

BEGIN WITH THE HEART

Recovering a Sacramental Vision

Daniel O'Leary

A COMPANION JOURNAL

***for personal, paired or small group reflection and courageous conversation
to facilitate the journey through the Project***

'Put yourself in courageous conversation with the cliff-edge of your life, no matter how frightening it seems. Courageous conversation needs courageous hearts.'
(David Whyte)

'We are workers, not master-builders; ministers not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.'
(Oscar Romero)

***'Where then do we begin' Meister Eckhart was asked.
'Begin with the heart'***

'Begin with the Heart' introduces a radical dimension to the work of catechesis and religious education. It explores a dynamic theology, a true spirituality and an educational model for all aspects of our educational endeavours in school and parish. It was inspired by On the Way to Life (2005) from the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

**The Companion Booklet follows the general outline of
'Begin with the Heart'**

PART ONE: GIFTS OF IMAGINATION.

- **RECLAIMING IMAGINATION: *The Forgotten Dimension***
- **RESTORING THE SACRAMENTAL VISION: *Something prevented them from recognising him***
- **LITURGICAL HORIZON: *The Mountain behind the Mountain***

PART TWO: WELCOMING THEOLOGY

- **THEOLOGY OF HUMANITY: *A Ground to Stand On***
- **NATURE AND GRACE: *Thresholds of Transformation***
- **SACRAMENT RE-VISITED: *Prisms of Revelation***

PART THREE: THE ART OF EDUCATING

- **THE POETRY OF EDUCATION: *Working the Vision***
- **DAMAGED BEAUTY: *New Dialogue of Life***
- **BEGIN WITH THE HEART: *You Teach Who You Are***

PART FOUR: ENGAGING THE WORLD

- **THE POSTMODERN AND THE MULTICULTURAL: *Befriending the Enemy***
- **ENDWORD: *Catechising as Humanising***

NOTES

- *Before using this 'Companion Booklet' please read Part 1 of 'Begin with the Heart' and watch the DVD. Otherwise the discussion exercise may not flow as it should. Page references in the text are to 'Begin with the Heart'.*
- *These summaries, reflections and responses, drawn from 'Begin with the Heart', are meant for facilitators of adults involved with any age-group in evangelising, catechising, forming, religiously educating and preaching in the Catholic tradition of Christianity. They are also intended for all those who wish to deepen their own spiritual lives.*
- *Part One has a special interest for readers who seek a deeper understanding of the notion of the Catholic Imagination that lies at the heart of this book and of 'On the Way to Life'.*

Part Two sets out to explain the traditional theology of nature and grace that radically changes our understanding and experience of 'the abundant life'.

Part Three focuses more particularly on the implications of this theology and vision for teaching, catechising, preaching and all Church ministries.

Part Four briefly addresses the challenges of 'telling our Story' in a richly multi-cultural, postmodern society. It also provides a partial summary of the book.

- *On The Way to Life: Contemporary Culture and Theological Development as a Framework for Catholic Education, Catechesis and Formation. A Study prepared by the Heythrop Institute for Religion, Ethics and Public Life and commissioned by the Department for Education and Formation of the Bishops' Conference for England and Wales. While readers may wish to read the full text of the document at a later date, there is no need to have done so before exploring 'Begin with the Heart'.*

INTRODUCTION

All evangelising, catechising, teaching and preaching are based on a theology. It is important that we should be able to articulate it. The Vatican II theology outlined in 'On the Way to Life' (OTWTL) is both imaginative and sacramental. It offers a vision that brings a new dynamism to our own faith, to our ministry in the classroom and parish-room.

Archbishop Vincent Nichols sees OTWTL as 'a vital catalyst for bishops, priests, teachers and all those involved in catechesis to reflect on the Church's mission in education.' Throughout the reflections that follow, suggestions are made for linking this theological vision with the actual lives of God's people, with pastoral ministries, and with an experienced-based, life-centred educational theory. This is one of the hopes expressed by the Bishops' Conference and the Catholic Education Service (CES). They are concerned about how to maintain and enhance the spiritual integrity of RC schools in a 'results' dominated age.

Many questions arise. How do we experience the healing presence of grace in the routine activities of our daily lives? How can hearts be touched? How can faith be 'caught'? How do we liberate that innate creativity already waiting inside our students? How do we make both relevance to, and abundance of life and humanity the aim of all our teaching and catechising? How do we keep the vision of Jesus at the heart of everything we do? How do we fan into flame a faith that is often dying out within us?

One way is by paying more attention to the hearts and minds of those who work so faithfully in parishes, homes and schools. The heart of catechesis is the heart of the catechist. The teacher's spirit must be transformed before the students' will be. 'Unless the faith means something to the parent and teacher' Cardinal Hume said 'it will not mean much to the children'.

