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TOWARD "MATURING IN CHRISTIAN FAITH" TODAY

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I. Introduction

In recent years there has arisen from any number of sources a heightened awareness of the urgent need today for basic catechesis and religious education among Catholic Filipinos. The ever growing percentage of Filipino children and youth who are being educated in public schools without adequate Catholic catechetical formation is one firm basis for this pressing concern. Moreover a number of recent surveys among Filipino youth and young adults have confirmed the startling lack of religious and spiritual literacy among many students and graduates of even Catholic schools. PCP II had already proclaimed more than a decade ago that catechesis is "the most basic area of renewal, the first priority."[1] The "National Pastoral Consultation on Church Renewal" (2001) confirmed this ten years later by placing "Integral Faith Formation" as the first of nine pastoral priorities.[2]

The Church in the Philippines is not unique in recognizing catechesis/religious education as a (if not *the*) top priority. Many Catholic bishops' conferences in Europe, the United States, Latin America, Asia, and Africa have similar pronouncements on the same

urgent catechetical need.[3] The Vatican has led the way in publishing the *Catechism for the Catholic Church* (1994), and the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997), which the Philippine Catholic Church has emulated by creating its own national catechism *The Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (1997), its translation into Filipino, *Katesismo para sa mga Pilipinong Katoliko* (2000), and by revising its own National Catechetical Directory, *Maturing in Christian Faith* (1985).[4] Yet despite these laudable and undeniably fruitful efforts in recent years, the urgency for renewed catechesis—and, in fact, for a "new evangelization"—seems to have increased rather than diminished.

It is not possible to cover even in cursory fashion all dimensions of the catechetical ministry at once. Hence this study focuses on the understanding of the nature, goal and methods of both the catechetical ministry itself, and of its message—the Gospel message—to be communicated. It does not enter into important areas such as the socio-religious and cultural contexts of our local catechesis, nor the needed adaptation to the level of those being catechized, nor questions of organization, personnel, and institutions involved in the catechetical ministry. Within its more limited focus on the catechetical ministry and its message, it begins by investigating some major obstacles that are met in any serious effort to respond to the complex catechetical need. It involves the initial problem of recognizing the real depth and extent of the catechetical problems and of the validity of catechetical-evangelization itself. This is followed by an overview of some basic problems that arise in striving for an adequate grasp of the content and sources of the message, and of the methods and goals of a renewed catechesis. This overview offers the needed background for all critical attempts at developing, from the side of the nature, goal and methodology of the Good News itself, an effective, well-planned catechetical program. Finally, this study concludes with some general principles which could provide the basis for developing and "carrying out" such an effective catechesis that responds to our national catechetical need.

Throughout this study, an initial bibliography of available sources is offered in the endnotes for the purpose of providing references to selected articles and books that are representative of the better works in the various topics treated. These references also confirm the extent and depth of what is involved in the present catechetical ministry. Actually, the catechetical ministry itself is in the process of a rather radical alteration in its configuration which can be viewed in terms of three basic shifts: from "school/student-centered" to the life-long process of Faith formation; from an "informational, overly doctrinal" to a more experiential, contextualized catechesis; and from individual/sectarian catechesis to a community of inter-religious dialogue.[5]

In viewing the nation-wide catechetical needs of our local Church, and the many generous attempts to respond to these urgent needs, one cannot but be impressed by the spontaneous goodwill and spirit of self-sacrifice offered by so many. Yet this impressive positive witness may obscure a basic weakness. Highly motivated, good-willed efforts to respond to the catechetical needs are not always based on sufficient critical planning or accurate assessment of the many actual complexities and depths of the problem. A not uncommon "mind set" among those who volunteer for catechetical work, or those newly appointed to some catechetical leadership post, is that whatever was being done needs to be radically transformed. Therefore any new initiatives on their part will certainly be an advance and cannot fail to create some improvement. School and parish administrators are often tempted by complaints and charges from various sources to precipitous change from the *actual* admittedly imperfect parish or school catechetical efforts to some highly touted "new" plan that promises a much more fruitful catechesis. Such changes have often proved to be counterproductive in the longer view.

What is frequently missed in this approach is that the very motives animating the "reformers" are the very same sentiments that inspired the originators of the present on-going catechetical program

—often begun only three years or so before. So what is actually happening is a series of "new beginnings" every three or four years, none of which seems to have profited from the mistakes or inadequacies of the past. The unfortunate result is that most five year catechetical plans barely last two or three years before some change in leadership inaugurates new plans.

Briefly, the sheer number and variety of new catechetical initiatives that have been tried over the past few decades and have either failed or simply faded into oblivion should be a clear enough warning that creating an effective catechetical/religious educational program is not a simple matter—neither in terms of the message itself, nor the means of communicating, nor the goal to be achieved. This is the case even before facing the further formidable problems of attracting a sufficient number of qualified catechists and religion teachers, supplying them with adequately inculturated religious educational materials that are needed to communicate the Gospel message and yet are "student friendly," etc.

This caution is not aimed at discouraging those who wish to volunteer to improve the catechetical ministry—but rather to stress the need for sufficient understanding of the realities of the catechetical enterprise. Just being aware of the sheer number of those needing catechetical instruction compared to the very limited number of formed catechists is a first step. Any adequate understanding of the problem would include the recognition of the paramount importance of the professional formation of catechists/religion teachers, and of the long range planning needed in order to ensure some continuity and follow-up of the projects initiated. It should also prompt a persevering, realistic effort at *collaboration* among active catechetical groups and institutions. At present, much of the truly excellent work being done by individuals, specific groups and Catholic institutions is focused on responding to an immediate felt-need, without, however, averting sufficiently to how this work can be sustained, or how it fits in with other on-going catechetical programs.

