



# THE LIVING LIGHT

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SPECIAL FEATURE—

End of Time and Last Things



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# Bipolar Eschatology

By BERARD L. MARTHALER

Until the twentieth century, the common practice in Catholic catechisms, if they dealt with eschatology at all, was to treat “the last things” in the final section. The creeds and the placement of the Book of Revelation at the end of the New Testament seemed to justify this arrangement. The last article in the Apostles’ Creed professes belief in “the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” The Nicene Creed concludes, “We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.” Manuals of theology used in seminaries treated eschatology as an afterthought. The Book of Revelation, though popular in many Protestant circles, received little attention among Catholics.

Catholic manuals of theology and catechisms focused on the fate of individuals. They looked to the future, going into great detail about death, judgment, heaven, and hell. Lessons centered on reward and punishment—Purgatory, the beatific vision, the “fire” of hell for one’s actions. (As one person put it, “preachers were fascinated by the furnishings of heaven and the

temperature in hell.”) The emphasis was on *eschata*—the “last things”—rather than on the *eschaton*—“end-time”—and on the consummation of creation as a whole.

But the treatment of eschatology began to change a hundred years ago.

A number of Protestant biblical scholars began to argue that eschatology is key to the understanding of Jesus’ ministry and the beginning of the Church. Although most Catholic scholars have rejected the exaggerated “eschatologism” of Albert Schweitzer and Rudolf Bultmann, they have acknowledged the prominence of eschatological themes in the New Testament. The focus of eschatology has shifted from the future to the present. End-time has already begun. The *eschaton* is now.

In his well-known instruction to individuals desirous of becoming catechumens, *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, St. Augustine outlines six ages of the world. The first five, he says, are already past, and the sixth and final age



has begun. The beginning of this final age dates from the birth of Christ, and it continues now. It is the period in which events foretold from long before are coming to pass. The “true Passover,” typified in the Passion, death, and Resurrection, was followed on the fiftieth day by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The many who repent and reform their lives in response to the Lord’s call, like him, have suffered persecution.

Today it is common to speak of “realized eschatology.” The phrase, coined by biblical scholar C. H. Dodd, recognizes that we live in end-time, the period between the Lord’s first coming and the *parousia*—the “second coming” of Christ. The Church proclaims, “Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.” The Church’s prayer from ancient times has been *Marana tha*—“Come, Lord Jesus.”

Karl Rahner, among other theologians in recent years, emphasized the need to strike a balance: Eschatology must focus on both the “already” and the “yet to come.” Further, Rahner wrote, “eschatology has become bipolar.” Catechisms must continue to teach about the “last things” and the destiny of individuals while at the same time seeing them in the larger picture

of a cosmic eschatology. Eschatology must reflect on God’s purpose in creating the universe. Much overlap exists within the theological studies of *alpha* and the *omega* of creation. Eschatology must be seen as central to the Gospel message and not simply the denouement—the final outcome of a complex sequence of events.

There is a new urgency for catechesis to take a fresh look at eschatology beginning with the Book of Revelation. The Catholic Conference of Illinois, to name one group, has expressed alarm at the recent acceptance of “rapture theology” even by some catechists. The Illinois Catholic bishops warn, in their “Statement on *Left Behind* Books and Videos” (online at [www.catholicconferenceofillinois.org](http://www.catholicconferenceofillinois.org)), that the eschatology in such materials as the popular *Left Behind* series “reinforces an unhealthy and immature belief in a harshly judgmental God.” They call on “those responsible for faith formation to provide planned, coherent and informed catechesis to all age groups about church teachings on the end of the world, based on Scripture and tradition.” The articles in this issue of *The Living Light* are a partial response to this call. ❧

# A Catholic Reading of the Book of Revelation

*Martyrs from John of Patmos, the author of the Book of Revelation, to Oscar Romero, the assassinated archbishop from El Salvador, have proclaimed God's Word by sharing "the distress, the kingdom, and the endurance we have in Jesus" (Rev 1:9).*

By FLORENCE MORGAN GILLMAN

Those who surrender to the service of the poor through love of Christ, will live like the grain of wheat that dies. It only apparently dies. If it were not to die, it would remain a solitary grain. The harvest comes because of the grain that dies. We know that every effort to improve society, above all when society is so full of injustice and sin, is an effort that God blesses; that God wants; that God demands of us.

—Oscar Romero (from a sermon preached minutes before his death)<sup>1</sup>

Many Christian martyrs have known far in advance of their deaths that they would face torture and even death because of their beliefs. This was certainly true for Oscar Romero, the archbishop of San Salvador, El Salvador, who was killed in 1980. When I heard him speak late in 1979 at a seminar at the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium, he was already a well-known, outspoken advocate for justice for the poor people of El Salvador. Internationally recognized as a key figure of opposition to the brutal military regime terrorizing his country at that time, he was asked at the seminar whether he feared the consequences of continuing his high-profile protest. Romero's answer was profoundly simple, determined, and courageous. He told us that as

an archbishop, he was meant to be the leader of his people, and that, since most of them were among the poor, endangered masses of El Salvador, it was his role to speak for them and therefore against the military's injustice and brutality. He indicated that if what he said endangered his life, so be it. He was not willing to be silent or to permanently leave El Salvador. Several months later, in March 1980, Romero was indeed assassinated by the military.

### **QUO VADIS?**

From the beginning of Christian history until the present time, Christians have been persecuted and martyred. The biographies of these martyrs are extraordinarily provocative, especially the stories of those, like Romero, who knew that they put their lives at risk by continuing to act on their convictions. Learning about these people helps other Christians to see our own lives in sharper focus. Martyrs challenge us to reflect upon the depth of our faith and fortitude. How do they find the courage to continue despite the likelihood of awful consequences ahead? What if we, too, were to face torture and death because of the actions we take or the demands we make for justice—actions and demands that arise from our faith?

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*As a literary form,  
apocalyptic writing might  
be described as writing  
for a time of crisis.*

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In situations of persecution, Christians have recognized that they do have a few options. One is to run away and hide. Another is to *apostasize*: to admit to having once been a Christian, but certify that that identity has been abandoned. Many Christians living during the Christian persecutions of the Roman Empire chose to apostasize in order to save their lives. The Roman administration was surprisingly lenient toward former Christians. Those who denied they were Christians and made the fact plain by worshiping the Roman gods were pardoned, regardless of their past conduct. They had, in the words of Emperor Trajan, willingly worshiped “our gods.”<sup>2</sup> A third option is to remain a faithful Christian and face the torture and death that might result, much as Romero chose to do.

## JOHN OF PATMOS

We suffer with those who have disappeared, those who have had to flee their homes, and those who have been tortured.

—Oscar Romero (1977)

In the early days of Christianity, church members facing persecution chose from the same three options. Because the first two options demoralized the faithful, and because the latter course of action required intense courage, Christians struggled to bolster each other's determination to persevere. This is the situation in which we find the author of the Book of Revelation, a man who calls himself John (1:1; 4:9; 22:8). Writing from a Roman penal colony on the island of Patmos (off the coast of western Asia Minor near the large city of Ephesus), John indicates that he has been arrested for bringing people to Christ or for proselytizing. From his prison, he writes a long document to encourage those on the mainland to stand firm and not waver in the midst of their widespread tribulations. Most likely, John wrote

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*Perhaps John thought that the more complicated his symbolism, the less inclined a Roman official might be to read his text.*

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between AD 81 and 96, during the reign of the tyrannical Emperor Domitian.

The Book of Revelation,<sup>3</sup> which is actually a long letter, has two major parts. The first is a series of seven brief epistles to the churches in Asia Minor at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laoditica (1:4-3:22). Each letter mentions details of the city

and conveys a specific message for the church there. John cites the strengths of the believers, but he also issues dire warnings to them about the dangers they face for their faith, especially from paganism and heretical Christians and Jews. John writes to the cities in a circular direction, addressing those from south to north and back to the south. Maybe this reflects the route he had traveled visiting the churches, while he perhaps held a role with authority, as the tone of the letters suggests. Because the letters consist of seven, a number that symbolizes completeness, John may have intended to address all Christians, including those beyond the cities who would read his document.

The second, much greater part of John's writing, is a lengthy and complex series of visions (4:1-22:21). Painted in blatant and often outrageously bizarre symbolism reminiscent of Ezekiel, they draw a reader, often in a

greatly puzzling way, into the author's apocalyptic thought process. John wrote as a prophetic visionary, following a long tradition of apocalyptic writing that had been popular in Judaism since about 200 BC, as is reflected notably in the Old Testament's Book of Daniel. A few Christian and Jewish writers would continue to use the same genre after John until about AD 200.

As a literary form, apocalyptic writing might be described as writing for a time of crisis. It is so named because the author purports to have received an *apokalypsis*, a revelation or a disclosure, literally an "uncovering." In biblical times, it was also resistance literature, and therefore could be dangerous to distribute or possess. Consequently, an apocalypticist would write in a coded language, embedding the vital, revealed message in vivid but intricate symbolism. The author of an apocalypse evidently perceived that he or she lived in the terrible days of *the final time* in human history, when the conflict between God and evil was about to come to a resounding resolution in which God's Kingdom would take over, never to be challenged by evil again. The writer apparently was convinced that all humanity, especially those faithful to God, would be engulfed in great danger, tribulations, and severe temptations as evil vied for each person's allegiance in the last days.

With this frame of mind, John wanted his fellow Christians to survive the imminent struggle in faithfulness to God, but he knew well that this would require profound strength. That is why in a vision about heavenly worship, he describes the victors, "the ones who have survived the time of great distress" by remaining faithful to Christ (symbolized as the Lamb), as those who had "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14).

The powerful symbolism of robes ironically made white by being washed in blood lures one into the mystical thought of John's apocalyptic vision. He is saying that faithfulness to the Lord leads persecuted Christians through bloody deaths so that they can ultimately emerge resurrected, garbed in pure white and standing before the throne of God. The power of God conveyed in the imagery is John's effective reminder to his readers to keep their focus on the Lamb during torture and death, for the Lord himself once died a bloody death at the hands of persecutors, yet he is now with God. John wants his readers to recall what they share in faith because of the Resurrection of Jesus and his presence at the throne of God: "the Lamb. . . will shepherd them and lead them to springs of life-giving water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (7:17).

## **IN GOD THE FUTURE EMPOWERS THE PRESENT**

I do not believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me, I will be resurrected in the hearts of the Salvadoran people.

—*Oscar Romero (1979)*

The faith of John of Patmos speaks to his fellow believers' own convictions. His method, Christianity's simplest, most direct means of communicating the truth it perceives, consisted of witnessing to faith. He reminds others, with the extraordinary integrity of one who has already persevered under trial, that the faithful are to proceed through life to its end believing that God is more powerful than death, a reality experienced in Jesus' Resurrection. I remember sensing deeply such witness to faith that day on which I listened to Romero. He spoke quietly, an unassuming, gently smiling man, who indicated in clear, direct statements that he intended to stay his course. It was a simple, intense, and sobering testament, a reminder that a Christian must take on the challenge of building God's Kingdom in whatever role one is placed by one's life choices, even if difficult, dangerous consequences are inadvertent.

While Romero profoundly gave witness to faith as he intently and earnestly looked around that seminar room filled with theology professors and their doctoral students, John of Patmos evidently was committed to writing for those whom he could no longer see eye to eye. Further, John couched his message in obtuse, symbolic visions that would confuse Roman authorities who might confiscate his document, which was politically dangerous for both John and his readers. Perhaps John thought that the more complicated his symbolism, the less inclined a Roman official might be to read his text, and that is why his writing is intricately detailed. Revelation is replete with extremely complicated scenarios that are difficult to envision. If this brilliant complexity was designed to confound any Romans hostile to Christianity, it must also have long occupied and puzzled John's intended audience, too, as it has continued to challenge readers ever since. John's book has never been easy to read!

### **"OF THAT DAY AND HOUR NO ONE KNOWS" (MT 24:36)**

John of Patmos repeatedly exhorts his readers to draw strength for their struggles from the future vindication promised them by God. Yet that fundamental Christian reminder about resurrection is strangely not what now comes to mind in many circles when one hears mention of the Book of Revelation. Biblical fundamentalists have publicly and vociferously hijacked this

book. They have forced it, against its own literary genre, to serve as concrete prophecy, a literal timetable for the last days of human history. As a result, many unsuspecting non-fundamentalists assume that is what Revelation is truly about.

The literalist reads Revelation as a veritable road map of the final days of world history, linking it to other apocalyptic texts such as that concerning the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4 and the figure of the Antichrist in 2 John. The literalist approach finds in Revelation precise details about such events as the second coming of Christ and the millennium—that thousand-year period that they consider to be literal, even as they debate whether it will precede or follow the *parousia* of the Lord. Literalism interprets John’s visions not in terms of their first-century AD milieu, but rather, with reference to a reader’s own times, whenever that might be. Thus, for example, the various evil beings depicted by John—allusions in the first century to Roman power and emperors such as Nero—were understood by some twentieth-century fundamentalists as speaking of Hitler or Stalin.

In the latter years of the twentieth century, some warned that the presidency of Ronald Wilson Reagan (who has six letters in each of his names) bore the mark of the beast, 666, as described in Revelation 13:18, which was presented as a compelling reason to fear, distrust, and especially not to vote for him. In the same era, the former Soviet Union president Mikhail Gorbachev, with his prominent forehead birthmark, was seen as the beast of Revelation 13:12, who had a mortally wounded but healed head. More recently, the Left Behind series of novels has held some sectors of popular imagination hostage to the expectation that the rapture is imminent, implying that those who are in on this elitist secret are therefore the “real” Christians.

A Catholic approach toward reading Revelation (and generally the approach of most mainstream Christians who, like Catholics, are not biblical literalists) is quite different. Catholics do not look for candidates and events in our current world situation to match with John’s visions, and we do not search for a timetable of the end events (in the spirit of the Gospel tradition that the Father alone knows “that day and hour,” as is written in Mt 24:36).

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*A believer essentially accepts John’s invitation to contemplatively share what he saw. Believers have been helped by artists who have translated John’s imagery off the pages of Revelation and onto canvas.*

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Catholic biblical interpretation, in a broad, two-step approach, emphasizes first and primarily that the book must be explained against the historical backdrop that occasioned its writing, as presented above. Catholic biblical exegetes ask how that spiritual or theological message that John intended for his readers might apply to contemporary believers. As this is the approach operative throughout this article, I first commented on John and his historical situation, noting that his overall purpose in writing was to strengthen his fellow Christians during their time of persecution. That discussion resulted in noting that it is relevant in every era for Christians to empower each other by witnessing to their shared conviction in God's power over death.

A Catholic interpretation certainly gives much attention to unpacking the intricate literary structure of the text of Revelation, the complexity of which is evidenced in the overlapping series of seven symbols: seven seals, seven trumpets, seven plagues, and seven bowls. Decoding John's vast levels of symbolism includes analyzing the fascinating numerology that pervades the book. Many commentaries on Revelation offer abundant details to explain John's extended use of the numbers three, four, and seven, along with twelve (three times four) and multiples of twelve, all signifying perfection and completion. John also frequently uses six, as in the 666 mark of the beast, a number that is one less than seven, in other words, one short of the perfect number. All of this exegetical work aids in discerning the subtleties of John's thought and the way he perceived the political, social, and moral situation in which he and his readers lived.

### **“LET THE ONE WHO THIRSTS COME FORWARD” (REV 22:17)**

How I would like to engrave this great idea on each one's heart:  
Christianity is not a collection of truths to be believed, of laws to be obeyed,  
of prohibitions. That makes it very distasteful. Christianity is a person, one  
who loved us so much, one who calls for our love. Christianity is Christ.

—*Oscar Romero (date unknown)*

In my observation, the Catholic reading of Revelation also has been distinguished by its use of the text in spiritual practice and liturgical art without decoding all of the symbolism. Instead of decoding symbolism, the reader tries to comprehend, enter into, or participate in the phenomenal scenes that unfold in John's text. The strong mystical, sacramental thread in Catholic

spirituality enables this way of interacting with Revelation. A believer essentially accepts John's invitation to contemplatively share what he saw and then to react from his or her own heart. In this endeavor of envisioning, believers have been helped by artists who have translated John's imagery off the pages of Revelation and onto canvas.

A striking example of this is Hubert and Jan van Eyck's renowned fifteenth-century Ghent altarpiece in St. Bavo's Cathedral in Ghent, Belgium. The twenty panels of this polyptych are composed of a vast amount of biblical imagery. The central scene is *The Adoration of the Lamb*, which conflates

imagery of the Lamb from Revelation 5:6 and 12, 12:11, and the river of life-giving water flowing from God and the Lamb in Revelation 22:1. In the scene, the Lamb stands on an altar with blood flowing from his breast into a chalice. Under the Lamb, on the front of the altar, are the words "Behold the Lamb of God who

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*The second, much greater part of John's writing, is a lengthy and complex series of visions (4:1–22:21).*

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takes away the sin of the world." Below this, at the bottom of the picture, a fountain of water flows down to the actual altar where Mass was said. In this masterpiece, heavenly worshipers approach the altar of the Lamb as they do in Revelation 22:3. The painting beckons the contemplative observer to enter the scene, to join in bowing in worship of the Lamb. A person praying in this way, who knows the whole text of the vision of the Lamb in Revelation 22, might recall John's closing words to the worshipers: "They will look upon his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. Night will be no more, nor will they need light from lamp or sun, for the Lord God shall give them light, and they shall reign forever and ever" (22:4-5).

### **"BLESSED IS THE ONE WHO KEEPS THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE OF THIS BOOK" (REV 22:7)**

No one knows if John of Patmos lived through his Roman imprisonment or how his life actually ended. His writing, difficult to understand even in the first century AD, was very controversial in early Christianity, although it eventually was included as the last book of the New Testament. The fact that the text of Revelation was kept and that copies were passed around by

early Christians reflects their profound regard for those who remained faithful under great duress. We can understand that when we think about individuals like Romero as well as the many other Christians who suffer for their religious identity today in places such as Pakistan and Indonesia: “Blessed are they who wash their robes” (Rev 22:14). ❧

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1. All quotations of Archbishop Oscar Romero are taken from *Voice of the Voiceless: The Four Pastoral Letters and Other Statements of Archbishop Oscar Romero*, ed. Ignacio Martín-Baró and Jon Sobrino. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985). See also the following websites: <http://www.silk.net/RelEd/ezineromero.htm>, <http://www.fprensa.org/romero.html>, and <http://www4.ncsu.edu/~dekull/quotes.html>.
2. This is evident in the exchange of letters written a decade or so after the Book of Revelation between Pliny, the Roman governor of Bythmia, and the Emperor Trajan concerning action to be taken against Christians and those who once were Christians. See J. Stevenson, ed., *New Eusebius: Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church to AD 337* (London: S.P.C.K., 1963), nos. 14 and 15.
3. While the Book of Revelation arose from the same region of western Asia Minor as the Gospel of John, it is widely held that these two documents were written by different authors, even though their common name, John, has led to the mistaken assumption that they were the same person. See “The Book of Revelation: Introduction” in the *New American Bible*.

# Left Behind:

## CROSSING THE THRESHOLD OF FEAR

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*The unprecedented popularity of the Left Behind books makes it imperative that Catholics be informed about the contents of the series and the Church's teaching about end-time.*

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By JOYCE S. DONAHUE

While church leaders were not looking, the best-selling Left Behind series of books has reinvented the way many of the faithful think about the end of the world. The rapture theology of the series has left some Catholics fearing that God may snatch them up to heaven without warning, or even worse, of course, that he may leave them behind. Every Catholic pastor and religious educator should be familiar with this series. While they may appear to be based on the Bible, the Left Behind books actually promote a non-biblical fear in opposition to Catholic teaching about a hope-filled end-time.

