fund schools that would educate every child—boys and girls. They did, and thus began the public school system of the Western world. Note well, however, that Luther never intended schooling to replace family or community education. In fact, he advised that boys attend school for no more than two hours each day and girls for only one, lest their schooling diminish their education at home and in the community around them.11

Alas, Martin's caution fell on deaf ears. Before long, Western culture had bought hook, line, and sinker into the schooling paradigm, equating universal education—a fine ideal—with universal schooling. The latter became a totalizing affair in that it subsumed everything that could pass for education, with the parental role reduced to seeing to it that children attend a didactic process by professional teachers in an institution designed to "school" them. Though the professionalizing of teaching was a breakthrough, its unfortunate underside was the impression that amateurs—like parents or neighbors—have nothing to contribute to the education of children. Huckleberry Finn said that he tried not to let schooling interfere with his education; the rest of the Western world wasn't nearly so wise.

We must deeply appreciate the work done over the years by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD)—often against great odds—and by Catholic parochial schools, whose very existence reflects heroic sacrifices on the part of many people. And indeed, schools, in general, are fine educational endeavors. However, the schooling paradigm has colonized our modern consciousness and especially regarding education in faith. When we think of "handing on the faith" we simply must stop equating this with a school/program project and instead reclaim the notions that all Christians are responsible to share their faith, and that catechetical education must be a communal effort that intentionally engages every Christian community—family, parish, and bonded group. Let us imagine that the whole Church is catechetical more than does catechesis as one thing among many others.

Everything about the Church and everything it does in the world should be intentionally crafted to nurture people in faith. The Risen Christ gave the mandate to evangelize and teach to the Christian community assembled on that hillside in Galilee, and everyone present received the same commission (see Mt 28:16–20). Catechesis cannot be delegated to a select few or to a particular agency; by baptism, every Christian person, family, and parish is responsible for it.

In particular, a Christian family cannot delegate its responsibilities to a parochial school or parish program. Vatican II reiterated that "parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children." Then, to drive home the point, it added, "Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it." Alas, such rhetoric can be counterproductive—only encouraging guilt—if parents hear "education" as "schooling," as demanding that they be more didactic with their children, sitting them down regularly for periods of instruction from a textbook. Rather, the parental catechetical
role is much more one of attending to the socializing power of the home, intentionally crafting its common life to nurture in Christian identity.

Whole and Communal Faith Requires Total Catechetical Education

The essays in this collection on the context of catechesis make abundantly clear that our contemporary situation poses tremendous challenges to “handing on the faith.” Indeed, it would seem to have been easier when most Catholics lived in “life-style enclaves” that provided the subculture socialization to initiate and sustain people in Catholic identity. Though we can never return to such “good old days,” we must retain the insight reflected there — it still takes a family and a village to raise a Christian. We simply need to be much more intentional and find contemporary ways to do whole community catechesis.

In addition to the demands of our postmodern world, however, total catechetical education is warranted by the very nature of Christian faith itself, and particularly as it pertains to the identity of a person and community. Karl Rahner claimed that Vatican II revolutionized catechesis by redefining Christian faith as a holistic affair. His point was that when faith was defined as belief in stated doctrines — the dominant sentiment of the Council of Trent (1545-63) — then catechesis could be done by a catechism that summarizes the beliefs to be taught in a school by a teacher. Two great blessings of the Second Vatican Council was that it reclaimed Christian faith (1) as engaging the whole person — one’s identity — and, (2) as radically communal.

Catholic Christian faith has a cognitive aspect in which a person needs to be informed and to reach personal conviction; an affective dimension that encourages prayer, worship, and a relational spirituality; and a behavioral requirement that demands living “the way” of Jesus as lifelong conversion into holiness of life. Thus, Christian faith should engage the whole person — head, heart, and hands — shaping our beliefs, relationships, and ethics. It should be the defining foundation of people’s total “being” — as both noun and verb, who they are and how they live. Echoing the breadth of its Great Commandment, to be Christian is to invest one’s whole mind, heart, and strength as a disciple of Jesus.