No initiative can hope to address the much wider and deeper dimensions, and manifold complexities, of the Church's catechetical need in its totality. But what is needed from the start is a basic grasp of the extent and depth of the whole picture, while recognizing the significant difference between an abstract ideal (perhaps as sketched in official Church documents), and the ever present limitations of actual catechetical programs and efforts. The correct presupposition is not that "nothing of value has been done before," but that "what we have is the best that previous efforts have been able to achieve." This lays down a challenge, then, to generate new creativity, new hope for a better, more effective catechesis, by directly facing and wrestling to overcome—not ignoring or avoiding—the real obstacles that have impeded former efforts.

This extended introduction can be summarized and sharpened by a brief series of propositions outlining the objectives of this study. There **is an urgent need for**:

1. **much greater catechetical effort**, at all levels, throughout our country;
2. **more effective, higher quality catechesis** that is possible only through qualified catechists/religion teachers in sufficient numbers;
3. **critical planning and active collaboration** in sustained efforts among the major groups and institutions engaged in the catechetical ministry—a willingness to work together toward a consensus regarding what has to be done, how, and by whom;
4. **a catechetical position** that intentionally aims to go beyond both the notion that anyone can create the renewed catechesis simply by common sense and goodwill, and the opposite tendency to slavishly follow, without any critical, creative effort at adaptation, Church guidelines interpreted in a basically fundamentalist manner.

This study aims to make a modest contribution toward more effective planning and execution of the means designed to deepen and improve the quality of our catechesis and religious education.

We now turn to a general overview of some major elements in the catechetical/religious education ministry and message in the Philippines today.[6] We begin by sketching the general background of today's catechetical ministry, and then proceed to some key factors indicative of its complex problematic, grouped in terms of the content, sources, methods, and goals of catechesis/religious education.

II. Elements of the Catechetical Challenge

General Background

The most obvious and over-reaching characteristic of the contemporary catechetical challenge must surely be the world-wide secularist background, with its materialism, consumerism and globalization, creating a post-modern world that defies any simplistic definition The impact of 20th century science and technology, of the philosophic and social sciences' "turn to the subject" characterized by historicity and individualism, and especially of the mass communications media creating a new "one world"—this cannot be overemphasized. The powerful influence of these factors touches every dimension of the cultural, social and religious life of individual Filipinos and families today, especially the children and the youth. These forces combine to generate attitudes, values, priorities and a whole new language that at least initially seem to have little continuity with the Catholic tradition—its religious language, ceremonies and practices.[7] Of course these new influences are not felt with equal depth and intensity in every area of our country—there are very significant differences between Filipinos in the provinces and those in the major urban centers. But these differences are slowly eroding through the pervasive influence of the mass media.[8]

Since Vatican II, among the many popular catechetical approaches perhaps the most widespread has been the so-called "experiential method" which concentrates on daily life experience, using much of the methodology and terminology common to the social sciences and communications. While marking a clear step forward beyond the question-and-memorized-answer method of the *Baltimore Catechisms,* this experiential approach gave rise to certain opposing reactions which stressed return to the "traditional teaching" of the Church.[9] This tension between focusing primarily on doctrinal content or on experiential and communication methods, sometimes oversimplified in terms of "orthodoxy" versus "orthopraxis," remains with us today in the tension between stressing the "Gospel message" or the "situated communication of the Faith."[10]

Yet within this secularist background there exists paradoxically a spiritual yearning that is manifested in too many ways to be denied. This increased interest in religion is a powerful worldwide phenomenon, the source of many positive movements such as the post-Vatican II proliferation of lay ministries, the Charismatic movement and the resurgence of many Christian Fundamentalist groups—and arguably of even some religiously inspired terrorist groups. Some have interpreted this phenomenon as an indication that the Catholic Church has not responded adequately to these spiritual yearnings. In any case, this openness to the spiritual should constitute a real clarion call for our strongest possible efforts in renewing catechesis and religious education.[11]

Specific Factors within the Catechesis: Content and Sources

Beyond this new general background, embracing paradoxically both secularist and spiritual yearnings, there are many specific factors proper to studying and communicating the Faith that need to be recognized and considered in any adequate, critically grounded effort toward a renewed, effective and fruitful catechetical ministry. These problematic factors can be grouped together in terms of catechesis'

content (the Gospel message itself), including the influence of current theology, the basic catechetical *sources* of Scripture, Tradition and human experience, and current catechetical *methods* and *goals.* The following sections take up a brief exposition of these factors.

Catechetical Content The first problematic factor pertaining to the *content* of catechesis focuses on the very legitimacy of its communication in today's catechetical evangelization. Preaching the "Good News," or evangelizing, has been brought into question in part by the new focus on interreligious dialogue. In the Church's preparation for the new millennium, inter-religious dialogue suddenly became a major focus of theological discussion, with direct impact on the Church's mission of evangelization,[12] and on the traditional Catholic teaching on the universality of Christ's salvific role. Since Vatican II there has already been a noticeable decline in the Church's *missio ad extra,*[13] and a number of conflicting Catholic theological positions have arisen regarding Christ as universal mediator of salvation.[14] Both these current objective factors influence the "intellectual climate" or "mind set" of Catholics today—both the catechists and those being catechized, whether they are consciously aware of them or not. Simply put, the traditional common understanding of Christ's missionary mandate (Mt. 28:19-20) and of Catholic missionaries sent to foreign lands, has come under serious criticism, with proposals for radical modification.

Beyond this open debate on the very validity and content of missionary evangelization and Christ's universal mediation, new studies in the central truths of the Faith have brought into question much traditional content of catechesis. For example, in current **Christological research,** the identity and mission of Jesus Christ have become the center of a major theological debate carried on for the past decades by experts.[15] Besides putting in doubt the traditional Catholic Creedal teaching on Jesus' unique identity as the God-man, the salvific value of Christ's Passion and crucifixion is seriously questioned,[16] as well as the traditional understanding of Christ's resurrection.[17]

Now the need for serious creative and critical theological research in Christology is certainly beyond doubt. But it is nonetheless true that prolonged, contradictory, and unresolved questioning of traditional Catholic teaching does cause confusion and uncertainty among ordinary Catholics and catechists who are not professionally trained theologians. The practical problem raised here for catechesis is twofold:

1) the "new learning," the latest theories and theological trends acquired by graduate students and seminarians are "passed on" to catechists and religion teachers who are ill-prepared to adequately evaluate the new positions, and even less capable of integrating the new with the traditional;

2) catechetical and educational administrators, often under pressure from parents, alumni/ae and local Church leaders, are led to either completely ignore such new ventures, or do just the opposite and adopt them even though they have not been tried nor tested, and often lack the needed critical grounding and experiential know-how to make them truly fruitful for the catechetical ministry.