The suspenseful, best-selling Left Behind series is written by conservative minister-educator-counselor Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins of the Moody Bible Institute. The first book in the series appeared in 1995, during the time of pre-third-millennium mania. The series will be completed with the publication of a twelfth volume, *Glorious Appearing*, in March 2004. The success of the first books has spawned another popular series for young teens and several other spin-off series as well.

Certainly, Left Behind is not the only vehicle for rapture theology in American pop culture today. Author David B. Currie notes similarities to Hal Lindsay's best-selling *The Late, Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970) and subsequent titles and places Left Behind in the context of the cult of David Koresh in Waco, Texas, the preaching of televangelists Jack

Van Impe and Pat Robertson, and Michael Drosmin's popular book *The Bible Code*.<sup>1</sup> But the popularity of the Left Behind series has reached levels that are unprecedented in Christian book publishing. Because it blends fiction with echoes of biblical authenticity, Left Behind is an extremely attractive vehicle for promoting rapture teachings. The characters in the books are sympathetic, and the storyline, about good people battling ultimate evil, is packed with suspense.

Reading these books can affect how Catholics live and practice their faith and how they hand it on to others. Some youth ministers report that teens are reluctant to practice their Catholic faith for fear they will be "left behind." One Catholic schoolteacher says she bought the children's series for her daughter because she thought it was based on the Bible. Parish catechists have been observed teaching the rapture as a biblical truth even though the word is not actually in the Bible and is never mentioned in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.<sup>2</sup>

In response to this confusion and a general lack of catechesis about end-time, the bishops of the Catholic Conference of Illinois have requested that Catholic religious educators begin to counter the popularity of the series by teaching the biblical version of the end of the world.<sup>3</sup>

Those who work in faith formation can no longer assume that Catholics know enough to dismiss these books as mere popular fantasy. Instead, they should understand why this series is capturing the hearts and minds of those people who cannot filter its emotionally charged message through the gauze of Catholic theological teaching. In these books, the Catholic Church faces a crisis of attitude and the potential for great misunderstanding about God and grace.

## **WHAT IS LEFT BEHIND?**

The Left Behind series was launched in 1995 with the publication of the book of the same title by Tyndale House Press of Wheaton, Illinois. The first eleven of a projected twelve books are now available in hardcover and paperback formats in both regular and large print, on cassette tape, and in translated editions in thirty-three languages. Currently, thirty-two of the planned forty-eight books for adolescents have been published to parallel the adult series. Professionally produced videos of the first two books, starring Kirk Cameron, are available from Cloud Ten Productions. Dramatizations on audiocassettes and compact disks, graphic novels (comic books), a Bible

study series, and a book explaining end-time prophecy are also being marketed in connection with the series.

In July 2003, a new series, *Apocalypse Dawn*, was launched that explores the military implications of the scenarios presented in *Left Behind*. The *Left Behind* Internet site indicates that another new series, *State Secrets*, based on the political intrigue behind events in *Left Behind*, is being prepared to capitalize on the popularity of such authors as Tom Clancy and John Grisham. LaHaye recently collaborated on the book *Babylon Rising* with Greg Dinallo (Random House), and Jenkins has just released the book *Soon* (Tyndale House); both are works of popular fiction blended with rapture theology.

Precisely how popular are the *Left Behind* books? The books in the initial series have sold more than 57 million copies, reaching the top of the bestseller lists in the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Publisher's Weekly*, and *USA Today*. The authors have been interviewed on the television programs *Good Morning America* and *Larry King Live* and in the

publications *People*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Entertainment Weekly*. Barnes and Noble named *Left Behind* to their list of the top ten best-selling books of the century. Both the youth and the adult books have been marketed through book sales in public and parochial schools. Multiple well-worn copies of the books line the shelves of libraries in mute testimony to their popularity.

The website [www.leftbehind.com](http://www.leftbehind.com) confirms that this series is a marketer's dream. T-shirts, videos, chat rooms, games, music compact disks, books in almost as many languages as the Bible itself, an online prophecy club, testimonials from popular Christian musicians, and promotional items testify to the growing popularity of *Left Behind*.

These books were written to proselytize. Although the authors repeatedly deny that they are anti-Catholic or that they target Catholics, they seem pleased that many of their readers are Catholics. Author LaHaye boasts that "we have thousands of Catholic readers, many of whom correspond with us and love the books."<sup>4</sup>

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## A SYNOPSIS OF LEFT BEHIND

An examination of the following synopsis of the Left Behind series reveals that the books are based on a literal (non-Catholic) reading of the Book of Revelation, and that the fictionalization is designed to draw the reader into the story through the use of suspense and by building sympathy for the characters.

### *Major Characters*

Rayford Steele, commercial airline pilot  
Chloe Steele, Rayford's college-age daughter  
Cameron "Buck" Williams, ace newspaper reporter  
Bruce Barnes, assistant pastor, New Hope Village Church  
Nicolae Carpathia, young politician from Transylvania  
Hattie Durham, flight attendant  
Dr. Tsion Ben-Judah, Israeli biblical scholar  
Dr. Chaim Rosenzweig, Israeli scientist

### *Book 1: Left Behind (1995)*

After a scientific breakthrough that makes the deserts of Israel bloom, a swift Middle Eastern war, and a rain of fiery hail, Israel occupies Jerusalem. Mysteriously, all over the world, all small children and "good" adults suddenly disappear. Aboard an in-flight 747 plane, Captain Rayford Steele and members

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*Targeted toward children  
ages ten to fourteen,  
the Left Behind youth  
series contains the stuff  
of nightmares.*

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of his frightened and confused crew reverse course for Chicago, where Steele joins up with others who are missing their loved ones, including journalist Buck Williams, minister Bruce Barnes, and Steele's own daughter, Chloe. From a videotaped sermon left behind by Barnes's raptured senior pastor, they learn about the "Rapture" and God's "plan" for the coming seven years of tribulation. The videotape explains that all people who have placed their trust in Christ alone have been taken to heaven. Everyone else has been left behind (209). The videotaped Pastor Billings reads Bible verses to show that the "Tribulation" will soon begin. After hearing the evidence, most of the group accepts Christ. Barnes, from careful study of the Bible, determines that they will experience seven years of suffering in the Tribulation.

Meanwhile, Nicolae Carpathia, an enigmatic and apparently irresistible young man, emerges seemingly from nowhere as a powerful political force, murdering anyone who gets in his way. He works his way up to become Secretary General of the United Nations. The two witnesses of Revelation 11:3-14 begin their ministry at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. Hattie Durham, Steele's flight attendant, becomes Carpathia's personal assistant and lover.

*Book 2: Tribulation Force (1996)*

Steele and the other members of his group learn from reading Scripture that Carpathia is the Antichrist. They realize that their mission is to warn the world of his danger. Steele becomes Carpathia's private pilot. Williams befriends Dr. Tsion Ben-Judah, a Jewish scholar studying Messianic prophecy, and they visit the two witnesses, whose preaching consists of quotations from Jesus. Hearing them and witnessing the power that God uses to protect them, Ben-Judah realizes Jesus is the Messiah. Under the increasingly powerful leadership of Potentate Carpathia, a "Global Community" is formed. Carpathia signs a treaty with Israel, signaling the beginning of seven years of tribulation. He plans to move the United Nations to New Babylon, to be built on the ruins of the old Babylon. Peter Matthews, a U.S. Catholic cardinal, becomes Peter II, the Pontifex Maximus of the Antichrist's new church (see Rev 17), Enigma Babylon One World Faith.

*Book 3: Nicolae (1997)*

Almost two years after the Rapture, people recognize that Carpathia is the Antichrist. The "Tribulation Force" and friends continue to win converts. World War III erupts, accompanied by famine and disease (the three horses of Rev 6:7-8). Steele infiltrates deeper into the organization. Williams discovers Barnes's huge unfinished book about end-time prophecy. In Israel, warned by various messengers, Williams and Ben-Judah (whose family has been killed by Carpathia's command) flee to Egypt. From there, they escape to America. Williams discovers a hidden safe-house built by Barnes. Durham considers aborting Carpathia's child. There is a great earthquake and meteor showers as the moon turns blood-red (see Rev 8:1-5).

*Book 4: Soul Harvest (1998)*

Steele and Williams search for loved ones in the aftermath of disaster. Few doubt now that biblical prophecy is coming true. People begin to side for or against the Antichrist. A sign appears on the foreheads of believers, visible

only to other believers. Ben-Judah, now the accepted spiritual leader of the believers, preaches about the signs and urges people to choose Jesus.

*Book 5: Apollyon (1999)*

Williams and Chloe, now in Israel, are in danger. The two witnesses are under arrest, but by God's power, they destroy their captors and continue to prophesy. Though they are forbidden to preach, the two witnesses continue to do so. Carpathia confronts them at the Wailing Wall in person. With the sun, moon, and stars darkened and the seasons now skewed (see Rev 8:12), a comet appears; and in the fifth trumpet judgment, angelic destroyers release a plague of demon locusts that look like metallic scorpions, whose sting is so horrible that people want to die.

*Book 6: Assassins (2000)*

Steele and others compete for the honor of being the one to assassinate the Antichrist. Carpathia and his ten kings turn against Pontifex Peter II and kill him. Carpathia is shot in the head by Chaim Rosenzweig, an Israeli scientist who is friendly to the Tribulation Force. It appears that the two witnesses also have been killed. Two hundred million horsemen appear and kill huge numbers of people as survivors try to make sense of it all.

*Book 7: The Indwelling (2001)*

This installment covers three days at the midpoint of the Tribulation. The two witnesses have survived the assassination attempt. While the Global Community uses all available technology to search for the killer of its leader, members of the Tribulation Force remain scattered around the world. Steele, who is having trouble praying, has doubts. Fearing prophecy about the resurrection of the Antichrist, Ben-Judah keeps watch. After three days, Carpathia shows signs of life and is resurrected in the more terrible form of the "Beast," now indwelt by Satan.

*Book 8: The Mark (2002)*

The Antichrist has returned, and he begins his rule over the world, requiring that all accept the mark of the Beast or die. Mass executions occur. Ben-Judah uses the Internet to reach believers around the world and teaches them that God will help the martyrs endure their suffering.

### *Book 9: Desecration (2002)*

Carpathia, who watches executions of believers for entertainment, prepares to walk the Via Dolorosa to the temple in Jerusalem. He enters in triumphant procession, desecrates the temple, and seats himself on the throne in the Holy of Holies, declaring himself to be God. The Tribulation Force helps believers to flee. Painful sores—a plague of boils—sent by God in his wrath appear on the Beast’s followers as the sea turns to blood.

### *Book 10: The Remnant (2003)*

Now about halfway through the Tribulation, the persecutions continue. A remnant of the faithful flees to Petra, the ancient city carved in rock at the edge of the Negev Desert, taking refuge from the terrible heat of the sun, which scorches all who are not loyal to the Antichrist. Carpathia knows their whereabouts and plans to bomb Petra. He is prevented from acting by the appearance of the Archangel Michael and an army of angels.

### *Book 11: Armageddon (2003)*

Six years into the Tribulation, most remaining believers are protected in Petra, and New Babylon is surrounded by a strange pillar of darkness. Carpathia moves his operations to his nuclear weapons storage facility. The Tribulation Force takes over the Global Community’s broadcasting system and addresses the world. Believers begin to journey toward Jerusalem to witness for God. Armies from all over the world begin to fill the Holy Land, and the river Euphrates dries up (see Rev 16:12). The final battle begins. The book ends in chaos, with only hours remaining until the return of Christ.

### *Book 12: Glorious Appearing (2004)*

Based upon the prophecy in *Left Behind* (309), all who are alive at the end of the world will see Christ return in glory to begin his thousand-year reign on earth.

## **LEFT BEHIND: THE KIDS**

Targeted toward children ages ten to fourteen, the Left Behind youth series contains the stuff of nightmares. It seems written to frighten adolescents into repenting and accepting Jesus out of the fear that they will not go to heaven. With four books corresponding to each of the adult books, the youth versions, begun in 1998, tell of four young people whose only sins involve acting like teenagers.

Judd, Vicki, Lionel, and Ryan are left behind when their families disappear in the Rapture. They are forced to battle minions of the Antichrist. The young “Trib Force,” like the adult counterpart of the Left Behind series, will both lose and gain members. This is a life and death struggle, and the contest is for the teenagers’ souls. A synopsis of the series is available at [www.leftbehind.com](http://www.leftbehind.com).

The length of the series, with its forty-eight books, encourages teens to develop long-term involvement with the teaching. Because of the potential for young people to become emotionally attached to the characters and to internalize the storyline, teachers and catechists should be aware that this is not a harmless fantasy, but rather, one that can impact the way young people relate to God and to other people.

## **NOT CATHOLIC TEACHING**

Here are a few things Catholics who are attracted to the books by LaHaye and Jenkins should know before reading these books.

- Any fundamentalist reading of apocalyptic Scripture is not Catholic teaching. The website for the Left Behind series shows a timeline that lists literal signs taken from the book of Revelation: seven seals, seven trumpet judgments, seven bowl judgments, and the return of Christ. Many of the books contain a quotation from Revelation as an epilogue. Carpathia, a main character in the series, is called the Antichrist. In the final, yet unpublished volume, Christ will return. The familiarity of these ingredients can lead people to assume that the Left Behind books reflect biblical truth. Catholics should know that *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (written by the Pontifical Bible Commission and published in the United States by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1994) says that any literal reading of portions of the Bible written in non-literal, literary forms distorts the meaning. Apocalyptic, such as the books of Revelation and Daniel, is a literary form written in symbolic language, and it was never intended to be a gloss on current events. Fundamentalism, the Vatican writers point out, “often historicizes material that from the start never claimed to be historical” (*The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 19).
- A seven-year tribulation between the “rapture” and the return of Christ is not biblical. Scripture teaches that Christ will come after a

## CATECHETICAL RESOURCES

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period of tribulation and that all believers will at that time be taken up to heaven to be with him. There will be only one judgment day; the Bible offers no separation of the good from the sinful within history. Belief in a rapture followed by tribulation and then judgment is a teaching of pre-millennarianism. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes that the Church has rejected such attempts “to realize within history that messianic hope which can only be realized beyond history through the eschatological judgment.” These attempts are themselves signs of the Antichrist (no. 676). Additionally, it is non-biblical to think that Christ comes to earth three times: “once at His birth in Bethlehem two thousand years ago; once at the secret rapture; and once in glory at the close of the age.”<sup>5</sup>

- A “second chance” at salvation is not biblical. There is simply no biblical basis for a time during which people judged unfit for heaven can make good. Judgment, we are told, will be swift and final. We will all, at the same time, receive the final judgment (Mt 13:37-43). The post-rapture, pre-judgment scenario in the Left Behind books borders on Pelagianism because characters seem to be working to redeem themselves.
- The Left Behind books’ image of God is harsh and judgmental. It reinforces a common stereotype of God as a judge on a throne watching each person’s every move. In the books, God’s judgment seems harsh and focused on small sins, as if perfect behavior is required of us. In *Left Behind*, college student Chloe Steele complains that this makes God little less than a “sick, sadistic dictator,” and she decides that if God took away those who disappeared, God is “spiteful, hateful, mean” (*Left Behind*, 65). The characters left behind in the fictional rapture are good people who are simply human. The worst that can be said of main character Rayford Steele is that he has had an occasional passing thought about women other than his wife. Others, such as minister Bruce Barnes, seem to be judged for their merely human doubts. For the teens in the Left Behind: The Kids series, it is worse. They are condemned to be left behind for their fairly common adolescent behaviors and attitudes: occasional lying, rebelliousness, or doubts about religion. These “misdemeanors” are more issues of maturity than serious sin.

- The theology of suffering is not Catholic. The escape of “good” people and innocent children in the rapture, excusing them from the years of tribulation, suggests that the virtuous should be excused from suffering. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), citing Scripture (Lk 18:8; Mt 24:12; Lk 21:12; and Jn 15:19-20) says the entire Church will suffer tribulation before the return of Christ (CCC, no. 675). The Left Behind theology denigrates the suffering of good, innocent people by implying they must have deserved their pain or that it had no purpose. By extension, this devalues the suffering of the martyrs, and perhaps even that of Christ.
  - The Left Behind books deny the efficaciousness of Baptism. People in the series are saved at a specific moment by saying a verbal formula. Near the end of the first children’s book, *The Vanishings*, a minister describes this to the kids as a “transaction . . . a deal” (178). Salvation takes place only when a person tells Jesus Christ that he or she accepts salvation. This is a “born-again,” evangelical version of salvation, which Paul Thigpen describes as “eternal fire insurance” in his book *Rapture Trap* (167) (see box for bibliographic information). In contrast, the Catholic Church teaches that salvation is a process effected and celebrated in the sacraments of initiation and continuing through Christian life (CCC, nos. 1254, 1305, 1344). We grow into our baptismal call, collaborating freely with the Spirit, to produce the fruits of salvation (CCC, nos. 1266, 1742). Catholic teaching is that we are saved through the grace of Baptism. We receive from Baptism “an indelible spiritual mark” of belonging to Christ (see Rom 8:29). “No sin can erase this mark, even if sin prevents baptism from bearing the fruits of salvation” (CCC, no. 1272).
- *The series is both subtly  
and overtly anti-Catholic.*

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- The series is both subtly and overtly anti-Catholic. In the moments after the rapture of the Left Behind books, few Catholics are among those who disappear. In chapter three of the second book, we learn that the new pope went up in the rapture, having just agreed on a point of theology with the Lutherans, indicating the Catholic Church had previously been in error. The authors do make a small concession to Catholicism by having Mother Teresa, over whose goodness no one

can argue, listed among the missing. However, there is a resounding slap in the face of Catholics when a self-centered, obese American cardinal, Peter Matthews of Cincinnati, becomes pope in an election rigged by the Antichrist. He becomes leader of the Antichrist's new one-world religion. Interestingly, Matthews tells of his sisters, who had just left the Catholic Church for an evangelical denomination and were also taken in the rapture.

## RESPONDING TO THE LEFT BEHIND BOOKS

The Left Behind series has had a large impact on the culture of twenty-first-century America. As a voice misleading people to fear the return of Christ rather than to wait in joyful hope, Left Behind theology can be a danger to the Church, especially to impressionable youth. Pastors and religious educators should not only be aware of the Left Behind books, but also be prepared to counteract the confusion it may cause in the minds of Catholics.

Ongoing, planned catechesis about the end-time and a conscious stance against all who use Scripture to promote fear are certainly called for. More than that, those who form Catholics should embody in their attitudes and actions the Church's hopeful, positive view of the end of time. ❁

JOYCE S. DONAHUE is associate director for children's catechesis for the Diocese of Joliet, Illinois. She collaborated in writing the Catholic Conference of Illinois's June 2003 "Statement on Left Behind Books and Videos."

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1. David B. Currie, *Rapture: The End Times Error That Leaves the Bible Behind* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2003), 16-21.
  2. Paul Thigpen, *The Rapture Trap: A Catholic Response to End Times Fever* (West Chester, PA: Ascension Press, 2001), 31.
  3. "Left Behind Books Series Criticized as Fundamentalist Preaching Tool," *Origins* 33:7 (June 26, 2003): 103-104.
  4. *Chicago Sun-Times*, Interview with Cathleen Falsani (June 6, 2003).
  5. Thigpen, *The Rapture Trap*, 27-28.