Maybe another renaissance is needed - a renaissance of the sacramental imagination. The use of those words should not put us off. Imagination, sacramentality and faith have always been sisters. Imagination is the divine creativity within us. Such imaginative vision, integral to the meaning of faith, needs to be nourished through exposure to the arts, to the great stories of the world, to intimate conversations with ourselves and with others, to play and to children, to poetry and to music, and to everything that nurtures our intuition and our sensitivity to God's presence all around us. (This is the focus of the attached DVD.)

To meet the daunting challenges of today's complex society (Part 4) we need good creative theology and dedicated teaching. While holding fast to the fullness of our tradition, we need to set free the Catholic imagination and sacramental vision that has always characterised that tradition. Without catching the vision, the heart does not know where to go; but without the fire of imagination it doesn't want to go anywhere, least of all to Church!

As parents, teachers, catechists and personal seekers, we are called to work with a passion for acquiring that central vision in ourselves, first. We must, in fact, *become* the vision. Filled with that vision, and together with a clear awareness of our complex cultures, we can all be part of a new and blessed renaissance in our Church and world.

PART ONE

Gifts of Imagination

***On the Way to Life* (OTWTL) is like a coat of many colours, and we are all attracted to our favourite hue within it. What captured the attention of many was the excitement and rich potential of what the authors call 'the Catholic Imagination'. They offer it as a grounding for renewing the process of effective catechesis in a world and in a culture that is forever changing. 'This would mean developing the sacramental imagination with the theology of nature and grace that underpins it, as the core conceptual structure for all the cognitive elements of educational and formational programmes. It would help to create a structural coherence between family, parish and school' (p67). It is well worth reflecting on this exceptionally strong statement. What follows is an attempt to unpack it.**

Useful Quotations:

The world needs the unifying power of the imagination *R.S.Thomas*

Imagination is more important than knowledge *Albert Einstein*

The human faculty of imagination is one of the most neglected and most misunderstood areas within contemporary theology . . . Imagination is, as it were, a bridge between human experience, understanding and interpretation. It is the imagination that enables human understanding to take place and it is impossible for understanding to exist without the power of imagination. *Dermot A. Lane*

With imagination you don't have to travel far to find God – only notice things. The finite and the infinite live in the same place. It is here alone, at this precarious point, that the holy secret is laid bare. 'I live in this world by attention'. *Simone Weil*

For what is a man's heart but his imagination *George Bernard Shaw*

The aim of the artist is to render the highest possible justice to the visible universe . . . The artist penetrates the concrete world in order to find at its depths the image of its source, the image of ultimate reality. *Flannery O'Connor*

The concept of sacramentality must be broken open so that we rediscover the sacramental potential of all creation. In such a vision the Eucharist becomes a focal point that is inclusive rather than exclusive in its capacity to express and celebrate the abundant sacramentality of everyday life, in which the surplus of meaning spills over into society, culture and indeed the cosmos itself, so that it cannot be contained in structures, rules and institutions. *Tina Beattie*

The only real fall of man is his non-eucharistic life in a non-eucharistic world. *Alexander Schmemmann*

PART ONE 1.1: RECLAIMING IMAGINATION – *The Forgotten Dimension*

This first section indicates that together with creativity, inspiration and beauty, imagination, too must be found at the heart of our Catholic faith and education. It introduces the role of imagination in the work of catechesis and teaching. We need to be reminded that already deeply embedded in faith and its practices, is the gift of imagination. To avoid confusion for the reader, terms such as ‘theology of nature and grace’, ‘sacramental vision’ and ‘the Catholic imagination’ are all, in the present context, intrinsically connected.

Summary

- **The ‘sacramental vision’ has a central place in Catholic education**
- **There is a kind of knowing that excites the heart, which ‘is commonly reached, not through reason, but through the imagination.’ (John H. Newman)**
- **Faith is a way of imagining our world as made in God’s image**
- **‘Imagination is necessary for faith.’ (Robert Haight) ‘According to our mystical theologians it is only through the imagination that the presence of the spiritual world is evoked and invoked. Its context is contemplation.’ (David Roberts)**
- **There is a need to recover the place of beauty in our catechesis**
- **All human imagination is a reflection of God’s imagination: it is the cradle of possibility**
- **It takes imagination to hold together the knowledge of the head and the intuition of the heart. We need the unifying power of imagination**

Your Response . . .

What is your intellectual or emotional response to these opening pages of ‘Begin with the Heart’? Which words, phrases, ideas, summaries did you find helpful, challenging, confusing?

Is the concept of ‘imagination’ an appropriate or inappropriate way of introducing the theme of the Project? Is it clear that to believe almost anything to do with Incarnation we need the grace of imagination (understood in its true sense)?