One lesson that can and should be learned from this situation is that the basic goals, priorities and methodologies of religious educators are not the same as those of professional academic theologians, scriptural exegetes or liturgical experts.

Besides current Christology, much of the traditional stand on the interrelation of faith and reason, the traditional apologetic bases for the *preambula fidei,* and on the question of truth itself, has undergone radical changes.[18] A metaphysically grounded systematic theology has been largely abandoned by many "experts" without any clear consensus about an adequate substitute, or even of the validity of such a basis.[19] In brief, much of Catholic "doctrine," both as traditionally accepted and as proclaimed even in Vatican II,[20] has come under serious question by the "experts," most of whom seem

little concerned over the practical impact such questioning might have on catechesis and religious education.

Following the *NCDP*'s guideline for viewing Faith's content in terms of doctrine, morals and worship, similar problematic issues are common in both Catholic morality and current sacramental theology. In morals, the contemporary stress on virtue ethics and character is surely a major advance from the former overly legalistic approach to morality through the Commandments. On the other hand, relegating the Ten Commandments to a series of disconnected footnotes does not help the catechist or religion teacher. There must be some "inclusive ground" that combines both virtue and commandment—for the simple reason that such corresponds more accurately to the moral reality of society from Gospel times till today.[21] Moreover the sheer amount of published speculation on freedom, conscience and moral law in the social sciences, philosophic and theological studies—often contradictory in orientation and specific content—tends to create confusion and poses a major obstacle impeding the catechetical process of fostering mature Catholic moral formation.[22]

The admirable progress that has been made since Vatican II in liturgical worship and sacramental theology cannot cover over the fact that PCP II's call for a "renewed worship"—focused on implementing Vatican II's ideal of "full, conscious, and active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy" (SC 14)—still needs to be sounded throughout the land.[23] Sacramental practice for many Catholic Filipinos still suffers from being separated from their daily life, still too "formal" to respond naturally and spontaneously to their deepest spiritual yearnings—perhaps still not "inculturated" enough to be experienced as "truly Filipino."[24]

Sources of Catechesis: Scripture Although most catechists and even catechetical leaders are probably unaware of it, there is a quiet growing transformation going on regarding the study and use of Scripture, particularly for catechesis and religious education. It

consists in a call for a broader, more holistic and Catholic "new approach" that has arisen from the experienced inadequacy of the historical-critical approach alone to effectively communicate the "Good News" as inspiring, uplifting, saving.[25] By its very nature, the historical-critical approach has tended to become overly technical, abstract and impersonal, separated from the living faith of the ordinary Catholic, and focused more on information rather than on any transformative formation called for by Scripture. This unbalanced stress on the secular historical-literary methodology of studying Scripture over Scripture's **religious** content and purpose has resulted in the glaring neglect of two basic functions of Scripture: its critical role (truth vs. idolatry, superstition) and formative function (to foster transforming life in the Spirit).[26]

This "new approach" to Scripture study and use draws on the Patristic tradition as well as many new insights from current hermeneutical studies. Grounded in an explicit Faith-view of the nature, purpose and methodology of Scripture itself, this "hybrid discipline-in-the-making" draws on the long history of the Augustine-Anselm theological tradition—"Faith seeking understanding" and "understanding seeking Faith"—which John Paul II recalled in his *Fides et Ratio.*[27] It opens up the "literal sense" of Scriptural texts to include both their origin and their meaning for today, with a renewed "critical" use of the Patristic allegorical approach and the traditional triple "spiritual senses."[28]

What is at stake here is not just one more new hermeneutical approach, but rather a much more fundamental reappraisal of what has dominated Scripture study for the past half century. The historical-critical method is still a vital part of any adequate Scripture study—what is being changed is its dominance as the *sole* method. For catechesis and religious education, the practical question: "how does this modify/impinge upon the Faith-life of the believer?" becomes a key norm for evaluating all Scriptural work. This is based on the very *nature* of Scripture as "ecclesial"—the book of the Church arising from the Faith of its inspired authors, narrating the paradigmatic

Faith events of the people of God, and calling the readers/hearers to such Faith. It assumes that the *purpose* of Scripture is for "teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in holiness" (2 Tm 3:16; cf. Col.1:28; 3:16), in a word, for "conversion."[29]

From this basis, the new approach fosters **study methods** that relate to Scripture as a work of *art*, as *"sacramental,"* something that naturally needs to be "performed" in order to be properly understood and evaluated.[30] To achieve this involves one's imagination through which the deeper meaning of Scripture's symbolic language is grasped.[31] That this "new approach" is not just one more novel Scriptural hermeneutic among many others is shown by the fact that it can and needs to be applied in an analogous way to the study of Catholic doctrine, morals and worship. Basically it consists in a more adequate holistic study of the realities of Christian Faith that gets beneath what can be objectively represented, by the exercise of a fuller, more adequate epistemology.[32]

Church teaching is the second essential catechetical source and a lively discussion has been carried on during the past decade or more on Tradition in general, and on the value of the Creeds in particular.[33] For those engaged in catechesis and religious education, the key factor is not so much the theory of Tradition but rather the more practical question of how to make Church teaching "alive" and inspirational for daily living out the Faith. Making good use of Church teaching is a real challenge today—regarding both its practical relation to Scripture, and especially its "meaning for today." Even "formed" catechists seem particularly weak in the needed skill of communicating to students, parishioners, etc. Church teaching as "**saving truths**." It is more than likely that doctrinal teaching comes across in great part in an "imposed, authoritarian manner," most often quite unrelated to daily life.