# An Eschatological Lexicon for Catechesis

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*The Catechism of the Catholic Church highlights the importance of eschatology, a theme that the General Directory for Catechesis finds to be a lacuna in catechesis.*

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BY BERARD L. MARTHALER

Catholics are accustomed to hearing the words “Christology,” “Mariology,” and “ecclesiology” in homilies and religious discourse of one kind or another. These words are the names for various subdivisions of theology that obviously, as the words themselves suggest, focus on the person of Christ, Mary’s role in the history of salvation, and the Church in all its dimensions. But what about “eschatology”?

Eschatology is the branch of theology that studies “the last things” (*eschata*, in Greek). The Bible—Old and New Testaments—has much to say about the creation of the world and its destiny, but it is only within the last century or so that Catholic theology has begun to systematize and organize these biblical teachings under the heading of “eschatology.”<sup>1</sup>

Systematic theology is all of a piece, and its various branches need to be studied in relation to one another. This is especially true of eschatology because it highlights themes that are central to the proclamation of the Christian message. The Nicene Creed proclaims that the Lord Jesus Christ “will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and [that] his kingdom will have no end.” It ends with words similar to the conclusion of the Apostles’ Creed, which professes belief in “the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” These creedal statements have not received the attention they deserved. To many, they seem like afterthoughts. Similarly, the Book of Reve-

lation, the principal source of Christian eschatology since it comes at the end of the Bible, is seen by many as something of a postscript rather than as what it is: the culmination of Revelation and the grand finale of salvation history.

Because “eye has not seen, and ear has not heard . . . what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9), even the inspired writers had to fall back on figurative language—metaphors, symbols, allegories—to describe

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*Eschatology is the branch of theology that studies “the last things.”*

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the end-time. Beginning with millennarists in the early days of the Church to the adventist tradition in Protestantism that is strong in contemporary America, many have taken the biblical language literally and built fanciful theories and imaginative visions of the end of the world.

Because the language of eschatology is beyond the powers of children (and many adults), Catholic catechisms narrowed the focus of the “last things” to the destiny of individuals. They concentrated on punishment and reward: death, judgment, heaven, and hell.

The *General Directory for Catechesis* singles out eschatology as one of the “doctrinal *lacunae*” (gaps) in catechesis (no. 30). It further states that “in explaining the Creed, catechesis shall show how the great themes of the faith,” among which it names eschatology, “are always sources of life and light for the human being” (no. 117). The history of salvation that has Jesus Christ as its center recounts what God “has done, continues to do and will do in the future for us” and has creation and eschatology as “its beginning and its end” (no. 115).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) takes a major step in remedying the aforementioned *lacuna*. Although its index cites only a few texts, eschatology is a recurring theme throughout the *Catechism*. In explaining the creedal article “From thence he will come again to judge the living and dead,” the *Catechism* quotes the Second Vatican Council (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [Lumen Gentium]*, no. 48) in saying “already the final age of the world is with us” (no. 670) and describes Christ’s ultimate victory over sin (nos. 668-678). In expounding on the concluding article in the Apostles’ Creed, “life everlasting,” the *Catechism* outlines the Church’s teaching about the particular judgment, heaven, Purgatory, hell, and the Last Judgment and adds a reflection on “the hope of the new heaven and the new earth” (nos. 1020-1050). In Part Two, the *Catechism* states, “There is no surer pledge or clearer sign of this great hope in the new heavens and new earth” (no. 1405)

than the Eucharist, and it links the Eucharist to the expectation of the *parousia* (nos. 1402-1405). Part Four picks up the theme, stating, “In the Eucharist, the Lord’s Prayer also reveals the *eschatological* character of its petitions. It is the proper prayer of ‘the end-time,’ the time of salvation that began with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and will be fulfilled at the Lord’s return” (no. 2771; see also nos. 2816-2818).

If a computer were to run a word-check through the text of the *Catechism*, it would identify hundreds of references to eschatology and eschatological themes as well as frequent citations of the Book of Revelation. There are, however, some terms or reference used by theologians and biblical scholars that are not explained in the *Catechism* or that need special emphasis. The list that follows is a glossary of a few such terms that educators need to be familiar with in their efforts to remedy a notable (and lamentable) *lacuna* in catechesis.

**ANNO DOMINI**, abbreviated AD, is Latin for “in the year of the Lord.” The term serves a practical purpose in dating events, and in theology it is a reference to end-time, a period of expectation and waiting for the *parousia*, a year not measured in days. The custom of dating time before and after the birth of Jesus was introduced in the sixth century AD by Dionysius Exiguus, a Scythian monk who resided in Rome. According to Dionysius’s calculations, Christ’s birth corresponded to the year 753 AUC (“from the foundation of the City,” i.e., Rome).

**ANTICHRIST** is the embodiment of the “supreme religious deception” that presents a “pseudo-messianism” (no. 675) promising salvation and a solution to the world’s problems that represents a denial of Jesus’ work and teachings. “Intrinsically perverse” is the Antichrist that takes “the form of a secular messianism” (CCC, nos. 675-676).

**APOCALYPSE** derives from the Greek word for revelation. In the Latin *Vulgate* and older English translations of the Bible used by Catholics, the Book of Revelation was called the Book of the Apocalypse. See **REVELATION, BOOK OF**.

**APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE** flourished during the Hellenistic period. Works in this genre are generally characterized by the author’s writing under a pseudonym that ensured anonymity. These texts purported to describe future events that were revealed to the author, as in Daniel and the Book of Revelation, in a dream or vision. In fact, apocalyptic writings were most often commentaries on the times in which they were composed. The books were characterized by allegorical language and complicated symbolism that veiled references to powerful rulers and contemporary events. Apocalyptic literature

was inspired by the writings of the biblical prophets who often looked ahead to the day when the Lord would save his people and destroy their enemies.

**ARMAGEDDON** means “Mountain of Megiddo” in Hebrew. The area was the site of many great battles in ancient Israel (Jgs 5:19-20; 2 Kgs 9:27; 2 Chr 35:20-24), and thus it became the symbol of the decisive battle against and final rout of the forces of evil at the end of time.

**BEATIFIC VISION** implies complete satisfaction and the perfect happiness enjoyed by the blessed in heaven. The term implies that in this world we see God indistinctly as in a mirror, and that in the next world the blessed will encounter him “face to face” and know him as they are known (see 1 Cor 13:12-13) in a mutually loving relationship.

For **CHILIASM**, see **MILLENNARIANISM**.

**DANIEL, BOOK OF**, is an early example of apocalyptic literature. It takes its name from its principal character, a young Jew in Babylon, not from its author, who is unknown. Composed in the second century BC, the book recounts stories drawn from popular tradition that tell of Daniel’s ordeals and triumphs during the Babylonian Captivity four centuries earlier. Its purpose was to strengthen and comfort the Jewish people in the time of the vicious persecution under Antiochus IV Epiphanes (167-164 BC). Using visions and apocalyptic imagery, the Book of Daniel recounts the disastrous fate of the ancient powers that tried to enslave Yahweh’s chosen people. It pointed ahead to “the day of the Lord” that would usher in an enduring kingdom. “The arrival of the kingdom is a central theme of the synoptic gospels, and Jesus, in calling himself the ‘Son of Man,’ reminds us that he fulfills the destiny of this mysterious figure in the seventh chapter of Daniel” (The *New American Bible*, Introduction to the Book of Daniel).

**DAY OF THE LORD** points to the day on which Yahweh will manifest himself in full power and glory. The Bible presents this day as both fearful and awesome: fearful because it will be a time of distress and gloom, as the Lord will pass final judgment on the world, and awesome because it will be the day when he vindicates his chosen Israel in a final triumph.

**DIES IRAE** is a Latin phrase that literally means “day of wrath.” These are the opening words of the Sequence that was sung in the old Requiem Mass. Of medieval origin, it weaves together allusions to both the Old and New Testaments. The first part of the Sequence presents a majestic description of the Last Judgment that inspires awe and fear. The second part is a passionate appeal to Christ’s mercy.

**END-TIME** is “the time of salvation that began with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and will be fulfilled with the Lord’s return” (CCC, no. 2771).

**ENOCH, BOOK OF**, is an apocalyptic writing attributed to an enigmatic figure of that name. It recounts the fall of the angels and describes the coming judgment of the Messiah, a heavenly being who is called the “Son of Man.” This book is not included in the biblical canon. Fragments of the original Hebrew were discovered at Qumran in the Dead Sea materials.

**LAST THINGS** is a popular term referring to death, judgment, heaven, and hell.

**MILLENNARIANISM** is derived from *mille*, the Latin word for one thousand. It refers to a belief that before the Last Judgment, Christ will return to the earth in order to establish an earthly Kingdom. It is based on a literal interpretation of the Book of Revelation, chapter 20. While Satan is chained, the martyrs and all who have been faithful to Jesus will come to life (the “first resurrection”) and for one thousand years share his royal priesthood in a messianic kingdom on earth. As the one thousand years near their end, Satan will be permitted to resume his activity. After a bitter struggle Satan will be conquered definitively by Christ in the Last Judgment. Sinners will then rise from the grave to be plunged forever into the pool of fire (the “second death”). The just will enter into the eternal happiness of heaven. (The doctrine is also called *chiliasm*, from *kilos*, the Greek for one thousand.)

**PAROUSIA** refers to the coming of Christ in glory. The perception and imagery used to describe the *parousia* in the New Testament is derived from the Jewish belief that at the end of time Yah-

weh would appear in a final glorious theophany. (See the Book of Daniel, ch. 7.) In English the *parousia* is spoken of as the “second coming,” which is associated in the popular imagination with a broad range of eschatological themes, for example, the end of the world, the day of judgment, the gathering of the elect.

**RAPTURE**, as envisioned by contemporary millennialists, is a theory that Jesus, in his second coming, “will snatch away” the Christian faithful and spare them from suffering through the last great battle waged by the forces of evil. After the forces of evil have been vanquished, Jesus will return again with the saved to reign for a thousand years before the final annihilation of the earth. The basis for this construct is a literal interpretation of several New

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*In English, the parousia is spoken of as the “second coming.”*

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Testament texts, especially the Book of Revelation. The term itself—rapture—seems to be derived from 1 Thessalonians 4:17, which describes how the faithful who are still alive at Christ’s coming “will be caught up [*rapiemur*, in Latin] together” with those who have already died, “in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”

**REVELATION, BOOK OF**, is the last book of the Bible. It borrows symbolic and allegorical language from the Old Testament, especially Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Daniel, to describe the decisive struggle and final victory of Christ and his followers against Satan and his cohorts. It was written in a time of persecution by the Roman empire (probably under Domitian, circa AD 95), and its purpose was to encourage and offer hope to Christians.

For **SECOND COMING**, see **PAROUSIA**.

**SON OF MAN** is a messianic title that occurs frequently in the Gospels, where it is used only by Jesus himself. It appears in the Book of Enoch (46) and in the Book of Daniel (7:13-14), where the Son of Man appears “coming, on the clouds of heaven.” When presented to the “Ancient One,” he “received dominion, glory, and kingship; nations and peoples of every language serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away, his kingship shall not be destroyed.” ❧

BERARD L. MARTHALER, OFM Conv, *the executive editor of The Living Light, has addressed eschatology in other writings, particularly in The Creed: The Apostolic Faith in Contemporary Theology (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1993).*

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1. For an explanation of the factors that contributed to renewed interest in eschatology, see the article s.v. “Eschatology” by Karl Rahner in *Sacramentum Mundi* 2: 242-246.

# “Rapture Fever” May Be Injurious to One’s Spiritual Health

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*A seductive new teaching about Christ’s second coming may undermine Christian concern for social wrongs and foster an unbiblical view of redemptive suffering, and it is often explicitly anti-Catholic.*

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By PAUL THIGPEN

Imagine the scene: Millions of people around the world, from every nation, suddenly dissolve without leaving a trace, leaving the rest of humanity in disbelieving horror. Who or what is behind it all? Has some powerful international terrorist organization coordinated an attack? Has some bizarre plague swept the globe? Have malicious extraterrestrials invaded the planet? No, say millions of fundamentalist Christians. The mastermind behind this bizarre event is none other than Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, a mistaken and rather novel idea about Christ’s return is making the rounds in the United States these days through best-selling religious fiction and countless fiery end-time sermons. The idea is that Jesus is coming back, not once more, but twice, and that on one of his returns, he will invisibly snatch up into heaven true believers and innocent children, both living and dead. This event has been dubbed the “rapture,” or “secret rapture.”<sup>1</sup> Supposedly, this divine abduction will cause massive, worldwide turmoil, and once Christians are gone, the devil will be free to take control of the world through his human puppet, the Antichrist.

According to this teaching, gross horrors will accompany the diabolical man's wicked reign. But the rapture will have taken place because God has promised to spare true believers from this evil by snatching them off the planet before the "great tribulation" begins. Later, after the tribulation has reached its climax, Christ will come back once more, this time publicly in "a glorious appearing," to defeat the forces of evil and bring history to a close.

In this scenario, Christ comes to earth a total of three times: once at his birth in Bethlehem two thousand years ago, once at the secret rapture, and once in glory at the close of the age. Many proponents of these ideas target Catholics, warning them that Catholics who fail to renounce some of the essential beliefs of the Catholic Church are not true Christians and will be left behind when the rapture occurs.

## **CATHOLICS AND THE RAPTURE**

Millions of Christians find the notion of the rapture mystifying and disturbing. They know that Christ has come and believe that Christ will come again—that he has both a first and a second coming. But the idea of an invisible third coming of Christ between the other two makes little sense to them.

Yet even some Catholics are catching "rapture fever" these days. Their evangelical Protestant friends and relatives may have lent them rapture-promoting books and tapes or given them complimentary tickets for rapture-themed movies. Perhaps with an evangelical Christian acquaintance

they've attended a revival meeting where they heard stirring preaching on the "end times."

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When Catholics encounter such presentations, they may be able to recognize and affirm in them certain basic elements of biblical prophecies about the close of history: the unprecedented suffering that awaits the world, the second advent of Christ, the resurrection of the

dead, and the Last Judgment. Yet they may not know the traditional Catholic interpretation of the relevant scriptural passages well enough to discern the errors, much less the speculative and often contradictory ideas in the tangled thicket of Protestant fundamentalist teaching about Bible prophecy. In fact,

many Catholics in contemporary America will have limited knowledge about what the Catholic Church teaches on the subject.

In that kind of spiritual vacuum, Catholics, upon hearing for the first time the teaching about a secret rapture, may find it seductive. Who would want to refuse to believe in a divine promise that heaven will provide a miraculous escape from horrifying diabolical attack for those who believe? An increasing number of Catholics today have fallen into this theological trap, with unpleasant consequences for their spiritual health.

## **A WEAKENING OF SOCIAL CONCERN**

Some may object: Why should we consider this teaching a threat to Christians' spiritual health? Does it really make much of a difference what people believe about the end of the world? Yes, it certainly does.

The first problem with the rapture doctrine is its typical effects on people's concern for others. If people are convinced that one day soon they will joyfully slip away to heaven and escape the worst in this world, they may dismiss most efforts to fight against evil here and now. What good is a struggle against poverty, hunger, homelessness, the culture of death, or the propaganda of immorality's champions if people are soon to be snatched away? Why bother with social justice issues if the fate of the world left behind has already been sealed?

Of course, not every believer in the rapture shuns social and political activism. Nevertheless, anyone who has heard many fundamentalist sermons likely has found that rapture doctrine rarely spurs preaching about why Christians should volunteer at soup kitchens or lobby elected officials for more just laws. The temptation to retreat is certainly sharpened by the conviction that God's plans for the "troops" call for escape rather than engagement in the world's problems.

## **AN UNBIBLICAL VIEW OF SUFFERING**

The secret rapture idea is spiritually risky in a second way: It may foster an unbiblical view of suffering. The teaching is often understood to imply that ultimately, God wants to shield contemporary Christians completely from the injuries of those who oppose them for taking their stand for him. Of course, the shallowness of this conclusion is exposed by the life of Jesus Christ and the lives of his saints throughout history, which amply demonstrate otherwise.

The larger issue here, of course, is the possibility of redemptive suffering in general. Rapture teachers often imply or even state explicitly that Christians are exempt from suffering God's just punishments in this life. They fail to understand that suffering can become a channel of cleansing grace; that many times we suffer because of our sin; and that even when we're innocent, our suffering at the hands of evil-doers can be joined to Christ's own suffering, thus cooperating with God's redemptive work in the world.

For all these reasons, God has no plan to snatch us out of the world when the going gets tough. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains, at the close of the age, the Church must pass through a "final trial" (no. 675) of persecution by the Antichrist, a "final Passover" (no. 677) of suffering in imitation of Christ.

## **TIES TO ANTI-CATHOLIC TEACHING**

The rapture doctrine is also spiritually dangerous in a third way: It is often tied to a large, complex body of religious teachings that are explicitly anti-Catholic. The fundamentalist authors of the current best-selling, rapture-promoting Left Behind series of novels, for example, have argued in nonfiction books that the Catholic Church is a creation of the devil and will be a tool of the Antichrist. They go so far as to associate the Vatican with the bloodthirsty "whore of Babylon" mentioned in the Book of Revelation, who drinks the blood of the Christian martyrs in the last days of the world (see Rev 17:1–18:24).

Not every Christian who believes in the secret rapture also believes that the Catholic Church is demonic. Yet many of the preachers who promote this doctrine work hard to persuade Catholics to leave the Church and join their own congregations. They warn that those who remain Catholic could be left behind at Christ's secret coming, become pawns of God's enemies, and be damned to hell for eternity.

Therefore, Catholics who encounter rapture-promoting literature are at risk of being convinced that they somehow belong to a counterfeit church. Drawn into reading books or attending religious meetings that use spiritual scare tactics, they may not be prepared with an adequate defense against high-pressure proselytizing. For all these reasons, Catholics must counter the rapture notion with a basic understanding of its origins and an appreciation of the Church's teaching about the end of the world.

## IS IT IN THE BIBLE?

From where does the idea of a “secret rapture” come? Most fundamentalist Protestants who believe in the rapture explain their belief by saying it’s in the Bible. They usually can cite several verses from Scripture that they offer as “proof” of this doctrine, some from St. Paul’s epistles and some from our Lord’s statements in the Gospels.

Once rapture believers begin to lay out their notions of the end-time, it becomes apparent that the secret rapture is only one item in a much larger spreadsheet of ideas—ideas they claim can map out events that will soon bring human history on earth to a close. These include descriptions of the Antichrist and predictions of specific political events in the Middle East, tossed about with a number of mysterious terms mined from the Book of Revelation: “the four horsemen,” “the mark of the beast,” “the false prophet,” “the whore of Babylon,” and that most infamous number “666.”

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Strangely enough, that same Bible, when read or heard by more than a billion other Christians—mainline Protestants, as well as Catholics and Eastern Orthodox—tells no such story. Though the rapture teachers typically insist they are only interpreting “the plain sense” of Scripture, they are in fact reading it through a peculiar theological lens. They already have in place a certain set of assumptions about what they will find there, often ingrained in them since childhood through repeated sermons.

Which Bible verses are used by rapture believers to try to defend their belief? The scriptural detail that often excites them is found in a passage about the second coming of Christ in St. Paul’s first Letter to the Thessalonians:

For the Lord himself, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thes 4:16-17)

For most fundamentalist interpreters, when St. Paul says we shall be “caught up . . . to meet the Lord in the air,” the plain sense of the passage is that it refers to a secret rapture. In fact, ironically, this is where the doctrine of the rapture gets its name: In the *Vulgate*—for centuries the official version

of Scripture of the Catholic Church—the Latin verb *rapiemur* with the meaning “caught up” was used in this verse.<sup>2</sup>

Since ancient times, however, Christian interpreters of this text have concluded that it simply refers to the second coming of Christ as expressed in the creeds. The Apostle uses imagery parallel to that of other biblical passages that were traditionally thought to describe Christ’s return at the end of the age (for example, Mt 24:31; Lk 21:27; 1 Cor 15:51-53). Such imagery hardly implies some kind of secret rapture; instead it announces a magnificent and public event: Christ’s brilliant descent from heaven amid clouds of glory, angels, a trumpet blast, and the resurrection of the dead.

