



## Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

### Focus Article:

📖 Stepping into the Drama  
(*Catechism*, pp. 11-19)

### Suggested Article:

📖 Illuminating the Word  
(*Catechism*, pp. 38-48)

### What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to [Christian\\_Reflection@baylor.edu](mailto:Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu).

### Christian Reflection

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# Stepping Into the Drama

Catechesis invites us to assume our roles in the unfolding drama of God's continuing creation and redemption of the world. Yet we are more deeply initiated by the powerful catechisms of media, American culture, and capitalism than by the ancient faith of Christians.

## Prayer

Scripture Reading: Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-5

## Responsive Reading

Not that we have already obtained all this,  
or have been made perfect,  
but we press on to take hold of that  
for which Christ Jesus took hold of us.

**We do not consider ourselves yet to have taken hold of it.**

But one thing we do:

**forgetting what is behind  
and straining toward what is ahead,  
we press on toward the goal to win the prize  
for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus.<sup>†</sup>**

## Reflection

When Luke provides an "orderly account" for Theophilus to grasp the truth he has been taught (*katēchēthēs*) – perhaps in a formal class (cf. Galatians 6:6) – isn't it interesting that he pens a *story*, or *drama*, about Jesus and his disciples (in Luke) and the early Christians (in Acts)? As Theophilus, the intended reader, is mentioned again in the middle of the story (Acts 1:1), Jesus is promising the Spirit's baptism to those who will become God's agents in the kingdom. Is this an invitation for Theophilus to become a disciple and embrace his role in the drama?

We embrace our role as disciples, Gary Furr writes, in a way analogous to how actors enter their roles over time. "The catechism class as like an actor's workshop" – it is a time of intensive training, but hardly the whole of one's preparation. Indeed, catechetical instruction "is embedded in every single aspect of what the Church does," he notes. "It includes *praxis* (worshiping, praying, witnessing, doing mission, helping the needy, advocating justice, and developing spiritual disciplines), *doxology* (prayer and worship), and *therapeutics* (the inner work of healing, growing in grace, and sanctification) as well as *theology*."

Catechism is difficult today because "consumerism, individualism, and the overwhelming impact of technology present huge obstacles to deepening our relationships to one other, to God, and to ourselves (rightly understood) within to the Kingdom of God," Furr notes. How can we respond to these challenges?

- ▶ *Consumerism threatens to reduce personal relationships to partnerships, valued for their economic usefulness.* "We are even tempted to measure membership in a congregation and Christian friendship by their financial usefulness to us." Furr urges us to counter this trend by a biblical emphasis on generosity and faithful stewardship of our resources.
- ▶ *Inappropriate individualism is fraying families, work relationships, communities, and congregations.* Even historic Christian calls for



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freedom, when “deeply couched in the language of modern democratic self-determination,” may feed the problem. “How can we be free to believe without just believing whatever we want?” Furr asks. We must emphasize “individuality” rather than “individualism,” for “Community without robust individuality turns into either authoritarianism or collective inertia.” As we learn to pattern our lives on the stories of great Christians and restore the practice of testimony, “we can emphasize our solidarity with one another.”

► *Pervasive “technologies of connection” are changing our relationships.* As we become separated from family and friends “by miles, life pace, time, and commitments,” we rely on new technologies like cell phones, e-mail, podcasts and blogs to stay connected. Can we use these technologies for instruction in the faith? We can use them selectively, but we should also “maximize opportunities for face-to-face relationship in the context of faith,” Furr writes. “Believers need intensive and unprogrammed occasions to talk to and learn from one another. A spiritual retreat can offer quiet, unhurried times for reflection and renewal, where we can work our way through our deepest dilemmas in the presence of God.”

Catechesis, the lifelong process of learning to be Christ’s disciple, is “far more demanding of our best efforts than we imagine,” Furr concludes. “We have only begun when the baptismal class is finished. What faces us is the nurturing of a spark into a life aflame—one that has learned by lived experience how to love, serve, suffer, and sacrifice so that we might live in God’s Kingdom that has come to pass.”

### Study Questions

1. What does it mean that catechetical instruction includes *praxis*, *doxology*, *therapeutics*, and *theology*? How are new believers, young and old, taught about each aspect of discipleship in your congregation? Examine the strengths and weaknesses of your church’s program of catechesis.
2. Walter Rauschenbusch distilled ‘distinctive’ Baptist beliefs to three emphases. How can each one be an asset in catechesis? Are any potential dangers lurking in them for catechesis?
3. Do you agree that consumerism, individualism, and technology are challenges to instruction in the faith today? Discuss specific ways they undercut catechesis in your church.
4. Consider how the Christian community is depicted in the illumination *Life in Community* (cover). What does this suggest about the nature of catechesis, or instruction in the faith?
5. What role(s) have stained glass windows and illuminated manuscripts of Scripture played in catechesis over the centuries? Can they play these (or other) roles in our culture that is so pervaded by new communication technologies?