PART ONE 1.2: RESTORING THE SACRAMENTAL VISION

'Something prevented them from recognising them'

Too often the creativity of children and adults is suppressed by inadequate catechesis. Without the sacramental vision it is impossible to recognise the presence of God all around. The task of the educator is, beyond the giving of new information to students, to bring them to the edge of their own divine possibilities. Story, poetry and all the creative arts become a necessary part of this adventure. A basic aim is to provide space for graced vision to happen. This chapter makes some preliminary comments on the implications for teaching and catechising arising from the core message of OTWTL - about the Church's work in spreading the Gospel, in handing on the Faith, in making Christianity real for the people of today's world.

Summary

- **The work of the artist (and the catechist) is to reveal what is hidden all around us**
- **As with the apostles after the resurrection, something prevents us from recognising the presence of Christ everywhere and in every one**
- **Bernano's country priest was seized by the Catholic imagination when he announced, in the face of enormous suffering and disappointment 'Grace is everywhere'. People need catechists, teachers and preachers to bring that hidden presence to light**
- **The experience of union with God is the ultimate goal of the curriculum**
- **Teachers, like parents, are co-creators, with God, of the Kingdom**
- **The study of God is the study of life in the light of the Incarnation**
- **A radical shift is needed in how we see the goals of our various pastoral educational roles**

YOUR RESPONSE . . .

What is your intellectual or emotional response to the above? Which words, phrases, ideas, summaries did you find helpful, challenging, confusing? Are you comfortable with the notion that 'grace is everywhere'? Can you give examples of what this revelation means in your understanding of your own life? In light of the above pages how would you redefine the aims of catechesis and RE?

PART ONE 1.3: LITURGICAL HORIZON - *The Mountain behind the Mountain*

This final section in Part One is an attempt to apply the transforming principle of the Catholic imagination to liturgy. There is a catechetical dimension to liturgical celebration that is powerfully revelatory. After further stories and reflections about sacramental vision, this section explores a way of looking at Eucharist, and at all liturgical moments, from a life-enhancing perspective. Ever faithful to the meaning of Incarnation, a major role of liturgy is to gather up, name, purify, intensify and celebrate every dimension of what we call ordinary life in its personal and universal dimensions. This too is the role of all catechesis, teaching and preaching.

Summary

- **Without imaginative story only dead doctrine remains; before dogma began there was only story**
- **Where there is no vision there is no transformation**
- **The work of the catechist is to awaken others to what they already are – the body of Christ**
- **Jesus was the walking sacrament of God's compassion**
- **Music, poetry, art and architecture nourish the soul and provide a window to God's beauty**
- **Since the Incarnation there are not two distinct worlds – one secular, one sacred**
- **At the Eucharist we celebrate the hidden presence of God in all our experiences, in all creation**
- **In the liturgy of the Church we name, express and celebrate in visible and tangible form, the fundamental grace that lies hidden in the world – in the routine of daily living, in all human experience, in the totality of creation. Ours is an embodied Christianity**

YOUR RESPONSE . . .

**What would you describe as 'peak experiences' in your life?
In what way would you connect them with God's presence?**

**Can you remember those lasting moments when you were transformed,
those places of grace when your faith became an experience?
What special moments or peak-moments will never leave you?**

**Were you always aware that the liturgies we celebrate were so closely linked
to, and spring from, the quality and experiences of our lives?
When have your ordinary experiences found expression in the Sunday
liturgy? At a wedding? A baptism? A funeral? First Communion?**

**Where do you feel the presence of God most – at Mass or in your ordinary
life? What is the connection between both kinds of awareness? How would
you describe the connection between the 'liturgy of life' and the 'liturgy of
the Church'; between daily living and celebrating the Eucharist?**

**From where, for you, is God absent? Can we speak of naming grace in
human experience in the face of radical suffering? Can limited and sinful
human beings, and divided human communities, enflesh and proclaim the
incarnate presence of God in the world?**

**In the midst of ecological devastation can we announce that God is revealed
throughout creation?**

PART TWO

Welcoming Theology

There is a joy about studying and 'doing' theology. It is a creative and fulfilling kind of work. Understanding things is so satisfying. The study of theology needs to be set free. Even though the academic study of theology is now engaged in by an increasing number of lay people, it still exists, in a pastoral sense, on the sidelines of our faith. Perhaps this is the time when it can be restored to centre stage again. All evangelising, catechising, teaching and preaching is based on a theology. It is important that we should be able to articulate it. Otherwise we do not have a ground to stand or build on. The Vatican II theology outlined in OTWTL is both imaginative and sacramental. It offers a vision of creation and incarnation that brings a new dynamism to our own faith and therefore, to our ministry in the classroom and the parish-room.

Useful Quotations:

God is the ultimate and absolute source of all being; but this universal principle of creation – the *Logos*, primordial reason – is at the same time a lover with all the passion of a true love. *Eros* is thus supremely ennobled, yet at the same time it is so purified as to become one with *agape* . . . we experience the love of God, we perceive his presence and we learn to recognise that presence in our daily lives. ***Benedict XVI***

As disciples we find God in and through our humanity. In a very real sense there is nowhere where God is not. Given that human beings are created in God's image, the pinnacle of creation, and the fact that God chose to become a human person, it is possible to see the mystery of God in the mystery of our humanity.