It is important to note that this is not really a matter of Catholic-Protestant disagreement. The majority of Protestants throughout history and even the majority of those alive today do not believe in a secret rapture. Not one of the major leaders of the Protestant Reformation—Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, John Knox—nor even later leaders such as John and Charles Wesley ever taught such a doctrine. All of those Protestant teachers arguably would have found the idea of a secret rapture as unbiblical as the Catholic Church does. And many Protestant teachers today loudly denounce the doctrine.

A handful of other biblical passages are commonly used as proof texts by rapture believers.<sup>3</sup> But in these arguments, as in the one based on 1 Thessalonians, the rapture promoters are reading into the passages their preconceived idea. Examining such arguments only makes it clear why none of the great biblical commentators or theologians throughout Church history, whether Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant, has ever concluded that the secret rapture idea is taught in the Bible.

## **THE EMERGENCE OF THE RAPTURE DOCTRINE**

When and how did the secret rapture notion first come about? The doctrine, as it is currently taught in Protestant fundamentalist circles, seems to have evolved in the nineteenth century, although similar notions cropped up occasionally in colonial America. In the early part of the eighteenth century, for example, Increase Mather (1639-1723), a Puritan minister in Boston, wrote of Christians being “caught up in the air” before the world was consumed by the fire of divine judgment. In 1788, a Baptist pastor and educator of Philadelphia, Morgan Edwards, published an essay promoting a similar idea, teaching that Christians would be taken to heaven three and a half years

before Christ judged the world. Edwards admitted in his essay that his ideas were uncommon among his peers.

The next hint of such a doctrine appears, surprisingly, in the writing of a Chilean Jesuit named Manuel Lacunza. His book *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty* was published in Spanish in 1812. In the massive volume, Lacunza concluded that toward the end of the world, Jesus would snatch up from earth the faithful believers who regularly received the Eucharist. Then the Lord would keep them safe for forty-five days while terrible judgments chastised the world. Finally, he would appear with them on earth to judge the human race. (Rome eventually condemned the work as doctrinally unsound and placed it on the Index of Forbidden Books. Ironically, because of Lacunza's speculations, some

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*The rapture doctrine is often tied to a large, complex body of religious teachings that are explicitly anti-Catholic.*

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Protestants today who denounce both the rapture idea and the Catholic Church actually label the teaching as a “Jesuitical papist heresy.”)

Lacunza's book was translated into English in 1827 by Edward Irving, a minister of the Protestant Church of Scotland who was later excommunicated from his denomination for teaching that Christ's human nature was sinful. After being removed from his local congregation, he helped to organize a new denomination called the “Catholic Apostolic Church,” which was in some ways a forerunner of the modern Pentecostal movement. Apparently under Lacunza's influence, Irving began preaching the secret rapture, though he, unlike Lacunza, thought it would happen three and a half years before Christ's final coming.

About this same time in England, John Nelson Darby, a leader of the British sectarian group called the Plymouth Brethren, preached about a secret coming of Christ. This group experienced numerous conflicts and schisms, some resulting from disagreements over the secret rapture teaching. Historians debate the extent to which Irving may have influenced Darby, but in any case, both “Irvingites” and “Darbyites” came to adopt the secret rapture teaching.

In time, Darby traveled extensively to preach his ideas about the end-time, making seven trips to Canada and the United States alone between 1859 and 1874. His ideas began to gain acceptance at the influential “Bible prophecy” conferences of the time, which in turn shaped the beliefs of tens

of thousands of American Protestants. As a result, several popular evangelical Protestant leaders in America came under his influence, including the famous revivalist Dwight L. Moody, the shoe-salesman-turned-preacher who captivated enormous crowds of listeners on both sides of the Atlantic.

## DISPENSATIONALISM

Sharply disenchanted with all organized forms of religion, Darby was hostile toward the Catholic Church and Protestant denominations as well—a hostility that deeply shaped a new system of scriptural interpretation he developed. “Dispensationalism,” as his ideas came to be called, spread quickly throughout hundreds of British and American congregations of his day and became a standard feature in much of what was then emerging as Protestant fundamentalism. The popularity of the new system, which included the secret rapture idea, was aided significantly by the publication in 1909 of *The Scofield*

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*“Dispensationalism” is so called because it divides all history into seven “dispensations.”*

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*Reference Bible*, at that time the best-selling Bible in American history. The book sold nearly two million copies in the first thirty years after its publication.

A King James Version of the Scripture, *The Scofield Reference Bible* included extensive notes on nearly every page of the scriptural text by C. I. Scofield, an enthusiastic convert to Darby’s dispensational beliefs. Scofield was a Kansas City lawyer with no theological training. But his legal training compensated in persuasiveness for what he lacked as a biblical scholar. In time, millions of Americans were studying Scofield’s marginal notes as eagerly as if the notes were part of the divinely inspired biblical text.

Dispensationalism is so called because it divides all history into seven “dispensations,” progressive stages in God’s unfolding revelation to humanity. In each of these time periods, God reveals some specific aspect of his will and commands obedience to it to test humanity’s faithfulness. In each period, however, the human race utterly fails the test. So each period must end in God’s judgment, and a new period must follow, in which God makes a new set of arrangements dealing with the human race that put it once more on trial. For that reason, the promises and commands that God issues under one dispensation may be different from those under other dispensations.

Darby's dispensational scheme sharply divides between two divine plans for history, one for an "earthly people" (the Jews) and one for a "heavenly people" (the Church). He makes such a radical distinction between the two that Israel and the Church become utterly isolated from each other, with Israel under "law" and the Church under "grace." All continuity between God's dealings with the Jews and his dealings with the Church disappears.

According to the dispensational view, for example, the Bible must be divided between those passages intended for Israel and those intended for the Church. Some dispensationalists insist that Old Testament prophecies apply exclusively to Israel and not to the Church. Some even go so far as to claim that Jesus did not preach the Sermon on the Mount for Christians; it is actually for Jews who will live in Christ's future earthly kingdom.

Dispensationalism teaches that God's plan for the Jewish people was revealed through a series of covenants, or agreements, which pointed to the establishment of an earthly kingdom by the Messiah (the Christ, the "Anointed One"). But Israel rejected the Messiah—Jesus Christ—when he came. So God had to postpone the founding of the kingdom. He turned away from Israel and created a new people, the Church, out of the Gentile nations (non-Jewish peoples).

According to this "postponement" theory, Israel's "prophetic clock" stopped ticking when Christ died. But it will start ticking again when the Antichrist arrives on the scene and the secret rapture takes place. With Christians out of the way, the great tribulation will proceed, with Israel at center-stage once more in God's dealing with the world. Once Christ returns to earth a final time, he will reign for a thousand years as ruler of an earthly kingdom of Israel, with its capital at Jerusalem.

## **LATER POPULARIZERS**

With its anti-organizational bias, the dispensational scheme appealed to isolated Protestant congregations in America that were unaffiliated with any denomination. It also made inroads into denominations that view local congregations as independent of larger structures, such as the various Baptist church associations. But the best-selling Scofield Bible and America's perennial love affair with emotional revival meetings helped to spread the rapture idea even into some of the more highly structured Protestant denominations as well. Especially influenced were Methodists and their spiritual heirs, Christians in the Holiness and Pentecostal movements.

After Scofield died in 1921, other fundamentalist Protestant leaders continued to spread dispensational teaching. Dallas Theological Seminary in Texas and Moody Bible Institute in Chicago embraced the new ideas enthusiastically and trained thousands of young men to promote their views in the

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*The majority of Protestants throughout history and even the majority of those alive today do not believe in a secret rapture.*

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congregations where they were called to preach. Meanwhile, two world wars made countless Christians world-weary and eager for divine relief.

After the reestablishment of Israel as an independent nation in 1948—an event many Protestant fundamentalists see as a sign of the end-time—interest in biblical prophecy intensified. The tensions of the Cold War and the political, social, and cultural disruptions of the 1960s further prepared many evangelical Protestants to focus on the “promise” of escape from a seemingly hell-bent world. By the 1970s, the time was ripe for an array of best-selling books on the end-time written from a dispensational, secret-rapture view.

Most notable among these was the best-selling book of the 1970s in America, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970), and its sequels, which together have sold more than thirty-five million copies. Author Hal Lindsey’s sensationalist style presents a heady mix of highly selective Bible quotes; news clips of world events that the author claimed were “fulfilling biblical prophecy”; frightening “scientific” predictions of natural and man-made catastrophes; and a print version of the old revivalist “altar call,” an appeal to readers to get “saved” so they will not be left behind at the rapture. With tantalizing chapter titles such as “The Yellow Peril,” “The Future Fuehrer,” “World War III,” and “Polishing the Crystal Ball,” Lindsey found a ready audience, especially among young people, for the dispensational doctrine he had learned so well as a student at Dallas Theological Seminary.

Lindsey has had countless imitators in print and also on radio, television, film, and video. Not all of them are dispensationalists, but all have gotten great mileage out of the same attention-grabbing message: it is titillating and comforting, and it sells.

The “snatched out of tribulation” story line so popular today is only the latest incarnation of a relatively new idea. Since most Catholics are unaware

of its dubious origins, they need a more careful catechesis in eschatology to help them avoid the problems of the rapture trap. In that way they can embrace a more Catholic vision of the end-time that focuses on renewal, reconciliation, and hope instead of believing, as the rapture doctrine does, in destruction, separation, and vengeance. ❧

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1. In Catholic tradition, “rapture” is associated with an elevated kind of mystical experience that comes without warning and in which one is completely entranced by the divine presence. The paradigm for this mystical rapture is St. Paul’s description of how he was “caught up into Paradise and heard ineffable things, which no one may utter” (2 Cor 12:4). See M. Frohlich in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (2002), s.v. “Rapture.”
2. See the marginal note for 1 Thessalonians 4:17 in the *New American Bible*.
3. For more details, see Thigpen, *The Rapture Trap: A Catholic Response to “End Times” Fever* (West Chester, PA: Ascension, 2001).

# “... Christ Will Come Again”

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*The Eucharist celebrates “realized eschatology” in that it is both a memorial of Christ’s death and Resurrection and “a pledge of future glory.”*

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By JUDITH M. KUBICKI

“Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again!” How many times have we joined in praying this memorial acclamation without stopping to ponder its profound significance? But the reality is that this simple text, brief as it is, expresses a key dimension of the Eucharist—its eschatological character.

Often, our understanding of eschatology is equated with the apocalyptic Scripture texts that are proclaimed at the very end and the very beginning of the church year. Warnings of natural catastrophes and horrors of war are associated with our expectations of the end of the world. An eschatological vision, however, in the biblical sense and in the sense that is inherent to the Eucharist, offers something far more wonderful than images of cosmic destruction. Instead, it offers something in which we can truly hope and for which we can joyfully wait.

The biblical notion of eschatology is rooted in the Christ event. It includes the announcement of the coming Reign of God through the life, ministry, death, and Resurrection of Christ and its inauguration by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Eschatology, then, looks forward to the final consummation of all things in Christ. We wait in joyful hope for the full flowering of the Reign of God proclaimed by Christ. Our eschatological

vision, therefore, springs from our belief in the Paschal Mystery. We ritualize that belief and our incorporation into the Paschal Mystery whenever we participate in the Eucharistic liturgy.

## **EUCHARIST AS RITUALIZED ESCHATOLOGY**

There are at least two ways in which we can understand the liturgy as inherently eschatological. The first has to do with the nature of liturgy as memorial and its consequent structuring of time. The second has to do with the eschatological thrust of several prayers in the Ordinary of the Mass. Since it is the Liturgical Year that structures our celebrations of the Paschal Mystery, a key element of the Eucharist is its celebration of time. By means of the unfolding of the seasons and feasts of the church year, we “remember” the mysteries of our faith. This remembering is not simple recall, but an *anamnesis* that makes the past present in the “now” moment. At the same time, the future also becomes present. The Reign of God proclaimed by Christ is at hand, even as it is yet to come. This tension between the “already” and the “not yet” is part of the eschatological nature of the liturgy and of the Liturgical Year.

As Bruce Morrill so aptly points out, “the Church realizes itself as the body of Christ through the symbolic words, objects, actions and, moreover, through the overall shape or structure of the Eucharistic liturgy. This shape, however, is based on the eschatological principle that the liturgy is the one way that the Church, situated as it is in the old world, can experientially know, can envision, the new world to which God has ordered all things in Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

Eschatology is thus tied to transformation in all its aspects: of the bread and wine, the individual, the community, history, the entire cosmos. Christian understanding of transformation is rooted in its understanding of eschatology. That is, the universal transformation begun in Christ is the ultimate goal of all of creation. The Eucharist is thus the anticipatory presence of the eschaton that foreshadows universal transformation.<sup>2</sup> As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) points out, “Whenever the Church celebrates the Eucharist she remembers this promise and turns her gaze ‘to him who is to come.’ In her prayer she calls for his coming: ‘*Marana tha!*’ ‘Come, Lord Jesus!’ asking ‘to share in your glory when every tear will be wiped away. On that day we shall see you, our God, as you are. We shall become like you and praise you for ever through Christ our Lord.’”<sup>3</sup> The *Didache*’s description, quoted above by the *Catechism*, highlights the Church’s understanding of the Eucharist as both memory of Christ’s Passion and “pledge of future glory”

(CCC, no. 1402). “Doing Eucharist” anticipates the future in the present. Thus the memory engaged in the Eucharist is eschatological because it is memory, not only of the past, but also of the future, a “recalling” of the future coming of Christ.<sup>4</sup>

## THE ORDINARY PARTS OF THE MASS

In addition to the fact that the liturgy’s inherent structure as memorial provides an eschatological character to the rite and to the Liturgical Year, several of the texts that compose the Ordinary of the Mass are explicitly eschatological.<sup>5</sup> The four memorial acclamations and the Lord’s Prayer with its embolism are two prime examples of Ordinary parts of the Mass that possess explicit eschatological dimensions.<sup>6</sup> Both of these liturgical texts—imbued with a keen sense of *kairos*—exemplify the language of anticipatory memory.<sup>7</sup> David Power explains *kairos* in this way:

This is not quite historical time, if by that we mean an overarching vision of all times from beginning to end, rendered intelligible in a theology of origins. It is rather the sense of an event that occurs even now, with a promise whose fulfillment can be anticipated. This sense of a gracious presence in the midst of what cannot be reduced to the intelligible does not offer time-plans for the kingdom as future, as past, or as present. It bestows on us a present time in which God graciously events, in the anticipation of the fullness of a reign in which love and divine justice prevail.<sup>8</sup>

This language of anticipatory memory enables us to enter into an experience of *kairos* out of which we are inspired to proclaim the mystery of faith and pray for the coming of God’s Reign.

### *Memorial Acclamations*

The liturgical renewal given new impetus by the promulgation of the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 1963) was instrumental in retrieving the important role of acclamations in Roman Catholic worship. *Music in Catholic Worship* describes liturgical acclamations as “shouts of joy which arise from the whole assembly as forceful and meaningful assents to God’s Word and Action” (no. 53). Acclamations have a key role in the liturgy because they enable the assembly’s active participation. They are most successful when they are set to music that is “rhythmically strong, melodically appealing, and affirmative” (no. 53).<sup>9</sup>

In a very real sense, sung liturgical acclamations are a prime example of liturgical music that is truly music *of* the liturgy. That is, acclamations are ritual music that enable the assembly to be actively engaged in the liturgical rite and in dialogue with the presider. In this way, acclamations aptly suit the genius of the Roman Rite in a way that hymnody cannot. This is because acclamations connect the assembly to both liturgical text and liturgical action in a vital and dynamic way. Furthermore, all of the important climaxes of the liturgical action are highlighted by the sung acclamations of the people. By means of these acclamations, the worshiping assembly actively expresses its faith and its participation in the mystery being celebrated.<sup>10</sup>

Since acclamations are a key element for enabling both participation in the liturgy and profession of faith, it is significant that “remembering” is celebrated by means of a dialogue with the presider that includes a major acclamatory moment. The fact that all four memorial acclamations have an eschatological dimension—three have an explicit eschatological focus—further supports the claim that an eschatological vision is at the heart of the structure and the prayer of the liturgy. The first option, cited at the beginning of this article, concludes with the assertion “Christ will come again.” The second option concludes with the petition “Lord Jesus, come in glory.” The third option asserts that by means of our eating this bread and drinking from this cup, “we proclaim your death, Lord Jesus, until you come in glory.” The first three express eschatological hope in the second coming of the Lord. The fourth option captures the “already/not yet” tension of liturgical time. We celebrate the freedom won for us by Christ that we possess and yet for which we still long in its fullness: “Lord . . . you have set us free.” We await the fullness of that freedom and ritualize our longing by means of memorial or *anamnesis*. Thus, the assembly proclaims its belief and its longing for the fullness of God’s Reign at the very center of the Eucharistic prayer by means of spirited (it is hoped!) acclamation.

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*The Eucharist is thus the anticipatory presence of the eschaton that foreshadows universal transformation.*

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Some musical settings of the memorial acclamations actually embody the eschatological dimension of this liturgical moment by means of their harmonic structure. An acclamation that concludes on the tonic (*do*) provides the experience of rest or resolution. The music sounds “finished,” so to speak. However, an acclamation that concludes on a chord that sounds like it

needs to “move” to another one in order to be finished or at rest provides a sonic experience of that eschatological tension between the “already” and “not yet.” There is a sense of incompleteness, of wanting to continue to the next chord or note in order to achieve rest. This musical thrust forward, this lack of resolution, symbolically embodies the eschatological longing for the final consummation of the Reign of God.

### *The Lord’s Prayer*

Immediately after the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer, the assembly prays the Lord’s Prayer. Here again, because of the familiarity of the text, we may miss the strong eschatological implications of the text itself and that of the embolism prayed by the presider on behalf of the assembly. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* points out that

In the Eucharist, the Lord’s Prayer also reveals the *eschatological* character of its petitions. It is the proper prayer of the “end-time,” the time of salvation

that began with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and will be fulfilled with the Lord’s return. The petitions addressed to our Father, as distinct from the prayers of the old covenant, rest on the mystery of salvation already accomplished, once for all, in Christ crucified and risen. (no. 2771)

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*The “kingdom come” petitioned for in the Lord’s Prayer expresses a sense of longing for the final coming of the Reign of God brought about by Christ’s return at the end of time.*

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While all the petitions can be said to have an eschatological character, “thy kingdom come” may be the most explicit. The *Catechism* describes this petition as “*Marana Tha*,” that is, the cry of the Spirit and the Bride: “Come, Lord Jesus!” Citing Tertullian, the *Catechism* continues: “Even if it had not been prescribed to pray for the coming of the kingdom, we would willingly have brought forth this speech, eager to embrace our hope. . . . Indeed, as soon as possible, Lord, may your kingdom come!” (no. 2817).

The “kingdom come” petitioned for in the Lord’s Prayer expresses a sense of longing for the final coming of the Reign of God brought about by Christ’s return at the end of time. However, such a focus on the second

coming need not distract the Church from its mission to the world. Rather, the longing for the final consummation of all things in Christ strengthens the Church's commitment to this very mission (CCC, no. 2818). This connection between mission and eschatological hope is also made in Eucharistic Prayer IV: "And that we might live no longer for ourselves but for him, he sent the Holy Spirit from you, Father, as his first gift to those who believe, to complete his work on earth and bring us the fullness of grace" (see *Roman Missal*).

