Landas 23:1 (2009) 135-159

CATECHESIS AS MINISTRY OF THE WORD: A DEFENSE OF THE NATIONAL CATECHISM

Joseph L. Roche, S.J.

This "Note" aims to be a positive and constructive response to Rafael Dy-Liacco's study, "Catechesis is a Practice of Faith: A Critique of the National Catechism," recently published in *Diwa*.[1] Since I consider Mr Dy-Liacco as both friend and colleague, a co-faculty member in the School of Humanities' Theology Department, Ateneo de Manila University, my response intends to be completely positive and constructive, in no way disparaging or demeaning the article or its author. Rather the whole purpose of this response is to offer some important clarifications that may eventually, in the Spirit's transforming power, lead to some common consensus.

But first Mr. Dy-Liacco must be thanked for his interest in, and serious study of, our National Catechism, i.e., *The Catechism for Filipino Catholics* [CFC].[2] His article provides the occasion for bringing out needed clarifications and positive guidelines for a more effective study and use of our national catechetical tool, created precisely to aid, support and raise the quality of Catholic catechesis throughout our country.

[1]Cf. *Diwa* 33 (2008): 88-108.

[2]CBCP, *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (Manila: ECCCE, 1997).

https://publications.lst.edu/

Two preliminary points must be raised before entering into the text itself. **First**, **"catechesis"** is usually approached together with evangelization as the basic means "**by which men and women are helped toward maturity in the faith, and are enabled to see the meaning of their lives and of the world in the light of God's revelation.**"[3] Using the term **"practice"** to describe the basic nature and operation of catechesis may not be the best way of communicating its function and ordinary exercise. While within the new discipline of "Practical Theology" catechesis can be viewed as one "Christian Practice," especially for those studying to be catechists, this has not been its basic function or exercise throughout the Christian ages.

For the great majority of Catholic Christians, catechesis is a distinct discipline of the Ministry of the Word, whose basic goal is to help them toward maturity in the faith. Throughout the Christian ages, catechesis has been understood primarily **not** as the full living out of the Faith itself**,** but rather as the **more limited discipline for educating in the faith,** fostering an **integral Christian initiation.** The **fully mature living out of the Faith** goes beyond "catechesis" taken with evangelization as the basic means toward fostering mature living of the Faith. Viewed precisely as a means of instruction in the Faith, catechesis needs to be continually renewed by broadening its concepts, revising its methods, searching for suitable language, and utilizing new means of transmitting the message.[4] Moreover the relatively recent official emphasis on "adult catechesis" as the primary form of catechesis, does not imply that adult catechesis constitutes either the whole of, nor even the full comprehensive goal of, living Christian faith to the full.

Secondly, throughout the article's critique, the CFC's text is criticized as **Roche's assertions**, etc. This surely does not do justice

[3]Cf. *New National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines,* no. 164.

[4]Drawn from John Paul II's *Catechesi Tradendae* [CT] (Vatican Press, 1979), nos. 17-19, 21.

https://publications.lst.edu/

to the many authors who contributed to composing the CFC, nor especially to the many evaluators from the CBCP and the two Vatican Congregations (of the Clergy and of the Doctrine of the Faith) who were involved in more than two full years of critical dialogue preliminary to the Vatican's official approval of the CFC. Rarely has any Church document been so intensely studied, critically evaluated, and subjected to such a prolonged process of revision. Thus, it is inaccurate to criticize the CFC's text as the private opinions and thinking of "Roche."

But now to move to the text itself of the article's critique of CFC. In addressing the article's two-fold aim, my response offers: (1) critical **support** of the *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* [CFC] against the alleged "weak points", and (2) a critique of the suggested "better direction" of the CFC by offering an improved "better direction."

Thus my response will relate in turn to the two major sections of article's critique: I. The National Catechism and Its Philosophical Assumptions, and II. Reconsideration of Some Points in the National Catechism, with its three sub-sections: A. Catechesis as "Putting On" the Lord Jesus Christ; B. Grace as the Catechetical Vocation; and the final section, C. A Narrative of Grace.

I. The National Catechism and its Philosophical Assumptions

The **first section** begins with a discussion of the meaning of "**Christian existence**" as proposed by St. Paul, who is touted as "the catechist par excellence," and how this vision would bear on Christian catechesis today. **Unfortunately**, this jump from St. Paul to today, ignoring the whole history of catechesis through the centuries, and especially the post-Vatican II efforts to strengthen and improve the catechetical ministry, has radically impaired the accuracy of the proposed critique of the CFC. A necessary source for properly interpreting the text of the CFC is the *National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines* 1985 [NCDP], since the CFC was composed precisely as

https://publications.lst.edu/

its follow-up volume, to exemplify concretely the NCDP's catechetical principles and guidelines.[5] The validity of the critique's rejection of CFC's alleged "philosophical assumptions" could have been checked by referring to the CFC's explicitly proposed nature, method and purpose, as dictated by, and flowing directly from, the NCDP with its own sources.[6]

The **major clarification** to be made in the critique's first section is simply that the CFC is completely **theologically based**, developing a consistent **Christian anthropology** from start to finish in following faithfully the catechetical principles and guidelines of the NCDP' 85. Far from rejecting the critique's "intense" description of the cruciform nature of Christian existence as "message of the cross" (repeated four times, but surprisingly without any explicit mention of the "resurrection"), the CFC provides an even fuller **comprehensive account** of "life in the Spirit," the power of the Cross and Resurrection, etc. Any doubt about the CFC's alleged philosophical assumptions—including both its alleged "putative existential outcomes" and the many alleged implications of these assertions—could easily have been laid to rest by consulting the very detailed exposition of the Holy Spirit's action (chap. 22, especially "The Activity of the Spirit in the Christian," nos. 1307-15), the detailed account of Christ's saving

[5]Cf. Episcopal Commission on Education and Religious Instruction [ECERI], *Maturing in Christian Faith: National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines* [NCDP] (Manila: St. Paul Publications, 1985). The *New NCDP* 2007, published by the Episcopal Commission for Catechesis and Catholic Education, [ECCCE], retains all the essential elements of the original edition while updating its chapter on methodology and relating its treatment of the three essential dimensions of the faith (doctrine, morals and worship) directly to the CFC, published in 1997.