And to what end are Christian disciples to invest their whole person, to define their identity? Jesus summarized his own sense of purpose — and thus of discipleship to him — as living for God’s reign. To believe in the Christ of faith demands that we invest ourselves in the commitments of the historical Jesus. We must give our whole selves over to doing God’s will of love and compassion, peace and justice, wholeness and fullness of life for all, “on earth as in heaven.” To be Christ-centered in our catechesis is to forge our identity around commitment to the reign of God à la “the way” of Jesus. This point — the unity of being Christ-centered and committed to God’s reign — is summarized well by the GDC when it refers to Jesus with the lovely title, “catechist of the Kingdom of God” (#163).

That Christian faith is so whole, so constitutive of identity, is precisely why it is deeply communal as well. The communal nature of being Christian was evident from the beginning, with roots in God’s call to Abraham and Sarah to become the parents of a people. The first Christians had such a communal understanding of their identity that Paul used the rich metaphor of the human body to describe them, urging all members to work together as the Body of Christ, alive by the Spirit in the world. “In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jew or Greek, slave or free person, and we were all given to drink of the same Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13).

Vatican II was a watershed in returning Catholics to the communal nature of Christian faith, and to the agency of each baptized member for the mission of the Church in the world. Over and over it restated in one way or another that the Church must function as a community, and that all the baptized “share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ.” Thus baptism calls us to “full, conscious, and active participation” in the Church’s worship — to be a priestly community; to side with those “who are poor or in any way afflicted” — to be a prophetic community; and “to express (our) opinion on things which concern the good of the Church” — to be a co-responsible community.

These dual emphases of Christian faith — holistic and communal — make imperative the proactive participation of family and parish in catechetical education. If it amounted to no more than teaching people what Christians believe — the cognitive content — then catechetical education could be done by some kind of schooling alone. But because being Christian pertains to one’s whole identity, and requires active membership in a community of disciples, a schooling model can help but will not be sufficient. Though good instruction in “the faith” is imperative, it takes
something more to form the Christian being of people. To nurture Christian identity requires socialization and inculturation by Christian faith communities — and the primary candidates are family and parish, with every member accepting responsibility for the task.

On the matter of personal identity, all the social sciences agree that we become who we become — in large part — through the influence of our sociocultural contexts. We interiorize the worldview, value system, and self-image mediated to us from our communities, and nothing is more influential than the primary socialization of family and neighborhood. So, coupling this consensus of the social sciences with the holistic and communal nature of Christian faith — and stating the obvious — to raise a person with a Polish identity requires a Polish family and community, to raise a Hispanic person takes a Hispanic family and community, and to raise a Christian person requires a Christian family and community.

No “One Way” Alone but the Broadest Coalition

Christian faith as whole and communal means that there is no one program for doing catechetical education; there is no sure or easy procedure for handing on the faith. There have been a series of programmatic proposals of late that, though worthy, are piecemeal and cannot deliver the easy salvation that their proponents promise. One can even detect some naïveté in the GDC when it claims that all catechetical education should be modeled on the catechumenate — as if this is the panacea. I don’t believe any one program or approach will ever again be able — if one ever was — to educate effectively in Christian faith. Instead, we need to make our best efforts on all fronts, and to weave a grand coalition of family, parish, and school/program into a seamless garment that provides total catechetical education. So:

