

Vision Paper for Catechesis in the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA Catechesis Task Force)

Introduction

This paper by the Catechesis Task Force provides a basic vision and outline for the process and content of catechesis in the Anglican Church of North America. The Task Force was formed to advise the College of Bishops of the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) regarding the work of making and forming of disciples of Jesus Christ—catechesis. The Task Force also supports other recent work in the Anglican Communion concerning catechesis, such as the Anglican Catechism in Outline (ACIO).¹

Jesus instructed the Church to disciple the nations. Conversion is at the core of this mission and involves repentance, a turning away from and a leaving behind of the old life, the “old man,” the old heart. Of course, it also involves a *turning to*; a turning to the life of Christ in us; a transformed life where we are, indeed, new creatures in Jesus. This is both an immediate reality in Christ, but also a process—a growing into Christ. Catechesis is the discipling process of growing up God’s people into Christ.

More formally, catechesis² is the education and formation of Christians from before baptism through the end of life, and it concerns specific, scripturally based content, and also follows a definable process in the context of an intentional community. At each stage in the process, the same general content may be addressed in varying depth. This work addresses the content more broadly, but the stages/process more specifically. Future work will address content in more detail.

Let us note at the outset that catechesis is and always has been rooted in Scripture. From Gospel narrative as introduction to the faith, to Creeds as summaries of Biblical theology, to traditional teaching on moral living, the Church instructs her children out of Scripture.³

Because the Anglican Church has had an excellent synthesis of Word and Sacrament over its history, both before and after the Reformation, the task of catechesis can best be viewed through that classical Anglican lens. It is a catholic lens using the Church’s best examples of that synthesis throughout the centuries, and a reformed lens as manifested by the English Church in her reformation.

¹ “...as proposed in the Interim Report of the Global South Anglican Theological Formation and Education Task Force (presented to the Global South Primates Steering Committee on 6 January 2008)” (Toward an Anglican Catechumenate: Guiding Principles for the Catechesis Task Force, Anglican Church in North America).

² Catechesis: Instruction given to Christian *catechumens preparing for *Baptism, esp. in the primitive Church. The word was also used of the books containing such instruction, of which the most celebrated is that of St *Cyril of Jerusalem. In the RC Church the word is now used for education in faith throughout life. (Cross, F. L. and Elizabeth A. Livingstone. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. 3rd ed. rev. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.)

³ With the understanding that Scripture and the early fathers are basic to this endeavor, a primary modern text to which this paper refers is *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way*, by J. I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett. This text draws upon Scripture and ancient sources, while being itself contemporary and readily accessible. We employ certain terms used by the ancient Church, but which may be foreign to contemporary Christians, such as “catechumen,” “neophyte,” and “candidates.” This is in a hope to avoid both ambiguity and a current and faddish terminology, which may be in vogue today, but tomorrow may be dated.

The three traditional subject areas of catechesis are the Creeds, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments. These areas provide the content for instruction. Distinct but not separate in the life of the individual being formed in the life of the Church and into the image of Christ, is the sacramental pathway of God's grace. God's grace is made manifest in the Word read and taught, and it is likewise made manifest in the sacramental life of His Church. It is worth noting that the three subject areas and the sacraments are all a part of the corporate worship of the Church.

An individual needs the didactic teaching and repetition of the Creeds: to be constantly rehearsing the doctrines of salvation. He needs, too, the experience of the Creeds in worship and grace: the sacramental pathway one "lives into" as one grows in Christ. Baptism and confirmation bring the individual into the life of the Church, incorporate him into the body of Christ, and regenerate him to new life. The grace of God in baptism is necessary, but it is not enough. Teaching and understanding are also necessary. The grace of God works through the sacraments and also through the teaching of the Word.

