



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Christian Reflection

Center for Christian Ethics
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Study Guides for

Catechism

These guides integrate Bible study, prayer, and worship to explore how the ancient church practice of catechesis can orient new believers to their roles in the drama of God's redemptive work. Use them individually or in a series. You may reproduce them for personal or group use.

Stepping into the Drama 2

Catechesis invites us to assume our roles in the unfolding drama of God's continuing creation and redemption of the world. Yet we are far more deeply initiated by the powerful catechisms of media, American culture, and capitalism than by the ancient faith of Christians. Can we recover the sense that our life with God is an adventure?

Catechism for Suspicious Protestants 4

What can we learn from the ancient church's practice of carefully instructing recent converts or those preparing for baptism? To introduce new believers to the Church of Jesus Christ is to open for them the treasures of the apostolic faith and practice—a faith larger than any one denomination's claims upon it—sharpened and transmitted through the ages.

First Things First 6

"What is the chief end of man?" The Westminster Catechism famously begins. This reflection on Psalm 8 exemplifies the rich and lively exploration of our faith which that first question can spark.

Introducing Children to Worship 8

We don't introduce children to worship to make them good but rather that they will know who they are. Worship that is attentive to the gospel's grand story will transform their lives, feed their imaginations not their egos, and help them (and us) learn to order our lives by the gift of God's time.

Laying Foundations of Faith 10

First Baptist Church in Richmond, Texas, is turning to an historical method of catechesis to help adolescents frame their faith expressions and understand the congregation's historical Baptist identity. The catechism class provides the foundation for their growth as faithful disciples.

Spiritual Direction 12

In the ancient discipline of spiritual direction, practical guidance for Christians of all ages is offered in the most sensitive and delicate way. The best spiritual directors are both good listeners and active interpreters of God's grace in the life of the individual and of the community.



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Focus Article:

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

Suggested Article:

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

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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.[†]**

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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Focus Article:

- 📖 Considering Catechism
for Suspicious Protestants
(*Catechism*, pp. 20-29)

Suggested Article:

- 📖 Learning Life-Giving
Ways of Life
(*Catechism*, pp. 81-85)

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Catechism for Suspicious Protestants

What can we learn from the ancient church's practice of carefully instructing recent converts or those preparing for baptism? To introduce new believers to the Church of Jesus Christ is to open for them the treasures of the apostolic faith and practice – a faith larger than any one denomination's claims upon it – sharpened and transmitted through the ages.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Colossians 2:6-8

Responsive Reading: 2 Timothy 2:11-13 (NIV)[†]

If we died with him, **we will also live with him;**
if we endure, **we will also reign with him;**
if we disown him, **he will also disown us;**
if we are faithless, **he will remain faithful –**
for he cannot disown himself.

Reflection

Paul urges the Colossians to remain “rooted and built up in him [Christ] and *established in the faith, just as you were taught*” (2:7). In this way, they will recognize and be able to resist empty, deceitful opinions. Yes, they have received faith as a gift from God (cf. Ephesians 2:8), but it is also about the content they believe. “Both kinds of faith are learned,” writes Daniel Williams. “‘The faith’ has a particular substance that must be taught to believers.”

To prepare new believers for baptism and lead them to a deeper understanding of the faith, Christians soon developed the practice of catechesis. At first, wise leaders were appointed by house churches to give oral instruction, for in the second century there were no books outlining Christian belief and practice. This new practice, Williams observes, gradually evolved:

- ▶ *Catechetical texts were written.* The Church always has been a “teaching Church.” Its earliest hymns, creedal statements, and doctrinal explanations express the basic meaning of the Bible. In the early second century a Jewish-Christian outline of ethics called the “Two Ways” was used in catechesis. By the end of the century, however, new handbooks were written specifically for catechetical instruction. Their features – from the Trinitarian structure of Irenaeus’s *Proof of Apostolic Preaching* to the question-and-answer format of the *Apostolic Tradition* – derive from earlier baptismal formulae.
- ▶ *A preparatory stage was added.* In the fourth century, “doctrinal sophistication [about the Trinity], the rise of...erudite Christian thinkers, and the influx of very many new Christians now that the persecutions were over” led to more careful organization of the process. A new stage of “catechumen” was for those who were enrolled for baptism, but not yet under instruction. “Christians in military or imperial positions took this route,” Williams writes. When they “proved the intentional sanctity of their life and began to attend the weekly and then daily meetings of instruction



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(usually held in the period before Easter), they became *competens*, that is, were qualified to go on to the next stage."

- ▶ *The content became more sophisticated.* By 350, the Jerusalem church had written a creed to be memorized in order to help new believers interpret Scripture. As a "mustard seed contains many future tree branches within its tiny grain," the creed would offer "in a few phrases all the religious knowledge contained in the Old and New Testaments," the bishop Cyril explained. There was also moral and doctrinal instruction, and catechumens "were required to renew their repentance, to show the purity of their intention, and to take seriously their preparation for their baptism."

Today, when "so many claims to religious truth compete in print or cyberspace, the need for imparting the Church's historic tradition is just as critical as it was for ancient Christianity," Williams notes. "Nothing can replace the formation of a theologically and Biblically literate people. Nothing is more essential."

Study Questions

1. What content did the early Christians teach new believers? How were their catechisms and creeds related to Scripture?
2. Which aspects of the ancient Church's practice of catechesis, outlined by Williams, are attractive to you? Which are not?
3. Explaining why new believers should publicly recite a creed, Augustine said, "So you have received and given back what you must always retain in mind and heart, what you should recite in bed, think about in the streets, and not forget over your meals; in which even when your bodies are asleep your hearts should be awake." Do you think this is still true?
4. Discuss Williams' view that "Sunday school may or may not succeed at [the critical job of imparting Christian truth to new believers], and it cannot be left to sermons alone." How well does your congregation accomplish this task?
5. According to Todd Edmondson, what two directions are recommended for catechesis today by Tony Jones and Dorothy Bass? How are these similar to the ancient Church's practice? Do Jones and Bass address your concerns about catechism?