- Not the “program” or “school” alone can fulfill the Church’s responsibilities for catechetical education, although a parish program or parochial school with trained catechists and good curricula are indispensable to handing on Christian faith;
- Not the “parish” alone can do all catechetical education, though a vibrant local faith community is vital, and every aspect of parish life can be structured to educate in faith;
- Not the “family” alone can be the sole catechist, though its influence is enormous and its common life can be crafted to nurture Christian identity and commitment;
- Not the liturgy alone can hand on the faith, though nothing is more effective to foster people’s faith than good liturgy, or more hazardous to faith than poor liturgy;
- Not the lectionary alone can provide the scope and sequence for “the whole Story” of Catholic faith, though lectionary-based curricula can bond liturgy and catechesis, and help to recenter the Scriptures for Catholic Christians;
- Not the (published) curriculum alone, though the texts and media used in schools and programs should reflect a thorough and theologically sound presentation of Catholic faith with pedagogy that actively engages participants in the teaching/learning dynamic;
- Not catechist educators alone can bear all responsibility for faith education, though well-informed and formed catechists who are credible witnesses to what they teach are vital agents of handing on the faith;
- Not the catechumenate alone, though when done well it is most effective for initiating adults into Christian community and its values can inspire all catechetical education.

Instead of any one way alone, total catechetical education demands:

- an intentional coalition of “family,” “parish,” and “program/school”
- involving all aspects of each — their whole communal life
- engaging all members as teachers and learners, sharing faith together
- across the life-cycle from cradle to grave — in “permanent catechesis” (GDC)
- informing and forming each other’s identity in whole and communal Christian faith
- as disciples of Jesus Christ for God’s reign in the world.

This shift toward total catechetical education requires us to continue doing catechesis well as a ministry of the Word, but to also recognize and harness the catechetical potential of all the Church’s other ministries. And this must be effected by every Christian person and parish, family, and school/program.
Since the early days, the Church has described its core ministries as \textit{koinonia}, requiring it to be a community that \textit{witnesses} to Christian faith; \textit{leitourgia} as requiring the public work of \textit{worshiping} God together; \textit{diakonia} which demands care for people’s physical and spiritual \textit{welfare}; and \textit{kerygma} which is fulfilled by evangelizing, preaching, and teaching God’s \textit{word} of revelation that comes through Scripture and tradition. So, we can summarize the Church’s core ministries as \textit{witness, worship, welfare, and word}. I place \textit{word} last because it is the obvious concern of programmatic education in faith, whereas we need to raise catechetical consciousness around the other three functions of the Church’s ministry. Let’s imagine every parish, family, and school/program as fulfilling each of the four — as appropriate to their context — and doing so with a catechetical consciousness.

\textbf{The Whole “Family” as Catechetical Educator}

Beyond the two-parent ideal, “family” must also include extended and blended families, single-, double-, and triple-parent families; in fact, any \textit{bonded network of domestic life} can function as a family for faith education. The Second Vatican Council reclaimed an ancient image of the family as “the domestic church.” If we take this seriously, then, in its own way, the family should participate in all of the Church’s ministries, and, I highlight here, do so with a catechetical consciousness.

\textit{Family as community of Christian witness} requires that the whole life of the home be suffused with the values and perspectives of Christian faith. The members must constantly review the family’s environment and atmosphere, lifestyle and priorities, relationships and gender roles, modes of discipline and accountability to each other, language patterns and conversations, work and recreation — every aspect — to monitor how well it reflects the convictions and commitments of Christian faith. If still caught in the schooling paradigm, we hear that parents are the primary catechetical educators as requiring them to become more didactic. But more important by far is their attention to the whole ethos of the home, its example, and the quality of shared family life. Everything about the Christian family should bear \textit{witness} to its faith; this is how it educates.

\textit{Family as a place of worship} calls it to integrate shared prayer, symbols, and sacred ritual into its patterns of daily life. As catechist, every Christian family needs its home liturgy to symbolize and celebrate, nurture and sustain its faith. I once asked an observant Jewish friend how she came by her strong Jewish identity; she immediately responded, “Oh, from the rituals in my home.” Surely every Christian family can create or rediscover — old Christian cultures had lots of them — sacred rituals for the home that will nurture the Christian identity of its members. Without family prayer — morning, night, grace — rituals and sacred symbols, the home is unlikely to nurture its members in faith.

