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CATECHETICAL REVIEW

Resources for Renewal: The USCCB's Role in Evangelizing Catechesis

By Fr. Daniel J. Mahan

“Father, what accounts for the extraordinary number of adults who received the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil this year?” This question has been posed to me countless times since that glorious night, “the night that even now, throughout the world, sets Christian believers apart from worldly vices and from the gloom of sin, leading them to grace and joining them to his holy ones.”[1]

It’s a phenomenon observed throughout the United States. So, how do we answer? We could attribute the record numbers to the Eucharistic Revival and the Eucharistic Congress of 2024. We could also give credit to the good work of apostolates such as FOCUS and NET Ministries. Various influences often intersect to produce wondrous outcomes, so identifying a main cause is tricky. At the very least, the emergence of so many neophytes from the waters of baptism this past Easter is clear testimony to the Holy Spirit at work in the Church. As a senior parishioner exclaimed to me on Easter Sunday, “The Holy Spirit is alive and well!”

That being said, I would like to shine a light on the important work being carried out by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops through its Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis and its Subcommittee on the Catechism. The U.S. bishops’ focus on an *evangelizing catechesis* might not top the list of stated causes of the impressive number of newly baptized this year, but I think it no coincidence so many gifts have been given to the Church soon after our shepherds have put forth this initiative.

Recent Developments from the USCCB



In an earlier article, titled “From Information to Transformation: Changing Approaches to Catechetical Texts,” I traced recent changes in the focus of the Subcommittee on the Catechism.[2] From its inception in 1992 as the Ad hoc Committee on the Use of the Catechism, the subcommittee has reviewed proposed catechetical textbooks to ensure their conformity to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in both authenticity and completeness. Following the 2020 publication of the new *Directory for Catechesis* by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, the subcommittee changed the way in which the review of catechetical materials took place:

- Instead of reviewing materials in their penultimate draft, the subcommittee adopted an approach that would accompany publishers from the beginning of a new resource’s creation. The subcommittee established the Institute on the Catechism to carry out this process of accompaniment and to help promote the bishops’ vision of an evangelizing catechesis.
- Instead of judging only whether the catechetical material was in conformity to the *Catechism* in its authenticity and completeness, the subcommittee established guidelines for resources to encourage Christian behavior and interior formation. Such lessons were already integrated into most catechetical series, but they did not have consistency. Without losing sight of the critical importance of solid and faithful cognitive content, the bishops now provide guidelines for catechetical materials to inspire a deeper love of the Lord and his Church and to motivate learners to put their Catholic faith into practice in their daily lives in concrete, practical ways.
- Instead of setting forth goals only for student texts, the bishops now provide goals for teacher and catechist materials, as well as parent and family manuals.
- Along with requiring the fulfillment of the cognitive, interior life, and behavioral goals within a K–8 basal series, the bishops have distinguished between expectations for intellectual and spiritual development for early childhood, middle childhood, and pre-adolescence, mirroring the *Directory for Catechesis*.

The publishing community has been very supportive and has collaborated well with the bishops in this process, sharing in the desire for excellent resources that aid in forming the whole person as a disciple of Christ. To help form catechetical leaders and catechists in their understanding of evangelizing catechesis, many publishers send out speakers, host webinars, and publish articles on the subject. These efforts contribute in no small manner to the primary formational goal of the Institute on the Catechism, found in its *Handbook on the Catechetical Formation Process*:

> To form a mature Catholic disciple who is firmly committed to feeling, thinking, and acting like Christ; who believes, understands and can articulate the truths of the Faith; who joyfully and frequently receives the Sacraments with ever-deepening devotion, especially the Sacrament of Penance and the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist; who lives the virtuous life with ever-growing charity and wisdom; who is steadfast in ongoing prayer; who faithfully engages with Sacred Scripture; who is active in the Catholic parish and bears witness to the faith in all aspects of life.[3]

This vision for the formation of the whole person in Christ is also articulated in the *Catechism*:

> To catechize is "to reveal in the Person of Christ the whole of God's eternal design reaching fulfillment in that Person. It is to seek to understand the meaning of Christ's actions and words and of the signs worked by him." Catechesis aims at putting "people . . . in communion . . . 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." (CCC 426)[4]

The *Catechism* articulates succinctly the role of catechesis in forming missionary disciples: "From this loving knowledge of Christ springs the desire to proclaim him, to 'evangelize,' and to lead others to the 'yes' of faith in Jesus Christ" (CCC 429). The joy and amazement felt by so many Catholics at the published number of those who received the Easter sacraments is accompanied by the great hope that the bishops' ongoing emphasis upon evangelizing catechesis will bring many converts to the waters of baptism, instill in the hearts of the faithful the need for ongoing conversion through the Sacrament of Penance, and stem the dangerous tide of disaffiliation among our young Catholics.

Resources for Catechesis

This ambitious vision requires teamwork on the part of pastors, catechists, teachers, parents, and publishers. To guide and direct this effort, several important publications have emerged from the Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, the Subcommittee on the Catechism, and the Institute on the Catechism. To guide the work of publishers, these resources are now available:[5]

The *Handbook on the Catechetical Accompaniment Process* and its Spanish-language-translation *Manual del Proceso de Acompañamiento Catequético* (2024). One can find in the *Handbook* the interior life, behavioral, and cognitive goals for basal elementary series and sacramental preparation. The *Handbook* articulates the most significant catechetical goals for parents and families, catechists and teachers, and learners. The *Handbook* also contains a rich description of evangelizing catechesis and helpful considerations on catechesis for persons with disabilities.