Departing Hymn: "How Firm a Foundation" (verses 1 and 7)

How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!
What more can he say than to you he has said,
to you that for refuge to Jesus have fled?

"The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
that soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake."

*Text from John Rippon's A SELECTION OF HYMNS FROM THE BEST
AUTHORS (1787), alt.*

Tune: FOUNDATION

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Focus Articles:

- 📖 Training Our Aim
(*Catechism*, pp. 58-61)
- 📖 Living with Questions of Purpose
(*Catechism*, pp. 62-65)

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First Things First

"What is the chief end of man?" *The Westminster Catechism* famously begins. This reflection on Psalm 8 exemplifies the rich and lively exploration of our faith that first question can spark.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Psalm 8

Response (based on Philippians 2:12-13)

As we have obeyed in the past,
let us continue to work out our salvation
with fear and trembling,
for it is God who works in us
to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Meditation

Our vocation is not simply to be, but to work together with God in the creation of our own life, our own identity, our own destiny.... To work out our own identity in God, which the Bible calls, "Working out our salvation," is a labor that requires sacrifice and anguish, risk and many tears.

Thomas Merton (1915-1968)[†]

Reflection

In response to *The Westminster Catechism's* searching question about the ultimate purpose of human life, the answer to be retained in the heart and mind of the believer is "to glorify God and to enjoy him forever."

Many catechisms employ a question-and-answer format. They remind us that it is okay to ask difficult questions of meaning and purpose. Indeed, they make us face those questions we usually avoid until trouble comes or until a significant but baffling opportunity arises. "Are we, as the people of God, willing to live with those questions?" Kyle Reese probes. "Are we willing to walk with each other as we discover answers that lead to our vocation in God's world?"

This typical format also reminds us that the answers are crucial. That we are created to glorify and love God, for instance, "is not self-evident to every human being," notes George Mason. It is very different from what our culture teaches—namely, that our spiritual aim should be to achieve personal happiness, which we pursue within the horizon of our freedom. As Mason warns, "The consequences of this shift in aim are deadly to the soul that is made for satisfaction only by glorifying its Creator."

Catechesis is more than just posing questions and memorizing answers. Since it offers us a truthful way of seeing God and the world, catechesis involves character formation as well. For example, what would it mean for us to respond with our lives to that first question and learn to glorify and enjoy God? What practices would we embrace and how would we be changed?

It will help to consider how the psalmist asks God about our place in the divine order of things: "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" (8:4).



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► *The psalmist puts the question in the context of a powerful God. "We first must learn something about this God who created the heavens and 'established the moon and the stars,'" Kyle Reese observes. God's greatness "is not only seen in the works of creation (8:3), but also in the transformation of words, uttered by helpless babes and infants, into defense against God's own foes (8:2).... God is the sovereign Lord whose name is known throughout the earth. At the same time, God seems willing to risk God's work and words by sharing power with human beings, even babes and infants."*

► *Human purpose is found in responsible stewardship. "You have given [humans] dominion over the works of your hands" (8:6), the psalmist writes in a clear echo of the great creation hymn of Genesis 1. "God seems to hand over a portion of God's work to human beings," Reese says. "It is in this charge that human beings find their call, [their] vocation...."*

We glorify and love God, then, when we embrace and learn our role as disciples within God's redemptive activity in the world. Where do we begin? What do we say? How do we live? The rest of The Westminster Catechism points us to Scripture to guide us in the way we should follow.

"This aim of learning to glorify God requires work, and yet this training does not invalidate the agency of divine grace in the human work," Mason writes. "Christians are made by an ongoing process that can be viewed from one side as grace to grace, and from the other as work to work. Churches that take seriously this grace-work of making Christians will devise means to pass on the faith and form the character of Christians from generation to generation."

Study Questions

1. We do not walk around all the time asking, "What is the point of it all?" When do such questions of meaning or purpose arise for us, according to Kyle Reese? Why is good to be prepared with an answer?
2. In our popular culture – books and magazines, movies and TV shows, and music – what answers do we find to the question, "What is the purpose of human life?"
3. How does Psalm 8 answer the question of life's purpose and meaning? Compare what the psalmist says to the answers you found prominent in our popular culture.
4. Tertullian (c. 160-225) famously wrote, "Human beings are made, not born, Christians." What did he mean, according to Mason? What does this imply about our having a "chief end" (or, ultimate purpose) and our coming to know what it is?
5. Examine the Trinitarian text of Burt Burleson's new hymn, "Make Us All We're Meant to Be." How does it express the paradox that we must continue to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in us"?

Departing Hymn: "Make Us All We're Meant to Be"

† Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, revised edition (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1972), 32-33.



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Focus Article:

📖 Introducing Children to Worship
(*Catechism*, pp. 30-37)

Suggested Article:

📖 Catechism in the
Worshiping Community
(*Catechism*, pp. 86-91)

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Introducing Children to Worship

We don't introduce children to worship to make them good but rather that they will know who they are. Worship that is attentive to the gospel's grand story will transform their lives, feed their imaginations not their egos, and help them (and us) learn to order our lives by the gift of God's time.

Prayer

Almighty God, fill our minds with eternal thoughts and fill this room with praise.

We sing to you, our creator, redeemer, and friend.

Let us look into the mystery and hear the truth.

We listen for your Word.

Let us remember the good news and believe the gospel.

We trust again in your grace. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 78:1-8

Reflection

Are children "naturally spontaneous, vulnerable, and filled with wonder, and thus...better disposed to worship than are adults"? Or is worship so difficult for them that they must be trained for it in a separate "children's church"? Debra Dean Murphy charts a middle course between these extremes. "Children bring good instincts and often profound insights to the practice of Christian worship," she writes, but "preparation for their participation—and ongoing catechesis as they mature in it—are essential."

The joy of congregational worship can draw children (and us) into mature discipleship. Though children (and we) are naturally attuned to the practices and disciplines of worship, what training, or catechesis, do we need to participate fully in them? Murphy explores three dimensions of *story*, *imagination*, and *time*.