The Holy Communion feeds God's people "in an heavenly manner" with the Body and Blood of Christ. Christ is really given to the faithful in the Holy Communion. This is the continued grace of God in the believer's life which, co-working with the work of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of the Word, continues to sanctify and grow the believer, with the Church of Jesus as a whole, "till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."⁴

Catechesis, being the nurturing and formation of Christians over the course of their whole lives, always has been and must be done in the context of both Word and Sacrament. The classical Anglican way provides an excellent context for this formation.

Problem⁵

Why this focus on catechesis? Simply put, the contemporary Church has failed to train up her children in the admonition of the Lord. Children raised in the Church from the font of baptism often abandon the faith when they graduate high school and move away from home. This consistent problem in late 20th/early 21st century Anglicanism, and North American Christianity in general, tells us that the typical educational program—including the curriculum, youth ministry, Sunday school program for all ages and Bible Studies—of the average parish is deficient in raising up a godly generation to build, lead, and serve the kingdom of God. Rather than displaying a life transformed by Christ in the Church, the Church's children often show that they've been discipled effectively by the surrounding culture.

Moreover, the Church has done a very poor job of teaching, training, and forming disciples of adult converts. Many people live for years in the Church without noticeable growth in their doctrinal understanding and the implications of that doctrine lived out—and so with little victory over the sin and brokenness of their lives. A consistent and focused path has not been provided for them to learn, grow and mature as Christians, so that the contemporary Church is often filled with believers

⁴ NKJV, Eph 4:13

⁵ For a more complete treatment of the problem and a call to action, see the Catechesis Manifesto produced by the Catechesis Task Force entitled: "The Time for Catechesis is Now!"

more formed by the culture of the world than by the Church and the Holy Scriptures she treasures and teaches. This is a fundamental lack of the Gospel transformation everyone needs.

Thus, whether one looks at the lives of the children who have come from the font as young ones or at those who've come through the front porch⁶ of the Church in adulthood, it is clear that the Church is failing in this essential task of catechesis.

Toward a Solution

The solution is not, however, to be found in starting over and ignoring what the Church has done. Our age certainly suffers no lack of available materials, programs and ministry models—much of it creative and inventive. The programs and Sunday Schools and curricula of the last 100 years, however, have not formed the robust Church that many dream of. We are convinced it is time, as Jeremiah records, to look to the old paths.⁷

The ancient Church, indeed, had a model for raising up believers and helping them to mature in their faith. Though actual practice may have varied through the centuries, catechesis always included training in the three areas of Believing, Praying, and Living (another way to put it: Doctrine, Worship, and Holy Living).⁸

What is needed today in the life of the Anglican Church in North America is sound and effectual catechesis. The calling of mother Church is to disciple and nourish her children their whole lives through, from cradle to grave, so that they may continue to grow in the faith, to mature and be sanctified, and to increase in understanding and wisdom.

What follows, therefore, is an outline of this process and general content of catechesis. Each parish is unique, but for the ACNA to flourish as a unified Church, the parishes, with their clergy and laity, must all share the same vision of catechesis.

Content

The general content of catechesis over the course of the centuries has been,⁹ as noted in the introduction, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Decalogue¹⁰ (or as stated above, Believing, Praying, and Living). All catechetical content can be seen to fit these three basic areas.

⁶ This two pronged approach to catechesis has been talked of by the Catechesis Task Force as a “mission-minded dual catechetical approach: (1) catechetical evangelism, which focuses on disciple-making in an evangelistic situation (*from the front porch of the church*); and (2) liturgical catechesis, which focuses on disciple-making within the formational contexts of family and church (*from the font*).” (“Toward an Anglican Catechumenate: Guiding Principles for the Catechesis Task Force, Anglican Church in North America”) See also the paragraphs following “Thinking Missionally about a Catechumenate.”