### Departing Hymn: “Make Us All We’re Meant To Be”

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# Stepping Into the Drama

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To introduce the practice of catechesis – instruction in the faith for new believers – with the analogy of actors learning their roles in a drama.
2. To examine the challenges to catechesis in our culture.
3. To consider how art, especially stained glass windows and illuminated manuscripts of Scripture, can instruct new believers in the faith.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Catechism (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting.

## Begin with a Comment

Richard Osmer writes, “Catechesis is an interpretative activity undertaken by congregations and their individual members who see themselves as participants in the Theo-drama of the triune God and are seeking to better understand their roles in this drama by deepening their understanding of Scripture and Christian tradition.” Yet Osmer notes that when Paul teaches his congregations the tradition and Israel’s Scripture, he is not trying “to elicit unthinking obedience on the part of the members of his congregations. It is one of the ways he carries out a situated rational conversation with his congregations, inviting them to join him in reflecting on the meaning and implications of their life in Christ. We would do well to keep this in mind in our catechesis of contemporary congregations” (Richard Robert Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations*, 237 and 31).

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to help members embrace their roles in the unfolding drama of God’s continuing creation and redemption of the world.

## Scripture Reading

In order to bring out the single authorship and continuous story of Luke and Acts, ask one group member to read Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-5 from a modern translation.

## Responsive Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

## Reflection

Catechesis, the process of learning to be Christ’s disciple, may be compared to actors learning their roles in an unfolding drama. First, it involves a lot more than gaining theological information or memorizing what to say in various situations (though it includes those); it is also about learning how to act, assuming the proper attitudes toward others, and responding with the right emotions. Catechesis is “about transforming all of the dimensions of the person – the will, the affective life, and behaviors,” Gary Furr writes. Therefore, it cannot be limited to what happens in a special catechism class, but it involves just about all that we do in church. Furr

describes three obstacles to catechesis in our culture and explores how distinctive elements in his Baptist tradition might help us respond to them.

“Catechesis,” a transliteration of one of the words for “instruction” in the Greek New Testament, may be a new term for some members. It refers to the *process* of teaching the Christian faith (usually to new believers or people preparing for adult baptism or confirmation), while “catechism” can refer to either this *process* or a *written manual*. Thus, a congregation or denomination might write a catechism to be used in catechesis (or, in a catechism class).

### Study Questions

1. Catechesis involves all of the (overlapping) aspects of discipleship. “Praxis” refers to what we *do* as disciples—e.g., “worshiping, praying, witnessing, doing mission, helping the needy, advocating justice, and developing spiritual disciplines.” *Doxology* focuses on praising God. *Therapeutics* involves the right ordering of the self through “the inner work of healing, growing in grace, and sanctification.” *Theology* refers to learning truth about God. Discuss how well these are addressed in your congregation. Are new believers (young and old) receiving clear information, adopting appropriate attitudes and emotions, and learning proper behaviors in each area? Where is your best teaching done? What could be improved?
2. The first *emphasis on spiritual experience and Scripture rather than creeds* calls us to nurture and evaluate in one another a personal commitment to Christ. The *emphasis on freedom of worship* can support true worship and faith’s survival in an unwelcoming culture. When understood as “the priesthood of all believers,” it says all of us are responsible for God’s work in the world. The *emphasis on voluntary and democratic congregational life* encourages vital and heartfelt religion. Yet Furr warns that individualism can steer these emphases toward “laissez-faire religion” where we believe whatever we want. Deemphasizing tradition and emphasizing freedom are dangerous if they undermine the role of Christ’s Body in training disciples. He asks us to value “individuality” rather than “individualism,” because “Community without robust individuality turns into either authoritarianism or collective inertia.”
3. Ask three small groups to review a challenge and brainstorm specific ways it is noticeable in your church. Furr believes new believers must “enter a spiritual friendship that introduces them a new conceptual world and fosters a new set of behaviors and attitudes toward life,” so he focuses on how each challenge undermines such friendship. *Consumerism* tempts us to measure relationships by their financial usefulness, *individualism* denies our need for correction and formation by others, and the new “*technologies of connection*” tempt us to neglect face-to-face relationships with one another in the context of faith. Encourage members to discuss how practices of stewardship and generosity, testimony and identification with exemplars of the faith, and confession and spiritual retreat help us respond to the challenges.
4. *Life in Community* depicts “community of instruction bound together under the lordship of the risen Christ, which reaches from those earliest days of the Church in Jerusalem down to the [present],” Hornik writes. “The action of instruction, or catechism, in this image centers upon a meal (the Eucharist) within a meal.” What does this suggest about the roles in catechesis of worship, tradition, and rich fellowship that spans the centuries? How should instruction in the faith be focused on Christ’s life, suffering and death, and resurrection?
5. Heidi Hornik notes that for centuries manuscript illuminations and stained glass windows have taught believers (especially the illiterate) how to interpret Scripture. Ask members to brainstorm the contemporary roles these traditions might have in Christian communities around the world. Can they guide believers in our culture to essentials of the faith and right interpretation of Scripture? Can they make scriptural themes relevant and attractive to us?

### Departing Hymn

“Make Us All We’re Meant To Be” is on pp. 49-51 of *Catechism*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.