► *Tell me a story.* Children love great stories that evoke a compelling world, draw us into it, and bring us together. In worship we enact such a story. "In acts of praise and thanksgiving—prayer, song, sermon, sacrament—we tell and tell again the grand cosmic narrative of God's redeeming activity in the world," Murphy writes. As children hear, sing, and enact the biblical story, they sense the deep worth of Scripture. On the other hand, if we only "use the Bible's stories to impart pious moralisms to children ('be good,' 'be helpful,' 'be nice to your brother') we minimize Scripture's real purpose and power, and we fail to teach our children that they, along with us, are called to enter its narrative world and to be shaped by God's desire for communion with all of creation."

► *Use your imagination.* Children have a wonderful ability to engage imaginatively the world around them. "When we communicate with confidence and conviction that Christian worship invites us to inhabit this world of God's extravagant grace and goodness, most children will be eager for the adventure and challenge of living in such a world." (By "imagination," Murphy means a community's "construing reality according to a particular vision," not engaging in "subjective flights of fancy.") In regular



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catechesis through worship, children will learn to see the world differently, and soon they will “discern the disconnect between what occurs in worship and the workings of the world around them. As they mature, they will need continued guidance as they reflect on the implications of this disconnect for the Church’s witness and for their own efforts at faithful living.”

- *What time is it?* Children are naturally curious about time. In worship they “join the communion of saints through time—past, present, and future”—and [learn] that the saints live in God’s time, time redeemed by the saving work of Jesus Christ and measured by the rhythm of feasts and fasts that orders the Church’s common worship.” As they learn to mark the passage of time by the church year, “children, like the rest of us, come to realize that resistance is often called for.” Christmas and Easter become celebrations of God’s gifts in God’s time, rather than occasions for excessive spending in the names of Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny.

The lessons of worship are not just for children, of course. As we help them be “transformed by participation in corporate worship,” Murphy cautions, we “may ourselves need to be converted; we may need to have our own vision and understanding of worship sharpened, tested, transformed.”

Study Questions

1. Do you agree that congregational worship is naturally attractive to children? When does worship “lose” them?
2. How do your congregation’s worship services focus on *story*, *imagination*, and *time*? In which dimension do your worship services excel? In which one do they need to be improved?
3. Some congregations “dismiss” children from the worshipping body to attend “children’s church.” Why does Murphy object to this practice? What does she recommend instead?
4. In our “worship wars,” Murphy notes, *style* replaces *story* as the basis for planning worship services. Discuss her observation that “*Style* customizes worship and compartmentalizes worshipers. *Story* does something else.”

Departing Hymn: “Lord, Speak to Me That I May Speak” (verses 1, 4, and 6)

Lord, speak to me that I may speak
in living echoes of your tone;
as you have sought, so let me seek
your erring children lost and lone.

O teach me, Lord, that I may teach
the precious things that you impart;
and wing my words, that they may reach
the hidden depths of many a heart.

O fill me with your fullness, Lord,
until my very heart overflow
in kindling thought and glowing word,
your love to tell, your praise to show.

Francis R. Havergal (1872), alt.

Tune: CANONBURY



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Focus Article:

📖 Laying Foundations of Faith
(*Catechism*, pp. 66-72)

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Laying Foundations of Faith

First Baptist Church in Richmond, Texas, is turning to an historical method of catechesis to help adolescents frame their faith expressions and understand the congregation's historical Baptist identity. The catechism class provides the foundation for their growth as faithful disciples.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:41-47

Meditation

So you have received and given back
what you must always retain in mind and heart,
what you should recite in bed,
think about in the streets,
and not forget over your meals;
in which even when your bodies are asleep
your hearts should be awake.[†]

Augustine, Sermon 215.1

Reflection

When his congregation wrote a new catechism, John Lockhart recalls, they searched for "carefully chosen words of faith...to share with another generation the hope we have in God. The right word at the right time, Solomon taught us, 'is like apples of gold in a setting of silver' (Proverbs 25:11). Indeed, we lean toward profanity, vanity, and emptiness when we use words carelessly (at the wrong times or in the wrong ways) in communicating the intimacy of our relationship with the Triune God."

Catechesis deepens new believers' relationships with God by enriching their language of faith. Then they can "frame their most intimate experiences with God in profound, rather than profane, ways," Lockhart writes. Unfortunately, even many church-going adults "have a limited understanding of what they believe and an inadequate vocabulary to express their faith" — they still frame their beliefs in terms of emotional experiences that are unmeasured by theological reflection. Left to create their own language of faith, they find that their words, though genuine, are inadequate for voicing a mature faith.

The congregation made important discoveries along the way:

- ▶ *Helpful models are available.* Since church members were willing to explore widely in the Christian tradition, they quickly found themselves "among friends." They gathered ideas from historical catechisms (like *The Westminster Standard Larger Catechism* and *Shorter Catechism*), questions and answers in *The Book of Common Prayer*, Lutheran books of instruction, and their Methodist neighbors. They "discovered that Southern Baptists have had catechisms from their beginnings" in the 1860s, so they eagerly reviewed Baptist catechisms from the last two centuries. In overall structure, their new catechism follows the doctrinal statements of *The Baptist Faith and Message of 1963*, but it adds questions and answers concerning the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer, which are important topics covered in most traditional catechisms.



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► *Children can think theologically.* They “are easier to teach [than adults] and are eager for reflection,” Lockhart notes. “By the age of twelve, Jesus knew the importance of asking questions and seeking answers from the teachers in the Temple (Luke 2:41-52). What an exciting future we open for our children when we teach them the language of faith as those gifted teachers taught their language to Jesus.” So, Lockhart’s congregation teaches the catechism to fifth and sixth-grade children. As they enter adolescence, children “need to know that they can think, and think hard, about their faith, for they are entering a significant season when they are being introduced to competing narratives (or, stories of life) the world offers.”

► *Catechesis helps children live with the vital questions.* “In our catechism we have suggested that asking the right questions is important, though the answers are unfinished,” Lockhart says. “If we can put the right questions into the hearts of our children, with answers that guide them toward a dynamic and faithful dialogue with one another, their teachers, and God, we will nurture disciples whose faith continues to mature throughout life.” The children enjoy working with adults who take their thoughts seriously. And the teachers report that they learn much in return from these young theologians.