\textit{Family as a place of human welfare} requires it to care for the spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being of its own members, rippling outward toward others in need and serving the common good of society. Family life must reflect love and compassion toward all, promoting justice within and without. If children grow up and adults dwell within a family that tries to live the social values of God’s reign, it will surely hand on this “constitutive” aspect of Christian faith effectively. A school or program can teach about justice, but people will be much more likely to live justly and commit to justice for all if they experience as much in their own families.

\textit{Family as a place of God’s Word} calls members to share their faith around Scripture and tradition, among themselves and in the broader community. Parishes and publishers must help parents — with resources, training, suggestions, support, encouragement, expectation — to integrate attention to God’s Word into the patterns and conversations of family life. Every catechetical series or curriculum must be crafted around partnership with parents, and should lend them the resources to be actively involved in the formal catechesis of their children. Modern parents are admirably intent to teach even the youngest children their numbers, alphabet, and so on. Why not be equally proactive and from an early age to handing on the language and symbols of faith?

\textbf{The Whole Parish as Catechetical Educator}

Elliot Eisner has written insightfully about the explicit, implicit, and null curricula of schools — what they formally teach, what they teach more subtly through the school’s environment, and what they teach by what is left out of the curriculum. Eisner’s schema is helpful in thinking about a parish as well; it helps us to recognize that everything about it educates, that the whole life of a parish is its curriculum. Indeed, ministry of \textit{the}
Word is a parish’s explicit curriculum. However, its shared life and all of its other ministries are its implicit curriculum—at least as significant as the explicit one—and a parish teaches by what it neglects to teach as well. For example, if a parish does not preach and do the works of justice, it actually teaches—by default—that justice is not constitutive of Christian faith. The key is for a parish to become conscious of how its whole life educates—or can miseducate—for Christian faith; it must intentionally craft all of its ministries to maximize their catechetical potential.

Parish as community of witness: A parish should reflect the Good News it proclaims, and be readily identifiable as a Christian community of faith, hope, and love. Beginning with Vatican II, official documents increasingly portray the Church as God’s “universal sacrament of salvation” (GDC #45). Recall Aquinas’s definition of a sacrament—a sacred symbol that causes what it symbolizes. As such, every parish should be struggling to realize and effect what it preaches. Members must constantly ask: Does the life of this parish—its worship, shared prayer, and spiritual nurture, its community ethos, modes of participation, and structures, its human services, outreach, and social values, its preaching, catechesis, and sharing faith programs—does everything about us bear credible witness to the way of Jesus? To the extent that a parish can say “yes,” it is an effective catechetical educator.

Parish as worshipping community: Stating the obvious, every parish must assemble as a Christian people to worship God together. For the majority of Catholics, Sunday Mass is their primary participation with their faith community. Now, the social sciences teach that a community shapes its people primarily through its symbols, and a people’s sacred symbols are the most formative of all because they have what anthropologist Clifford Geertz calls “an aura of ultimacy.” In sum, the quality of a parish’s liturgy is likely the measure of its effect as an educator in faith.

Now, the primary function of liturgy is to worship God. To cite Vatican II, “the sacred liturgy is above all things the worship of the divine Majesty.” So, to use liturgy to catechize in a didactic way would be an abuse of liturgy. On the other hand, precisely because it is so symbol-laden, the liturgy contains “abundant instruction for the faithful.” Referring to all the sacraments, the Council continued that “because they are signs they also instruct. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it.” So, likely the most effective strategy for a parish to educate well is to care for the quality of its liturgy. Pastoral practice of late reflects growing awareness that the liturgy and catechesis of a parish should be intimately linked, and there are many creative efforts to deepen their effective partnership. Indeed, catechesis is to prepare people for “that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy.” Likewise, as cited, good liturgy nourishes and strengthens faith. But beyond this formal partnership, there are many ways that liturgy, and especially Sunday Mass, can permeate the catechetical life of a parish. For example, parish meetings can begin with faith sharing around a scripture reading from the previous or upcoming Sunday; families can reflect together on what they heard from the readings or sermon; homes can have symbols or rituals that celebrate the liturgical seasons (Advent wreaths, Christmas cribs, Lenten fasts), and more.