Archbishop Vincent Nichols

Theology cannot be expressed solely in the sleek and passionless form of the treatise, but demands movement, sharp debate . . . the virile conversation of deep and powerful emotion. ***Hans Urs von Balthasar***

The religious educator is at once theologian and educator, for the field of religious education is located at the point where theology and education meet.

Richard McBrien

PART TWO 2.1: THEOLOGY OF HUMANITY - *A Ground to Stand On*

'On the Way to Life' urges us to reconsider the still untapped potential of the Second Vatican Council, especially the promise that lies within a rediscovery of what it calls the Catholic imagination and the sacramental vision. There is a theology of nature and grace that sees Revelation as the amazing love-story of God's desire to be intimately among us in human form. Full of compassion, God wished to create the world out of pure love, and then, in time, to become that creation. That 'becoming' happened in Jesus Christ. In OTWTL we read about the re-emergence of a rich understanding of human nature grounded in grace. What makes us truly human is the instinct for God that we all carry. Dualism is everything that separates God's own creation and God's own people from God's own self. All dualism ended the night that God was born into our world in the shape and form of the infant Jesus.

Summary

- **We welcome a theology of nature and grace that honours the unlimited possibilities of humanity, intrinsically graced at its centre from the beginning**
- **This theology has radical implications for our own personal spirituality and for our work as parents, teachers, catechists and priests**
- **Human nature is intrinsically ordered to God; humanity and history are transformed in Christ; the alchemist's stone is Christ (OTWTL)**
- **However we may interpret the doctrine of original sin, there is absolutely no doubt about its reality in our lives and in our world. But while it may be all- pervasive, it is never all-victorious**
- **To explore the mystery of Incarnation knowledge is not enough; a 'new mind', a transformation of consciousness is needed**
- **Incarnation has a cosmic significance that is celebrated in the Eucharist (John Paul II)**
- **Vatican II proposes an understanding of humanity which accepts what contemporary culture has to say about it in part, but completes it with the rich vision of humanity and its history transformed in Christ (OTWTL)**

YOUR RESPONSE . . .

In the light of this section how would you describe the main emphasis of a theology of nature and grace?

Which words, phrases, ideas, and summaries did you find helpful, challenging, confusing eg 'dualism'?

Do you see the value of being confident about the theology that underpins your beliefs?

PART TWO 2.2: NATURE AND GRACE - *Thresholds of Transformation*

The theologian Karl Rahner wished to move away from the traditional Roman Catholic dichotomy between nature and grace that was emphasised in the past. Our whole lives, by virtue of creation and incarnation, are graced by God's own self-expression from the beginning, whether or not this astonishing revelation is ever articulated. The teacher, the priest, the catechist and the formator need to be thoroughly 'inside' this kind of theology. They need to be comfortable with the wisdom that sees God as the absolute and loving mystery now insinuated into the innermost core of humanity. The catechist reveals to people that they are already grasped by God's graced self-revelation in the hiddenness and ordinariness of their everyday lives; that they are always graced, blessed, loved by God.

Summary

- **Education is more about revealing than transmitting**
- **The good news can only be received within the context of each one's particular environment, language, images and experiences. Each individual heart, in its own personal truth and reality, is invited to respond**
- **God is not diminished in the graced elevation of humanity and creation**
- **The hours of God's grace are always and everywhere close to hand and to heart**
- **Teachers and catechists need to keep their mystical hearts nourished**
- **The deep simplicity of the sacramental vision is often distorted or lost due to over-elaborate and doctrine-based schemes. There is a need for a re-visioning of our religious education, catechesis and preaching**
- **Whether they know and accept it or not, all students have an experience of grace from within**

YOUR RESPONSE . . .

Which words, phrases, ideas, and summaries did you find helpful, challenging, confusing? E.g. 'Education is more about revealing than transmitting'.

How do you explain the terms 'nature' and 'grace'? And that it is only *within* the events of our daily lives that the event of grace can ever be revealed and experienced?

PART TWO 2.3: SACRAMENT REVISITED - *Prisms of Revelation*

The way in which we understand faith will determine the way we do theology and it will also shape the character of our Christian education in all its forms. If we regard faith as mainly to do with learning, knowing, Church membership, believing many doctrines and propositions, then theology and catechesis will be understood and presented in terms of such concerns. Where faith, on the other hand, is understood as a response to the mystery of the Incarnation, of God's immediacy in human experience, then theology and Christian education will take the form of an exploration of that same human experience, in a way that illuminates and reveals the active, enlightening love of God at the heart of the world.