“Too many Christians over the years have recognized the value of memorization and organization of theology through a catechism for us to ignore this form of discipleship training,” Lockhart concludes. “We have found that catechesis is a marvelous way to lead our children into a lifetime of learning.”

Study Questions

1. For John Lockhart, what are the most attractive features of the traditional question-and-answer approach to catechism?
2. What benefit does Augustine claim for it in the meditation?
3. Do you have lingering concerns about this approach?
4. What is the advantage of a local congregation writing its own catechism? What are some pitfalls? Did this congregation adequately address these dangers?
5. Where would your church turn for help to write a catechism?
6. Why did this congregation add the following question from James Boyce’s catechism: “Q. Does (the Bible) teach us every thing about God? A. It does not; no language could teach us the full glory of God, nor could we ever comprehend it”?

Departing Hymn: “Author of Faith, Eternal Word” (verses 1 and 2)

Author of faith, eternal Word,
whose Spirit breathes the active flame;
faith like its finisher and Lord,
today as yesterday the same.

To you our humble hearts aspire,
and ask the gift unspeakable;
increase in us the kindled fire,
in us the work of faith fulfill.

Charles Wesley (1740), alt.

Suggested Tunes: WINCHESTER NEW or HESPERUS



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

📖 The Teaching Power of
Spiritual Direction
(*Catechism*, pp. 73-80)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful
for your personal or group
study? Please send your
suggestions to
Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu.

Christian Reflection

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Spiritual Direction

In the ancient discipline of spiritual direction, practical guidance for Christians of all ages is offered in the most sensitive and delicate way. The best spiritual directors are both good listeners and active interpreters of God's grace in the life of the individual and of the community.

Prayer

O God, we lift our hearts to you.
We turn aside from all that has consumed us,
that we might be consumed by something greater.
Consume us with the fire of your Spirit.
Burn away what needs to be no more
and refine that which is eternal.
This is our prayer and our great hope. Amen.

Scripture Reading: 1 Timothy 4:6-8, 14-16

Reflection

Regular one-on-one or small group meetings with a trusted spiritual director – a favored form of instruction in monastic communities since the fourth century – are becoming more common for laypersons as well. “In these meetings we describe our prayer experiences, our joys and difficulties, and gain perspective on how our spiritual practice may be shaping us,” Emilie Griffin writes. “The director helps us to develop confidence in God, to relax in prayer, to deal with trouble spots of any kind.”

The meetings are not programmed, but generally follow the flow of the director's practical concerns. “Good spiritual directors,” says Griffin, “listen attentively, ask questions when needed, apply spiritual principles sparingly and judiciously, and wait for the Holy Spirit.” She explores several good reasons for reviving this ancient discipline today.

- ▶ *Spiritual direction helps us discern God's work in our lives.* “The entire spiritual life,” Griffin notes, “is grounded in a willingness to interpret events in the light of grace.” A director can help us read God's activity between the lines of even small events in our lives – a colleague's word of correction, the experience of joy in a Sabbath's rest, a friend's encouragement, or an answer to prayer. “[Most] events in our lives...are capable of a spiritual interpretation. When we hold back from this interpretation, we are underestimating God, and we are depriving ourselves of a full appreciation of God's grace.”
- ▶ *Spiritual direction increases our practical knowledge of God.* The drama of God's creation, gracious redemption, and continuing guidance of the world as narrated in Scripture provides the framework of our faith. But to learn our role in God's drama, we turn to “trained interpreters – pastors, professors, spiritual writers, and teachers whom we regard as trustworthy witnesses to the nature and action of God. These interpreters guide us...to profess our faith, deepen our understanding of the gospel, and grow as disciples,” Griffin writes. They help us wrestle with our doubts and deal with daily problems. In spiritual direction, “God's grace [is] mediated through living persons who are



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

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our spiritual friends and counselors. This living and active application of Christian teaching can be invaluable."

- ▶ *Spiritual direction enriches our vocabulary of faith.* In her work as a trained director, Griffin notices that some of her directees have begun keeping a spiritual journal. This personal writing is "a form of learning, a faith-learning in which we may discover the truths of our faith as part of lived experience." Another valuable discipline is devotional reading. "In addition to the Bible, which is intimately connected to our spiritual living, there are many devotional texts, works of reflection and faith-narratives that nurture our understanding of God." Through these disciplines of spiritual reading and writing, her directees are learning "a new vocabulary for spiritual life." They are becoming more comfortable in articulating their experiences with God and professing their faith.

In these three ways, spiritual direction "serves to enlarge our knowledge of Christian faith and practice," Griffin concludes. It continues and strengthens our catechesis, our Christian teaching and instruction.

Study Questions

1. For Emilie Griffin, what are the most attractive features of the practice of spiritual direction?
2. What sort of person would be a good spiritual director? What sort of person would be a good directee?
3. Could the practice of one-on-one or small-group spiritual direction be adapted for catechesis of new believers, young or old? Are there other believers in your congregation for whom this practice would be appropriate?
4. Henri J. M. Nouwen says, "The deepest satisfaction of writing is precisely that it opens up new spaces within us of which we were not aware before we began to write." What is the value of keeping a spiritual journal?
5. What is the value of reading devotional texts? Have certain authors shaped your spiritual vocabulary? What devotional books would you recommend to a new believer?

Departing Hymn: "Teach Me, O Lord" (verses 1, 2, and 4)

Teach me, O Lord, your way of truth,
and from it I will not depart;
that I may steadfastly obey,
give me an understanding heart.

In your commandments make me walk,
for in the law my joy shall be;
give me a heart that loves your will,
from discontent and envy free.

O turn away reproach and fear,
your righteous judgments I confess;
to know your precepts I desire,
revive me in your righteousness.

Joseph P. Holbrook (c. 1866), alt.

Suggested Tunes: OLD 100th or TALLIS' CANON

Appendix: Optional Lesson Plans for Teachers

For each study guide we offer two or three optional lesson plans followed by detailed suggestions on using the material in the study guide:

- ▶ An *abridged lesson plan* outlines a lesson suitable for a beginning Bible study class or a brief group session.
- ▶ A *standard lesson plan* outlines a more thorough study.
- ▶ For some guides a *dual session lesson plan* divides the study guide material so that the group can explore the topic in two meetings.