Diocesan officials who strive to implement and encourage an evangelizing catechesis that forms missionary disciples are supported through the newly published *Companion to the Handbook on the Catechetical Accompaniment Process: A Diocesan Guide for an Evangelizing Catechesis* and its Spanish-language-translation *Guía Complementaria al Manual del Proceso de Acompañamiento Catequético: Guía Diocesana para una Catequesis Evangelizadora.* Written in a reflective style, the *Companion* presents catechetical leaders with a path toward the prayerful discernment, dialogue, collaboration, and ongoing formation that make possible a culture of evangelizing catechesis in our parishes and schools.[6]

For the catechetical texts born of the bishops' *Secondary Level Protocol for Assessing the Conformity of Secondary Level Catechetical Materials with the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, also known as the *High School Framework,* the Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis and the Subcommittee on the Catechism are at work on a *High School Handbook*.[7] This resource is expected to complement the cognitive goals set forth in the framework with interior life and behavioral goals and to do so within the culture of our Catholic high schools. To be truly transformative, an evangelizing catechesis must involve every member of the high school community and every aspect of high school life, both curricular and co-curricular, and extend into families and the wider community.

These are exciting times in the development of catechetical materials and resources. It is encouraging to welcome materials specifically for parents, families, and for catechist formation. Such materials would clearly present sound doctrinal teaching as well as be worthy resources for the formation of the behavioral and interior life of adults.

The bishops of the subcommittee are also eager to see the development of materials that are specialized for certain audiences or topics, such as resources like those focusing on theology of the body or on faith and science. The bishops are encouraging publishers and writers to produce resources that address the specific needs of different audiences.

Through their Institute on the Catechism, the bishops sponsor an annual convocation that gathers in a retreat-like atmosphere the bishops, diocesan catechetical leaders, members of the publishing community, and those associated with organizations and institutes that advance the cause of an evangelizing catechesis. The Catechetical Institute of Franciscan University of Steubenville has helped greatly in the preparation and execution of this yearly convocation. The USCCB's institute also helps dioceses to organize events for local catechists and hosts webinars that are recorded and added to their growing library of digital resources housed on its website.[8] These events and

resources demonstrate beautifully the great collaboration that is emerging between bishops, publishers, catechetical leaders, school superintendents, catechists, and others, all guided and promoted by the bishops.

Conclusion

“Were not our hearts burning within us” as we heard tell of the impressive number of new Catholics who emerged from the baptismal font at the Easter Vigil this past year (Lk 24:32)? While the numbers are still being compiled and analyzed, there is certainly cause for rejoicing that the Holy Spirit is alive and well in our Church. Trusting always in the power of the Holy Spirit, we have great hope in the ongoing work of a renewal in catechesis and the formation of fully committed missionary disciples through an evangelizing catechesis. We will not necessarily be able to pinpoint an exact cause, but we know it is the result of various efforts, particularly with the help of leaders setting the way. With the magnanimous vision of the bishops before us—and with patience in the slow but steady progress of the work of all who have a hand in the artful ministry of catechesis at every level—we may rightly express our full confidence in the “hope [that] does not disappoint” (see Rom 5:5) and the flame of faith that can never be extinguished (see 2 Tm 1:6).

> May this flame be found still burning
> by the Morning Star:
> the one Morning Star who never sets,
> Christ your Son,
> who, coming back from death’s domain,
> has shed his peaceful light on humanity,
> and lives and reigns for ever and ever.
> **R.** Amen.[9]

Father Daniel J. Mahan *is a priest of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. He serves the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops as the Director of the Institute on the Catechism and is the author of* A Journey Through the Catechism: Unveiling the Truth, Beauty, and Goodness of the Catholic Faith *(Ave Maria Press, 2024).*

Notes

[1] International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *Exsultet*, in *The Roman Missal*, (USCCB, 2010), https://www.usccb.org/prayer-worship/liturgical-year/easter/easter-procl....

[2] See my first article, “From Information to Transformation: Changing Approaches to Catechetical Texts,” *Catechetical Review* vol. 11, no. 1, https://franciscanathome.com/the-catechetical-review/articles/informatio.... See section Recent Developments from the USCCB.

[3] Institute on the Catechism, *Handbook on the Catechetical Accompaniment Process* (USCCB, 2024), 13, https://evangelizingcatechesis.com/site/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/IOC_H.... See section Recent Developments from the USCCB.

[4] Quoting John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae* (Apostolic Exhortation on Catechesis in Our Time), no. 5. See section Recent Developments from the USCCB.

[5] See the “Resources” page on the website for the Institute on the Catechism, https://evangelizingcatechesis.com/site/resources/. See section Resources for Catechesis.

[6] Institute on the Catechism website, “Resources.” See section Resources for Catechesis.

[7] USCCB, “Conformity Review Protocols,” *Secondary Level Framework*, https://www.usccb.org/committees/catechism/conformity-review-protocols. See section Resources for Catechesis.

[8] The Institute on the Catechism, https://evangelizingcatechesis.com. See section Resources for Catechesis.

[9] International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *Exsultet*. See section Conclusion.

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