[6]High on the list of Vatican II catechetical sources of the NCDP '85 would be John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* [CT] (Vatican,1978) which is, in many ways, clearer and more helpful than the more recent official catechetical documents such as the Congregation of the Clergy's *General Directory for Catechesis* [GDC] (Manila: Paulines, 1998).

https://publications.lst.edu/

redemptive mission (Chaps. 10-11-12, with special emphasis on the risen Christ, no. 627), and the incisive description of Faith (chap. 3: "Our Response: We believe.").[7]

Instead the critique spends much time and space on: (1) the necessary "consonance" between message, messenger, and method, (2) CFC 's mode and thrust of thought as lacking in catechesis' transformative power, (3) CFC's presumption that "overall the saving of Christian Faith is about philosophical insight obtained through analysis,"(4) apparently through **integration** which is "supposed to bring home the liberating/saving truth of the Catholic faith in all its fullness and power."[8] Perhaps the clearest way of clarifying these misconceptions is to offer first a brief summary rejection of each of the four misreadings of the CFC, followed by particular, more detailed, clarifying responses to certain specific charges against the CFC. These more detailed responses should provide ample support for rejecting the critique's misreadings.

Brief Clarifying Rejections of the Alleged Philosophical Assumptions

First, contrary to the initial charge, CFC brings together **message, messenger** and **method**—and **receivers** of the message—in a fully

[7]There's no reference in the proposed critique to any of these major CFC's chapters, nor to the multiple places throughout the whole catechism in which Trinity and Grace are intrinsically linked. Cf. e.g. CFC nos. 267-68 Blessed Trinity/Grace; no. 983 on the theological virtues; nos. 951-52 and 1575 on GRACE; and no. 464 on Jesus Christ as center of catechesis, quoting CT 5, and PCP II 7.

For a sharper grasp of the CFC's exposition of Trinity and Grace, see *A Companion to the CFC* (Manila: ECCCE, 1998), 104-11.

[8]For a more accurate notion of integration as used in the NCDP, see "Multiple Integrations in NCDP and CFC," in *A Companion to CFC* by J. Roche and Archbishop L. Legaspi (Manila: ECCCE, 1998), 55.

https://publications.lst.edu/

theological manner, constantly moving from the basic catechetical sources (Scripture; Church teaching and depth human experience), with God's chosen messengers and methods. There is, of course, a perfectly legitimate, even necessary, **role for philosophy** in the total work of theologizing, but the alleged "Philosophical Assumptions" ascribed to the CFC are proposed as negative and impeding authentic catechesis. The clarification here consists in rejecting these alleged assumptions. The CFC is **not** based on any set of alleged philosophical assumptions.

In fact it may come as a surprise to the critic to learn that the proposed "consonance" of message and method **repeats** a major truth stressed by the NCDP'85, the NCDP'07, and the CFC, against all local catechetical 'experts' who were consistently trying to reduce catechesis (described by "content, context and communication") to an inter-disciplinary work on the social science level.[9] Both the NCDP'07 and the CFC do better than the sources quoted in the critique of the CFC, precisely because both works were responding to our local catechetical scene. Any authentic catechesis has to consider the context of communicating the Christian message. Quoting St. Paul and some recent authors like Lull, Fee and Kraftchick et al. may not be the best way to properly focus on our Filipino concrete catechetical context.

Second, the formative and transformative powers of **God's Revelation** and the **missions** of Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Church, are constantly stressed throughout the catechism. CFC's chapter 22, together with its constant linking of Trinity and Grace, go far beyond the critique in developing the inner transforming role of the Holy Spirit.

Third, hence there are absolutely no presumed philosophical insights posing as the saving Christian Faith, but rather a Creedal structured exposition "communicating the essentials [which

[9]Cf. NCDP'85 nos. 68, 408; NCDP'07 no. 340.

https://publications.lst.edu/

constitute] an integral Christian initiation, open to all the other factors of Christian life."[10]

Fourth, integration as a method simply means "pulling things together" The NCDP'85 presented it as the first dimension of "A Pedagogy of Faith," drawn from Scripture and Tradition. The NCDP'07 also confirms this position by presenting integration as exemplifying "Fidelity to God" and summarizing briefly five distinct integrations, each one drawn from Scripture and Church teaching (Tradition) and actualized in the five activities of the Apostolic Church described in Acts 2:42 (*kerygma, didache, leiturgia, koinonia*, and *diakonia)*.[11] Integration's 'alleged' power to "bring home the liberating truth of the Faith" obviously comes completely from what is being integrated, namely divine revelation coming to us through Scripture, Tradition and depth human experience, and our graced faith response's three essential dimensions (doctrine, morals and worship).