Summary

- **The notion of sacrament is central to our understanding and spreading of the Christian faith**
- **Jesus, the sacrament of God, was thoroughly and utterly human. It was in this fragile and finite humanity that God, from the beginning, desired to become flesh**
- **That is why the 'moment' of revelation continues to take place in the living experience of all people and in the unfailing existence of all creation**
- **What was begun in creation is finalised in Incarnation and made accessible to all people through the Spirit-filled Community**
- **Properly speaking we do not receive grace; we do not possess it as something from outside; no, we *are* our grace. Grace is life fully lived**
- **Without the wider sacramental vision, the seven sacraments themselves would lose their true meaning and become empty ritual**
- **The sacraments declare forth what is otherwise hidden in the darkness of the world, in the routine of every day**

YOUR RESPONSE . . .

What is your intellectual or emotional response to the above statements? Which words, phrases, ideas, and summaries did you find helpful, challenging, confusing?

There are many theologies within the Church. Can you name some of them?

Do you agree that theology is for living as well as for learning?

How does the Vatican II theology of nature and grace transform your understanding of what it means to be a Christian?

Do you understand how a theology of nature and grace does not replace a theology of sin and redemption but balances and underpins it; there is both healing and completing in the life and work of Jesus?

How would you describe the language needed to show a secular society the realities of salvation, sin and the need for redemption?

Why do you think the reclaiming of the sacramental vision and imagination is so crucial for catechesis and preaching in today's Church?

PART THREE:

The Art of Educating

A theology of nature and grace suggests a three-fold pedagogical strategy. As in the basic pattern of creation, incarnation and mission, it is appropriate to identify and emphasise three fundamental stages of Christian education in our schools and parishes.

In general terms, the first phase of any theme or topic looks at aspects of personal experience, creation and the human condition in the raw, so to speak.

After the creative exploring by the students of these aspects and experiences, the transforming light shed on them by the birth and Passover of Jesus Christ is then shared. This is the good news that changes everything. All is revealed as already in God's image, already saved, but always in need of purification.

The third phase is where the new awareness of this deeper love and meaning at the heart of students' lives and loves is remembered, rejoiced in, and celebrated in all kinds of ways. This is the awareness that, in turn, motivates and empowers the students with a sense of mission and service to the world.

Useful Quotations:

Catholic stories are incarnational; they speak of God incarnate in the human condition. The story came before the doctrine. Doctrine grows from story and can never exhaust its truth. It is the beauty of the story that holds Catholics to their heritage. Beauty is not opposed to truth. It is simply truth in its most attractive form.

Andrew Greeley

Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinions in good people is but knowledge and wisdom in the making.

John Milton

The fruit of truth must grow and mature on the tree of the subject before it can be plucked and placed in its absolute realm.

Bernard Lonergan

The groundwork of religious education must relate the insights of theology and the philosophy of education. It must comprehend development psychology and the techniques of curriculum development. Its focus is a practical activity rather than an abstract theme.

Kevin Nichols

Any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any age of development . . . Teaching and learning is the enterprise par excellence where the line between subject-matter (content) and method (process) grows necessarily indistinct.

Jerome Bruner

I cannot imagine what else a teacher, or for that matter a preacher, should do, except to remind people of their capacity for the infinite . . . All teachers know this humility, this diffidence in practice, for they know that when they have taught well the students will spontaneously say 'of course' – for they recognise, as if recalling a truth no longer the teacher's, because now commonly possessed and shared.

Denys Turner

PART THREE 3.1: DAMAGED BEAUTY - *New Dialogue of Life*

This section tangles with some difficult issues. It touches on the question of 'content' in catechesis and religious education. Jesus came to redeem, renew and fulfil our lives. His humanity is the focus of Revelation. So is all humanity and all creation. Our experiences, then, in the light of scripture and tradition, are an essential part of the content. Also, our aims in evangelising and teaching need to be clarified. Have they to do with knowledge or a transformed life, with something 'taught' or something 'caught'? Through what process is the Christian vision transmitted? How are hearts set on fire with love of God and love of the world? 'The only thing that counts for me,' wrote Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, 'is not to propagate God but to discover him. From this discovery conversion follows somewhat automatically.' How much depends on the passionate commitment of the catechist or teacher? And how much on the readiness of the student for significant change?

Summary

- **Much debate centres on what is meant by the term 'content' in our catechesis and preaching. There is a need for clarity about our understanding of 'knowledge', of 'human experience' and of how they interconnect and complete each other**
- **The real aim is not only to acquire knowledge and information about the faith – it is about how God's secret love and meaning is revealed in each student's life-experiences, and in the world itself**
- **The General Directory of Catechesis hopes for a profound transformation of mind and heart by nourishing the depths of the human person in everything that he or she is**
- **Is it realistic to expect teachers and catechists to have a passion, a charisma, for their faith and for spreading its vision? And are they confident in their understanding of the theology that underpins the vision?**
- **The source of that vision, of the teacher's inspiration, of the whole transforming process, is the humanity of Jesus**
- **All essential Catholic teaching finds its rightful place in a catechesis that nurtures the sacramental imagination based on a theology of nature and grace**
- **Head and heart combine in the total transformation of the human person. But love will always come before knowledge**
- **'All our speech (catechising, preaching) if it is to be true speech about God, will be an act of love . . .' (OTWTL)**

YOUR RESPONSE . . .