Human experience is a basic source of all catechesis, especially in its inculturated dimension,[34] but the adequacy of human experience alone as the unique basis for catechesis is seriously questioned.

Personal experience alone is inadequate to ground the central Christian truths of the Incarnation and the Blessed Trinity. The traditional position of God's revelation as the basic source of Christian Faith seems inescapable. Nevertheless, the practical challenge of how to communicate this revelation to people today in concrete relevant ways without losing the religious transcendence of God and his message, remains a central problem for all catechesis. This is the perennial basis for the tension between a catechesis based primarily on theology, and one drawing heavily on the social sciences/ communication media. Perhaps the best hope for some resolution comes from the new thrust for a truly "pastoral" and "practical" theology that by its very nature embraces the "Good News" itself and its impact on Christian living.[35]

In brief, then, the catechetical problems raised by study and use of its sources may be summarized as follows:

1. sheer historical critical investigation alone into the sources of Faith is not adequate because it fails to grasp their full Faith reality;

2. the academic goals of biblical and theological research are not identical with those of catechesis/religious education; these disciplines have different priorities;

3. an understanding and use of the sources that concentrate on a primarily "notional" as distinct from a "real assent," are not adequate for authentic catechesis. This is true of all three essential dimensions of the Faith: doctrine, morals, and worship.

III. Catechetical Methods and Goals

Methods in Catechesis Tracing the history of various catechetical methodologies through the ages is a study in itself. Even when limited to the post-Vatican II scene, one cannot but be impressed by the sheer amount and intensity of studies on catechetical methodology.

Much of this focus on method has undoubtedly produced significant progress—exemplified, for example, in the current insistence on inculturation, and on developing the existential, experiential, subjective dimensions of daily living the Faith. Current catechetical methodologies are drawn from numerous contemporary sources. The social sciences and various educational and communication theories are exercising direct influence on religious educators such as James Michael Lee. Likewise the developmental theories of the human person as popularized by Kohlberg, Piaget, Erikson, Loder and Fowler, have had a significant impact on current catechetical methodology. Other new catechetical methods have been developed from the foundational work of certain philosophers and theologians such as Buber, Lonergan, Polanyi, Rahner, von Balthasar, Hauerwas and Tracy.[36]

But perhaps the most important new development in catechetical methodology has been the acute concern regarding the most fruitful ways of studying and using sacred Scripture in catechesis.[37] The publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and its many critiques elicited a new critical discussion in this area. It is this renewed concern for a more holistic, more "Catholic" study of Scripture—as described above—that has more than anything else inspired new research into methodology in catechesis and religious education.[38] This new thrust is only just beginning to effect any change in the formation of catechists/religion teachers and in the composition of religion textbooks. But there are high hopes that this fuller understanding of Scripture, which is characteristic of the traditional Catholic approach, will gradually bring about a more fruitful and effective catechetical methodology.

One reason supporting this hope is the fact that the same fundamental principle is operative in renewing doctrinal, moral and liturgical catechesis. Like Scripture itself, all three essential dimensions of the Faith are immediately and directly related to the actual living out, day-to-day, of the life of Faith. Therefore one major criterion for testing the validity of any study of these dimensions is: "how does it modify/affect/touch the daily life of faith of the faithful?"

This norm constitutes the first rule of thumb for religious educators, and distinguishes them from academic experts who are focused exclusively on the scientific research in Scripture, Tradition, doctrines, morals or worship.[39]

Finally, it might be helpful to take a step backward from the current scene in order to get a more general view, a wider, more encompassing perspective from which to view catechetical methodology for our new millennium. As briefly indicated at the start of this essay, a number of significant changes are evolving within our basic catechetical orientation. These changes will radically affect catechetical methodology. One example is the movement **from** a basic a-historical, Church doctrines (Creed) catechetical approach **to** one focused more on its Scriptural sources, in an historically sensitive methodological approach. Another example is the change from the traditional question-answer method, stressing memorization of objective doctrines of the Faith, to more problematic, experiential methods that put great stress on the modern means of communication. Both these movements involve significant changes in how to go about catechizing, how to prepare catechists for their actual catechetical work, and how to design effective, inculturated catechetical materials, especially religion textbooks for children and youth levels.

These changes in actual catechetical methodology are direct consequences of more fundamental changes in catechetical perspective. Three basic shifts in catechetical orientation are already in process: 1) from child-youth school based catechesis to the life-long process of faith formation, whose prime analogue is adult catechesis; 2) from a primarily objective, informational, doctrinal orientation to a more contextualized, inculturated, experiential approach, sensitive to the subjective dimension of the life of faith; and finally, 3) from the traditional individual/sectarian catechesis to a more communitarian religious openness that extends even to inter-religious dialogue.[40]

In summary, current catechetical methodology has profited greatly from a creative critical use of significant advances in our knowledge of how human persons grow up, mature, form their ideals and values, overcome obstacles, etc. Perhaps the most outstanding feature is the new stress on the **imagination** in the life of Faith and personal grasp of basic human **symbols**, key to understanding sacramental life and Faith itself.[41] Regarding any attempt at integrating the many diverse methodologies, perhaps the key to any practical resolution is to recognize the **different levels** of methodologies. In the area of catechesis, the *NCDP* proposed a methodology drawn directly from the nature of the "Good News," coming to us through Scripture and Tradition. From a philosophical perspective, deduction and induction dominate the general classification of method, while from a more pedagogical view, a method of "see, judge, act, celebrate, evaluate" has been adopted by many in diverse forms.[42]

Goals of Catechesis The preceding sections have already covered any significant changes in viewing the basic apostolic goals of catechesis. Whatever advances that have been made usually originate from one or two sources. First, there is the ongoing research into current catechetical initiatives and trends with the view towards improving the quality and effectivity of catechesis.[43] Second, renewed interest in all aspects of being human in today's world has given new impetus to a specifically "Christian anthropology" that provides new and different support for catechesis.[44]