Finally, the embolism at the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer continues the eschatological focus of that prayer and of the entire liturgy. The presider prays on the assembly's behalf for deliverance and protection "as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ" (see *Roman Missal*).

## **ESCHATOLOGICAL HOPE**

Particular seasons and feasts of the Liturgical Year serve as windows for catching glimpses of the mysteries we profess to believe. Advent is one of those seasons. It distills into a few short weeks the Church's perennial longing for Christ's coming in the flesh, in the end-time, and in every present moment of our lives. Such Advent remembering is ritualized every time we do Eucharist, every time we long for the Lord's coming in joyful hope.

The text of the Advent anthem by Paul Manz, "E'en So, Lord Jesus, Quickly Come," is a poetic adaptation of Revelation 22 by Ruth Manz. The final lines express the eschatological hope of the Church that motivates each celebration of the Eucharist:

Rejoice in heaven, all ye that dwell therein,  
Rejoice on earth, ye saints below,  
For Christ is coming, is coming soon,  
For Christ is coming soon!  
E'en so, Lord Jesus, quickly come,  
And night shall be no more;  
They need no light nor lamp nor sun,  
For Christ will be their All!<sup>11</sup> 🕯

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- 1 Bruce Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 112.
- 2 German Martinez, *Signs of Freedom: Theology of the Christian Sacraments* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 174.
- 3 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana-United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000), no. 1403. Subsequent references are given in the text. Also see *Didache* 10, 6: SCh 248, 180.
- 4 Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 239.
- 5 The “Ordinary of the Mass” refers to those core elements that are found in every celebration of the Eucharist. These include such unchanging elements as the “Holy, Holy,” “Lamb of God,” and the Lord’s Prayer. It also contains prayers included on most Sundays and solemnities such as the “Gloria” and the Creed. Some elements of the Ordinary include more options or variations, such as the several Eucharistic prayers with their acclamations, particularly the four memorial acclamations.
- 6 The word “embolism” means expansion or addition. It is the insertion prayed by the presider that begins “Deliver us, Lord . . .” and is followed by the assembly’s “For the kingdom. . . .”
- 7 David N. Power, *The Eucharistic Mystery: Revitalizing the Tradition* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1993), 315.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy, *Music in Catholic Worship* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1972).
- 10 J. M. Kubicki, “Acclamations, Liturgical,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (New York: Gale Group, 2003).
- 11 Ruth Manz, “E’en So, Lord Jesus, Quickly Come” (St. Louis, MO: Morning Star Music Publishers, 1987).

# Doing Last Rites Right:

## THE RITUALS OF DEATH

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*Rituals help human beings to face the most difficult moments in life.*

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BY DOLORES L. CHRISTIE

Catholics who participate in Sunday Mass with any regularity recognize the last words they hear before they leave it: “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.” As parishioners shuffle forth to retrieve coats or canes, children, or even wayward Cheerios from the church floor, the words linger into the music of the recessional hymn. Most people assume the admonition refers to “ordinary time,” the six days of living between Sunday gatherings of the faith community. Sunday’s ritual seeks to transform the daily grind, to offer re-creation in the “daily bread” of Eucharist. Although the final words of the liturgy are not often interpreted in this way, they also are an appropriate send-off for those who die. This article will examine the ritual dimensions of the passage from the life of this world to the afterlife, exploring the topic through the filter of Catholic tradition.

Human beings have always used rituals as ways to express meaning and to celebrate life’s important events. From ancient festivals of harvest to the modern celebration of the unleavened bread of Passover, from the crowning of kings to the inauguration of presidents, from birthday parties to baptismal events, people find communal ways to mark those passages that human cultures consider important.

Several thousand years before Abraham lived, human communities were already burying their dead with care and with ceremony. For people in the United States, the tragedy and shock of September 11, 2001, brought a great need for psychological closure to the event, for ways to make sense of the terror that brought (and still brings) people together at the attack sites to

remember, to grieve, and to heal. There, familiar movements and words compose both formal and informal liturgical observance as people ritualize their grieving. Such actions are components of every civilized community, grounding us in what is real, and connecting us to one another and to the transcendent.

Rituals can be as exquisitely ordinary as the peek-a-boo games of childhood, or as elaborately formal as the holy days of Lent and Easter. In a Catholic context, rituals in contemporary life help people face the sometimes illogical realities of human living, particularly when those realities are sickness and death. If rituals are not prescribed for us, we invent them. I had occasion a few years after the 1995 bombing in Oklahoma City to visit that city. At the site of the empty field where the Murrah Federal Building had stood, people still were coming in pilgrimage to insert bouquets of flowers and notes and other items into the chain-link fence that cordoned off (at that time) the site—long since cleared of debris—where 168 people were killed. The same phenomena occurred after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, and after the death of Diana, Princess of Wales—flowers and tokens were left by mourners marking the place of her fatal car accident in Paris, France, and at public places associated with her.

The human condition prompts each of us to seek meaning: to search for answers for why life happens as it does, to look for logic in events, or simply to blunt the pain and suffering that we all experience. Within the Catholic tradition, there are several rituals for people who are ill or facing death. These rituals offer solace as well as an answer to the questions regarding what life is about. They also reveal to us God's saving love among us.

## **THE SACRAMENT OF THE SICK**

The first Catholic ritual connected with life's end is the Anointing of the Sick. As early as the ninth century, church communities celebrated anointing of the infirm to heal physical illness and to strengthen the spirit. In early Christian cultures that did not understand the biological origins of sickness, it was important to make sense of illness in light of religious faith. Later (about the twelfth century), the focus for the ritual shifted from healing and consolation to the forgiveness of sin, an extension of the biblical admonition to forgive sinners.<sup>1</sup>

Over the centuries, the sacrament gradually became reserved only for those people who were on the verge of death. Before the changes to the sacraments brought about by the Second Vatican Council, families generally

waited until close to a dying person's last breath to call the priest for the sacrament. Catholics knew the sacrament by the name of "Extreme Unction" because it involved anointing with oil (unction) someone who was in *extremis*, or very near death. Postponing the anointing until the very end may have reflected a desire to deny death or a fear that summoning the priest admitted human defeat in the face of illness (akin to the physician who says, "I've done all I can. Only God can save him now."). It also may have reflected an act of kindness by loved ones who did not want the dying to know of their terminal condition. To call the priest was to admit to the patient as well as to the family that death was imminent.

In this extreme context, it was the priest's function to perform the "last rites" over the body. The actions of God's representative brought comfort to the sad space of grief and indicated God's grace-

filled presence with the dying. Nevertheless, the ceremonies often did little to comfort the patient, who in most cases was beyond cognizance of either the ritual or its significance. Although sacraments are only for the living (*Code of Canon Law*, canon 941), the anointing often became the first of the rites celebrated for the dead as it was administered conditionally if there were any chance that the person might still be alive.

In the post-Second Vatican Council Church, the elements of the sacrament that emphasize healing of body and spirit have been retrieved. The new rite for the Sacrament of Anointing underlines the importance of its efficacy for the sick as well as those who care for them. It "re-members" body and spirit, providing a ritual that addresses the integral whole of the human person as well as the place of the sick within the community. Modern sacramental theology emphasizes the *communal* nature of divine mediation of God's saving acts (the sacraments). It picks up the anthropology of the Second Vatican Council that accentuates the unity of matter and spirit rather than focusing on a dualistic separation of the two.

A former theology tended to interpret sacramental action in a much narrower and more individualistic manner. Sacraments emphasized the mystery of God in the face of things we could not explain or understand instead of highlighting the connectedness of human actions to the divine. A celebration that underscores the material and its essential connection with the spiritual is

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consistent with a more modern theology of the afterlife, which emphasizes the continuity of the current life with the life to come. Karl Rahner frequently wrote that the human being was an “incarnate spirit,” an integrated being in which these two elements exist in a unifying and integral tension. This essential connection of human materiality with human spirituality must find its fulfillment not in some heavenly warehouse for disembodied souls, but in a future existence in which we are always related to the world.<sup>2</sup>

Joseph Martos has pointed out the retrieved communal dimension of the sacrament, that “relatives and friends, nurse and doctors, are invited to take part in the sacramental ministry of the priest by praying with him when he comes for his visit.”<sup>3</sup> This presupposes that the priest will visit sick people

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periodically during a serious or terminal illness. The instructions for the sacrament say that it is inappropriate now to delay the celebration of the sacrament until moments before death, recommending instead that the sacrament be celebrated whenever serious illness is present.

For caregivers and sick persons alike, such ritual has many benefits. First, sacramental celebration brings the community together in a frank appreciation of God’s constant love and active care in

human lives. Second, the use of physical element—in this case the oil or the bread and wine of Eucharist—make connections between the things of earth and the things of God. To have the sick touched for reasons other than taking blood pressure, turning to keep bed sores at bay, inserting needles, and doing other necessary medical interventions reminds them and those who care for them that they are more than a dying body. The use of oil is soothing; this explains why it is used frequently as lubrication for body massage. For centuries, oil was considered a strengthening agent; athletes of old were marked with it before competitions. Oil was also a sign use to signify royalty; kings were blessed with oil as they were crowned.<sup>4</sup> Oil offers the promise of greatness and a reminder of vitality; it is a fitting sign to honor the human body at any time! How particularly fitting it is then to use it as the body faces its own decay, its materiality is compromised with pain, discomfort and degradation. The oil is a reminder that even in the decline of the body, the

promise of God's love remains: God will be faithful to the pledge given in baptism that divine love conquers sin and death.

Several years ago, I delivered a series of lectures at a retreat for ministers. As a culmination of one of the retreat days, the organizers held a prayer service in which all the participants gathered in a circle. During the prayer, we were each asked to turn to the person next to us and anoint him or her. As it happened, I was placed next to an older, unmarried gentleman who lived alone and whose only contact with other people was his ministry in the parish. After the anointing service—we happened to be next to each other completely by chance—he remarked that this was the first time he had been touched in a long time. No one ever touched him. Since he lived a solitary life and had no relatives, there was little opportunity for him to experience any physical human contact. The soothing touch during what seemed a contrived ceremony offered him something not available in another context. The experience was a sacramental moment both for him and for me. It communicated God's presence both in words in the human touch of Emmanuel, God fleshed in our midst. The first epistle of John reminds us that we see, hear, and touch God only in the fleshed-out community, not in some paranormal mystical relationship (see 1 Jn 1:1-3).

Although many who are sick and close to death likely do experience the physical contact of others, since they require medical and comfort care; it is conceivable that they are rarely touched in other ways—as human beings on an equal footing with their caregivers. The wonderful play *Wit*, about a woman who has cancer and who is dying in a hospital, illustrates this reality. At one point in the play, a bevy of doctors come in to examine the patient. The dialogue focuses totally on the physical: the primary site of the cancer, the involvement of other organs, the efficacy of the surgery (“a significant part of the tumor was de-bulked”).<sup>5</sup> That the disease is not the most important issue, that the person in the bed deserves the same care and attention as the cancer and as the caregivers, is not addressed by the doctors. The Sacrament of Anointing allows the opportunity to raise the person—not the pathology or the physical reality only—the incarnate spirit, to center-stage. It reminds the dying that they are more than an ailing biological organism and that precisely in their embodiment in God's image they have a unique dignity.

The third element in the Sacrament of Anointing is that of reconciliation. Reconciliation is very much a part of the dying process. Often people have things they want to say, words of forgiveness or apology. Mitch Albom,

the author of *Tuesdays with Morrie* (the moving story of a man's weekly visits to a dying former teacher), has more recently written another book entitled *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*. In it, Alбом envisions meeting after death people he has known in life. One of the people he meets is his Uncle Eddie. As he muses about the meeting, Alбом says that he would like to tell Uncle Eddie how important he (Eddie) had been to him (Alбом). The author had admired the uncle for many years, but never took the time to tell him.

People who are near death need the human interaction that allows for forgiveness of self and of others. They need the opportunity to say and to hear, "I am sorry." Sometimes our human limits prevent us from forgiving well or at all. Forgiveness rituals offer the opportunity to bring closure and healing to life relationships as we pass on. Regret for words unspoken, fences left unmended, or stories not shared often haunt survivors long after a loved one is buried. The Sacrament of Anointing can offer what may be a last chance to bring forgiveness and closure.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross has remarked that people die as they live: passive or pugnacious; communal or individualistic. Sacramental celebrations remind us that God can and does make up what we lack. God forgives us when we cannot forgive ourselves; God builds bridges that we are physically or psychologically too weak to complete. The sacrament can raise human ordinari-ness, even human obstinacy, to a new dimension. The saving action we name "sacrament" effects what our limited selves may be incapable of doing. A sacrament's effect, notes Martos, "should be a personal encounter with God as a transcendent source of strength and power, and a trusting cooperation with the grace of inner and outer healing."<sup>6</sup>

Fourth, the Sacrament of Anointing includes the sacred meal of Eucharist. We speak of Communion as the "bread of life" and "cup of salvation." The Sacrament of Anointing provides for persons who often can no longer take pleasure or receive benefit from ordinary food and drink, the elements of nourishment. It points to the divine and provides for those present a real "banquet": food for the journey, as the Scripture tells us. Is it not this life after death to which the life on earth points? Called *viaticum*, this Communion at the time of passing on to God is particularly significant. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "it is the seed of eternal life and the power of resurrection" (no. 1524).

The sacramental rituals of Reconciliation, Anointing, and Eucharist bring Christian life to an end and prepare us for our final pilgrimage to the Father.

## THE SICK ROOM

The second ritual accompanying death is not listed among the seven sacraments of the Church. It occurs immediately after the expiration of the person. It can occur in the jangled sterility of an intensive care unit or the rumpled reality of a home sick room. There may be tears; undoubtedly there will be sorrow. For many who have endured a lengthy vigil with a long terminal illness or an extended burden of care, there is likely relief. There may be a last touching of the still-warm corpse and the disbelief that death really has taken someone we loved. The “presence” of the person lingers in the physical form of the deceased. It remains a potent symbol that continues to make present the person who breathes no longer.

For those who stand at the bedside, there may be a mixture of emotions: sadness, anger, regret, even relief that the ordeal is done. There may be the need to process new feelings. “The dying body and the dead body acquire terrifying qualities. These bodies render visible the processes which are denied in the pursuit of an ideal which rests upon the control of bodily boundaries,” observes Hallam and her coauthors.<sup>7</sup> Seeing death in another brings us to face it for ourselves. It is not an easy event. The hardship is more pronounced when the deceased is a young person or a child. The implications for pastoral sensitivity and for the appreciation of the universal rituals embedded here are many.

The pronouncement of death heralds the beginning of the disassembly. The physical organism has shut down and starts to decompose. Those gathered scatter to other tasks. In a sense, the final blessing is intoned. The rubrics are predictable. The body is removed. The empty room stands as mute testimony to life departed. The same feeling is evoked in the empty church when the candles are snuffed, the organist has gone home, and only a few faithful stay to pray after Mass. When the sick room has been stripped of its central character, the sheets have been torn away, the other reminders of death to life have been removed; quiet and hollowness alone remain. The cross is empty. Good Friday awaits the dawn of Easter Sunday. Calls are made to relatives and friends, announcing the passing. Perhaps the priest is called and final prayers are said above the corpse. The family is consoled. The body is transported,

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cleaned, dressed, and prepared for its final social hour. Papers are signed certifying that what was witnessed has indeed occurred. Sorting between the atmosphere of shock and sadness the family prepares final tidbits of news for the obituary and begins to think about the funeral service.

These rituals of the ordinary tie those left living both to the deceased and to the reality of life. It is important that we give ourselves over to them. The Benedictines have a motto: *Ora et labora* (pray and work). We are beings that need to wash the dirty dishes and soiled bed linens of life as much as we need to have the peak moments of prayer that point to the afterlife. The rituals of cleaning up after the death, the preparations for the funeral, are all important elements in the process of grieving. It is a loss that much of this activity now takes place in foreign settings, in the rooms of hospitals attended by a paid staff of strangers or in a funeral home.

Still, there are many tasks that need to be done even if the person has died in a hospital. For those who assist the grieving, for those who do pastoral work with families of the dying, it is important not to swoop in and perform tasks that those who are in sorrow may need to do in order to heal their own hurt. It is not only the “*ora*” that heals; it is also the “*labora*.” To put away the dishes, unwashed in the late-night run to the hospital, later to sort the deceased person’s personal items, to plan the funeral Mass: all are healing tasks best left to those who grieve. These tasks, which insert the grieving intimately into the ordinary, are essential rituals connected with death.

## **THE FUNERAL LITURGY**

The final ritual for Catholics is the celebration of the funeral liturgy and the burial. Ordinarily the body is brought to the church, covered with a white cloth symbolizing resurrection, and blessed with smoking incense. (Because the Church allows Catholics the option of cremation, a memorial service now may be substituted in place of a funeral rite. Appendix two to the *Order of Christian Funerals* contains the approved modified texts and ritual adaptations to be used with cremated remains.) The familiar actions, songs, motions, and words of the Eucharist draw us in and nourish us, leading us to healing. If the family wishes to do so, they help to plan the liturgy along with a parish minister, who guides the planners to appropriate readings and music. To personalize the familiar ritual is to underscore the dignity and uniqueness of *this* dying person, known by God intimately even before he or she was knit in the mother’s womb, as the psalmist notes, and now embraced by God as no other.

Nevertheless, the central focus of any sacrament is the saving action of God. A funeral liturgy should concentrate on the joy of God's love and the conquest of death and sin by that love; it should not be a maudlin tribute to the dead. While words remembering the life celebrated may be spoken, they should not be the central focus of the funeral Mass. It is certainly appropriate and efficacious to remember in other venues the life of the person who has died. A photo display celebrating the life of the deceased is becoming a part of the funeral home display in many parts of the country. At a recent after-funeral party, members of the family and friends rose to tell stories about the deceased person's life. They spoke of his gifts of hospitality, his inordinate desire to nourish family ties, and his ability to bring people together: each of these testified to his own early life when he was orphaned in his teens. The lifeless body, newly interred, was re-connected and re-fleshed in the accounts of those present. Ezekiel's dry bones came alive!

Religion and religious ritual are not an attempt to keep the wrath of God at bay as we obey the rules and offer to God the pains of living. Nor are they a quick fix to be used when we have exhausted other alternatives: "Let God do it. He can do anything." Rather, religious practice is the entering into an ongoing relationship with love and with the God who loves.

For Christians the Gospel is the narrative of birth, life, and the passage through death. It is the story not only of the Jesus of history becoming the Christ of faith; it is also the story of all persons who claim kinship with the Son of God. We are called by God to come into life for a few years. During those years we are called to create ourselves in our relationships with our bodily selves, with others, with the earth, and in all of these with God. The Second Vatican Council document *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, speaks most clearly of the innate dignity of human beings, their relationship to God as divine image, and their essential social nature. In freedom, human beings journey in their lives to the ultimate destination.

We who work in a pastoral context can make ourselves aware of the potential to celebrate life, and we can make the dying process better for those

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*To personalize the familiar ritual is to underscore the dignity and uniqueness of this dying person, known by God intimately even before he or she was knit in the mother's womb.*

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who face it and for those who accompany the dying. The task of creating and of using rituals that heal, that nourish, and that unite persons is one of the most important pastoral tasks there is.

May we all die in the arms of friends. May we leave a legacy of ourselves in love, forgiveness, and stories of our own wonderful, unique lives lived out in pursuit of relationship with God, and, therefore, with one another. We are fallible; we are limited; we see these wounds in metaphor in the diseases that affect our bodies and distress our spirits.

