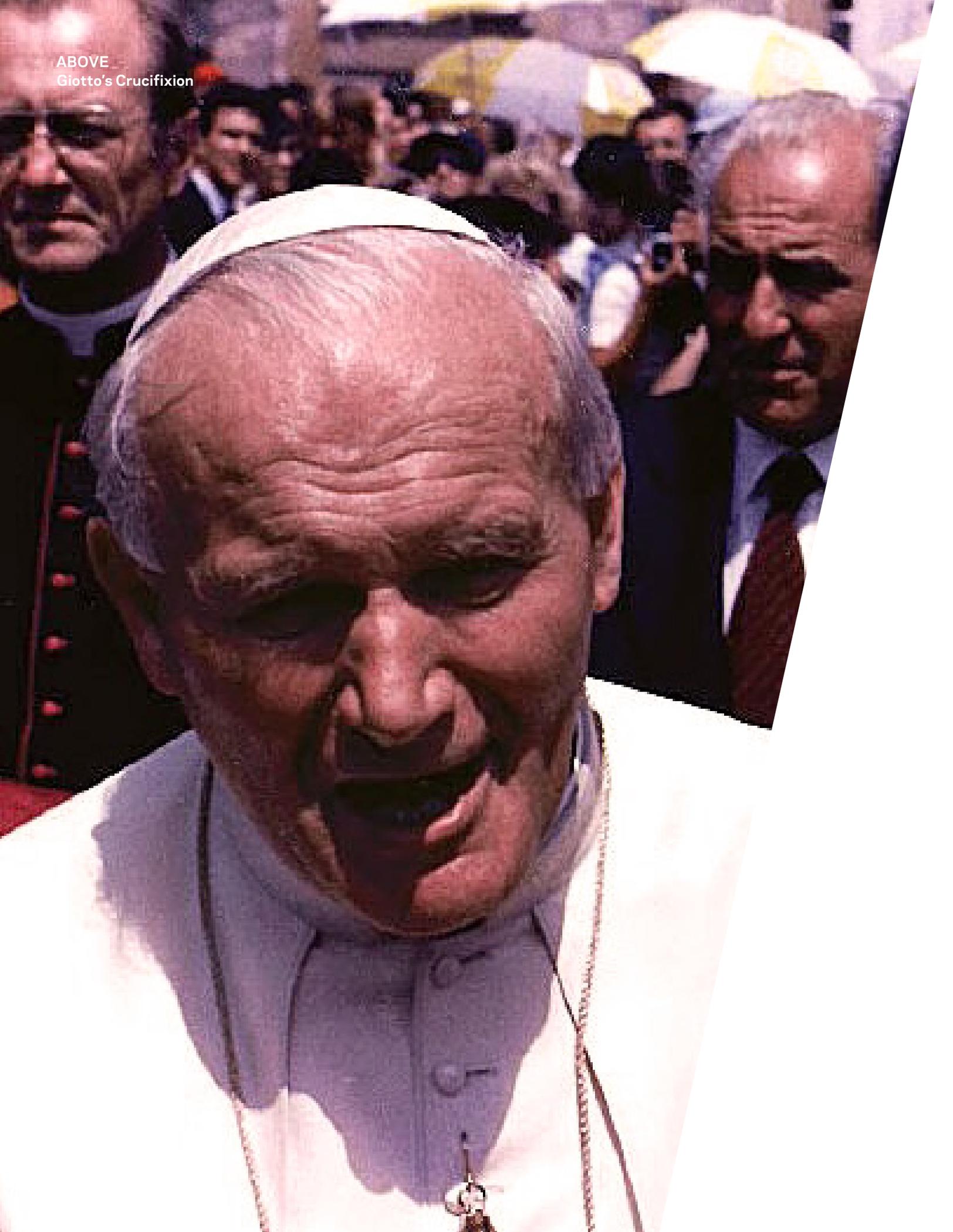


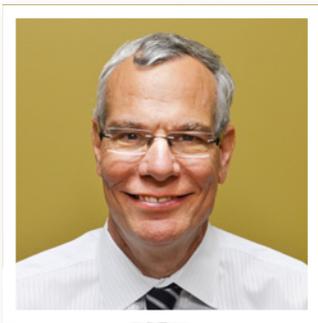
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Giotto's Crucifixion



EVANGELIZATION, CATECHESIS, AND THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

THE CATECHETICAL LEGACY OF BLESSED POPE JOHN PAUL II

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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 *Catechesi 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 Eterovi 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



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John Paul II's Funeral

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 *Catechesis 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

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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:



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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.