Preliminary Conclusion: All four points of criticism represent serious misreadings of the CFC. In each case, the CFC is working completely from revelation and Faith, not from any supposed philosophical assumptions as charged. This judgment can be verified by a careful, more detailed analysis of certain concrete interpretations taken up in the critique of the CFC.

More Detailed Analysis

The **first** more detailed example of misreading the CFC is offered by the critique's criticism of a half-page quotation from an article ("Multiple Integrations") on the integration of the **doctrine of**

[10]Cf. John Paul II, CT no. 21.

[11]Cf. NCDP'85 nos. 414-18; and esp. NCDP'07 nos. 356-67, at 361-65. A further discussion of integration, "Towards a Review of Integration in Catechesis," was published in the *CBCP Monitor* 11/19: C3.

https://publications.lst.edu/

creation with teachings on morals and worship.[12] Integration here is allegedly "supposed to bring about a set of self-realizations within the believing subject." This criticism incredibly ignores the **grammatical subject** of the quoted text (God creating) expressed in its opening words—"God the Creator," and developed in each follow segment: "present NOW," "no longer in competition with us," "but empowering our freedom," not "filling in our gaps," but rather "sustaining all our powers at every moment of out life." In brief, the text is focused **not** on "our self-realization," but on **God's** creative action in our daily lives.

The critique's complete **misreading** of this quoted material (as well as of the nature of integration, and the alleged CFC's "philosophical assumptions") is developed by relating it to Bultmann's demythologizing biblical faith. Reference to Bultmann is here completely irrelevant—the quoted material grounding CFC's approach portrays no misunderstanding of personal self-understanding. Rather, the quoted material deals precisely with the first objective basis of **Christian Anthropology,** namely **creation.**[13]

Creator's Role in our Daily Life

A **second** example is drawn from the critique's misreading of the same quoted text on the Creator's interior role in our daily living. This time the misreading focuses on the text's exposition of the maxim "**God helps those who help themselves.**" The first step in this misreading was to ignore the introductory statement asserting the aim of "**clarifying the accurate meaning"** of the maxim**.** The second was to misunderstand the clarification itself which asserts that the maxim does **not mean** we first do our thing on our own, and then God rewards us. Just the opposite — God is always first, at the origin of things. Our "helping ourselves" is already using a "gift" from God.

[12]This is a further critique of the same article and page cited in note 8 above.

[13]The specifically theological vision of CFC is stressed in "The Theological Concept of the CFC," *Docete* 25/112: 19-25.

https://publications.lst.edu/

To quote the original: "God is already intimately present and active within us when we 'help ourselves'."

The development of the critique's rejection by denying any valid use of both "grace builds on nature" as well as the "theory of immanent grace" (described inaccurately) completely misses the point. There is absolutely **no** reduction of "the saving experience of life in the Spirit." Rather the direct opposite is being affirmed: God's active creative presence is already in us, inspiring our "helping ourselves"! The entire negative critique attacks the direct opposite of what the CFC is actually asserting. Nor can the critique be "justified" by focusing uniquely on "the experience of" — since the clarification was needed precisely because such experience of the Spirit was being denied in the **misunderstanding** of the maxim (very common among local college students).

God's Role in our Successful Deeds Missed

A **third** example of misunderstanding the same text, apparently caused by the same fixation on the saving experience of the Spirit to the exclusion of everything else, focuses on 'Roche's' assertion that God is "more present when we are most successful, not only when we are forced to call on him for help in desperation." The misunderstanding begins immediately with "[Roche's statement] needs to be measured against the assertions in 2 Co 12:9-11 and 13:4." The presumption that these Pauline texts reject my assertion is the clearest possible indication of a complete misunderstanding of my assertion. The **needed clarification** can be summarized as follows:

Put positively, St. Paul and Roche are paradoxically asserting the **same truth**: namely **God's creative life-giving presence within us**. The difference is:

-St. Paul boasts of his weakness to bring out the power of God present in his weakness;
-Roche asserts God's power within us even when we think it's all our doing!

https://publications.lst.edu/

My assertion in no way contradicts St. Paul, but I would choose to measure it against a superior Scriptural model which combines both negative and positive approaches to the same divine indwelling, namely, the Blessed Virgin Mary's Magnificat:

> "For he has looked upon his handmaid's *lowliness*;
> behold, from now on, will *all ages call me blessed*,
> The *Almighty One has done great things for me*, and holy is his name."
> (Lk.1:48f)

Catechetically, I suggest the advantage of following Mary's prayer here because it responds directly to the apparently universal human temptation to forget about God and the necessity of prayer when things are going well, in contrast to difficult times when we naturally turn to God for help. The critique of this text gives no evidence of grasping this common problem as the context for 'Roche's' assertion.[14]

CCC's Moral Life's Generalization vs. CFC's Description of Moral Agent

A **fourth** example of misunderstanding can be drawn from the alleged contrast with the CCC' s understanding of Christian moral life. The CCC quote asserts that "Life in the Holy Spirit," "made up of divine charity and human solidarity," "is graciously offered as salvation."[15] An inspiring insight, but leaving one to wonder

[14]An actual practical example can concretize the theological reality being stressed here. A college teacher in a special group teaching the social doctrine of the Church began by holding up a large picture showing a flowering bush, a butterfly, a bird, and a man with a shovel, digging a well. She asked the class: in this picture, who is the source of the bush, the butterfly and the bird? Expected answer: God! Who is the source of the well? Reply: the man. But a clarifying question was raised: is God more active creatively in the bush, butterfly, and bird, OR in the man freely digging the well? The teacher in this case had presumed the man was acting 'on his own,' independently of any input by God.