Each lesson plan is for a 30- to 45-minute meeting, with about one-third of the time being set aside for worship.

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.

Catechism for Suspicious Protestants

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, 2, and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To understand how the practice of catechesis, the instruction of new believers and those preparing for baptism, developed in the early Church.
2. To examine our suspicions about written catechisms today.
3. To consider how true catechesis is much more than memorization of theological truths.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Catechism (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and the suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “How Firm a Foundation” locate the familiar tune FOUNDATION in your church’s hymnal or on the web at www.cyberhymnal.org.

Begin with a Story

“One of the stranger ancient citations of the Nicene Creed appears on a small piece of papyrus placed in a magical amulet from the later fifth century. Evidently the wearer thought that the creed possessed power such that merely wearing it could invite God’s blessing or ward off misfortune!” writes Dan Williams. Was the creed for this person “merely a token or emblem of the Church’s power, rather like hanging a ‘Christian’ rabbit’s foot around your neck”?

In this study, Williams challenges us to early Christians taught new believers “the biblical and doctrinal fundamentals of the Christian faith.” Equipping them with these truths “cannot be displaced in favor of simply giving one’s own testimony anymore than to imagine personal experience of the faith can be substituted for a reasonable grasp of that faith,” he writes. “To do so would be like handing out magical amulets for new believers to wear simply as emblems of a faith being used, but not grasped” (*Catechism*, pp. 20 and 28).

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 give members discernment as they prayerfully consider their roles in instructing new believers in the faith.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Colossians 2:6-8 from a modern translation.

Responsive Reading

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

Reflection

This study outlines how the practice of catechesis developed in the Church during the second through fourth centuries. Daniel Williams addresses *where*, *when*, and *how* new believers were instructed in the basics of the Christian faith and *who* were their teachers, but he emphasizes *what* they were taught. You might use these five pronouns to organize your summary and discussion of the material. Use this opportunity to articulate any suspicions members may have about the practice of catechesis. Do they disagree with the *goals* of catechesis

or the ancient *methods*? If the suspicions revolve around the methods, you could shift the discussion to Todd Edmondson's review of the two recent approaches advocated by Tony Jones and Dorothy Bass.

Study Questions

1. The focus of ancient catechesis was on learning clear statements of key doctrines about God's creation of the world, humanity's fall into sin and death, God's redeeming activity through Jesus Christ, and God's life with humanity and the world through the Spirit. It was essential to understand these matters correctly in an empire filled with competing notions about God, humanity, and the world. Yet, as Irenaeus writes, these doctrines were not memorized only for intellectual benefit, but they served as the basis "of our faith, the foundation of the building, and the *consolidation of a way of life*." In other words, belief and practice were never separated.

As the bishop Cyril explains to catechumens in Jerusalem, his church's creed says nothing contrary to Scripture. Indeed, its concise statements will help them summarize and understand the biblical message and guide them to read the Bible with insight. Where do new Christians turn for guidance in reading the Bible today?

2. Members might begin by reacting to the content of catechesis discussed in question one. But encourage them also to examine *where* (in small group settings in house churches or catechetical schools), *when* (in intensive courses lasting several weeks or years, often in preparation for baptism on Easter), and *how* (through doctrinal explanations tied to Scripture) new believers were instructed in the basics of the Christian faith, and *who* taught them (wise members of the house churches, professional catechists, or the pastor or bishop). What might we learn from each aspect of the ancient practice of catechesis? What might we change in order to address the needs of new believers today?
3. Clear statements of essential beliefs can be so embedded in our "mind and heart" that they shape how we think "in bed,...in the streets,...over [our] meals"; they can inform our dreams and unconscious thoughts. Ask members to take a minute to think of Scripture passages, hymns, or words from a creed that they retain in this way. Has it been helpful to have such key thoughts memorized? Would it benefit new believers to be formed by them today? How do we benefit from remembering the same thoughts in common with other Christians?
4. Discuss how well the congregation's Sunday school classes (and other discipleship training groups) for children and adults address the Christian faith and practices in a systematic way. Are sermons organized in a series to introduce new believers to these? How often does the congregation read a creed or confession of faith in public worship? Is there a class especially for new believers or new members? If so, when does this class meet (before baptism or church membership), and what instruction is given? Are new believers and new members formally shepherded in some other way by pastors or teachers?
5. Both Tony Jones and Dorothy Bass stress formation of character and shaping our actions. They think catechesis should inculcate "the living qualities of Christian practice without forsaking substantive doctrinal matters." On the one hand, Jones commends ancient Christian practices of reading Scripture (*lectio divina* and reciting psalms in the daily offices), praying (centering prayer, the Jesus prayer), Sabbath-keeping, keeping silence, pilgrimage, walking a labyrinth, and spiritual direction. On the other hand, Dorothy Bass re-describes Christian practices in contemporary terms, such as honoring the body, hospitality, forgiveness, healing, and discernment. Both return to a church practice of requiring catechumens "to renew their repentance, to show the purity of their intention" through their actions. Their stress on learning practices corrects our tendency to reduce faith to an intellectual exercise.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

First Things First

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Unison Response	Unison Response
Silent Meditation	Silent Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1, 2, and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To consider how questions about the meaning and purpose of human life arise.
2. To explore how catechesis (when it follows a traditional question-and-answer approach) requires us to ask difficult questions of meaning and points us to Scripture for answers.
3. To contrast popular culture with *The Westminster Catechism* on whether and how we should respond to questions about the ultimate meaning of human life.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Catechism (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus articles before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

"I love the scene in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* where hobbits Frodo and Sam talk about the nature of adventures," writes Kyle Reese. "Prior to their perilous journey, Sam had believed adventures were something that famous heroes or heroines went looking for in order to cure their boredom. Now he has learned that rather than looking for their adventures, these individuals landed in the midst of their tales, which brought with them a host of unsettling questions. Sam's insight leads him to this pressing question in the midst of his and Frodo's journey, 'I wonder what sort of tale we've fallen into?'" (*Catechism*, 65).