⁷ Thus says the LORD: "Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls...." Jer. 6:16

⁸ Packer and Parrett have demonstrated that these three elements—called by many different names—were in place in all the life of the Church (62). They note that catechesis was most effectual in the life of the Church during the 2nd through the 5th centuries and at the time of the Reformation in the Western Church. They also mention the Puritans of the 17th century as especially good at catechesis (52-68), as was the Roman Catholic Church during the Counter Reformation and in the late 20th century (24).

⁹ *Grounded in the Gospel*, 62

Teaching on the Sacraments naturally falls within each of these three areas. The most obvious place of sacraments is in corporate worship, so teaching on sacraments would take place under the heading of Praying. There is also, however, much to be learned and believed about the sacraments; this would fall under the heading of Believing. And the sacraments equip us for practical, everyday holy Living.

We have, then, under the ministry of the Word, the following breakdown of the catechetical content (see chart in appendix A): Believing, Praying, and Living.

- *Believing* corresponds to Creedal Studies (foundationally Apostles' Creed but also Nicene and even Athanasian) and the doctrines and teaching of the Church (the Hermeneutical Tradition¹¹) built upon the foundations of the Creeds (the Church's summaries of the Holy Scriptures).
- *Praying* corresponds to the Lord's Prayer and teaching the catechumen how to pray and how to build into the life of worship in Christ's Body, including participation in the Sacramental life of the Church.
- *Living* corresponds to the Decalogue and ethical and moral living out of the faith with constant life reference to doctrinal (creedal) and sacramental and prayer life (Lord's Prayer) realities.

Obviously, each of these three areas informs the believer's total faith encounter with God and how he lives out that encounter.

Sacraments (see fourth column of chart in appendix A) are by their nature physical and spiritual,¹² and thus they touch on the other three areas of catechetical content. The sacramental life as a whole is the intersection of Believing, Praying, and Living: we believe truths about the sacraments, we celebrate the sacraments in context of worship and prayer, and we ought to live out the grace of sacraments in a manner worthy of that grace.

The foundation of the Holy Scriptures in all areas of study, learning and formation has been mentioned and may be reiterated. Continual building upon the Scriptural foundation and constant reference to the Scriptures are the norm for catechetical formation. When the Church is healthy and

¹⁰ Catechisms, whether Catholic or Protestant, normally contain the Creed, the *Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments with explanations; (F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. rev. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). 301.

¹¹ The Convocation of 1571, which passed the XXXIX. Articles in the form in which we have them now, passed also a code of Canons, in one of which is the following clause: "In the first place let preachers take heed that they deliver nothing from the pulpit, to be religiously held and believed by the people, but that which is agreeable to the old and new Testament, and such as the *Catholic fathers and ancient bishops have collected therefrom.*"

In like manner, in the Preface to the Ordination Service we read, "It is evident to all men reading Holy Scripture, and *ancient authors*, that from the Apostles' time there have been three orders of Ministers in Christ's Church, Bishops, Priests, and Deacons."

So Archbishop Cranmer, the great reformer of our Liturgy and compiler of our Articles, writes, "I also grant that every *exposition* of the Scripture, whereinsoever the old, holy, and true Church did agree, is necessary to be believed...."

Dr. Guest, who was appointed at the accession of Elizabeth, to restore the re-formed prayer-book, after it had been disused in the reign of Mary, and who reduced it to nearly its present form, writes thus: "So that I may here well say with Tertullian, That is truth which is first; that is false which is after. That is truly first which is from the beginning. That is from the beginning which is from the Apostles...." (*Browne, E. Harold. An Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles Historical and Doctrinal.* 1st ed. New York: H. B. Durand, 1865.)

¹² From the Catechism of the 1662 BCP: Question. What meanest thou by this word Sacrament?

Answer. I mean an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof.

forming healthy disciples, from the ancient Church to the contemporary Church, her teaching is scripturally sound.