A more hands-on, concrete way of coming to a renewed understanding of the goals of catechesis and religious education would be to focus on how current catechetical work develops the three essential dimensions of Christian Faith. Is there any particular new emphasis in doctrinal exposition, or the developing basic notions in Christian morality or worship. For example, regarding doctrine, one significant advance has been the recognition of the urgent need to explain the importance of doctrinal truths and the manner of interpreting them, for living the Faith. The time of simply memorizing "formulas" has definitely passed.[45] Significant shifts have occurred

in moral catechesis, both before and after John Paul II's *Veritatis Splendor* (1993). One fruitful advance is the new awareness that Christian morals and Christian spirituality have to be integrated far more intrinsically than has been the case heretofore. The academic debate among moralists on whether or not there is a specific Christian morality has been transcended by ordinary Christians who testify to the impact of Jesus Christ in their moral lives.[46] Finally, regarding liturgical renewal with its many ups and downs, current research has made distinct advances in exploiting new dimensions of Catholic worship by relating liturgy to beauty and art, as well as justice and holiness.

IV. Concluding Summary: Some Practical Principles

From the overview presented of our present catechetical situation, and the exposition of the nature, goals and sources of our catechesis, together with a selection of available representative published works in these areas, a certain number of general practical principles regarding the renewal of our catechetical ministry can be formulated. They are not presented as anything definitive in any way, but simply as a modest effort drawn from years of experience that might hopefully contribute in some way towards a better planned, more effective, more deeply inculturated Philippine catechetical ministry.

Practical Principle 1. The core of all authentic catechesis must be the inspired Word of God and the Tradition of the Church, the people of God – in brief, the **content** of Catholic Faith drawn from divine Revelation. This content is not a dead letter handed on through the ages, but a **loving dynamic force of Christ's saving Truth, NOW,** always providing new meanings and priorities within the constantly evolving human condition.

Practical Principle 2. Absolutely essential are the **means** of communicating this Faith, including the advances in the human sciences and communications. But these "secular" means can never

take priority over the **religious** content of the Faith which remains the ultimate norm for judging their authenticity. At no time does pastoral theology—understanding the message in terms of actual living out the Faith—become less relevant or practical. No social science data nor communications' theory can substitute for the living Word of God.

Practical Principle 3. Effective catechesis depends in great part on fully formed catechists/religion teachers who can make the Word of God "come alive" in the Catholic community by instructing, correcting, celebrating, and most of all, witnessing to Christ. The perfect catechetical plan "works" only insofar as the graced work of catechists and teachers, animated by the Spirit, can inspire and elicit spiritual conversion to Christ.

Practical Principle 4. Both the reality of Faith—its content—and the catechetical means of communicating this reality, have **two essential dimensions**: one is the objective, ideal, ontological reality in itself; the second is the existential, experiential, subjective dimension of this reality as lived by the faithful. Both are absolutely essential; neither can substitute for, or take the place of, the other. The Eucharist is both an objective, ontological sacramental reality in itself and an existential, experiential, subjective ritual celebrated by the Catholic faithful.

NOTES

[1] *Acts and Decrees of the 2nd Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Manila, 1992), no. 183. The CBCP had a dozen years earlier, when introducing the "Catechetical Year" of 1990, published a Pastoral Letter entitled "To Form Filipino Christians Mature in Their Faith."

[2] *Boletin Eclesiastico de Filipinas [BEF]* 77, no. 823 (March-April 2001): 167-70, no. 7.

[3] See FABC, *"Asia: A Call for Renewed Catechesis," BEF* 72 (May-June 1996): 258-68. The US Bishops are producing a new revised National Catechetical Directory and have embarked on creating a national catechism. Cf. also US Bishops, "Encuentro and Mission: A Renewed Pastoral Framework for Hispanic Ministry," *Origins* 32 (Dec 5, 2002): 425-39.

[4] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [*CCC*] (Manila: ECCCE 1994); *General Directory for Catechesis* [*GDC*] (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997); *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* [*CFC*] (ECCCE, 1997); *Maturing in Christian Faith* [*NCDP*] (Pasay: St. Paul Publications, 1985).

[5] See Archbishop Leonardo Z. Legaspi, "Religious Education in the Year 2000: Challenges, Issues, and Prospects," *Docete* 23, Nos.102-103 (July-December 2000): 15-27; also, Thomas H. Groome, "Total Catechetical Education," in *Religious Education of Boys and Girls, Concilium* 2002, no. 4, ed. Lisa S. Cahill and W. Jeanrond, pp. 79-87; and Idem, "Conversion, Nurture, or Both: Towards Lifelong Catechetical Education—A Cautious Reading of the *GDC*," *Living Light* 37 (2001): 16-29.

[6] The ongoing effort (1999-2003) to revise the *National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines* (created in 1979-1982, final edition 1985) has exemplified both the manifold complexities of the problem and the different, even contrasting, approaches in responding to them creatively and efficiently.

[7] The gap between traditional faith-language and contemporary new idioms was already noted by John Paul II in *Catechesi Tradendae* [*CT*] (Vatican, 1979) no. 59. For a Lonergan approach, see Stephen Happel, "Religious Rhetoric and the Language of Theological Foundations," in *Religion and Culture: Essays in Honor of B. Lonergan*, ed. Timothy Fallon and Philip Reiley (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 191-203.

[8] Cf. the commentary on the CBCP's Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Culture by Daniel P. Huang, "Emerging Global, Postmodern Culture," *Landas* 13 (1999): 48-58. More recently the very term "globalization" has been challenged, but with no adequate substitute. Cf. Karen Lowery Miller, "The New Buzz Word: Globaloney," *Newsweek* Special Edition, "Issues 2003" (December 2002-February 2003): 52-58.

[9] This reaction to return to more traditional catechesis was clearly exemplified in the plan to create a "universal catechism." Briefly mentioned in Vatican II, this plan was explicitly implemented only after the Synod of 1985. The

"Universal Catechism" draft appeared in 1990, and finally the *CCC*, translated in the major languages, in 1992-94. But as early as the mid '70s, the Synod of 1977 and John Paul II had confronted this problem. Cf. his *CT* no. 22.