Parish as community of welfare: Living the way of Jesus demands the works of compassion and mercy, of justice and peace. So, every parish must be a community that cares for human welfare—spiritual and physical, personal and social. It should offer people the inspiration and organization, the support and persuasion that prompts them to carry on this aspect of God’s saving work in the world. Diakonia is required of Christians by their faith. My added point here, however, is that it’s also required for the parish to be an effective catechetical educator. When a parish has outreach to the poor and marginalized, when it participates in the social struggles for justice and peace, then it most likely hands on the faith effectively.

Parish as community of Word: Every local Christian community—as well as the Church universal—must function with “the Scriptures together with sacred tradition as the supreme rule of faith.” It must constantly evangelize, preach, and teach this Word of God that is ever “expressed in human language.” A parish fulfills its ministry of the Word most eminently through the Sunday lectionary and preaching, and within its formal programs of catechetical education. However, the call to the Church by Vatican II that we recenter the Word of God at the core of our faith, and give all our people “easy access to sacred Scripture” is a long way from being realized. Though Catholics have made progress in becoming more familiar with the Bible, we need to redouble efforts
so that people have ready access to and personally appropriate God's revelation into their everyday lives.

There is much evidence that gatherings of people to share their faith around scriptural texts have a particular power to them. Such conversations in which people bring their lives to the text and the text to their lives are more likely than purely academic study to enable people to personally appropriate the spiritual wisdom of the biblical word, encouraging ongoing conversion and growth in holiness of life. Total catechetical education requires that explicit catechesis be "permanent...for the whole of life" (GDC #56). The community should be ever teaching and learning together, from cradle to grave, around God's Word that comes through Scripture and tradition.

The Whole "School" or "Program" as Catechetical Educator

"School" includes any church-sponsored school that educates in Christian faith. By "program" I mean every other formal effort at catechetical education — the graded parish program for children and adolescents, all adult religious education, RCIA, youth and young adult programs, faith sharing groups, and so on. Thus, "school" and "program" epitomize the Church's intentional efforts to provide a formal curriculum of education in faith. The point I emphasize, however, is that formal programs of catechetical education should not limit themselves to being a ministry of the Word alone, but should integrate the other functions of ministry into their curriculum as well. The school or program should contribute to formation as well as information in faith.

Witness as an Aspect of School and Program. The whole environment of the school or program should reflect the communal values of Christian faith — respect and reverence for every person, hospitality and care toward all, and living witness to faith, hope, and love. Years ago, John Dewey argued that schools should reflect the values of a democratic society — if they intend to educate people for democracy. Surely a Christian school or parish program should be suffused with the values and commitments of Christian faith. Further, all formal catechetical education should encourage students to participate actively in their parish community, nurturing their ecclesial identity.

Worship as an Aspect of School and Program. I'm not suggesting that the Catholic school or catechetical program try to duplicate the parish in its ministry of worship. Yet, opportunities for shared prayer and liturgy, for experiences like retreats and spiritual mentoring should be integral to every formal catechetical curriculum. And the very pedagogy of a class or gathering can include moments of prayer and contemplation, of ritual and celebration. Likewise, the effectiveness of formal catechetical curricula is enhanced by correlation with the liturgical year and engagement with the local parish liturgy.

Welfare as an Aspect of School and Program. In parishes and schools, "service programs" have come to be recognized as powerfully effective in faith education. This is as it should be. We can probably do a better job in the formal curriculum, however, of giving students opportunity to name and reflect on their service experiences, and to integrate their reflections with Catholic social teachings. When corporate decisions are made, the catechetical program — within its limits — should offer students the opportunity to carry them out.