Sam's wise query is at the heart of the Christian faith. Indeed, it is the very first question we should ask, according to *The Westminster Catechism* which begins this way: "What is the chief end of man?" The answer, it turns out, is not only about us, but also about God.

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 use our honest and faithful questions to draw us to himself.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Psalm 8 from a modern translation.

Response

Read the response together aloud.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

Our contributors have been saying that a catechism can lead us to ask the important and difficult questions about our faith and guide us to answers in Scripture. This discussion, drawing on the articles by George Mason and Kyle Reese, exemplifies this with a concrete example – the famous first question and answer of *The West-*

minster Catechism (1674). This catechism, written by the Westminster Assembly during the English Civil War, was published in a “larger” version for proclamation from the pulpit and a “shorter” version for instruction of children. Both are available online at www.ccel.org. The catechism was widely adopted by Presbyterian, Congregationalist, and Baptist churches.

The phrase “to glorify God” may seem quaint to us today, but it is good New Testament language that means to make known and bring honor to the activity of God in the world. Paul deploys this language in Romans 15:5-9 to explain how harmony within the Christian community points to God as its source and exemplifies God’s purposes for the world.

Study Questions

1. Encourage members to discuss when they’ve raised questions about the meaning and purpose of life. Reese says we ask them when we face great difficulties (e.g., a tragic death, great failure or disappointment, or overwhelming demands) or significant opportunities that reorganize our lives (e.g., changing careers, welcoming a child into our family, or moving across the country). When life is turned upside down in these situations, we must reevaluate our fundamental commitments, expectations of others, and plans for the future. We even may question God’s faithfulness and the significance of family and friends. If we have an answer to the question of meaning, we will know whom we should trust and how to determine the direction forward in life. We will have trained our aim (in Mason’s phrase).
2. “The present possession of personal happiness has become the secular substitute for the spiritual aim of enjoying God forever,” Mason says. Members may give examples of movies, books, and songs that promote a self-centered, pleasure-oriented aim. Does popular culture promote other large aims for human life? Or, do all of the anti-heroes and dark comedies of popular culture suggest that human life has no purpose? Either way, the catechism stands in stark contrast to this, proclaiming (1) that human life has a transcendent purpose and ultimate meaning and (2) that it is found in loving community with God and others.
3. The psalmist locates the meaning of human life within God’s larger purposes for creation. Our lives find meaning because God has created and loves the world and because he invites us into careful understanding and loving stewardship of parts of the creation. Encourage members to contrast these two models of human creativity: the vision in Psalm 8 of stewards who discover new ways of loving and caring for one another and for God’s creatures, and the cultural vision of individuals determining their own values and serving self-created ends. In the first model, human creativity is supported by and reflective of God’s creativity; in the second, it is in competition with God’s power.
4. “[Tertullian] did not mean by that one could not go to heaven unless one is a finished product,” Mason writes. “He meant that if one’s aim in life is...to be shaped into the image of Christ in order better ‘to glorify God and enjoy him forever,’ then some construction must take place to build the character and better the conduct of the believer.” He warns that fellow believers within his Baptist tradition readily see “that being born into a Christian nation or to a Christian home or onto the cradle roll of a Christian congregation does not make one a Christian. Yet we do not seem to see that being born again is only the beginning of an intentional life of transformation into the likeness of Christ.”
Even though our ultimate aim is “imprinted” in our humanity, in the sort of inclinations and needs we naturally have, we only become aware of that aim and faithfully committed to it through training a certain way of life and community. In this sense, others must teach us how to put off the “old self” and put on the “new self” in Christ Jesus.
5. Each verse is a prayer addressing the three persons of God. The second verse emphasizes God’s gracious work in saving, directing, and calling us “to be all we’re meant to be.” The final verse alludes to our work of “professing,” “pursuing,” and “becoming.”

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.

Introducing Children to Worship

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To examine the catechetical (or, teaching) value of three dimensions of congregational worship – story, imagination, and time – that draw children (and us) into mature discipleship.
2. To consider whether children have a natural aptitude for worship.
3. To discuss how we can develop children’s skills in the practice of worship.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 8-9 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Catechism (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “Lord, Speak to Me that I May Speak” locate the familiar tune CANONBURY in your church’s hymnal or on the web at www.cyberhymnal.org.

Begin with a Story

Forming children into disciples through the life of worship takes a lot of time, Debra Dean Murphy believes. Yet the very slowness of the process “reminds us that the end of worship – its goal or *telos* – is not entertainment or even personal edification, but a life transformed by the habit of praise and thanksgiving.”

She reports how in Wendell Berry’s novel *Jayber Crow*, the title character recalls an exchange with a wise old Bible professor:

“You have been given questions to which you cannot be given answers. You will have to live them out – perhaps a little at a time.”

“And how long is that going to take?”

“I don’t know. As long as you live, perhaps.”

“That could be a long time.”

“I will tell you a further mystery,” he said. “It may take longer.”

The professor’s insight should remind us, Murphy writes, that “in undertaking the task of introducing children to worship we recognize this gift of time: that we don’t have to do it all at once or say it all at once – indeed we cannot; and that if we ensure our children’s regular presence in the worshipping assembly, and couple that commitment with substantive catechesis, the Spirit will do its transforming work with the passage of time” (*Catechism*, 35).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by leading members to read the responsive prayer. The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Psalm 78:1-8 from a modern translation.

Reflection

This and the next two study guides, “Laying Foundations for Faith” and “Spiritual Direction,” explore three approaches to catechesis today. This one examines how worship trains young children, “Laying Foundations

of Faith” discusses using a question-and-answer catechism with older children and adolescents, and “Spiritual Direction” explores one-on-one guidance in the faith for adults. All of these approaches, however, may be adapted for believers of all ages and at every level of maturity. As Debra Dean Murphy notes, we can all be transformed through worship that emphasizes story, imagination, and time. Likewise, the question-and-answer approach to catechism and practice of spiritual direction can be adapted to serve all believers.

Therefore, this study is an opportunity to explore the end, or *telos*, of communal worship more generally, rather than just focus on how the congregation introduces children to worship.