[10] Cf. the efforts of the new *GDC* to balance "The Gospel Message" with the "Pedagogy of the Faith" in Parts II (nos.92-138) and III (nos.139-62).

[11] The study on the "Pastoral Framework for Hispanic Ministry" quoted above (note 3) gives, as one of the "signs of the times" which call for a refocusing in ministry, "the Church's concern with the growing number of Hispanics who are joining other Christian denominations or religious traditions." Ibid., no. 23. Much the same could be said of our Philippine catechetical situation. For a broader Asian picture, see Peter C. Phan, "Reception of Vatican II in Asia: Historical and Theological Analysis," *Gregorianum* 83 (2002): 269-85.

[12] Positive aspects of interreligious dialogue were brought out in the CBCP sponsored seminar held in Tagaytay, Jan. 25-26, 1999, especially in "The Spirituality of Interreligious Dialogue" by Bishop Michael Fitzgerald, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Cf. *Origins* 28 (Feb. 25, 1999): 630-34. A different effect has since surfaced in the debate about the legitimacy of evangelizing the Jews. Cf. Avery Dulles, "Covenant and Mission," and the rejoinder of Mary C. Boys, Philip A. Cunningham and John T. Pawlikowski, "Theology's Sacred Obligation: A Reply to Avery Dulles on Evangelization," *America* 187 (October 21, 2002): 8-16. See also Cardinal Walter Kasper, "Christians, Jews, and the Thorny Question of Mission," *Origins* 32 (Dec. 19, 2002): 459-66.

[13] This despite the efforts of John Paul II, especially in his encyclical "*Redemptoris Missio*, on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate," *Catholic International* 2 (March 15-31 1991): 252-92.

[14] See Joseph H. Wong, "Anonymous Christians: Karl Rahner's Pneuma-Christocentism and an East-West Dialogue," *Theological Studies* 55 (1994): 609-34; and its development in James T. Farmer's "Four Christological Themes of the Theology of Karl Rahner," in *The Myriad Christ,* ed. T. Merrigan (Leuven University Press, 2000), 433-62; and the still valuable article of J. Peter Schineller, "Christ and Church: A Spectrum of Views," *Theological Studies* 37 (1977): 545-66.

[15] See Peter C. Phan, "Jesus Christ with an Asian Face," *Theological Studies* 57 (1996): 399-430; *The Myriad Christ: Plurality and the Quest for Unity,* ed. Terrence Merrigan (Leuven University Press, 2000); and Clive Marsh and Steve Moyise, "How Christology Works: The Gospel in Practice," in their *Jesus and The Gospels,* 108-14. A specific example of how a theological discussion can cause confusion and uncertainty among catechists/religion teachers is the contradictory evaluations among the periti—from extremely high praise to sharp criticisms —of the work of Roger Haight, *Jesus: Symbol of God* (Orbis, 1999): 505 pp. The point here is in no way to disparage the author's work itself, but simply to point out the negative effects on catechesis/religious education caused by such discordant wrangling among the theological "experts," most of whom seem completely unaware of, or unconcerned with, such consequences.

[16] See Robert P. Imbelli, "The New Adam and Life Giving Spirit: The Paschal Pattern of Spirit Christology," *Communio* 25 (Summer 1998): 233-52, esp. 242-46; William B. Frazier, M.M., "The Incredible Christian Capacity for Missing the Christian Point," *America* 167 (Nov.21, 1992): 398-400. For a positive pastoral drawing directly on Scriptural texts, see Joseph A. Grassi, *Rediscovering the Impact of Jesus' Death: Clues from the Gospel Audiences* (Sheed & Ward, 1987).

[17] For an up-to-date positive approach to the resurrection, see Gerard Loughlin, "Living in Christ: Story, Resurrection and Salvation," in *Resurrection Revisited,* ed. Gavin D'Costa (Oxford: One Word, 1996), 118-34. Dennis J. Billy offers an insightful summary in "The Resurrection Kernel," *Review for Religious* 51 (1992): 206-16.

[18] See Archbishop William Levada, "Toward a New Apologetics," *Origins* 31 (March 21, 2002): 661-67. John Paul II's thirteenth encyclical, *Fides et Ratio* (Manila: Paulines, 1999) focused on the current challenge to an adequate understanding of human reason and the interrelation between philosophy and theology. See Avery Dulles, "Reason, Philosophy, and the Grounding of Faith," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 40 (December 2000): 479-90; Kurt Pritzl, O.P., "Truth in *Fides Et Ratio*: Aristotelian Reflections and Recommendations," *Communio* 29 (Sprint 2002): 89-106; Cardinal Ratzinger, "Culture and Truth: Reflections on the Encyclical," *Origins* 28 (Feb 26, 1999): 626-30; and Catherine Pickstock, "Imitating God: The Truth of Things According to Thomas Aquinas," *New Blackfriars* 81 (July-August 2000): 308-26.

[19] For the broader question of truth in today's culture, see Cardinal Walter Kasper, "The Challenge of Truth in a New Cultural Context," *Origins* 31 (Jan.3, 2002): 489-92; James W. Fowler, *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), Jack A. Bonsor, "History, Dogma, and Nature: Further Reflections on Postmodernism and Theology," *Theological Studies* 55 (1994): 295-313; Idem, *Athens and Jerusalem: the Role of Philosophy in Theology* (Paulist, 1993); and Roman T. Ciapalo, ed. *Postmodernism and Christian Philosophy* (Catholic University Press, 1997).

[20]In a series recounting "How Vatican II Changed the Church," Michael Walsh explains how "the doctrine of religious liberty, as conceived by John Courtney Murray and others, and as defined in Vatican II's *Dignitatis Humanae,* has been stood upon its head." Cf. Idem,"U-turn on Human Rights," *The Tablet* (14 December 2002): 7-9.