[15]The CCC quote is explained as drawn from CCC's outline of Christian moral life, chapters one, two and three, with a footnote reference to no. 1699. Actually

https://publications.lst.edu/

who precisely is living this "life in the Spirit," and **how**: by doing what? How does this life in the Spirit "fulfill the vocation of the human being"? And since it is "graciously offered as salvation," do humans have anything to do with their salvation? Is divine charity (God's love for humans) everything, or is there also some place for graced human charity, our loving God, a love for which *we* humans are *morally responsible*?

Hence the CCC quote is not too helpful for connecting this "life in the Holy Spirit" to our daily moral life, to what we are morally called to do freely and for which we are held responsible. In CCC's quoted text, there is no explicit mention of anything we humans do—which, considering the topic is **moral** life, is extraordinary! Nor does the critique help very much by identifying "life in the Spirit" with our participation by grace in the **uncreated reality** of God's inner life—since again, there is absolutely no indication of what this participation means in terms of our free thinking, doing, praying The weakness with the CCC's quoted text, then, is its failure to make explicit the human dimension of our Christian moral life, for which we, not the Holy Spirit, are morally responsible.[16]

In contrast, the CFC quote (no. 682) begins the explanation of "The Moral Agent: The Human Person." That clarification alone destroys the validity of the critique, which simply refuses to address the human subject who is morally responsible for living a Christian moral life. Human persons are those who are called to, and actually live, Christian moral lives, not the Holy Spirit. The critique plays

---

it is a direct quote of no. 1699 which is a three-line generalization, printed at the bottom of an otherwise blank page, immediately before the first page of Part Three, Section One, Chapter one.

[16]For an interesting comparison between the CCC and CFC on Faith, Christ Our [Moral] Way, Christ our Life [Worship], and Prayer, with footnote references and summaries to some significant links with other current theological sources, see "Notable Qualities of the Content of the CCC and CFC," *A Companion to CFC*, 94-103.

https://publications.lst.edu/

the same game again in repeating the groundless claim that the CFC reduces Christian living to *philosophical* anthropology, without consulting the detailed exposition of **Christian** living throughout the whole catechism, especially chapters 13-21 on Morality and 22 on the Holy Spirit.

Humanism Misinterpreted Threefold

A further misdirected attack is given in complete misinterpretation of CFC no. 677. The critique **first** begins by claiming: "it is not at all clear that the moral life being proposed is unattainable by powers we already possess simply by virtue of our being human." This completely ignores no. 677's explicit starting point ("Left to ourselves, we have no power to fulfill Christ's command 'Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect'" Mt 5:48), a completely Christian Revelation moral goal.

Second, the critique claims "the Holy Spirit appears only as the means to the end of 'responsible freedom' and conscience. All this amounts to a humanism merely '*adorned with*' Christian doctrines." This statement reveals three major misunderstandings:

– *first*, the presumption that the humanism proposed in CFC is only "a humanism 'adorned with' Christian doctrine" — but that Christian doctrines have no intrinsic connection with Christian moral living — is completely contradictory to CFC's insistence on the unity, coherence and integration among Faith's three essential dimensions (doctrine, morals, and worship), explicitly approved by both the universal and local Catholic Magisteria;

– *second*, the charge that "the Holy Spirit appears only as means to the end of responsible freedom and conscience..." is refuted by CFC text (no. 677) which explicitly speaks of how "God strengthens us by enabling us to **share the life of Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spiri**t received in Baptism (Rom. 6:4) This Spirit, in uniting us to Christ, our Risen Savior, as members of his Body the Church, liberates and empowers us with new life in responding by our daily words and deeds to God's love."

– *third*, *the misinterpretation that* "responsible freedom" and

https://publications.lst.edu/

"conscience" are aspects of a secular humanism, is also explicitly rejected by CFC's description: "Thus, as disciples of Christ, mutually supporting one another through the grace of the Holy Spirit, we come to exercise responsible freedom according to God's loving design, as grasped by our gradually formed Christian conscience." This specifically Christian Revelation vision of moral life is confirmed in CFC's next paragraph (no. 678) in which person, freedom, moral responsibility and conscience are proposed as the constitutive elements of personal **Christian** moral living,—all exercised through the example of Christ, the grace of the Spirit, and the Father's loving mercy."

Conclusion

All these examples of misunderstandings seem to arise from one basic inadequate view: the consistent lack of focus on the actual believing Christian human believers, e.g. Catholic students. In the **second** and **third** examples, there seems little or no **appreciation** of the common lack of awareness, even among Catholic college seniors, of God's creative, graced presence in their daily lives. Nor in the **first** and **fourth** examples is there any sign of CFC's insistence on the intrinsic connection between believing in the truth (doctrine) that God is our Creator **and** acting morally and worshipping in consonance with that belief. What is clearly missed is: the CFC is focusing **not** on any secular, psychological "self-realization," but on "living as a Christian, a child of God." (1 Jn 3:1)

The next section of the critique is an account of the Black Elk of the Lakota Sioux, (pp. 95-96) offering an outlook supposedly in contrast with "Roche's." Since the above paragraphs have presented "clarifications" that radically modify the validity of the critique's grasp of 'Roche's' outlook, there is no legitimate basis for this comparison.