We must stop thinking of works of compassion, justice, and peace simply as an outcome of catechetical education; such praxis is a source of formation in faith as well. Doing Christian things is not just the consequence of knowing our faith, but a source of such "knowing." As Jesus explained, when we live according to his teachings, we become true disciples, and thereby come to "know" the kind of truth that sets us free (see Jn 8:31–32). Note the sequence he proposed here — from praxis, to relationship, to knowledge — though, of course, it can be reversed as well. My point is that when catechetical programs sponsor the works of justice and compassion, such works are not simply an "outcome" or ancillary but are integral to the curriculum.

God's Pedagogy as Our Own

Within the comprehensive umbrella of total catechetical education, we need an effective and appropriate pedagogy, an intentional way of structuring teaching/learning events. Such pedagogy should be capable of honoring the values of both catechesis and religious education. This means that it should nurture people's Christian identity with a thorough knowledge of and conviction about their faith, and conversely, teach the
wisdom of Christian faith in ways likely to form and transform people's identity.

Regarding pedagogy, the GDC makes perhaps its most insightful proposal. It says that "the pedagogy of God," which was also reflected in "the pedagogy of Jesus," should be "the source and model of the pedagogy of faith" used by all catechetical educators (see esp. #139–147). At this point in a lengthy essay, I can only extrapolate and summarize how the GDC understands such "divine" pedagogy.

God enters into and is actively present through the events of human history. Thus, history is the locus of God's self-disclosure and saving grace; within their historical experiences, people encounter God and discern what God's revelation means for their lives. Over time, and guided by the Holy Spirit, the great Scriptures and traditions of Christian faith emerged from communities reflecting upon their experiences of God's presence and saving deeds, climaxing for Christians in the historical life of Jesus Christ. Now, people can inherit this "faith handed down" by learning the Scriptures and traditions that mediate this normative revelation. However, if people are to appropriate Christian faith as their own and be likely to live it, then our pedagogy now should be modeled on God's experiential pedagogy over time. In this light, the GDC suggests three guiding principles.

First, the teaching/learning dynamic must be an active and participative one; a docile reception of "the faith" is not sufficient. So, catechetical education should "promote active participation among those to be catechized" (#145), encourage "dialogue and sharing" (#159) among participants. Likewise, every participant "must be an active subject, conscious and co-responsible, and not merely a silent and passive recipient" (#167). And the rationale for this is both anthropological and theological: "The active participation of all the catechized in their formative process is completely in harmony, not only with genuine human communication, but specifically with the economy of Revelation and salvation" (#157).

Second, the teaching dynamic must draw upon and engage the lives of participants as integral to the curriculum. The GDC reiterates this point repeatedly. For example: "Catechesis is...realized in the encounter of the word of God with the experience of the person" (#150); "Experience is a necessary medium for exploring and assimilating the truths which constitute the objective content of Revelation" (#152 b); "The catechist must teach the person to read his [and her] own lived experience" because experience is "the locus" of "the pedagogy of the Incarnation" (#152 c).

Third and following on, the core dynamic of catechetical pedagogy should teach the faith tradition through and for people's lives. This means bringing together and integrating people's lives with the faith handed down, merging "life" and "Christian faith" into lived and living Christian faith. Thus, catechetical pedagogy should encourage "a correlation and interaction between profound human experiences and the revealed message" (#153). Again, "Catechesis...bridges the gap between belief and life, between the Christian message and the cultural context" (#205); it ever intends "to link orthodoxy and orthopraxis" (#237), intentionally "correlating faith and life" (#207).

Over many years, my own work has attempted to articulate a "shared Christian praxis approach" to catechesis and religious education. The ideal context of this approach is a community of conversation and active participation by all in sharing and learning faith together. It typically unfolds as a process of "brining life to Faith" and "brining Faith to life." It invites people to look at and reflect critically on their lives in the world. It encourages them to bring their own praxis to encounter, reflect upon and learn the wisdom of Christian Story and Vision. Then, more than correlation,²³ it invites people to integrate the Faith into their own lives, to personally appropriate it, and to choose to live it as "faith alive" in the world.²⁴

Such a pedagogy bonds catechesis and religious education, and as a communal process is eminently appropriate to total catechetical education. By God's grace working through some such overarching paradigm and participative pedagogy, I'm confident that we can effectively hand on the faith in our time and place.