[21]The CFC, following the NCDP, chose a triple level view of Catholic morality, embracing: 1) a vision of the transcendent moral values, 2) moral norms, commandments, beatitudes, and 3) individual moral acts judged by conscience. It promotes the union of both commandments and virtue by developing the Ten Commandments as flowing from the two great Love Commandments and the Grace grounding the Theological virtues.

[22] One example is the prolonged polemic among moral experts on "proportionate reasoning," which Richard McCormick admitted as early as 1982 had become stagnant, offering no progress, no new insight, or even faint hopes that some sort of consensus could eventually be achieved. For a more recent overview, see Andrew Beards, "Moral Conversion and Problems in Proportionalism," *Gregorianum* 78 (1997): 329-57.

[23] PCP II, nos. 167-72. See Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk, "Liturgy, Law and Life," *Origins* 31 (March 14, 2002): 645-650. Bishop Rodimer, in his "Beatitudes for Those Leading the Liturgy," Ibid., 32 (November 7, 2002): 364-66, describes how the greatest challenge to the pastor as liturgist is to be a peacemaker between the organist and the guitar players!

[24] Need for a more deeply inculturated liturgy is the constant refrain of liturgists and PCP II.

[25] Cardinal Ratzinger called for the development of a new "C Method," described as "taking advantage of the strengths of both the patristic-medieval exegetical method [A] and the historical-critical method [B], but cognizant of the

shortcomings of both." Quoted from a roundtable discussion summarized in Paul T. Stallsworth, "The Story of an Encounter," in Richard J. Neuhaus, ed. *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 107-8. This discussion is quoted in the beginning of the valuable article of Gregory Vall, "Ps. 22: Vox Christi Or Israelite Temple Liturgy?," *Thomist* 676 (2002): 175-200.

[26] Cf. Luke Timothy Johnson, "Renewing Catholic Biblical Scholarship," *Priests & People* 16 (Aug.-Sept. 2002): 297-301; Sean P. Kelly, "Interpreting the Gospel of Matthew," *Scripture in the Church* 32 (July-Aug. 2002): 373-84; William M. Thompson, "Spirituality's Challenge to Today's Theology," *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 8 (2001): 54-73.

[27] See Kasper, "The Challenge of Truth in a New Cultural Context," 490, commenting on chaps. 2 and 3 of John Paul II's *Fides et Ratio,* entitled *"Credo Ut Intelligam,"* (nos.16-23) and *"Intelligo Ut Credam"* (nos. 24-35) respectively.

[28] On the more inclusive literal sense and use of allegorical hermeneutics, see Mark S. Burrows, "To Taste with the Heart: Allegory, Poetics and the Deep Reading of Scripture," *Interpretation* 56 (2002): 168-80; Michael Cahill, "Reader-Response Criticism and the Allegorizing Reader," *Theological Studies* 57 (1996): 98-96; Brian Daley, "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Useable," *Communio* 29 (September 2002): 185-216; John O'Keefe, "The Peril and the Promise of Patristic Exegesis," in *Practical Theology,* ed. Michael Lawler & Gail Risch (Creighton University Press, 2000), 144-61.

[29] On the nature & purpose of Scripture, see Paul J. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority: Nature and Function of Christian Scripture* (Hendrikson, 1999); Michael Leary, *Christ and the Catechist* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987); Joel B. Green, "Modernity, History and the Theological Interpretation of the Bible," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54 (2001): 308-29; Robert M. Jensen, "The Religious Power of Scripture," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52 (1999): 89-105.

[30] On Scripture as sacramental and a work of art, see: Daniel Shin, "Some Light from Origen: Scripture as Sacrament," *Worship* 73 (1999): 399-428; Paul Avis, "The Gospel as a Work of Art," *Theology* 104 (March-April 2001): 94-101; Richard Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts: Encountering God Through Music, Art and Rhetoric* (Paulist, 2000).

On Scriptural interpretation as performance see: Stephen Barton, "New Testament Interpretation as Performance," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52 (1999): 179-208; Nicholas Lash, "Performing the Scriptures: Interpretation Through Living," *Furrow* 33 (August 1982): 467-74; Martin Stringer, "Text, Context and Performance: Hermeneutics and the Study of Worship," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 53 (2000): 365-79; Frances Young, *The Art of Performance: Towards a Theology of Holy Scripture* (London: Darton, 1990).

[31] On the key role of imagination in Scripture interpretation, see: Paul Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination Metaphor, Symbol and Myth in Religion and Theology* (New York: Routledge 1999); Brendan Byrne, "To See With the Eyes of the Imagination: Scripture in the Exercises and Recent Interpretation," *The Way Supplement* 72 (1991): 3-19; Luke Timothy Johnson, "Imaging the World Scripture Imagines," *Modern Theology* 14, 2 (1998): 165-80; Nicholas Lash, "Interpretation and Imagination," in *Incarnation and Myth: The Debate Contained*, ed. M.D. Goulden (London, 1979).

[32]In a ground breaking work years ago, Herbert Richardson clarified five types of belief and unbelief as a prelude to an insightful exposition of "Feeling and Religious Experience" in a chapter on "The Myth Is the Message." See his *Toward an American Theology* (New York: Harpers, 1967), 30-70. More recently, see Romanus Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life* (Catholic University Press, 1996), and Luke Timothy Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity: A Missing Dimension in NT Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998).

[33] See for example Terrence W. Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition* (Orbis Books, 2000), and its Review Symposium "Four Perspectives" by Ann Riggs, William Portier, Elizabeth Johnson and Roberto Goizueta, with Author's Response, *Horizons* 28 (2001): 105-19. For some recent studies on the Creed, see David Burton Bryan, *From Bible to Creed* (Glazier, 1998); Bruno Forte, *A Short Introduction to the Apostles' Creed* (St. Paul's, 1994); Hans Küng, *Credo: The Apostles' Creed for Today (SCM, 1993);* Nicholas Lash, *Believing Three Ways in One God: A Reading of the Apostles' Creed* ((University of Notre Dame, 1993); Berard Marthaler, *The Creed*, 2nd ed (1994); Gerald O'Collins and Mary Venturini, *Believing: Understanding the Creed* (Paulist 1991).