Are you fairly clear about the central place of humanity in the understanding of the mystery of Incarnation?

There is a place in our work for knowledge about Scripture and doctrines; but this knowledge is taught so that a love of God can be caught.

Can you come up with examples of how both mind and heart might be engaged for true transformation to happen?

How would you attempt to approach the teaching of, say, any of the sacraments against this horizon of both knowledge and inner conversion?

Would you say that our popular approaches to RE and catechesis are more centred on achieving a mental comprehension of things than on touching lives with news of the beauty, presence and indwelling of God?

How do you feel about the challenge to the catechist and teacher to be part of this vision if they are going to teach it, to have a passion for this way of seeing things, to teach out of their own hearts as well as their minds?

PART THREE 3.2: POETRY OF EDUCATION - *Working the Vision*

The design for 'working the vision' outlined here, follows an underlying threefold dialectic in all our catechetical, pedagogical and, indeed, homiletic strategies. An incarnational approach to catechesis, RE and all pastoral ministry takes its starting-point from the real lived experience of the student. Its end-point then, in the light of what Jesus did and who he was, is that same human experience, but now understood and experienced as transformed. This is where the call to mission is heard, and responded to, in a new and powerful way.

Summary

- **'I have come very strongly to believe that it is the cultivation of imagination which should be the chief aim of education.'** (Mary Warnock)
- **OTWTL recommends the developing of the 'sacramental imagination with the theology that underpins it as the core conceptual structure for all the cognitive elements of educational and formational programmes.'**
- **The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures are our canon of the imagination, the standard and guide for Christian imagining. They are stories sprung from stirred imaginations, as God's people remembered and envisioned their relationship with the Lord invisible among them.**
- **In the perennial task of handing on the faith, nothing is more needed than that parents and pastors, catechists and communities rekindle in themselves the flame of the Christian imagination. (John Henry Newman)**
- **The catechist works within the intrinsic relationship between the students' life experience and the specifically revelatory dimension of Christianity. We find the phrase 'Christian humanism' in OTWTL**
- **Humanity can never be the measure of itself; 'Christ is the completion of the human project' (OTWTL)**
- **If the work of God in the beginning was to flesh the Word, the work of the catechist now is to Word the flesh once again. Artistic expression is needed for its implementation in human hearts.**
- **Religious education is dependent upon the arts. 'Music and singing are the borderland of the human. It is here that the divine begins.' (Hans Urs Von Balthasar)**
- **The religious educator must be an artist who is deeply in touch with the genius of the Catholic imagination - holding up to people the great images, stories and pictures of the Christian salvation tradition.**
- **The ministry of catechesis serves to name, in ritual, symbol and word, the grace that we experience in daily life, at the same time purifying and deepening that graced experience.**

YOUR RESPONSE . . .

How do you understand the phrase 'a Christ-centred humanism'? Why is it possible to see Christianity as the champion and protector of a true humanism?

Why is faith impossible without imagination?

Why is it said that the catechist and religious education must be artists?

Do you agree that their primary function is to hold up to people the great images, stories and architecture of salvation that are at the heart of the Christian imaginative tradition?

Why are more than words needed for people to catch the excitement of what was revealed in the Incarnation?

How would you explain the phrase from OTWTL, 'Humanity can never be the measure of itself. Christ is the completion of the human project.'

PART THREE 3.3: BEGIN WITH THE HEART - You Teach Who You Are

'Know yourself because you teach who you are.' Teaching, catechising and preaching, like most truly human activities, are fundamentally coloured and textured by the state of our inner lives. Invisibly and silently, we are always projecting the condition of our souls through everything we say and do. 'Viewed from this angle,' observes Parker J Palmer, 'teaching holds a mirror to the soul.' This section emphasises that the more confident, sure-footed and aware we are around our own emotions and attitudes, the more effective we will be in our catechising and in our own living out of the faith. It is only then that the evangeliser, like a mid-wife, will be in a position to draw forth from students their own precious essence – the image of God.

Summary

- **Know yourself well because you teach who you are.'**
- **The catechist can only be really present to someone else to the same extent that she is present to herself**
- **Good teaching cannot ever be reduced to the latest curriculum, or set of creeds, or pedagogical technique – it depends, for the greater part, on the purified, enthusiastic humanity of the educator. 'There is no greater calling on earth than teaching.' (Cardinal Hume)**
- **'Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers; and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are also witnesses.' (Pope Paul VI)**
- **'The teacher or catechist does not write on inanimate material but on the very spirit of human beings.' (CES)**
- **There is a spirituality of teaching and of learning, of the catechist and of the student. This spirituality remains constant only when Christ is kept at the centre.**
- **Unless our own hearts are nurtured how can we be trusted with the heart of another?**
- **There can be no development in student spirituality without a development in staff spirituality**
- **'Within Christian spirituality, long before we speak of anything else – church, dogmas, commandments, even admonitions to love and justice – we must speak about Jesus, the vine, the blood, the pulse, the person and energy that undergirds everything else.' (Ronald Rolheiser)**
- **Beyond set programmes, courses and syllabuses, it takes whole-hearted participation in the whole Church to form students in the faith. Without belonging to an enthusiastic community beyond school and family, it will be so difficult for a student to experience a living faith and a vibrant Church.**

Your Response . . .