Study Questions

1. Encourage members to share their experiences with children in worship. When do the children show interest? When do they become bored and restless? For instance, I have noticed young children pay special attention when other children or young people lead in worship, or when adults they know (relatives, school teachers, or neighbors) are involved. Some children have a favorite part of worship—the congregational singing, Communion, baptism, the children’s sermon, ringing of chimes, and so on. Sermons may seem like a long stretch to children, but they often “tune in” for stories, dramatic readings, or instruction addressed to them.

Encourage members to talk to children about worship. Do they notice connections among the Scripture readings, hymns, prayers, liturgical actions, and sermon? What parts of a service do not seem to “fit”? What questions do they have about what happens in worship?

2. You might assign three small groups to review the worship services along these dimensions. How is the *story* dimension expressed in Scripture readings, preaching, testimonies in which members’ stories connect to God’s drama, the stories of saints, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper? Are children taught how each element of worship fits into God’s drama?

In the *imagination* dimension, discuss how drama, storytelling, sermon applications, sacraments, and other elements of worship help children “see” their world—their families, friends, and possessions—in Christ-like ways. Are children engaged in interpreting their own experiences through the lens of the biblical story? Are they taught to see how God’s story is shaping their lives and relationships?

In the *time* dimension, Murphy includes celebrating of the seasons of the church year and seeing oneself in the communion of saints through the ages. How do children learn about Christians in other eras? Who teaches them the meaning of baptism (inclusion in the communion) and the Lord’s Supper (sharing a meal with the communion of saints)?

3. “When we ‘dismiss’ children from the worshiping body (say, for ‘children’s church’), no matter how well-intentioned our efforts at teaching them *about* worship, we convey to them and to all others present that dividing the worshiping body is an acceptable norm,” Murphy objects. “More importantly, we rob children of the gift of being formed by the regular habit, discipline, and joy of corporate worship—which is really how they learn it and learn to love it in the first place.” Instead, she recommends that children be included in acts of worship and patiently taught the meaning of each part of worship. “All of this, of course, takes work,” she admits. “It takes patience, preparation, flexibility, much good humor, and a great deal of creativity and resourcefulness.”
4. “Style-driven worship is planned, promoted, and produced...[by asking]: What is the basic worship *preference* of today’s discriminating congregant-consumer? Quiet, contemplative worship? ‘Rock and roll church’? Hymnody, liturgy, vestments, and choral singing? A mixing and matching of all of the above?” Murphy writes. “But a preoccupation with style and preference puts the wrong subject at the center of the discussion (and indeed of worship itself), for the proper question to ask when planning and executing worship is not ‘what do people like?’ but ‘what is God doing?’ She does not urge us to adopt a children’s style either.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Laying Foundations of Faith

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1, 3, and 4	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To examine why and how the members of First Baptist Church, Richmond, TX, created a catechism for their children.
2. To weigh the advantages and drawbacks of this approach to catechesis.
3. To consider where your congregation would turn for help in writing a catechism.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Catechism (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “Author of Faith, Eternal Word” locate the familiar tunes WINCHESTER NEW or HESPERUS in your church’s hymnal or on the web at www.cyberhymnal.org.

Begin with a Story

John Lockhart recalls a story about “the missionary [who] entered a new village, gathered the children together, and asked if they knew what prayer was. Most of the children excitedly raised their hands, indicating their eagerness to answer. Calling on one of them, the missionary was pleasantly surprised, if not shocked, at the child’s sophisticated answer. It was concise and doctrinally correct. The child’s few words were well chosen and well expressed. The missionary invited another child to share his answer to the question about prayer, and the same simple, direct answer was given, word for word. A third child offered the same answer. The missionary quickly realized that this village had been given the gift of a catechism and the people had a foundation for their faith.”

Sensing that “our pews are full of people who cannot give such clear and precise answers to many questions about doctrine and the history of our faith,” Lockhart says, “The breakdown is obvious. How do we fix it?” (*Catechism*, 66).

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 increase your desire and give you wisdom to share the language of faith with children in your congregation.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Luke 2:41-47 from a modern translation.

Meditation

You may read the meditation in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Reflection

This is the second of three studies of how congregations might approach catechesis today. The first one, “Introducing Children to Worship,” examines how worship trains young children, and the following study, “Spiritual Direction,” explores one-on-one guidance in the faith for adults. This study considers using a ques-

tion-and-answer catechism with older children and adolescents. All of these approaches, however, may be adapted for believers of other ages and at various levels of maturity.

Tailor your session to address members' concerns. If they express doubts about the traditional question-and-answer method, spend time discussing their reservations. If they show interest in the approach, consider how your congregation might use it.

Study Questions

1. Lockhart emphasizes that the traditional question-and-answer format (1) gives us a richer theological vocabulary to articulate and understand our relationship with God, (2) encourages us to ask vital questions that we might otherwise ignore, and (3) points us toward dynamic answers that guide us "toward a dynamic and faithful dialogue with one another, [our] teachers, and God." The approach does not close off questioning and exploration of the faith, but invites us to an ever deepening engagement with it. A catechism, when it is drawn from the extensive Christian heritage, puts us into conversation with wise saints in other cultures and times. In this way, it can be a corrective to our theological parochialism.
2. Augustine believes that when we memorize the answers of a well-constructed catechism, they will shape the way we think and live throughout the day. In this way they shape our character and become second nature. They make us receptive to God's presence: "even when your bodies are asleep your hearts should be awake."
3. Encourage members to mention other concerns. Perhaps they worry that the traditional method leaves too little room for questioning and reflection, requires too much trust in authority, is not sufficiently critical of the tradition, and so on. To what extent could these concerns be addressed by wise planning of the catechism?
4. A local congregation can tailor the catechism—its language, length of answers, number and order of topics covered, and so on—to the new believers who will use it. Schedules and lesson plans can be developed for teachers, and creative projects and discussions constructed for students. The church will learn much from the process of writing the catechism and will have pride and ownership in their education program.