[34] On **human experience**, see: George P. Schner, "The Appeal to Experience," *Theological Studies* 53 (1992): 40-59; and Robert K. Martin, "Theological Education in Epistemological Perspective: The Significance of Polanyi's 'Personal Knowledge' for a Theological Orientation of Theological Education," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 1, no. 3 (1998): 139-53.

[35]See for example, Ray Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001); Reinhard Hutter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Robert Kinast, *Let Ministry Teach: A Guide to Theological Reflection* (Liturgical Press, 1996); Idem, *Making Faith-Sense: Theological Reflection in Everyday Life* (Liturgical Press, 1999).

[36] For sources in catechetical methods, see Susan Shaw, *Storytelling in Religious Education* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1999); Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1999); Idem, "Faith Development and Religious Education," in *Faith Development and Fowler,* ed. Craig Dykstra and Sharon Parks (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1986), 251-71, with Fowler's own high praise, 290-91; Barbara J. Fleischer, "Theological Method for Adult Catechesis—Rooted in Tracy and Lonergan," *Religious Education* 95 (Winter 2000): 23-37; and Idem, "Practical Theology and Transformative Learning: Partnership for Christian Religious Education," in *Forging a Better RE in the Third Millennium,* ed. James M. Lee (Religious Education Press, 2000), 202-25; Robert W. Pazmino, "Surviving or Thriving in the Third Millennium," in Ibid., 69-88; Thomas Groome, "Conversion, Nurture, or Both: Towards a Lifelong Catechetical Education—a Cautious Reading of the GDC," *Living Light* 37 (2001): 16-29.

[37] On the **use of Scripture** in catechetical methodology see: Mary C. Boys, *Biblical Interpretation in Religious Education* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1980) and the balanced critical review by Michael Warren in *Horizons* 9 (1982): 192-93; Marcel Dumais, "L'Actualisation de L'Ecriture: Fondements et Procedures," *Science et Esprit* 60 (1999): 27-47; Andre Fassion, "Catechese et Exegese Critique," *Rev. de Sc. Relig.* 88, 4 (2000): 599-613; Ernest Hess, "Practical Biblical Interpretation," *Religious Education* 83, 2 (1993): 190-210; William Kurtz and Kevin Miller, "The Use of Scripture in the Catechism of the Catholic Church," *Communio* 23 (Fall 1996): 480-507; Peter Williamson, "Actualization: A New Emphasis in Catholic Scripture Study," *America* 172 (May 20, 1995): 17-19.

[38] For published works on this new stress on a more holistic, Catholic exegetical approach see footnotes nos. 25 to 30 above. An interesting work which links theological reflection with the Gospel is Robert L. Kinast, *If Only You Recognized God's Gift: John's Gospel as an Illustration of Theological Reflection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

[39] The difference between religious educators and professional exegetes, systematic theologians, moral experts, etc. was sharply brought out in the many, often contradictory, evaluations of the *CCC.* A critical study of representative critiques of the *CCC,* both positive and negative, led to one initial unexpected conclusion: the majority of critics had no firm grasp, or reasonably accurate notion, of what a universal catechism is all about.

[40]As noted above, the detailed presentation of these elements are Archbishop Leonardo Z. Legaspi's "Religious Education in the Year 2000: Challenges, Issues and Prospects," *Docete* 23, nos. 102-103 (July-Dec. 2000): 15-27.

[41] On imagination, see Gerald J. Bednar, *Faith as Imagination: The Contribution of Wm. F. Lynch, S.J.* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1996); Catherine Dooley, "Give Imagination a Chance!," *Living Light* 38 (2001): 17-27; Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination: An Essay in the Theology of Teaching* (Harper & Row, 1987); Sharon Parks, "Imagination and Spirit in Faith Development: A Way Past the Structure-Content Dichotomy," in *Faith Development and Fowler,* ed. Craig Dykstra and Sharon Parks (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1986), 137-56.

[42]See the US Bishops, "Encuentro & Mission: Pastoral Framework for Hispanic Ministry," *Origins* 32 (Dec 5 2002): 27-39, and *GDC* 150-55.

[43]For some recent work in catechesis/religious education, see: *The Echo Within: Emerging Issues in Religious Education,* ed. Catherine Dooley and Mary Collins (Allen: Thomas More, 1997); *Empowering Catechetical Leaders*, ed. Thomas Groome and Michael Corso (Washington DC: National Catholic Educational Association, 1999); Thomas H. Groome, *Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent* (Allen: Thomas More, 1998); Peter Phan, "Catechesis as an Instrument of Evangelization: Reflections from the Perspective of Asia," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 39 (2001): 165-86; Idem, "Now That I Know How to Teach, What Do I Teach? In Search of the Unity of Faith in Religious Education," Ibid., 187-209.

[44] For examples of current studies in theological anthropology, see Robert Barron, *And Now I See. . . A Theology of Transformation* (Crossroad, 1998); John R. Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity: Basic Christian Anthropology* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991); Sharon Parks, *The Critical Years: The Young Adult Search for a Faith to Live By* (Harper & Row, 1986).

[45] For example, see the International Theological Commission, "On the Interpretation of Dogmas," *Origins* 20 (May 187, 1990): 1-14.

[46] Examples of recent publications in Christian Morality are: James Keating, "A Mystical Moral Theology," *New Blackfriars* 83 (June 2002): 264-74; *Spirituality and Moral Theology*, ed. James Keating (Paulist, 2000); Timothy E. O'Connell, *Making Disciples: A Handbook of Christian Moral Formation* (New York: Crossroad, 1998); William Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise, Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 1999).

[47] Regarding **worship**, see: John Saward, *The Beauty of Holiness and the Holiness of Beauty: Art, Sanctity and the Truth of Catholicism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997); Don E. Saliers, *The Soul in Paraphrase: Prayer and the Religious Affections* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980); and Idem, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994); Dwight W. Vogel, "The Depth Dimension of Christian Worship: A Trinitarian Perspective," *Worship* 76 (July 2002): 313-24.