The Gospels and epistles of John remind us of the need to become young as we die. We are God's "little children," beloved disciples (learners) as we explore our unique path of life. We are asked, like the Disciples, to "come and see," to taste the bread of life. Having dined at the royal banquet of the liturgy, having passed through the darkness of death, we come alive again in a sacred time and sacred space that "eye has not seen nor ear heard" (1 Cor 2:9). May we all die with good ceremonies of passage, a fitting foretaste of eternal life. May we all go in peace to love and serve the Lord! ❧

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1. In the first several centuries of Christianity, it was not clear what happened with those who, after having been baptized, had turned away from Christ by serious sin (adultery, murder, apostasy) and now wanted to return to the Christian community. One solution was to put off Baptism until death was imminent. This practice probably was the genesis of a sacrament of forgiveness that many older Catholics would recognize: Extreme Unction.
  2. See Zachery Hayes, *What Are They Saying About the End of the World?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 62.
  3. Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to the Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (Tarrytown: Triumph Books, 1981), 339.
  4. The term we use for Jesus, "Messiah," means "Anointed One."
  5. Margaret Edson, *Wit* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1999), 37.
  6. Martos, *Doors*, 339.
  7. Elizabeth Hallam et al., *Beyond the Body: Death and Social Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999), 21.

# A Framework for Lay Ecclesial Ministerial Development

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*Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs provides an organizing tool for assessing and implementing formation goals and objectives for people in catechetical and pastoral ministry.*

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By LEISA ANSLINGER

Serving the Church as a lay ecclesial minister can be wonderfully rewarding, challenging, even daunting at times; it can also be life-giving and highly demanding. Those who serve in parishes need a lot of specialized knowledge and skills in order to serve the people of God effectively. While every minister brings his or her own special gifts to bear in their work, certain common skills are needed by everyone in ministry. What are those skills? Where and how are they developed? Are there any foundational or primary skills that need to be developed first? What is the aim of ministry—how will individuals know that they are developing in a positive manner?

What follows is a modest proposal, the result of my lengthy observation of catechetical leaders in development and reflections upon their growth and my own. The framework is borrowed and adapted from Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Those who have studied Maslow's hierarchy are familiar with his pyramid and the theory that a person develops into a mature adult as he or she gradually progresses through various levels of development. Although people walk their own winding paths on this journey, Maslow suggests that there is a developmental sequence or hierarchy through which everyone progresses. Thus, needs at the base of the pyramid (physiological or

safety needs, for instance) must be met before a person is ready to move on to the next layer or “higher order” of needs. When people attempt to “jump ahead” and address higher-level needs before lower-level ones, growth will not take place appropriately, resulting in ineffectiveness and dissatisfaction.<sup>1</sup>

The developmental structure provided by Maslow applies equally well to ministry formation. Considering the many understandings and skills that lay ecclesial ministers need to develop over time, I believe it is possible to develop a structure that shows the hierarchy of abilities needed for effective pastoral ministry. By identifying these foundational skills and abilities, we can lay out a structure for people to develop higher-order abilities, and thus we can develop pastoral leaders more effectively. Building individuals’ skills for effective leadership should improve personal satisfaction in parish ministry and minimize burnout. This will lead to improved retention in ministry.

The following developmental structure is based upon the principle that foundational skills or understandings are necessary in order to develop “higher-order” skills. The framework outlined below provides a structure in which goals are easily set so that progress toward the goals can be effectively measured. Using this structure has helped me to plan for my personal ministerial growth. I also have used it when guiding staff members or parishioner leaders toward deeper understanding and effective skill development. If, for instance, a new catechetical leader does not have a foundational understanding of how people typically grow in faith, that leader will not have the skills necessary to guide a beginning volunteer catechist who is experiencing difficulty with her seventh-grade class.

I have found that Maslow’s pyramid is helpful in organizing the ongoing formation and growth of individuals, parish staffs, or professional organizations/clusters as we enter into processes of continual renewal in ministry. The needs have been identified from many conversations with colleagues who have shared the joys and frustrations of catechetical leadership. Dialogue with people in various situations and circumstance has convinced me that everyone in parish ministry shares similar needs.

Lay ecclesial ministers often enter ministry without preparation or experience. The structure is helpful in identifying foundational skills that need attention. The catechetical leader can use the pyramid structure to assist others in setting yearly developmental goals and to evaluate how effectively these goals have been achieved. The pyramid structure presented here builds upon the *National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers*.<sup>2</sup> The *National Standards* are the result of collaboration between the National Association of

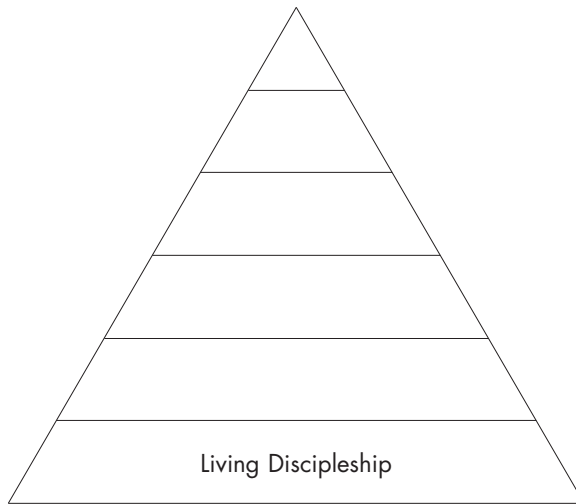
Lay Ministry, the National Conference of Catechetical Leadership, and the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, and they have been approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Commission on Certification and Accreditation (CCA) for a period of seven years. The *National Standards* “reflect the broad areas of ministerial competence needed for the four ministerial roles addressed by this document.”<sup>3</sup> The four roles addressed by the *National Standards* are those of parish catechetical leaders, youth ministry leaders, pastoral associates, and parish life coordinators. While the *National Standards* provide in detail the minimum competencies people need in order to be effective, the framework provides a structure that gives pointers as to when people attain these competencies—providing mile markers on the journey of development, so to speak.

## **LOOKING AT THE FRAMEWORK**

### *Level I*

The foundation of the pyramid is the minister’s relationships with the Lord and with the Church. Discipleship is the foundation of the ministerial vocation. One is drawn to ministry through a profound relationship with Christ. One who is in love with God desires to serve others, following Jesus’ example of self-emptying presence. Those who hope to foster such a desire in others must keep the flame of faith alive within their own hearts. That flame will be strengthened as one experiences the Paschal Mystery in his or her life, particularly through service of others. Following are some characteristics of living discipleship:

- An ongoing relationship with God
- A regular rhythm of full, conscious, and active participation in the Eucharist and other sacraments
- A life that is shaped through prayer and through meditation on the Paschal Mystery of Christ’s life, Passion, death, and Resurrection
- Rootedness in the Word of God, with the ability to comfortably read and reflect upon Sacred Scripture
- A basic understanding of and the ability to explain to others essential beliefs, especially those summarized in creedal statements
- Moral behavior that is shaped by faith, expressed in the teaching of the Catholic Church
- An outpouring of service to others, as an organic expression of living faith



**Figure 1.** Maslow’s pyramid as applied to ministry formation: Level one.

- Active participation in the faith community, with all of its benefits and responsibilities (including stewardship of all of life: everything being given by God and returned to God in gratitude)
- A marked desire to share one’s love of God and the way that love transforms life over time

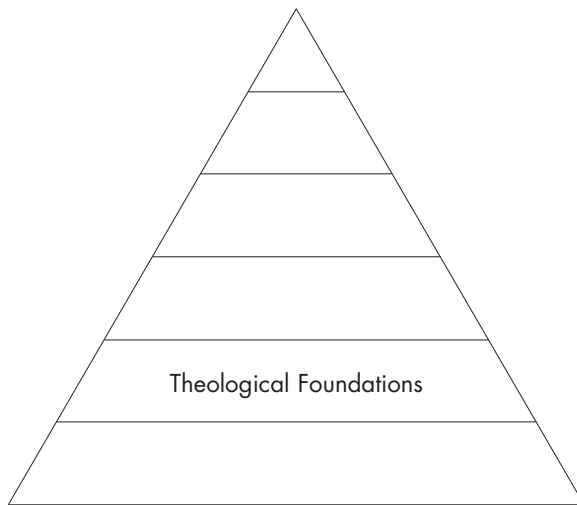
An outgrowth of the lay ecclesial minister’s living relationship with Christ is the development of a healthy and holy ministerial identity. Certification Standards One and Two include competencies that illustrate such traits. Other suggestions for discerning growth in discipleship can be identified in *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* (elements of living faith),<sup>4</sup> or paragraph number 75 of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.<sup>5</sup> The *General Directory for Catechesis*, nos. 233-239, situates the vocation of “specialized catechists,”<sup>6</sup> and points to personal qualities necessary for effectiveness in the ministry of catechesis.

### *Level 2*

The lay ecclesial minister needs a strong theological foundation. Leadership also requires a certain amount of basic administrative skill in order to balance pastoral responsibilities. A catechetical leader will build upon such a foundation in meeting the needs of his or her community. *National Standards* includes common competencies and competencies that are particular to specific ministerial disciplines. Certification Standard Three: Roman Catholic

Theology begins to be implemented here. Included in this section of *National Standards* are those theological understandings essential for all who serve in ministry:

- A theology of Revelation as embodied in Sacred Scripture, Tradition, and creation
- A thorough understanding of Trinity, Christology, and the Paschal Mystery
- A theology of church
- Liturgical and sacramental theology
- A theology of pastoral ministry, including skill in theological reflection
- A theology of moral life and a thorough understanding of Catholic social teaching
- A theology of spirituality, integrated through prayer and ministerial practice
- A respectful understanding of ecumenism and other faith traditions

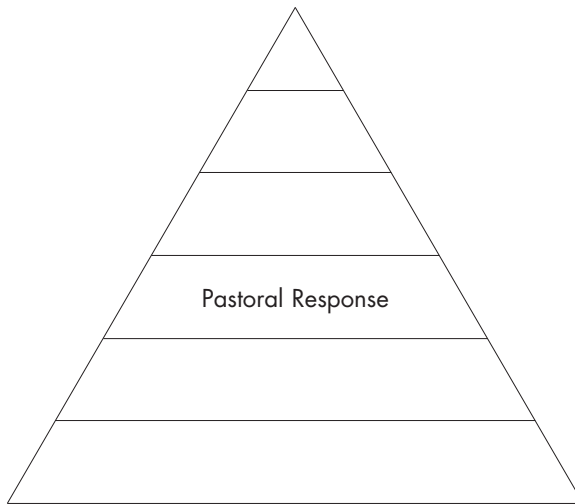


**Figure 2.** Maslow’s pyramid as applied to ministry formation: Level two.

### Level 3

Building upon the prior two levels of discipleship and theological understanding, the minister can now begin to develop the skills needed in order to offer pastorally appropriate responses to situations as they arise. Some of those skills include the following:

- Catechetical leaders must understand the Church's sacramental life in order to develop appropriate sacramental preparation processes that encourage a life of reflection and action based upon full, conscious, and active participation in the sacraments.
- Ministers must have the ability to discern the community's needs; adult faith formation, for example, requires a foundation in the theological competency areas along with the ability to develop processes that effectively engage adults in furthering their understanding in such concepts.
- By learning how to understand the ways in which people develop faith over their life-span, the minister will be able to organize catechetical processes that are age-appropriate and that build over time.
- Ministers will often face situations with individuals that involve moral decision making and applications of the Church's teaching in daily life. The minister needs to understand the Church's teaching in these areas and have the people skills needed to help people work through these difficult areas appropriately.

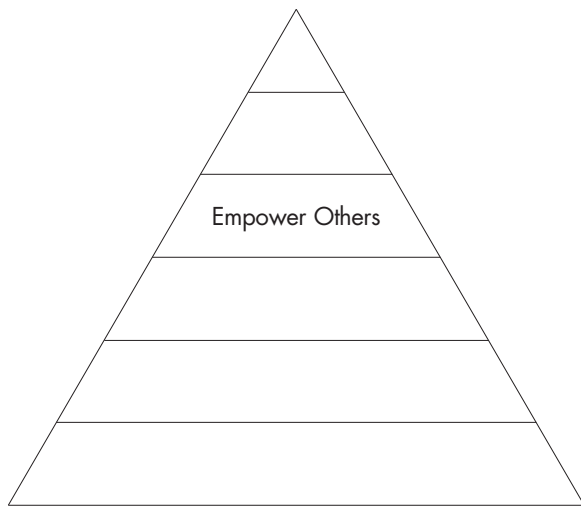


**Figure 3.** Maslow's pyramid as applied to ministry formation: Level three.

In these situations and numerous others, ministers need both a solid foundation and higher-level skills in order to act appropriately. In addition to the theological foundations identified in Certification Standard Three, many of these skills are found in Certification Standard Four: Pastoral Praxis.

#### *Level 4*

The next level on the skills pyramid is the ability to “animate” or empower the community towards discipleship. Recent research in the Diocese of Rockford, Illinois, indicates that “vital” parishes have one element in common: parish leaders who “encourage a diversity of people to become involved in parish ministries.” The ability to empower others toward growth in living discipleship is, therefore, an important skill for the lay ecclesial minister. While Certification Standard Five: Professional Practice speaks to some of the skills involved in this level and the next, numerous additional skills are also needed, including the following:



**Figure 4.** Maslow’s pyramid as applied to ministry formation: Level four.

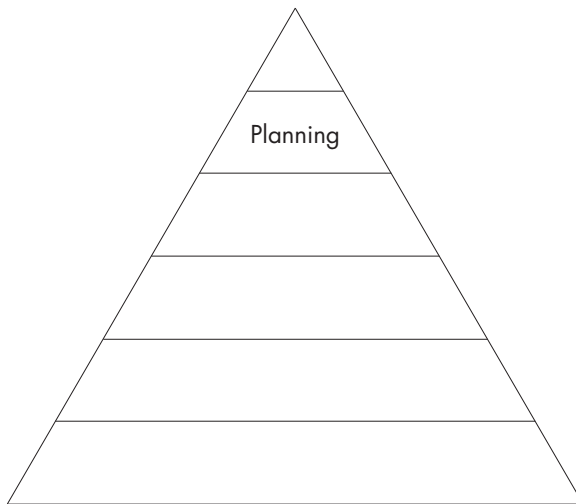
- The ability to lead parishioners in identifying communal ministerial needs
- The ability to encourage and empower parishioners to share their gifts and talents

- Skill in guiding individuals or groups with discernment of their gifts
- The ability to work with parishioners who are ready to offer their time and talent towards a ministerial effort
- The ability to actively support parishioner-led ministries, leading to comprehensive ministry, programs, and outreach
- The ability to develop an infrastructure of parish ministries through ongoing formation for all in the community, ensuring stability while remaining open to growth and change

Pastoral ministers alone are not responsible for coordinating parish ministries. In fact, by acting alone they actually cause damage over time to the parish's ministerial structure. Instead, the lay ecclesial minister must learn to involve as many other parish leaders as possible in the process of developing ministries, providing them with appropriate formation and training, creating a structure for sustained ministry, and offering essential support services.

*Level 5*

The lay ecclesial minister must possess the ability to engage in both long-term and immediate planning along with others in the community. Such planning requires the following:



**Figure 5.** Maslow's pyramid as applied to ministry formation: Level five.

- The ability to lead parishioners through processes to discern parish needs in light of the vision of the Church found within its documents
- The ability to plan for a future that embodies the vision discerned by parishioners and pastoral leaders
- The skills to put such a plan into practice and to ensure steady progress toward the plan

Learning to gather the dreams and hopes of the community and to synthesize the desires of parishioners with the vision presented in the Church's documents is possible when one possesses the foundational skills found in the lower layers of the pyramid.

### *Level 6*

Finally, at the top of the pyramid is the ability to conduct objective self-assessment. Lay ecclesial ministers are never “finished products.” One who is committed to ongoing development will take the everyday experiences of service and will consider potential areas of growth. Setting goals for personal ministerial growth and periodically evaluating such development will lead one to practice more effective ministry and to experience a sense of satisfaction.

I have used the principles upon which the above hierarchy is based personally and with numerous members of my parish's catechetical staff, both formally and informally. Such reflections have resulted in more effective ministry and greater ease in a variety of ministerial settings. Goals are being set with increasing comfort, and it is wonderful to celebrate people's progress toward their goals.

Beneficial uses of this framework include the following:

- *Using the pyramid for objective self-assessment and goal-setting:* The experience of using the framework to set reasonable goals and to evaluate one's growth toward those goals can be particularly enlightening, especially in a group setting. For example, diocesan or deanery associations at an annual retreat could host a process where individuals use the framework to discern areas of strength and areas needing growth, to reflect upon their previous service experience, and to develop goals for the coming year.



**Figure 6.** Maslow's pyramid as applied to ministry formation: Level six.

- *Developing a sequential, thorough, and pastoral process of skill-building to encourage more effective training programs:* Many people enter ministry through volunteer service within their parish. Once a person begins regular service, he or she needs to begin to develop the skills listed at the base of the pyramid. Once that is accomplished, the person can build upon those foundations learning the skills needed to become effective ministers. Many pastoral ministry formation processes concentrate on the skills found in only one or two layers of the pyramid, mostly those having to do with theology or method. Lay ecclesial ministers will benefit from building skills in the upper layers of the hierarchy once essential foundations have been laid.
- *Reflecting upon the pyramid to build collaboration among clergy and lay ecclesial ministers:* While research regarding effective collaboration strategies is being conducted with increasing frequency, most of this research is centered upon the communication and interpersonal aspects of a collaborative relationship. Research that is based upon the pyramid, I believe, could result in fruitful learning with wide-ranging implications.

My purpose in proposing this framework is simple: I hope to engage others in conversations for the benefit of the Church. Whether this model has value remains to be seen; much research needs to be done to establish its

mettle. Nonetheless, it has helped me and those with whom I minister to serve more effectively, and I hope it will help others in similar ways. I welcome discussion on the framework and its implications, and I firmly believe that a commitment to such dialogue will reap wonderful benefits for the People of God.

Too often people are forced into ministerial roles before they have the preparation and training they need to be effective ministers. Little thought is given to what skills people need to learn or how they can best learn them. Basing our own ministerial growth upon a structured system of formation and developing processes by which others can do the same will enhance lay ecclesial ministry for the Church in the United States. ✪

LEISA ANSLINGER is the pastoral associate for faith formation at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Cincinnati, Ohio.

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- 1 Abraham Maslow's two seminal works on the hierarchy of needs are *Motivation and Personality* (1954) and *Toward a Psychology of Being* (1968).
- 2 *National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers* (Washington, DC: National Association of Lay Ministry, the National Conference of Catechetical Leadership, and the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, 2003), 7-8.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 4 Department of Education, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Leader's Guide to "Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us"* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000).
- 5 International Commission on the English in the Liturgy and Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, Study Edition* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1988).
- 6 Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana-United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1998), nos. 233-239.
- 7 Michael Cieslak, "The Consequences of Pastoral Leadership," in *The Parish Management Handbook*, ed. Charles E. Zech (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2003), 129.

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# Catechesis in Latin America

*Two works by a well-established and internationally recognized educator survey the history, theology, and catechetical approaches in Latin America.*

BY JEFFREY GROS, FSC

Catechesis has very different histories in North and South America, and the catechetical renewal in the United States and Latin America in the decades since the Second Vatican Council has faced very different challenges. Two volumes by Enrique Ahumada Garcia help those of us in North America understand just how different these challenges have been. The first volume, published more than a decade ago, *Comienzos de la Catequesis en América y Particularmente en Chile* (Chile: Seminario Pontificio Mayor de los Santos Angeles Custodios, 1991), is a comprehensive history of Latin American catechesis. The second, *Teología de la Educación* (Santiago, Chile: Editorial Tiberíades, 1991, 2003), has only recently appeared. García is now at work on a history of catechesis that will deal with the entire hemisphere.