In a revised curriculum, how would topics such as Church, sacraments, prayer, particular themes and issues be presented in such a way as to be true to the theology and the sacramental vision as presented in OTWTL?

How did you respond to the discussion about the way Church teachings and human experience need each other in the presentation of the faith? Is it reasonable to expect catechists and teachers to be people with passion and conviction, to be on fire with their responsibility, to transform the students by the power of their vision?

How do you react to the statement that you teach, catechise, lead (serve) and preach ‘who you are’?

How can the *raison d’être* of the RE Dept in a Post-Primary School be redefined and augmented e.g. in contributing to, and in facilitating the sacramental vision in the teaching of *all* subjects and in *all* that happens within the school community?

How do you respond to these quotations from P.J. Parker’s *The Courage to Teach*?

- ***‘If we want to grow as teachers, we must learn to talk to each other about our inner lives, our own identity and integrity.’***
- ***‘Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher.’***
- ***‘Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness – woven between themselves, their subjects and their students, on the loom of the heart.’***
- ***‘My ability to connect with my students, and to connect them with the subject, depends less on the methods I use than on the degree to which I know and trust my selfhood – and am willing to make it available and vulnerable in the service of learning.’***
- ***‘The best gift we receive from the great mentors is not their knowledge or their approach to teaching but the sense of self they evoke within us.’***
- ***‘Teaching and learning are ultimately grounded in a sense of the sacred.’***

PART FOUR

Engaging the World

Postmodernism is uneasy with all certainties, especially scientific and religious ones. There is no place for 'grand narratives' in a world-view that is associated with the unpredictable and the provisional. At the same time, many cultures and religions are fundamentally attached to their beliefs and practices, with little or no interest in ecumenical involvement. In both mind-sets there is often suspicion and even hostility. In the face of much intransigence and a pervading sense of chaos or even threat, is there any way forward for the Christian faith today? A theology of nature and grace will relish the opportunity of validating its claims in a postmodern, multicultural world. It would not be the first time that the incarnate God found new self-expression in a place of confusion, contradiction and aggression.

Useful Quotations:

Nothing human is hurt by the Gospel. Every authentic value, in whatever culture it appears, is accepted and raised by Christ. *Pope John Paul II*

We still refer too easily to believers and non-believers as if believers had faith and non-believers had no faith. Faith is by no means an exclusively religious category. Faith, in fact, is an element that belongs intrinsically and universally to the human condition. *Dermot Lane*

If we can acknowledge the human need for transcendence, and honour the ways in which created goodness expresses that need, then we are well placed to draw individual postmodern spiritualities into the larger 'story' of salvation history.

John Drane

It takes imagination, creativity and courage to renew our language of the Kingdom as a home of all humanity – of all whose theological sympathies are different from our own - even when they appear to be going in the wrong direction. They have their own truth too. We must give authority to others. As Bishop Butler said, 'Let us not fear that truth can endanger truth' *Timothy Radcliffe*

Speaking appropriately of God is, while not impossible, the most difficult, the most demanding, the most dangerous thing that human speech can do . . . It is the tragedy of modern Western culture to have fallen victim to the illusion that it is perfectly easy to talk about God. *Nicholas Lash*

Then I remember that it is *this* world, this fragmented postmodern world, that God so loves, making possible again the search to uncover the seeds of the Word in contemporary circumstances, even if the latter bears many traces of elements that are inimical to the Christian Gospel and way of life. *James Corkery*

What can the Church do for, or with, a young, post-Modern, post-Enlightenment, European generation? To batter them with Church authority is more likely to alienate them than to persuade them. Better indeed, as Newman suggested, to ask them what they think. *Clifford Longley*

One of the priceless treasures that we possess as Christians is that we know our story. *Bishop Edwin Regan*

How beautiful it is to be a Christian. Being sustained by a great love and revelation is not a burden; it is like having wings. *Pope Benedict XVI*

PART FOUR 4.1: THE POSTMODERN AND THE MULTICULTURAL

Befriending the Enemy

This section offers some common ground for courageous conversation. Such debate will point to the need for Christians to examine again their own beliefs and doctrines, and to reinterpret and purify the language and images around the mystery and reality we call God. For all postmodernism's and pluralism's undoubted potential for the erosion of the Christian faith from the world today, can there also be a hidden potential for the transformation of our understanding of the Christian faith, for the enrichment of our spirituality? 'Some theologians view postmodernity as not merely the friend of Christian faith, but "a cultural wavelength" in which faith can live and be credible today. To challenge prevalent social injustice Christian faith needs to re-appraise its own foundation symbols, and, in particular, its theology of creation.'
(Denis Carroll)