Process

Catechesis takes place through the whole Christian life, in stages appropriate to the individual's development in the faith¹³. Broadly speaking, the early Church developed the following stages: proto-catechesis,¹⁴ involving instruction for inquirers; the catechumen¹⁵ stage; the stage of the elect¹⁶ (those who have had their name added to the list of candidates for baptism); the neophyte¹⁷ stage for the newly baptized; and, of course, there were mature believers, called in this document, "the faithful."

The Catechesis Task Force has delineated five stages in Catechesis:

Inquirers (stage of proto-catechesis, leading to conversion)

Catechumens (formal training in preparation for baptism and/or confirmation)

Candidates (*Competentes*/candidates for baptism)

Newly Initiated (the recently baptized/confirmed, stage of early *mystagogy*)

The Faithful (stage of *mystagogy*)¹⁸

INQUIRERS

An Inquirer simply wants to know about the faith, and has made no commitment to it yet. He is, we might say, still on the front porch of the church, watching, questioning, listening. The content for this stage is simply the Gospel narrative, the story of Jesus: His incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, and the call these events make on our lives. Someone in this stage may also be part of a program or course such as the Alpha Course or Christianity Explored.

¹³ see content under the header "Catechetical Evangelism," ("Toward an Anglican Catechumenate: Guiding Principles for the Catechesis Task Force, Anglican Church in North America").

¹⁴ Packer & Parrett, 54.

"Augustine argued that catechists should set before inquirers the great *narratio* of the Scriptures, and grand story of God's redemptive dealings with mankind" (ibid. 221).

"...An individual seeking membership in a local household of faith had to go through a long period of catechesis prior to baptism. This process was marked by four stages: (1) *evangelization* (inquiry and introductory summary of the faith)..." ("Toward an Anglican Catechumenate: Guiding Principles for the Catechesis Task Force, Anglican Church in North America").

¹⁵ catechumens (Gk. *κατηχούμενοι*). In the early Church those undergoing training and instruction preparatory to Christian *Baptism. (F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. rev. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). 302.)

¹⁶ competentes ('those qualified'). In the early Church *catechumens admitted to the final stage of preparation for *Baptism. They were also known as 'electi', or, in the E., as 'those being illuminated' (*φωτιζόμενοι*). (F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. rev. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). 392.)

¹⁷ neophyte (Gk. *νεόφυτος*, lit. 'newly planted'). The word occurs in 1 Tim. 3:6 in the sense of 'newly converted' and was generally used in the early Church of the recently baptized. In acc. with the biblical admonition not to make a neophyte a bishop, the First Council of *Nicaea (325, can. 2) postponed the admission of neophytes to holy orders until the bishop deemed them sufficiently strong in the faith. (F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. rev. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). 1143.)

¹⁸ Technically, *mystagogy* often refers to the *neophyte* stage, as they move into the mysteries of the sacramental life. In this paper, however, *mystagogy* is used to refer to the continual deepening of one's faith and moving into the deeper mysteries of that faith throughout the rest of one's life.

CATECHUMENS

Catechumens have made a commitment to become members of the Church either through baptism and confirmation, or through confirmation alone. They have moved from simply inquirers to those ready to commit to learning and growing. As in the ancient Church, a rite of initiation accompanies this step, and the learning commences in a structured and formal way, usually lasting about a year.

CANDIDATES

Historically called *Competentes*, those Catechumens who are ready for baptism are called Baptismal or Confirmation Candidates. This group undergoes an intensive Lenten study to finish off their preparation for the rite of baptism and/or confirmation. Then, traditionally, the rite takes place at Easter, and the Catechumen enters the next stage of growth in Christ, becoming the Newly Initiated.

NEWLY INITIATED

Neophytes, as they were called in the early Church, are taught extensively and are formed in a life of prayer and spiritual disciplines. This important time after baptism lays the foundation for a future life of growth and learning in Christ. The new Christian can now put together his earlier learning with the sacramental living into which he may now enter fully.

THE FAITHFUL

After this foundation time in the new Christian's life, he moves into the stage of the faithful, where he pursues the joys and mysteries of lifelong discipleship in the faith.