García, a De La Salle Christian Brother and a seasoned educator and catechetical leader in Chile, was trained at Lumen Vitae in Belgium. He has had a distinguished career in the classroom and in the catechetical section of the Council of Latin American Bishops Conferences (CELAM). He has been active for more than forty years in catechetical renewal throughout Latin America and around the world, in addition to being involved with the Holy See's initiatives in promoting the biblical apostolate.

García has long been associated with CELAM's international formation center that trains catechists for the twenty-four episcopal conferences of Latin

America and the Caribbean. He has held executive positions with both the episcopal conference of Chile and the Archdiocese of Santiago. As a member of the catechetical department of CELAM, he has been actively involved in the implementation and inculturation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *General Directory for Catechesis*. He currently directs the international graduate center for catechetical research and leadership, Catecheticum, and edits a journal by the same name. He has traveled widely in the United States and Europe as well as throughout all of Latin America. He is conversant in English and, as the citations in published works show, also follows the work of U.S. catechists in some detail. García is singularly equipped to provide an overview of Catholic education and its theological underpinnings.

## **BEGINNINGS OF CATECHESIS IN AMERICA**

*Comienzos de la Catequesis en América y Particularmente en Chile* (henceforth *Comienzos*) tells the story of catechesis in Latin America from the era of the conquest through the end of the sixteenth century. García lays the groundwork for catechesis in the New World by surveying the theological and catechetical developments in the Old: pre-Reformation Europe. These developments were the backdrop for the drama of the conquest and evangelization of the Americas. *Comienzos* describes the approaches to evangelizing the indigenous people that created the major theological and socio-political controversy that characterized catechetics during the conquest. It describes the differing approaches to catechesis used by the Dominicans, Jesuits, and the secular clergy.

In many ways, the modern human rights movement and the Catholic theology behind it emerged from the debates of Dominicans (like Bartolomé de Las Casas, OP, and Francisco de Vittora, OP) and Jesuits (following José de Acosta, SJ) as well as a host of Franciscans. Catechists, if they were to have any credibility, found it necessary to become advocates for the humanity and human rights of the indigenous peoples. In this earlier volume, *Comienzos*, García documents the struggle, the differences over inculturation and catechetical methodology, and the catechetical implementation of the Council of Trent. Latin America had a rich tradition of councils and collegiality in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, before independence. The evangelizing mission of catechetics was central in these councils of bishops and their follow-up. García not only describes the key pastoral figures in the catechetical movement of the period, but also documents the reception that these local/regional councils received.

The variety of positions of these councils on evangelization, catechesis, the liberty of the indigenous people, and their relationship to their Spanish and Portuguese overlords set the tone for five centuries of catechetical and ecclesiastical development. Out of that pastoral experience and theological reflection has come a treasure trove for modern experiments with, and reflections on, the process of inculturating the Gospel.

In sixteenth-century Spain, church reform had begun well before the Council of Trent. Key Spanish figures who contributed much to educational renewal proposed at Trent drew on their scholarly expertise and pastoral experience at home in articulating the Catholic faith for the universal Church. Consequently, the reception of the decrees of the Council came with a certain ease in a Spanish

empire that covered two hemispheres. In Latin America, the local councils of bishops, when called to inculturate the teachings of Trent into the New World, concentrated in large part on implementing the catechetical program of Catholic renewal. García describes the roots of these developments in rich detail, always with an eye to the relevance of these early debates and developments for pastoral practice today.

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*García lays groundwork for catechesis in the New World by surveying the theological and catechetical developments in the Old.*

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## **THEOLOGY**

García makes clear, in his more recent *Teología de la Educación*, that this past experience explains why the Latin American bishops have taken such a different approach to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* than have the bishops of the United States. The catechists of CELAM draw on a rich tradition of inculturation and catechetical research that has its roots in the sixteenth century. With careful attention to methodology, the bishops in Latin America build on the popular devotional life of the people and the variety of local cultures into which Gospel proclamation must be incarnated today.

With the Second Vatican Council, preconiliar work in both Spain and Latin America in catechetical renewal following the worldwide kerygmatic focus became an important resource. The specialized Catholic Action work of Belgium and France, with its attention to social analysis (Observe, Judge,

and Act)—like lay leadership ministry, small intentional communities, and identification with the working class and poor—had influenced many Europe-trained priests and religious, García among them, as well as many of the missionaries who came to Latin America from the North Atlantic churches. The 1968 Medellín conference of CELAM incorporated these catechetical and pastoral initiatives into its program for implementing the Second Vatican Council. Pastoral strategies and catechetical methods that

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*García describes the roots of these developments in rich detail, always with an eye to the relevance of these early debates and developments for pastoral practice today.*

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emphasized the option for the poor, base Christian communities, inculturation especially in the indigenous and African American cultures, family catechesis, the Church's social teaching, and intentional Bible study and liturgical renewal all became priorities.

In spite of all of the debates about evangelization in the sixteenth century, in many countries the Church relied on the state for support of its pastoral programs, which left many groups of bishops allied

with economic and military elites that were sometimes unpopular with its citizens. In places like Guatemala and Mexico, these alliances had been broken by violent reactions against the Church. The Second Vatican Council's emphasis on religious liberty, lay leadership, and the move to have the Church take responsibility for its own educational and pastoral mission, independent of the state, caused considerable social dislocation.

Positively, the preconiliar catechetical, liturgical, and social renewal became a resource for the emergence of strong centers of leadership. Among these was Chile, during the dire, oppressive years of General August Pinochet (1970s and 1980s), when only church groups could meet legally, and then only under draconian supervision. It was in this crucible that catechists like García were able to provide (in spite of the military opposition to the Church's social teaching) resources that were authentically Catholic, and pastorally concerned for all, especially the poor. Family catechesis was often the only context where group socialization could occur independent of repressive government control. García was a leader in the catechetical work during this dark period of Chile's history. In fact, his initiatives in family catechesis have been widely influential internationally, throughout Latin America and in sectors of the U.S. Hispanic/Latino community.

*Teología de la Educación* does not attempt to tie theology as closely to the Latin American experience as it does to the biblical witness and the Church's magisterial statements on education. It is enriched by the concrete implication of Catholic catechesis in the countries of Latin America and the context where care about the explicitly biblical, historical, and sacramental character of all of education becomes an important witness against right-wing, militaristic, and economic regimes whose educational establishment is challenged by the biblical witness and Catholic sacramental consciousness and social teaching.

This new volume, *Teología de la Educación*, includes twelve chapters, all grounded in sound biblical and patristic research, the contemporary Catholic Magisterium, and the best of interdisciplinary pedagogical thinking. It begins with a chapter surveying the understanding of a theology of education and its contents. Then it turns to the educational process, grounding its survey in the principles of Vatican II as elucidated and inculturated in the Latin American experience and episcopal teaching.

The third chapter addresses the human person as the subject of education as outlined in Scripture and the tradition and offers a vision of the role of the Christian in the world. The next chapter goes on to develop God's role in the educational process and the goal of Christian education. This first part lays a careful theological groundwork for an understanding of the Christian person in a modern, scientific world with all of its political and economic challenges. The author's background in science helps him to show the compatibility of the Christian faith vision and that of the modern, social, and physical scientific worldview in which the Christian educator is called to operate.

Chapter five elaborates the educational process from an incarnational point of view, informed by an ecclesiological vision and a contemporary psychology of development. The role of the family in human and Christian education is explored in chapter six. The responsibility of the family and the centrality of a Christian family culture is developed in some detail. The subsequent two chapters take up the Church's role as educator, within its own life and toward the world, and the relationship of education to society and the state. In both chapters, the Latin American experience—with base communities, evangelization of culture, and liberation in society—provides resources for reflecting on education theologically.

Chapters nine and ten treat the school as a privileged place for evangelization—including the evangelization of academic culture. The author's wide experience in the school systems in Chile and in Latin American leadership,

and his background in science, bring a particularly rich insight on how to bring the Gospel into dialogue with the multiplicity of disciplines in the modern school. While approaches to the variety of fields—from science through mathematics and the arts—vary in different contexts, the theological reflection and conceptualization of the interdisciplinary dialogue that is entailed provide an important basis for analysis. The section on the evangelization of

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*The author's wide experience in the school systems in Chile and in Latin American leadership bring a particularly rich insight on how to bring the Gospel into dialogue with the modern school.*

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academic culture becomes particularly important on the secondary and higher education levels where particular disciplines have become disembodied worlds unto themselves, with minimal interdisciplinary interdependence and communication and often with no link to the Christian faith. These chapters will particularly interest those engaged in formation for mission and building of faith communities among the variety of disciplines in a school.

Religious education in the school is covered in chapter eleven. Here the author elaborates on the professional development of teachers, the school as a faith community, the role of interdisciplinary dialogue, the care for religious diversity in the school, and the importance of evangelization of culture. A final chapter addresses the Christian educator as minister of Christ. In it, García develops a thorough spirituality of educational ministry that is grounded in biblical and patristic sources and in important figures in the field. These chapters will interest those in staff development work and lay ecclesial ministry formation, as well as those in catechetical leadership in both schools and parishes.

An English translation of both works, *Comienzos* and *Teología de la Educación*, would make them useful foundational texts for English-speaking U.S. educators and not limit their use to the Hispanic/Latino community. Because the magisterial texts covered in these works incorporate not only the Synod for America (1997/1999) but also the documentation of CELAM and many of the appropriate episcopal conference statements, they are particularly useful resources for intercontinental formation and research in the Western hemisphere.

García's volumes will provide solid reading for the Christian teacher in any field and can serve as a resource for instructors and administrators charged with the development of educators and educational communities in the Church. We can look forward to further volumes by this author. The experience of Latin America enriches the volume and does not detract from its usefulness in other situations. In fact, it is a resource for linking the Church's teaching on education to the concrete task of Catholic formation in a variety of contexts. ❧

JEFFREY GROS, FSC, is associate director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, D.C. He has worked in religious education and theology at parish, diocesan, high school, university, and seminary levels.

#### **CORRECTION**

The editors regret that the review of John P. Hogan's 2003 book *Credible Signs of Christ Alive: Case Studies from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development*, which appeared in the Fall 2003 issue of *The Living Light*, did not correctly credit the reviewer, who was Jeffrey Gros, FSC.

## Rapture: The End-Times Error That Leaves the Bible Behind

by David B. Currie

Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2003

486 pages plus, paper, \$19.95.

What exactly is the “rapture”? Where does the word come from? How do we minister to those who believe in it? Answering those questions, David B. Currie’s *Rapture* provides a clear and detailed description of rapture theology—from the biblical books of Daniel, Matthew, and Revelation—in one volume. In his new book, Currie, a former Christian fundamentalist pastor who converted to Catholicism, presents an exhaustive exposé on how those who promote the end-time scenario of a pre-tribulation rapture use Scripture to try to prove their point of view, while they admit privately that the Bible actually contains no explicit teaching on it. As someone who once believed in the rapture, Currie speaks to the issues with unique authority and insight.

Despite its imposing size, his book is actually a “good read.” Currie comes across as witty and personable, as well as thorough and passionate about his subject, yet never preachy. His use of the first-person style, his able story-telling, and his reliance on timelines and other visual aids in the book help to enliven a potentially dry, theological study.

Belief in the rapture is an important and extremely personal issue for Currie, who was brought up to believe in pre-millennialist rapturism, a theology of the end times based on a fundamentalist interpretation of Scripture. From his personal experience, he gives anecdotal evidence that such beliefs cause some people to live in fear and to make key changes in their career, church affiliation, and lifestyle because they are sure the world as we know it will end any minute. He even contends that “unknown thousands of young Catholics have left the Faith after being exposed to rapturist ideas about the end times” (xxiv).

Currie presents a thorough history of rapturism, from its beginnings with second-century Montanism in the Middle East and such Fathers of the Church as Irenaeus and Tertullian, through the Protestant reformers and the nineteenth- and twentieth-century proponents of the idea. The context he provides includes recent manifestations of this theology with cult leader David Koresh (of the Waco, Texas, tragedy), televangelists such as Jack Van Impe and Pat Robertson, Hal Lindsey’s book *The Late Great Planet Earth*,

and Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins's *Left Behind* series of novels. He lists events throughout history that have been seen as signs of the end of the world as well as people considered candidates for the role of the Antichrist—including former U.S. President Ronald Reagan!

In a section of the book that many readers will find unsettling, Currie argues for pre-millennialist rapturism as he commonly did years before as a believer of the theology. Using the tools of fundamentalist polemic, he sets up the scriptural case beginning with the prophecies of Daniel and describes how key elements of the theology have been interpreted throughout history. By the end of this section, Currie has established the rapturist belief system for the reader; he spends the remainder of the book discrediting it.

He begins to dismantle rapturism by clarifying the nature and techniques of apocalyptic literature, and he lists nine ground rules that would have been understood by the literature's original writers and readers. These rules cover the functions of symbols and numbers within apocalyptic literature, as well as the roles that history and prophecy play in it. He notes that a literal reading of this type of literature does not conform with the purposes or expectations of the writers or of their contemporary readers.

Currie then continues with a discussion of scriptural passages in Daniel, Matthew (the Olivet Discourse), the Epistles, and finally and exhaustively, the Apocalypse (Revelation). He shows how rapturists read these passages, and then explains what the authors of Scripture intended and how they expected their audiences to read it—a thoroughly Catholic method for scriptural exegesis.

Final sections of Currie's book discuss why rapture theology appeals to some people in our contemporary culture and how others can respond to this belief as faithful Christians. Among the appendices, Currie includes information on the early Church Fathers, Zechariah, and the authorship and dating of the Apocalypse (Revelation).

This book is indispensable for anyone who wants to understand the roots and current issues of rapturism, the background for the current craze among adults and teens over the *Left Behind* novels, or the messages of popular televangelists. Reading this book would assist diocesan and parish personnel responsible for Catholic faith formation in advising catechists who may encounter these beliefs.

—Joyce Donahue  
*Department of Education*  
*Diocese of Joliet, Illinois*

## Essentials of Christian Theology

by William C. Placher, ed.

Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003

422 pages, paper, \$29.95.

There are many introductory texts to Christian theology. Most recent texts are edited volumes that allow several authors from various different perspectives to address the fundamental topics of Christian theology. Such edited texts have value and make a worthy contribution to the field, but they also have limitations. By being an active editor of *Essentials of Christian Theology*, Placher successfully overcomes in this text many of the limitations of the genre.

First among the text's merits, its structure is both unique and clever. Each of the nine chapters treats a basic concept of systematic theology: Revelation, Trinity, providence, human nature and sin, Christology, ecclesiology, morality, religious pluralism, and eschatology. These topics are common to almost all such works, but each chapter in this text includes two articles by different theologians. This allows the reader not only to hear the differing and complementary propositions of the theologians, but also to recognize the debated issues of each category of study in theology.

Second, the authors Placher has chosen as contributors to this text are extraordinary writers and theologians. They include Stanley Grenz, Noel Erskine, John Cobb, David Cunningham, Sallie McFague, Kathryn Tanner, Serene Jones, Clark Williamson, Robert Jenson, Leanne van Dyke, Hughes Old, Letty Russell, Ellen Charry, Michael Battle, Paul Knitter, J. A. DiNoia, Richard Mouw, and Ted Peters. Each of these theologians is well respected and has often published within their sub-disciplines. Each is passionately dedicated to Christian theology and to their respective contexts. Placher introduces each theologian immediately after the table of contents. The boilerplate introductions list teaching positions and publications, as well as the writers' religious affiliations. Christian theology is a lived theology and each of these thinkers is ordained or active in a religious community.

Finally, Placher's editorial hand is apparent in each chapter in ways that serve the reader well. He starts each chapter by providing the history of the topic, presenting an overview of related of biblical, traditional, and contemporary issues. The articles that follow then delve into issues and arguments. While Placher admits that his perspective imbues the text, he does his best to limit his contribution to the arguments. I found it especially helpful that the central

thesis statement of each author's article appears in a box on the same page. These "pull quotes" aid the reader in focusing on the arguments of the texts.

Placher argues that contemporary North American theology must address five factors: (1) modernity (modern science's impact on the community's faith); (2) the challenge of Karl Barth (i.e., Christianity should never change to the will of society); (3) ecumenism (the increased conversations between Christian denominations); (4) pluralism (the greater role of women, Black Americans, and Hispanics in Christian theology in a world of many religious traditions); (5) and postmodernity (the suspicion of optimism regarding the growth and development of humanity). These challenges make this introductory text necessary for the serious seeker.

Clearly, having two authors write about each topic permits a helpful point-counterpoint presentation to develop. While some of the authors write from a common understanding, others write from opposite positions. Knitter and DiNoia, the two Roman Catholics, wrestle with the issue of religious pluralism and soteriology. Knitter is well known for arguing for a theocentric Christian theology that acknowledges the salvific characteristics of the world's religions. He argues for an individual commitment to a religious tradition that permits and encourages openness to the validity of other faiths. DiNoia, in response, argues for a Christocentric Christian theology that reflects a more narrow interpretation of the Second Vatican Council's decree on non-Christian religions. He argues for respect and acceptance of non-Christians, but supports the position that Jesus Christ, God incarnate, is necessary for salvation.

John Cobb and David Cunningham, the theologians who wrestle with the issues surrounding the theology of God, do not stake out such diametrically opposed positions. Cobb argues with scientists about the history of the world and the plausibility of arguing for the existence of God. He does so using the suppositions and language of contemporary science. Cunningham writes that the scientific and philosophical arguments regarding the existence and nature of God do not move one to action or faith. He claims that all we know about God and that the nature of God stems from God's self-revelations, found fully in the person of Jesus Christ.

Other chapters can be dissected, but the overall intention is clear: the structure of the book allows the reader to peek in on the theological debates consuming professional theologians. While gaps exist in the text (e.g., chapters on the Holy Spirit, social justice, and the role of the Christian tradition),

it still manages to present a nearly comprehensive image of Christian theology. I highly recommend this book for those seeking to understand contemporary theology.

—Brian M. Doyle  
Marymount University  
Arlington, Virginia

## **One Hundred Years of Catholic Education: Historical Essays in Honor of the Centennial of the National Catholic Educational Association**

*by John Augenstein, Christopher J. Kauffman, and Robert J. Wister*  
Washington, DC: NCEA, 2003  
318 pages, paper, \$25.00.

This collection of essays is more of a *festschrift* that has Catholic education as a common theme than it is a history of the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA). Only a handful of essays focus directly on the NCEA; others give it a nod in passing, and a few don't mention it at all.

The first essay, an overview of the NCEA's first century by John Augenstein, introduces the Secretaries General who shaped the organization, explains its organizational structure, and describes the services it provides. In the second essay, Robert Wister notes that the NCEA's seminary department, which was established four years earlier than the association itself, "has experienced in microcosm, many of the twentieth century's challenges to the larger Church" (23). His sober account conveys efforts made by rectors and faculties to improve the curriculum and teaching in seminaries. While he describes factors in seminaries' growth, Wister does not offer a simple explanation for their decline. Apparently the best-researched essay in the book, Kathleen A. Mahoney's account of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities is a brief but not superficial overview of the development of Catholic higher education in the United States.