Summary

- **The scandal of particularity; revelation can happen only in the setting of today's world, in the particular circumstances of the here and now**
- **There are hidden opportunities for dialogue within a pluralist, postmodern world. Its relativism is not always an evil thing. Without courage and trust there will be no true progress, no healing growth**
- **What we are seeking is not safety but truth. And truth does not work against itself. Some postmodern concerns can be seen as pointers towards Gospel values**
- **The encounter with the 'other' draws us to a deeper awareness and purification of our own beliefs**
- **A theology of nature and grace is a common ground for dialogue with other faiths and cultures in a postmodern world**
- **The Catholic culture has the power to transform contemporary culture where it is weakest. But first it needs to formulate a language which will engage other cultures in a dialogue with the Church**

YOUR RESPONSE . . .

A theology of nature and grace looks for the hand of God in the swiftly evolving shape of today's society – its pluralism, its racial complexities, its unprecedented 'highways of information' and communication.

Why do you think the above approach to multiculturalism and postmodernism may be too generous, too naive? Or why do you think its optimism is justifiable?

Why do you see the sacramental vision of creation as offering a ground for dialogue with other faiths and cultures? Or not?

Would you say that the Catholic faith has much to contribute to a rapidly evolving post-Christian society?

Can we recognise God in all aspects of culture and other religions today?

What are the signs of a moral loneliness in the lives of many religion-less young people today?

What are the obvious indications of our current individualisation, our loss of a sense of the common good, of community?

Would themes such as 'desire', 'freedom' and 'belonging' form a common ground for 'courageous conversation' in a pluralist context?

Do we realise the extent and the challenge of the changed face of the society we now belong to?' (Karl Rahner's comment: "Never take for granted that everyone alive at the same time belongs to the same generation." And, how many generations, cultures, beliefs are there in one RC inner-city Secondary School or parish?)

What are the advantages and dangers in welcoming, rather than in condemning, the inevitable environment of a postmodern world? What are the challenges and opportunities it offers to Catholic Christianity to critique and purify itself?

How can the Catholic Church provide an authentically Christian postmodern spirituality and a postmodern catechesis for today's postmodern society?

PART FOUR 4.2: ENDWORD - *Catechising as Humanising*

In general, this Endword is a brief recapitulation and summary of some of the main themes running through 'Begin with the Heart'. It repeats a few significant observations and quotations to remind us of the central place of a theology of nature and grace in our work. As OTWTL emphasises, theology influences the aims, content and language of the way we evangelise, teach, preach and celebrate liturgy. This section recalls the Project's main theme about the central place of humanity in our faith story. It does this by contrasting, under the headings of theology, evangelisation, liturgy and language, two occasionally differing approaches to the holy work of 'handing on the faith'. It tries to indicate how, when they are at their best, these approaches need each other so as to be true to the Gospel.

Summary

- **There is a need to be confident about the model of theology on which our educational efforts are based**
- **The humanity of Christ is at the heart of all our 'humanising and transforming' work with others (Benedict XIV)**
- **God became human so that human beings could realise their divinity**
- **Original sin blinds us to the life-giving truth about our origin and destiny**
- **Recovering the language of love and excitement in the work of education**
- **There is a need, among catechists, to nourish their own deep awareness and experience of the freedom of sons and daughters of God**
- **That is the transforming experience that is 'caught' from the catechist and teacher**

YOUR RESPONSE . . .

Can you distinguish, in your own way of catechising and teaching, the two strands and strains (eg of head and heart) outlined in the final section of 'Begin with the Heart'? (4.2)

Does this way of evaluating two different but complimentary approaches clarify for you in any way, the issues we are discussing?

How would you suggest they can be woven into the one catechetical fabric? *Many things are taught so that one thing may be caught.* Could you expand on that statement?

Would you agree that the content of our catechising, teaching and preaching is an urgent issue facing the teaching Church today? A key question centres around the way we understand 'experience' as content.

REFLECTIONS AND QUERIES

It may begin with mild flu-like symptoms such as fever, but as the heart muscle gets weakened by the viral infection, you may experience: Chest pain. Shortness of breath (at rest or during physical activity). To "buy time" before the heart transplant and to prevent organ damage, the patient can be fitted with a temporary assist device such as ECMO (extracorporeal membrane oxygenation) or a ventricular assist device. Remember: Do not take flu symptoms lightly. Avoid strenuous exercise when having the flu. This reduces undue stress on the heart which might be inflamed from the viral infection. Seek emergency medical help if you feel unwell following a bout of flu. Ref: M19.