Community

In an age of hyper-individualism, where the self is the exalted god of the age, we must state certain things which would have been taken for granted in centuries past. We therefore have to emphasize that catechesis takes place within the community of the local church; it is not primarily an intellectual pursuit to be gone about in private with a stack of books. Catechesis is formation and education of the heart, head, body, emotions, and will—in short, the whole person. Furthermore, a student becomes like his teacher—not his curriculum—and iron sharpens iron. A new believer cannot grow into maturity without teachers and friends in the body of the Christ.

Conclusion

“The church of God will never be preserved without catechesis.”¹⁹ So said John Calvin. True of the church at large, it is also true of our branch of it, the Anglican Church of North America. The ACNA must formulate and implement a plan for successful catechesis if she wants to see her desire for many faithful children come to fruition. The plan outlined here, albeit briefly, can be seen to have several merits:

1. It is ancient, not based on contemporary whim.
2. It is in keeping with realities of the Faith—it encompasses sacraments, doctrine, worship, practical life.
3. It takes into account the Christian's progress in the Faith, from the inquirer to the faithful.
4. It is tested & proven.

¹⁹ qtd. in Packer and Parrett, 23

Let us go boldly forward, then, in the hope that God will use the work of men to the strengthening of His Church, as He has done so often before.

Appendix A²⁰

	Word			Sacraments	
	Believing <i>(Doctrine/Creeds)</i>	Praying <i>(Worship/Lord's Prayer)</i>	Living <i>(Holy Living/Ten Commandments)</i>		
Inquirers <i>Proto-catechesis: First Glimpse of the Gospel</i>	Unfolding the Story in compelling fashion, perhaps utilizing programs such as Alpha or Christianity Explored.			Initiation Observation of Sacramental life, participation in priestly blessing, preparation for, and final participation in, Sacraments of Baptism & Confirmation	Formal
	Hearing the Word taught and proclaimed.	Appropriate observation/ participation in prayer service and worship gatherings.	Appropriate observation/ participation in community outreach.		Non-Formal
	Cultivating an ethos of hospitality and love of strangers.				Informal (and implicit)
Catechumens <i>Catechesis Proper: Formal Grounding in the Gospel</i>	Exposition of the Creed; further training in Dogma.	Exposition of the Lord's Prayer; further training in a rule of life.	Exposition of the Decalogue, Sermon on the Mount; further training in moral and ethical living.	Initiation Observation of Sacramental life, participation in priestly blessing, preparation for, and final participation in, Sacraments of Baptism & Confirmation	Formal
	Continually hearing the Word taught and proclaimed.	Deepening participation in prayer and worship.	Deepening participation in community, justice, mercy, vocation.		Non-Formal
	Cultivating an ethos of solemnity and celebration				Informal (and implicit)
Candidates	Continual study of the Scriptures and sound doctrine.	Continual training in prayer, worship, and evangelism.	Continual training in ethics, service, vocation.	Continued Growth Regular participation in the sacramental life	Formal
	Continually hearing the Word taught and proclaimed; personal study.	Deepening participation in prayer, worship, and evangelism.	Deepening participation in community, justice, mercy, vocation.		Non-Formal
	Cultivating an ethos of humility and teachability.				Informal (and implicit)
Newly Initiated	Continual study of the Scriptures and sound doctrine.	Continual training in prayer, worship, and evangelism.	Continual training in ethics, service, vocation.	Continued Growth Regular participation in the sacramental life	Formal
<i>Ongoing Catechesis: Further growth in the Gospel</i>	Continually hearing the Word taught and proclaimed; personal study.	Deepening participation in prayer, worship, and evangelism.	Deepening participation in community, justice, mercy, vocation.		Non-Formal
The Faithful	Cultivating an ethos of humility and teachability.				Informal (and implicit)

²⁰ Chart is Adapted from Packer and Parrett, 166