Fourfold Attack Against Fire

The critique's next charge is that the CFC never deeply explores the NT theme of consonance, but instead "confounds an account of one's faith with merely intellectual explanation of it." (p. 96). This

https://publications.lst.edu/

misunderstanding grounds a ruthless attack on the Formation Institute for Religion Educators (FIRE). This attack is summarized at some length here in direct quotes in order to generate a certain sensitivity to the nature and quality of the critique. FIRE is described as (1) found to be useless by the FIRE students for their faith life; (2) continually meeting resistance (misjudged as 'difficulty in understanding') by more knowledgeable FIRE students; (3) yielding "school religion programs and courses that rank relatively low in both effectivity and student popularity," and (4) remaining beyond the capability of the vast majority of catechists to execute. All this is supposedly drawn from the initial draft of a cooperative work entitled *The Mystery of Religion Education: Vademecum for Religion Educators,* which was published a year later as *Practical Catechesis: The Christian Faith as a Way of Life* (Phoenix, 2008).[17]

This critique seems to lack any reliable basis—the source cited provides no support whatsoever, but rather describes our present catechetical context which is in clear, urgent need for such a critically formed and tested catechetical approach as FIRE.[18] So perhaps the best way of refuting these charges is to focus on the actual thirty year history of FIRE which offers a sound basis for clarifying such a series of 'out-of-hand, ruthless and wild misinterpretations'. Regarding the **first** charge, FIRE students must actually find FIRE very useful since each year more applicants apply than can be accepted. The **second**

[17]Reference is given to the initial draft of a work entitled *The Mystery of Religious Education: Vademecum for Religion Educators (2007)* which subsequently has been completed and published as *Practical Catechesis: The Christian Faith as a Way of Life* (Phoenix, 2008). Of the three references, the **first** cites the wrong chapter, and then misinterprets the text which is not criticizing FIRE but rather the common lack of a holistic approach to Scripture and to Practical Theology which the FIRE approach is trying to offer. The **second** and **third** references focus not on FIRE but rather on diverse common responses to post-modernism and especially to the uncritical acceptance of the basically social science approach to catechesis.

[18]None of the critique's charges are supported by the *Vademecum* nor its final version, *Practical Catechesis: The Christian Faith as a Way of Life*.

https://publications.lst.edu/

charge about 'resistance' to FIRE flies in the face of the increasing demand by bishops, priests, religious superiors, catechetical leaders, etc. for conferences on FIRE's basic approach and its 'integration' methodology. Moreover, the fact that both the original NCDP (1985) and NCDP'07, as well as the CFC, our national catechism, all propose and exemplify the FIRE approach and methodology, surely offers **strong support** rather than resistance.

The **third** charge regarding school religion programs that rank low in effectivity and popularity is directly contradicted by the many successful religion textbook series that have adapted the FIRE approach. In the past three years, four major new religion textbook series—two by the largest female Religious Congregations in the country and the others by two of the top Catholic Universities—have followed the *National Catechetical Directories*' approach, together with constant use of the CFC. The **fourth** charge of "beyond the capacity of the vast majority of catechists" views this erroneously as a defect in FIRE's intelligibility rather than as proving the totally inadequate formation of most catechists, and thus the urgent need for professional formation like FIRE.

II. Reconsideration of Some Points in the National Catechism (pp. 97-108)

Groundless Charge of Misinterpreting the Spirit

The critique's **first** charge in this second major part of the article, subtitled "Catechesis as 'Putting on the Lord Jesus Christ'" (pp. 97-102), accuses the CFC as "neither exploring nor grasping the centrality of this existential theme for catechesis. Hence CFC fails to understand the locus where faith and gospel meet." Instead, CFC **"**replaces existential self-understanding in faith with general philosophical analysis." The critique then goes on to relate this particular charge against the CFC to 2 Tim.3:5 which speaks of "making a pretense of religion and denying its power," and develops its own charge by claiming CFC promotes "an outward form of godliness," "casting

https://publications.lst.edu/

doubt on the true power of the Spirit," manifesting "fundamental misunderstanding of that Spirit…"

The obvious "**clarification**" urgently needed here is to repeat what has already been clarified, but now apparently needs to be repeated in stronger terms. The critique's consistent charge that CFC fundamentally misunderstands the Spirit cannot be taken seriously, since in the whole critique there is no reference to CFC's chap 22 on the Holy Spirit which completely contradicts the charge, and which follows the numerous explicit expositions of the role of the Holy Spirit throughout the whole catechism, from "God's Call: Revelation (chap. 2) to the "Final Goal: Resurrection of the Body and Life Ever-lasting" (chap. 29) and the "Epilogue: The Lord's Prayer."

Critique's Total Lack of Graced Human Cooperation

Second, the charge that CFC fails to understand the locus where **faith** and **gospel** meet lacks any credible basis. The critique never addresses CFC's sharp exposition of faith in chap. 3 (especially its 'Paradoxical Characteristics'nos. 142-54) nor its account of the actual human living out the Gospel. Instead the critique consistently misinterprets CFC's exposition as a general philosophical analysis, replacing "the existential self-understanding in faith." The contrary is more accurate: the critique's "existential self-understanding" has apparently no human dimension—nowhere in the critique is the concrete human active cooperation, inspired by the Spirit, addressed. The "existential self-understanding in faith" seems to be just words; there is no human embodied reality.

Moreover, in the preceding pages our clarifications have shown how the critique's specific charges in its Part I erroneously misinterpreted CFC's explicitly 'theological' expositions of freedom and conscience to philosophy and a secular humanism "adorned with Christian doctrines." These charges can be refuted in concrete fashion by simply consulting CFC's **Subject Index** which provides a full page of explicit references to the Spirit's Activity/Role, Identity, and Titles, as well as the NCDP'07

https://publications.lst.edu/

no. 263 which clearly integrates the role of both divine and human in our graced life.