Among the pitfalls are the catechism might be poorly written, badly organized, or theologically parochial; the writers and editors might not be trusted by the congregation; and there might not be wide support for its use. First Baptist Richmond, TX, was fortunate to have theologically sophisticated leaders who were trusted by the congregation. They studied catechisms from a variety of Christian traditions, but followed the order of presentation of a doctrinal statement the church had long respected.

5. This raises the question of trust and authority (not power). Are there theologically trained, well respected leaders in the congregation? Does your church honor the leadership of a denomination or branch of the Christian tradition? Are the catholic (universal) creeds read? Would your church work with certain churches, a college or seminary, or another church group to develop a catechism? To which publishers would you turn for guidance?
6. Recent theological debates in North America have been bitter and vengeful, in part because our theologies are so debased and entangled with political and cultural agendas. Many participants have been uncharitable and lacking in humility; they have not listened for the truth in their opponents' views. James Boyce's statement encourages humility. "Wouldn't it be refreshing to be in a study group where members humbly shared their comprehension, knew they could not be too dogmatic about a conclusion, and eagerly awaited your insights?" Lockhart asks. "How might Southern Baptist identity have been transformed during the last thirty years if just this one question and answer had been lived out?"

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Spiritual Direction

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1, 2, and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To examine the ancient Christian practice of one-on-one or small-group spiritual direction.
2. To weigh the advantages and drawbacks of this approach to catechesis.
3. To consider how your congregation might use spiritual direction for catechesis.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 12-13 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Catechism (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “Teach Me, O Lord” locate the familiar tunes OLD 100th or TALLIS’ CANON in your church’s hymnal or on the web at www.cyberhymnal.org.

Begin with a Story

The practice of spiritual direction originated in the desert Egyptian communities of the fourth century, where Christians gathered to put some space between themselves and the distorting culture of the Empire. They deferred to the spiritual direction and advice of those with more discretion. In clever stories they peeled back the layers of vanity that could afflict directees and directors in this network of authority. Here are two of the stories they told:

A brother said to a great hermit, “Abba, I want to find a monk who agrees with me and I’ll live and die with him.” The hermit replied, “Your search is good, my lord.” The brother repeated what he wanted, not understanding the irony of the hermit.... Then the hermit said to him, “You do not want to follow the will of anyone, you want to follow your own will, and that is why you will be at peace with him.”

Some hermits used to say, “If you see a young man climbing up to heaven by his own will, catch him by the foot and pull him down to earth for it is not good for him.”

Benedicta Ward, trans., *The Desert Fathers* (10.115 and 10.114)

In these stories we see ourselves, don’t we? Our fitful jumping from church to church to find a “good fit,” changing channels when a commentator “goes to meddling,” and insisting on reading the Bible “for ourselves” may reveal a deeper spiritual disorder. Are we capable of receiving spiritual direction today? Are any Christians good and wise enough to be our teachers?

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by reading the prayer in the study guide.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read 1 Timothy 4:6-8, 14-16 from a modern translation.

Reflection

This is the second of three studies of how congregations might approach catechesis today. The first one, “Introducing Children to Worship,” examines how worship trains young children, and the second study, “Laying Foundations of Faith,” explores using a question-and-answer catechism with older children and

adolescents. This study considers one-on-one or small-group spiritual mentoring in the faith for adults. All of these approaches, however, may be adapted for believers of other ages and at various levels of maturity.

Study Questions

1. Griffin emphasizes how a spiritual director can help us (1) deal with doubts and see God's activity in our lives, (2) apply the "essentials of Christian belief to our day-to-day experience—e.g., knowing how we should "relate to God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) on an ongoing basis [and] live for God and others," and (3) articulate our faith as we speak and write. The director's guidance is tailored to our specific problems and concerns.

When a small group meets with a spiritual director, the participants have an opportunity to share their concerns with one another and to encourage and help other group members.

2. Ask members to explore the scripture reading for clues, because the Apostle Paul had mentored Timothy for several years and now Timothy was mentoring other Christians. For example, good directors must be wise and discerning in order to nourish directees "on the words of the faith" and offer them "sound teaching." They must be committed to "godliness" and actively training themselves in godly ways, even as they humbly acknowledge that their talents and efforts are gifts from God, which have been recognized and developed by the community of faith. Griffin writes, "The best spiritual directors are essentially listeners. They wait for the questions posed to them by the directee.... They remind themselves not to be overly opinionated and never to lecture or pontificate. Even so they are active interpreters of God's grace in the life of the individual and of the community."

Good directees need to be self-aware and honest enough to articulate their struggles and concerns, and trusting and brave enough to share these with the director. They must be humble and obedient to take direction. (These last two traits are emphasized in the opening stories from the desert Christian tradition.)

3. Are the new believers, young or old, spiritually mature enough to have the traits of a good directee described above? The conversations, the guided spiritual readings, and the amount and type of writing encouraged would need to be appropriate for their abilities and spiritual awareness. Is it always best to group new believers by age, marital status, or educational level, or would they benefit from discussing some topics in a mixed group? Should parents or mature close friends of the directees be invited to some of the meetings, or would this undermine the intimacy and professionalism of the director's relationship to them?

When mature believers are dealing with similar concerns (e.g., responding to divorce, preparing for a new ministry, seeking guidance on family responsibilities, etc.), would they benefit from ongoing spiritual direction (rather than just a "book study" or retreat)?

4. Encourage members to discuss their experiences with journal-keeping and spiritual writing. What experiences have they tried to record and understand? Nouwen says, "The writing itself reveals to us what lives in us." As we articulate and interpret our spiritual experiences in writing, we discover our own fears, doubts, and hopes, our attitudes toward ourselves and concerns for the world, and so on; we come face to face with our sinful desires; we spell out our theological beliefs and their practical value. We also discover the Holy Spirit that "lives in us," providing correction, guidance, and comfort.
5. Griffin describes devotional texts that have encouraged her and deepened her "knowledge, not so much on the intellectual level but rather as a kind of wisdom." (Over the years she has written about many more of these texts and taught them professionally, often for the Renovaré movement.) What books would you recommend to a new believer who is an older child, an adolescent, a puzzled college student, a young adult, a busy professional, etc.?

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.