Faith and Culture

Following the Boston College conference that gave rise to these papers, I'm prompted to add a reflection on the relationship between "faith and culture." I promised at the beginning of this essay to propose a way to hand on the faith that might be effective in our sociocultural context as well as true to the tenets of Catholic faith. But have I offered as
much and what is the relationship between “faith” and “culture” that
total catechetical education both presumes and promotes? (Of course,
“culture” and “faith” are ever intertwined but let us set them out as
distinct in order to imagine their most fruitful relationship by way of
handing on the faith.)

Some colleagues at the conference and their papers here reflect a
pessimistic assessment of contemporary culture, as if the “cultural cate-
chesis” (Griffiths) is entirely negative and only to be resisted by people
of Christian faith. Accompanying this bleak sentiment and by contrast,
there was a very positive assessment of traditional formulas of Christian
faith, presuming them to reflect “the Lord’s style of language” (Wilken),
and certainly not to be adapted to a cultural context. I find that neither
position reflects a distinctly Catholic attitude.

Similar to its anthropology that the person, though capable of sin, is
not inherently or inevitably sinful, Catholicism’s cosmology sees what
people create — their cultures — as most likely both graced and sinful.
Though we and our cultures are “originally” capable of sin, we are also
originally graced, and more prone, by God’s grace, toward good than
evil. So, we can expect every culture to have both positive and nega-
tive aspects, things that Christian faith can build upon and aspects that
Christians should resist and work to change.

In the phrase of Justin Martyr, writing circa A.D. 150, every culture
has “seeds of the Word” already present within it; these can be brought
to fruition by encounter with the explicit Word of God through Scrip-
ture and tradition. Indeed, every culture will have “weeds to the Word”
as well, for which Christians must be critically alert and determined to
resist. Yet, a guiding principle might be that there is never a (totally) God-
less culture; God’s revealing presence and saving grace can be recognized
and encountered within every cultural situation.

If there is never a Godless culture, likewise, is never a culture-
less Christianity — as if we have some ahistorical expression that comes
immediately from God, instead of being mediated through human lan-
guage and its cultural context. From the beginning, Jesus Christ, the Son
of God, was “made flesh” at a particular time and place; both he and the
Gospel he preached reflected the culture and mores of his context. Since
then, and instead of standing over against or above the world, the wiser
attitude has been that this Christian faith must become incarnate in every
time and place. The faith must become as indigenous to every culture,
while remaining true to its core tenets and convictions. This requires con-
stant “inculturation” of the Gospel that it might be heard — according
to the mode of the receiver — in new times and places.

Vatican II called for such a “living exchange” between faith and cul-
ture. Pope John Paul II said that “the synthesis between culture and
faith is not just a demand of culture, but also of faith. A faith which does
not become culture is a faith which has not been thoroughly received, not
fully lived out.” So, inculturation might be understood as an “exchange
of gifts” (John Paul II) between faith and culture, whereby Christian
faith, remaining true to its core, becomes native within each culture,
thereby enhancing both the local culture and the mosaic of Christian
faith with a unique expression.

All catechetical education is faced with the task of incultrating Chris-
tian faith in its particular time and place. To this end, catechetical
educators must encourage what I understand as a dialectical exchange
between faith and culture. By dialectic here I don’t mean Marx’s misin-
derstanding of Hegel as thesis, antithesis, and synthesis; rather I intend
dialectic in the sense that Plato imagined it as the give and take of good
conversation, as mutual affirming, questioning, and moving on to new
possibilities.