CCC's Generalities Outline vs. CFC's Graced Human Moral Action

The critique's **next step** is to insist on the catechetical goal of the transformed reader and transformed community by quoting CCC's outline of catechesis: a catechesis of the Holy Spirit, of grace, of the beatitudes, of sin and forgiveness, of human virtues, of Christian virtues, of the two fold commandments of charity, of ecclesial catechesis (pp. 99-100). Amen, alleluia! All this is supposedly working from the inner person to the outer teaching. **First clarification**: in the critique, there is **no inner person**–just a list of generalities which appear in the text of any ordinary catechism, and certainly in CFC. The critique then explains how the consonance between message, messenger and method is not guaranteed by the Spirit, but rather by the ministers of the Spirit who are tasked for this, and thus catechesis itself becomes an act of faith. **Second clarification**: there is no actual achieved **consonance** without the human action of the **catechized**. The focus of the critique is solely on the ministers of the Spirit, ignoring any required action by the catechized. Instead we get a summary of OT salvation history, climaxed with St. Paul's "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom 13:14) Unfortunately, there is no explanation at all of this "putting on." CFC's consistent effort to do just that is rejected as merely philosophy, "adorned with Christian doctrine"!

No Graced Human

The following section of the critique, "**Grace for the Catechetical Vocation**," (pp. 102-104) confirms this startling "gap" that has impaired the critique from the start. There is nothing on the catechists' necessary cooperation with the Spirit. Instead catechesis is described as "not merely instruction…but if it is to bear the power that transforms its hearers" and "the transformed community promised by God, then the way that we approach and teach these things must be of one piece…." **Clarification**: still no actual individual human

https://publications.lst.edu/

receiver nor human community receiving and practicing the Faith. The critique then develops the history of salvation from Lv.19:33-34 to a long quote from 1 Co 1:20-30, together with some quotable insights (e.g."God is not just saving individuals…he is creating *a people*") from Fee's work, **God's Empowering Presence**, but still with absolutely no attempt to explain how the actual receivers of the Gospel message are called to respond. Mention of "finding one's story" surely does not communicate the Gospel narrative of Christ's passionate call to Faith in him and his Word. Everything is still focused on the Spirit and God's creating call: there is no actual human receiver who is morally responsible for freely cooperating with God's grace in receiving the message. The necessary human cooperation with God's prevenient grace (stressed by Trent against the Luther) never appears.[19]

No Free Human Graced Response

The final section of Pt. II of the critique, "**A Narrative of Grace**"(pp. 104-108) begins by stressing that "the ultimate reading of the biblical text is a narrative of grace of which the community is heir and its members are recipients." From "dehumanizing ways which might possess us," "we are freed in the Spirit of Christ, because of our being bearers of God's saving grace." Again, any necessity for a free human response seems to be completely ignored, something utterly lost sight of.

But the critique brings in a new charge, this time rejecting the discussion by Roche, Locker, and Natividad on the historical-critical method [HCM] in biblical studies. Their treatment is dismissed as "generalizations" regarding what one finds inspiring or not, and therefore something that has no real place in an objective discussion. This critique needs serious clarification in a number of ways. **First**, our discussion was not about one's taste for what is inspiring or not,

[19]Cf. Council of Trent, "Decree on Justification," in J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith In the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church,* 4th rev. ed. (Bangalore: Theological Publications India, 1982), no. 1929.

https://publications.lst.edu/

but about the nature of the HCM as alone adequate for the religious educator. We (Locker, Natividad, and Roche) have discovered to our dismay that it is impossible in practice to communicate an evaluation of the HCM that recognizes its positive contributions while insisting it is inadequate if taken **alone**. The present critic joins many others in completely ignoring this "alone."

Second, citing authors who use the HCM and yet manage to be "inspiring," has no particular relevance. Like the critic himself, who admits that he holds "the Holy Spirit stands within the text," these authors are not using the HCM alone. By firmly holding that "the Holy Spirit stands within the text," the historical text has now actually become intrinsically "trans-historical." This is confirmed by asserting God is its author together with the human authors.[20]

Exegete's Personal Faith "Saves" HCM

The critique's effort to save the adequacy of the HCM alone is to stress the Christian faith of the exegete interpreting the Scriptures — a personal faith which surely cannot be taken as an intrinsic part of the HCM. The HCM was created as the 'scientific' approach to historical research, formulated in the late19th century to emphasize the genuine objective validity claimed by secular historical works —- a method which claims no methodological means for discerning and evaluating the role of the Holy Spirit.

In reality, the gradually increasing recognition recently for an explicitly theological and canonical hermeneutics has already become a common theme for many professional Catholic and Protestant exegetes. Moreover with the elevation of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), to the Papacy as Pope Benedict XVI, this call for a new "spiritual hermeneutics" has become one of the strongest and most publicized

[20]Cf. Vatican II, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation," no. 11 on Biblical inspiration, inerrancy and canonicity.

https://publications.lst.edu/

new official Papal teachings focusing on sacred Scripture. In his first intervention during the Synod on the Word of God, (Oct. 5-26, 2008) the Pope illustrated the pitfalls of the historical-critical method of interpreting Scripture when it is divorced from a "hermeneutics of faith." The Pope urged the Synod to include two items in their final list of proposals to him: first, to insist that the historical-critical method be balanced by a "hermeneutic of faith," second, that Catholic scripture scholars be educated in this principle.[21]

Finally, the critique's last paragraph once more renews its two basic charges: 1) that CFC is a mere work of "philosophical analysis of the faith," 2) that the CFC never relates to the transforming Spirit's role in empowering us to "put on the Lord Christ." These charges have already been "clarified" a number of times as serious misunderstandings of the CFC's position. But now, at this final stage, perhaps a deeper, more sharply formed 'clarification' may be suggested, to offer some further possible enlightenment. This **new clarification** suggests that the basic source of the critique's consistent misunderstandings of the CFC can be traced to two major weaknesses: 1) lack of any developed contact with the primary sources of Catholic catechesis as a distinct discipline within the Ministry of the Word, explaining the actual nature, purpose and methods of catechesis,[22] and 2) the *complete failure to address the*

[21]Cf. *The [London] Tablet* (18 Oct. 2008): 35. The Pope's detailed evaluation of the HCM is set forth in the first chapter of his best seller entitled *Jesus of Nazareth.*

[22]The critique is full of theological references which have no specific catechetical orientation. In preparing this defense of the CFC, it was soon discovered there was no need to examine the interpretative accuracy of the critique's use of these theological sources since they clearly had no direct relevance to the CFC's position. More significant, perhaps, is the surprising lack of any reference to basic catechetical sources. Neither traditional catechetical sources from the Patristic and Scholastic periods, nor any major 20th century official Vatican catechetical documentation (nor any Philippine ecclesial publications) seem to have been used in the critique. For a professional critique of an officially Vatican approved national catechism, one would expect wide use of works such as Berard Marthaler, *The Creed: The Apostolic Faith in Contemporary Theology,* rev.

https://publications.lst.edu/

constitutive ***subjective*** *dimension of 'Christian existence', i.e., both God's Self-Revelation and the graced human response in Faith (i.e. what God's revelation is calling for, and what the Christian believer is called to do as the morally responsible subject of living the faith.)*

The critique's continuous misunderstandings of the CFC's basic **Christian** vision is not at all by chance, nor is it unique. Many strive today to overcome the unfortunate post-Vatican II catechetical slide into a self-centered, social-science dominated humanism.[23] But the deeper problem to be faced is: How are we to come to an intelligible critically balanced account of the ***actual inter-penetration of the divine and the human in our daily life of faith***. Few experts seem to be aware of the extreme difficulty in articulating with critical accuracy this existential "dialogue." Manifold are the ways of **so stressing either the divine or the human dimension** that its counter-part is ignored. Concrete examples can be given of exaggerated, one-sided presentations of each dimension.

Subjective Dimension of Both God's Gift and Human Response

But the actual problem is still deeper. It is not primarily any one-sided, exaggerated focus on either the divine input or the human

ed. (Twenty-Third Publications, 1993), and his following work, *The Catechism Yesterday and Today: The Evolution of a Genre* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995); Robert Imbelli, ed., *Handing on the Faith: The Church's Mission and Challenge* (Herder & Herder Book, Crossroad, 2006); Pheme Perkins, *What We Believe: A Biblical Catechism of the Apostles' Creed* (Paulist, 1986); Roger Van Harn, ed., *Exploring and Proclaiming the Apostles' Creed* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), etc.

[23]Cf. for example, the insightful critique of John Cavadini, "Ignorant Catholics," *Commonweal* (Apr 9, 2004): 12-14 in which he accepts partial responsibility for the post-Vatican II "touchy-feely" phase of catechesis which resulted in a vast ignorance of sound Catholic doctrine, morality, and worship. His outline of a renewed catechetical pedagogy of the basics is: catechesis must become more theological, and all theology must become more catechetical.

https://publications.lst.edu/

reception. Most catechetical presentations surely refer to both God's objective Self-revelation in word and deed (DV 2), and to the objective graced human response in Faith. What is *missing is the* ***subjective dimension*** of *both God's Self–Revelation and our graced human Faith response.*[24] Deeper insight into the varieties and levels of human knowledge and action, together with various corresponding ways of human learning—coming to know, understand and 'perform' the truth acquired—have opened up new approaches to critical theological reflection on our traditional ways of educating the faithful in the Faith—and consequently what could improve the effectivity of our catechesis. This common neglect of the subjective dimension of Revelation and Faith has touched all current catechesis and theology.

The 'turn to the subject" which has so dominated philosophy in recent past centuries, has not as yet exercised the same radical revisions in theology and catechesis. Most seminary courses in theology are still commonly focused on an **objective, academic account** of all the varied individual theological disciplines engaged in communicating the Good News. The same is true for most catechist formation programs which concentrate on the catechists' accurate objective doctrinal

[24]**Two unfortunate slips** in official Church catechetical documents exemplify this tendency of missing the subjective dimension. The **first** is CFC no. 1527 which originally corrected the common subjective misunderstanding that sacraments produce grace automatically. Now the imposed text completely ignores the faithful as subjects celebrating the Mass while focusing completely on three objective aspects: 1) grace given *ex opera operato* (from the work having been worked); 2) grace given even if the priest celebrating the Mass is in mortal sin (the grace comes from Christ, not the priest); and 3) grace from sacraments celebrated properly, i.e. according to prescriptions of what the Church intends to do. Three strikes, all completely missing the lay persons celebrating the Eucharist. The **second** example is our NCDP'07, no. 201 which affirms that faith as content is totally from God, maturity in the Faith is totally grace from the Holy Spirit -- as if **the infinite living Triune God** is reciting some divinely composed and memorized Creed, and is in the process of maturing in the Faith! One wonders ….