So, as Christian faith encounters a culture, there will be aspects of
the culture that Christianity will affirm, aspects that it will challenge
and may even condemn, and ways that it will bring reform and new life
to the culture. Likewise, as a receiving culture appropriates a cultural
expression of Christian faith, there will be aspects that the receiving
culture will readily affirm, aspects within the culture-laden expression
of faith that the receiving culture may challenge or renew, and ways
that the receiving culture will forge its own unique Christian expression,
enriching the universal mosaic of the Church.

One need only note the rich diversity of cultural faith expressions
within Catholicism — Italian, Polish, French, Hispanic, African, Asian,
American, to name a few — to recognize that integrating faith and cul-
ture, to the enhancement of both, has been a rich aspect of the Catholic
charism throughout history. And it has managed to welcome such diver-
sity while maintaining a deep bond of communion and unity in faith.
Inculturation can work!

Reflecting further on the two-way dialectic, we can readily presume
that Christian faith can contribute to every culture, but may be more
reluctant to recognize how a cultural context can enhance the cultural expression of Catholicism that it receives. At the Boston College conference, Bishop Cupich had a helpful way of explaining how a culture can enhance “the faith” — not in the latter’s essence but rather by bringing out something that had remained latent. In his phrase, a culture can bring out something of Christian faith that had been a “recessive gene.” Let me give one of my favorite examples.

Catholicism’s encounter with modernity helped to bring forth its recessive gene about human rights. The grand listing by Pope John XXIII in Pacem in terris and the championing of human rights that we find in Vatican II’s Gaudium et spes was initially brought to the fore of Christian faith when the Church was confronted by the French Revolution and the modern quest for liberty, fraternity, and equality. In fact, throughout much of its prior history, the Church preached and practiced to the contrary. But modernity forced the Church to return to its sources and to see, as if for the first time, that indeed all people are created in the divine image, entitling all to equal rights and dignity, that the prophets had championed as much, that Jesus had amplified such social teaching, and so on. Of course, it was “all there already,” but it took modernity to bring it to the fore.

When Catholics bring a dialectical attitude to American society, we will indeed find aspects to be condemned — its materialism, militarism, racism, lack of respect for the rights of the unborn and the elderly, and more. But there will also be aspects of American culture from which Catholics and our Church can learn — structures of oversight and accountability, an appreciation for public discourse that especially concerns unsettled issues, the practice of consultation with all members of a community, and so on.

Total catechetical education as I’ve briefly outlined it here has the potential to “hand on the faith” in our postmodern culture, doing so in ways “according to the mode of the receiver.” By God’s grace, it seems to be our best hope to promote lived and living Catholic faith.

Chapter 11
Handing on the Faith through Community-Based Faith Formation
Our Common Challenge and Shared Privilege
BISHOP BLASE CUPICH

The shadows inched longer over the narrow streets of the small port city I was visiting last fall. I knew it was time to head back to my hotel. Sunset would soon turn into nightfall. It was then that one of the street vendors caught my eye. He had wrapped up his wares early and was joking with the others as he said farewell for the day. Many youths like him from North Africa are attracted to tourist towns along the southern Italian coast. They make enough to get by and hope to make enough to get ahead by hawking their hand-carved wares, knock-off watches, and clever street toys for visitors.

As he left his friends, the young tall black man walked with purpose along the same street leading to my hotel. Curious, I held back a bit to see where he was heading. Suddenly, he made a sharp left down an alleyway. Reaching the same corner, I spotted him about fifty yards ahead at a spigot. He had turned it on and was washing his hands, face and feet. He then pulled out of his sack a tightly knitted carpet. Placing it on the pavement, he faced eastward, bent down on all fours and began to pray. I understood. The setting sun was calling him to join his distant Muslim family in prayer to Allah, the One God.

Later that evening I recounted this scenario for my travel companions. They shared my admiration for the young man’s faith and how his relationship with God obviously centered his life. One woman remarked that the practice of his Muslim faith was all the more remarkable given that he was living in an alien land and culture. In all likelihood there was