https://publications.lst.edu/

presentation. What is often missing is any serious study of the faithful's actual living out of these objective realities of the Faith.[25]

Sources for Recognizing the Subjective [not subjectivistic] Dimension

Recognizing this radical neglect of the **subjective** dimension of both God's personal Self-Revelation and of Christian existence has gradually arisen from various starting points. **One** clear source has been the criticism of the 'scientific' historical-critical method that claims to be completely adequate, in itself, as the only hermeneutic needed in Scripture studies. In addition to the HCM, most Scripture experts are coming to accept the definite need for developing the "spiritual senses" of Scripture in a theological hermeneutics of faith.[26] A **second** source has been some post-Vatican II renewal studies in liturgical theology which recognized different possible 'theologies' of even the same sacrament (cf. note 27 below), as well as the need to correct traditional sacramental theology's exaggerated focus on the ontological, ideal image of the sacraments to the almost complete neglect of their subjective existential, experiential dimensions in the faithful's celebrating the sacraments.[27]

---

[25]Cf. Avery Dulles' brief article on six "Models of Evangelization," *Origins* 37 (May 17, 2007) for a simple example which recognizes the "subjective dimension" of both God's Gift and our human response.

[26]Cf. Lucia Natividad, Markus Locker and Joseph Roche, "The Use of Scripture in Theology and Religious Education," *Loyola Schools Review [Humanities]* 3 (2003): 9-23. What started out as an insight into a weakness in much current study and use of Scripture, especially in catechesis, was soon recognized as a weakness in communicating all three essential dimensions of the Faith, namely doctrine, morals and worship. Cf. for one example, "The Nature and Role of Doctrine in Catholic Faith," *Loyola Schools Review* [Humanities] 6 (2007): 137-70.

[27]Thomas O'Loughlin sketches three different "theologies"—three different objective dimensions of the Eucharist upon which theological reflection can

https://publications.lst.edu/

A **third** source of this new awareness of the subjective dimension is the recently newly developed discipline called "Practical Theology," with its emphasis on "Christian Practices," and direct focus on the faithful's actual daily living out of the Christian Faith.[28] It shows how recognizing the constitutive subjective dimension of both Revelation and Faith grounds an alternate approach that differs substantially from the traditional objective-focused approach to teaching theology.[29]

Hence the "better direction" proposed by this defense of the CFC consists in:

1) approaching the CFC within the genre of Catholic adult national catechisms;
2) with careful, accurate reading of its text, guided by its own general directives flowing from its own catechetical methodological basis (the NCDP's), and
3) ever mindful of the essential qualities of all authentic catechesis, namely, not improvised but systematic, dealing with essentials, yet sufficiently complete, to offer an

---

focus—in his "The Liturgical Vessels of the Latin Eucharistic Liturgy: A Case of an Embedded Theology," *Worship* 82 (2008): 482-504. Cf. also Joseph Martos, "Twenty Years Later," *Ministry and Liturgy* 29/2 (2003): 9-11, in which he warns against traditional Catholic sacramental theology's one-sided stress on the ontological, ideal dimensions of liturgy and the sacraments, to the almost complete neglect of any critical theological reflection on their subjective dimension — the faithful's actual celebration of the Eucharist or reconciliation.

[28]Cf. Markus Locker, Lucia Natividad, and Joseph Roche, "Grounding A Holistc Approach to Scripture in 'Practical Theology'," *Loyola Schools Review* [Humanities] 5 (2006): 57-72. See also *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, eds. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), and Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1999).

[29]Cf. Craig Dykstra, "Alternate Understanding of 'Practice'," in *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition*, ed. N. Murphy (Trinity Press, 1997) See also his most recent co-edited work with Dorothy Bass, *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

https://publications.lst.edu/

> integral Christian initiation, open to all the other factors of Christian life. (CT 21)

Conclusion

With this final 'clarification' the defense of the CFC, our national catechism, rests. Hopefully these pages will confirm the significant value of the CFC in catechesis, taken as an exercise of the ministry of the Word in the local Catholic Church in the Philippines. Our hope is that this article may encourage and help toward the deeper study and more creative and effective use of the CFC, in catechizing Filipino Catholics of all ages and life-styles, toward a fuller, deeper, more joyous inculturated Catholic Faith, in loving Christian service of all, throughout length and breadth of our beautiful land.

Soli Deo Gloria

https://publications.lst.edu/

CONTRIBUTORS

Joaquin C. Yap, Jr., D.Phil. from Oxford University, England, is associate professor of Systematic Theology at Loyola School of Theology.

Joseph L. Roche, S.J., Ph.D in Philosophy from the Catholic University of Louvain, is professor *emeritus* of Systematic Theology and Religious Education at Loyola School of Theology and the Ateneo de Manila University.

Aloysius L. Cartagenas, a Josefino who did his first cycle of theology at the Loyola School of Theology and graduate studies at the Catholic University of Leuven (S.Th.D.), serves as professor and formator at San Carlos Major Seminary and School of Theology in Cebu City, Philippines.

Enrico M. Genilo, S.J., S.T.D. from the Weston Jesuit School of Theology, is assistant professor of Moral Theology and Executive Secretary at Loyola School of Theology.

Timoteo J.M. Ofrasio, S.J., S.L.D. from the Anselmianum, Rome, is assistant professor of Liturgy at Loyola School of Theology.

https://publications.lst.edu/