Other essays that deserve mention are those by Gerald P. Fogarty, Thomas Groome, and Timothy Meagher. Fogarty analyzes court decisions and legal wrangling that have threatened the survival of Catholic schools. Fogarty's essay is complemented by Lawrence McAndrews's account of how, from President John F. Kennedy's administration through that of George W. Bush, efforts have been made by the White House and U.S. Congress to find ways of supporting students in Catholic schools nationwide without contra-

vening the constitutional constraints imposed by the separation of church and state. Addressing the same issue, Groome says, “the very charism of Catholic education is both to educate Christian disciples and good citizens” (180). He draws a distinction between education *for* faith and education *from* faith that he believes “is well substantiated by the story of Catholic education” (180). A school, he says, “can be thoroughly Catholic, and provide a good education without catechizing its non-Catholic students” (197). Although Groome opines that “the success of American Catholic schools suggests to the public system that it, too, needs a spiritual foundation for how and why it educates” (192), he seems to recognize that his position runs contrary to the mindset that sees the “wall” of separation of church and state as a barrier to education with a spiritual vision.

The editors have partitioned the fourteen essays under four headings: “National Leadership”; “Church and State”; “Charism and Ethos”; and “Race and Ethnicity.” Meagher’s too-short essay in the last section outlines the role that parochial schools played in “Americanizing” immigrants. Germans, Poles, and French Canadians who were intent on preserving their language and culture saw the parish school as a bulwark against White Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture and also, sometimes, against the policies of their Irish-born bishops. The others essays in this last section, though helpful, are not as strong. Cecilia Moore, in writing about “Ethnicity and Parish Schools: African Americans,” confronts the dilemma of being honest about the institutionalized prejudice and injustices suffered by Black Catholics that were once pervasive in the U.S. Church and, at the same time, showing an appreciation for the contributions of people like Mother Katharine Drexel and Archbishop Joseph E. Ritter, whose efforts to right the situation were heroic. (Moore might have noted that Ritter desegregated the schools in the Indianapolis archdiocese before his appointment to St. Louis. See page 252.)

The authors of “History and Inculturation: The Latino Experience of Catholic Education” state at the outset that “the restoration of a parochial-school education for the myriad communities of persons of Latin-American origin in the United States remains a work in progress” (257). They begin “with a review of the historical reasons that the first American Catholics, the Latinos/Hispanics, have not benefited from the institutions of the Catholic schools as they might” (258). It seems to this reviewer that much more could have been said, and that what is said could have been better organized. The historical overview suggests but does not explain how the experiences of Latino Catholics in the United States differed according to their country of

origin (e.g., Puerto Rico, Mexico, Cuba, Central America) and according to where they settled (e.g., Texas, California, New York City, the Midwest). The latter part of the essay is stronger. It focuses more on the contemporary scene, describing the NCEA's response to the Hispanic presence in the Catholic Church in the United States and "the synergy between Catholic schools and families." It concludes by presenting an agenda of actions to be taken for the situation to improve.

Besides the essays singled out above, there are at least two other reasons to recommend the book. First, there is the centerfold "A Pictorial History," a photo album of people and events that made the NCEA the voice of Catholic schools in the United States. A second reason to treasure the book is the bibliographies at the end of most of the articles. If one were to compile and collate them, one would have a comprehensive bibliography of the history, people, and issues that have shaped Catholic education in this country.

—Berard L. Marthaler, OFM Conv  
*The Catholic University of America*  
Washington, D.C.

## Lay Ministers and Their Spiritual Practices

by James D. Davidson, Thomas P. Walters, Bede Cisco, OSB,  
Katherine Meyer, and Charles E. Zech  
*Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2003*  
205 pages, hardcover, \$19.95.

The *General Directory for Catechesis* speaks eloquently about the need for the proper formation of catechists. Church leaders are called "to attend to the *personal and spiritual needs of catechists as well as to the group of catechists as such*" (no. 233). Therefore "diocesan pastoral programs must give absolute priority to the *formation of lay catechists*" (no. 234; see no. 238).

This new book reporting findings of a study by Davidson, Walters, and colleagues addresses this issue. It is organized into six chapters. The first chapter introduces the reader to the reason for the study: to gain understanding of the spiritual practices of lay ministry students in order to develop programs that will better support their spiritual growth. The second chapter introduces the subjects of the study: lay minister candidates from the archdioceses of Indianapolis (Indiana) and Louisville (Kentucky) and from the dioceses of Evansville (Indiana), Lafayette (Indiana), and Owensboro (Kentucky). Because other research has found similarities in the ages and demographic

characteristics of lay ministers, the authors apparently believe their findings can be applied to lay ministers throughout the country, though they do not formally make such a claim. Because they are few people of color (particularly Black and Latino) enrolled in ministry formation programs in the aforementioned dioceses, the researchers expanded their study to include focus groups of lay ministers of these racial and ethnic backgrounds from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.

The third chapter presents the results of the study. Study participants reported in high numbers that (1) they have a personal relationship with God, (2) this is nurtured by the Church, and (3) this affects their entire lives; this finding seems significant because these three components are taken from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (no. 2014).

When asked about the spiritual practices that are most important to them, most respondents named the following: Attending Mass (87%); having good and loving relationships (77%); having a harmonious family life (68%); performing well in ministry (68%); helping/serving others (66%); and praying alone (53%). Evidently missing from the practice of most lay ministers are spiritual retreats, reading the Bible, and praying the Liturgy of the Hours. Lay ministers are twice as likely as the average parishioner to attend Mass and receive Communion weekly. The study also identified five styles of lay spirituality, described by the authors as (1) traditional/devotional, (2) service/justice, (3) cognitive/intellectual, (4) interactive/scriptural, and (5) expressive/interior.

The fourth chapter examines the data using the statistical tool of factor analysis to see if “indicators” exist that can predict a lay minister’s spirituality based upon his or her life experiences. The authors find that one’s gender, years of Catholic school education, marital status, or age at Baptism present no significant differences in spiritual practice, but one’s age/generation, time spent in prayer, and membership in a religious third order do. The fifth chapter considers the implications of marriage, family, and ethnicity for one’s spiritual practices. I found this to be the weakest chapter, especially the part on ethnicity.

The first part of the sixth chapter provides an executive summary of the study. I think this would have been better positioned at the beginning of the book, where it would not have become a repetitious review. The chapter ends with seven recommendations for the spiritual formation of lay ministers (161), nine recommendations for directors of lay ministry formation programs (162-163), and eleven recommendations for pastors and bishops (164-165). A ten-page appendix contains the questionnaire used in the study,

a seven-page bibliography, and a detailed, twelve-page index. Despite the limitations noted above, this book deserves serious study by anyone engaged in or responsible for lay formation programs. The study's findings and recommendations should help to improve the spiritual formation aspects of lay ministry formation programs. Additional studies conducted in other, more diverse, lay ministry formation programs would be welcome so readers could compare the data and gain a fuller understanding of the spirituality of all lay ministers.

—Daniel S. Mulhall

*USCCB Department of Education  
Washington, D.C.*

## **An Inculturation Model of the Catholic Marriage Ritual**

*By David William Antonio*

*Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002*

*169 pages, paper, \$14.95.*

With his book on inculturating the Catholic marriage ritual for the Iloco people of the Philippines, Fr. David William Antonio, a diocesan priest in the Ilocos region, offers the Church a gift and a challenge. While Antonio's practical work of adapting the ritual will no doubt benefit his own Philippino community, liturgists and those involved in marriage preparation have much to learn from the model Antonio constructs and the theological analysis supporting it.

Antonio devotes the first few chapters of his book to analyzing the revised *Roman Order for the Celebration of Marriage* issued in 1991 by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. This new *ordo*, Antonio asserts, emphasizes the intrinsic goodness of marriage, the communal and ecclesial dimension of marriage, and the mutual and weighty responsibility of the couple in the sacrament. Most important for Antonio is the Vatican document's recognition of the legitimacy of adaptations of the rite in accord with local custom. The 1991 text allows for the use of local language, the addition of culturally significant texts, and the substitution of cultural rituals. It also opens the possibility of creating an entirely new rite. Antonio notes that the Congregation calls for prudence, advises that certain components of the rite cannot be changed, and requires liturgists to work with local bishops and to seek the approval of the Holy See before using a new rite. Still, he highlights the possibility for change.

The second half of Antonio's book focuses on the process used to adapt the marriage ritual for the Iloco people. The adaptation is guided by a nuanced understanding of inculturation. Antonio reads the 1994 *Roman Instruction on Liturgical Inculturation* as promoting not "a superficial interaction between the Gospel and culture in order to modify the existing shape and form of the liturgy," but rather "a reciprocal assimilation which results in mutual enrichment, that is, transformation of culture and the cultural rooting of the Christian faith" (76). Antonio praises the document's acknowledgment that the Church is enriched through inculturation.

However, Antonio contends that the official documents of the Church do not offer a methodology of liturgical inculturation. To remedy this lack, he adopts three key methods from fellow Philippino theologian Anscar Chupungco: dynamic equivalence (replacing traditional elements of the liturgy with similar local customs), creative assimilation (incorporating local rituals or linguistic expressions), and organic progression (completing or supplementing official rites). He adds to this a nuanced understanding of contextualization. Instead of appropriating cultural customs uncritically, he asks how the culture has changed over time (especially due to colonization and oppression) and discerns which symbols and rituals are capable of communicating meaning and giving hope to particular people.

The resulting revised Ilocan marriage rite brings together the best of the 1991 Roman rite with important local customs, prayers, and language. Particularly interesting for U.S. readers is the use of an extended ritual comprising four distinct parts (betrothal, marriage preparation involving catechesis made concrete in ritual, and celebrations on the wedding day in the home and the church. This structure respects the Ilocan idea of marriage as a progressive reality. The revised ritual also incorporates important Ilocan values, such as the key role of parents and extended family in marriage, while limiting the influence of others, like the inequality of men and women. The new rite is thus a beautiful model of mutual transformation and appreciation.

U.S. readers might want to consider the import of the rite for Catholic marriage liturgies in the United States. Would an extended ritual help couples appreciate the significance of marriage and prepare more carefully for it? Would the incorporation of carefully chosen local customs enrich the wedding ceremony? Would moving parts of the marriage ritual into the home help make the ritual more meaningful for couples, while enhancing their understanding of the family as domestic church? Most fundamentally, Antonio's book challenges all involved in marriage preparation and liturgy to

bridge the gap between official Catholic theology and that which makes marriage meaningful to couples in any culture.

*Julie Rubio*  
*St. Louis University*  
*St. Louis, Missouri*

## **Théologie, mission et catéchèse** *Théologies pratiques Series*

*Edited by Henri Derroitte*  
*Brussels, Belgium; Montreal, Canada: Lumen Vitae and*  
*Novalis, 2002.*  
*220 pages, paper, \$24.00.*

Henri Derroitte has assembled a collection of essays to offer analysis, strategies, and vision for catechesis and proclamation of the Word of God in the contemporary multicultural, pluralist, and secularized context of Europe and North America. Each of the thirteen authors seeks new ways of accompanying people on the journey of faith. In the introduction, Derroitte, professor at the Lumen Vitae Center of the Catholic University of Louvain (UCL), Belgium, explains that critical analysis of the contemporary cultural milieu demands new ways of doing catechesis and a deep theological reflection on the nature and goals of catechesis and mission. This reflection should lead pastoral leaders to rethink their priorities and to re-envision ways the Church can proclaim the Word to the world, transform its members, and form new Christians.

The essays reflect quality contemporary thinking about the scope and character of catechesis. G. Adler names the task of catechesis as plural, provisional, and fragile, giving space to the Word that summons us to think, live, pray, and celebrate in community. F. Pajer envisions the whole Christian community in an ongoing process of catechizing and being catechized and offers correctives to narrow views of catechesis as pertinent only to certain moments of Christian life. G. Routhier explores a “pedagogical turn” in catechesis for adults that leads them to deeper questions about ecclesiology, revelation, and tradition. A. Harkness treats the growing field of intergenerational catechesis, and J. Molinario takes up the concept of “permanent catechesis.” A. Fossion explores the catechumenate as model for all catechesis, and L. M. Renier argues that catechesis and liturgy must work in unison to ensure the viability

of Christian life in a secularized world. D. Kembe Ejiba develops the importance of narrative for the maturation of Christian faith. Derroitte seeks a future for family catechesis, and M. Villers spells out a practical model of a diocesan catechetical program.

U.S. readers will recognize contributors Anne Marie Mongoven, Francis Buckley, and Catherine Dooley (all translated into French by Monica Sandor). Mongoven, taking the tragedies of September 11, 2001, as her point of departure, presents the model and method of her “symbolic catechesis.” Buckley, using an interdisciplinary method, challenges parish catechesis to confront the problems that secularization presents. Dooley, taking a cue from the *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC), elaborates how the formation of catechists should have a “catechetical style” (GDC, no. 241) whose point of culmination is not in theology or method but in a life of witness and mission. In the final essay, Derroitte reflects on missionary proclamation and catechesis as closely united enterprises.

The influence of the GDC can be seen throughout the volume, in particular in its emphasis on catechesis as a moment in the process of evangelization. In fact, the volume might well serve as a commentary on the central themes and movements of the GDC. Through all the essays there is attention to the communal and collaborative task of catechesis in parishes and small communities; the call to integrate preaching, teaching, formation, celebration, and witness; a focus on praxis and the mutually critical engagement of culture, tradition, and experience; the call for new pedagogical methods to respond to new contexts; and a vision of catechesis as apprenticeship for Christian living. This volume helps the reader to think concretely about a revitalization of the Church’s catechetical ministry.

—Richard E. McCarron  
*Catholic Theological Union*  
Chicago, Illinois

*By What Authority? A Primer on Scripture, the Magisterium, and the Sense of the Faithful*

by Richard Gaillardetz

The Liturgical Press, 2003, \$14.95.

This is an introductory text on authority in the Church intended for use in college courses as well as lay ministry, diaconate, and seminary formation programs. Gaillardetz discusses the inspiration of the Bible, the development of the biblical canon, the relationship between Scripture and Tradition and their authority within Roman Catholicism, the role of the pope and the bishops in the Church, teaching authority in the Church, how to deal with disagreements with the Church's teaching, the contribution of theologians, and the role of all the baptized in discerning the meaning and significance of God's Word for today. Each chapter concludes with a brief discussion of disputed questions and suggestions for further reading.

*Madre de América: Novena en Honor de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*

by William G. Storey

Liturgy Training Publications, 2003, \$12.00.

*Mother of the Americas: A Novena in Honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe*

by William G. Storey

Liturgy Training Publications, 2003, \$12.00.

This Marian novena, available in English and Spanish, is a resource for nine days of individual or group prayer focused on the events of Mary's life. These include Mary's birthday, the Annunciation, Jesus' birthday, the flight into Egypt, her experiences at the cross and in the upper room, and the Assumption. The final day of the novena focuses on the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe to Juan Diego. The prayers begin with contemporary and traditional reflections on Mary. They include a call to prayer, hymns, Scripture readings, responses, and prayers. The text of the novena is complemented by an introduction that recounts the story of Mary's appearance to Juan Diego in Mexico in the sixteenth century and relates the devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe to European Marian traditions.

*Signing the Scriptures: A Starting Point for Interpreting the Sunday Readings for the Deaf, Year C*

by Joan Blake

Liturgy Training Publications, 2003, \$20.00.

This is a resource for those who interpret the Sunday readings for the deaf. It contains glosses for all the Sunday readings and for most major feast days from Year

C of the Lectionary for Mass. These have been developed by the author over the course of twenty years of work as an interpreter. Though they are not definitive translations of the Scripture readings, they will be particularly useful as a guide for those times when an interpreter is struggling to convey an elusive concept or grammatical structure through sign language. The signs used that do not have a standard English gloss are listed in an appendix along with a description of how the sign is executed.

*A Journey with God in Time: A Spiritual Quest*

by John S. Dunne

University of Notre Dame Press, 2003, \$15.00.

In this autobiographical work, Dunne shares his theological and spiritual reflections on his experiences of “finding, losing, and living love.” The topics he discusses, which include his relationship with his grandfather, his love of music, and his thoughts on death, are organized according to the phases of his life: childhood, youth, adulthood, and old age. A series of four nineteenth-century paintings by Thomas Cole, called *The Voyage of Life*, which reflects aspects of Dunne’s experience of these time periods, is replicated on a small scale in full color in the text. The first is a child in a boat with an angel; the second, a youth looking to the ideal; next, a man praying in the crisis of his life; and fourth, an old man looking toward the light. Dunne says that by writing this autobiography, he has learned that his life is about learning to love “with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all you might.”

*John Henry Newman: Heart Speaks to Heart*

Introduced and edited by Lawrence S. Cunningham

New City Press, 2004, \$13.95.

Cunningham has put together a small anthology of Newman’s spiritual writings. The selections are organized under the following headings: “Hymns and Prayers,” “Prayers and Meditations on the Blessed Virgin Mary,” “Texts for Meditation,” and “Devotion to the Saints.” The introduction offers a brief discussion of Newman’s life and spirituality, while the two appendices present a chronology of Newman’s life and a selected bibliography covering both works by Newman and studies about him.

—Maura Thompson Hagarty

## PROJECTS OF THE COMMITTEE ON CATECHESIS

The Bishops' Committee on Catechesis is now working on the following projects.

### *Doctrinal Guidelines for a High School Religion Curriculum*

The committee is developing guidelines for a high school religion curriculum based on the following eight themes:

1. *Who Is Christ?*—topics include Revelation and faith, Christology, the Trinity (especially the relationship between the Father and the Son), Christian anthropology, and a history of the life of Christ.
2. *What Did Christ Do?*—topics include the Paschal Mystery, sin and redemption, Jesus' death and Resurrection, Christ as the unique mediator, and our graced relationship with God.
3. *The Mystery of Christ in the World Today*—topics include the Church, the role of the Holy Spirit, Pentecost, the structure of the Church, titles and images of the Church, the divine and human dimensions of the Church, the "Marks" of the Church, and the structure and purpose of the institutional Church.
4. *The Sacraments as the Principle Manifestations of Christ*—topics include the types of grace, the sacraments as gifts; Christ and the Church's continued presence in the lives of its members through the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist; and preparation for Confirmation.
5. *Life in Christ (Part I)*—topics include morality, the uniqueness of being Christian, the call to conversion, and adoption in Christ, with special emphases on the fifth and sixth Commandments.
6. *Life in Christ (Part II)*—topics include the communal nature and the ecclesial context of morality, and the call to happiness and holiness, with a special emphasis on the seventh, eighth, and tenth Commandments to provide the context for discussing social justice issues.
7. *Sacraments at the Service of Communion*—topics include marriage, the priesthood, and religious life.
8. *Sources of Faith*—topics include Scripture and Tradition.

*Guidelines for the Formation of  
Catechetical Leaders*

The committee is considering the creation of a resource that would offer guidance to bishops for developing leadership formation programs.

*Doctrinal Guidelines for Education  
About Human Sexuality*

These guidelines are being created for pastors, parents, catechetical leaders, and publishers. The guidelines will cover how programs of human sexuality education are created and implemented.

*A Process for Implementing the  
National Directory for Catechesis*

A draft of the *National Directory for Catechesis* was approved by

the bishops of the United States in June 2003 and sent to the Holy See for its *recognitio* in September of 2003. There is no certainty about when the *Directory* will be returned and whether any significant changes will be requested. However, the Committee is considering ways in which to implement the *Directory* once it has received the Vatican's recognition.

*Foundational Catechesis for  
the Rite of Christian Initiation  
of Adults (RCIA)*

The Committee is considering whether or not there is a need to develop criteria for creating a complete foundational catechesis for use within the RCIA.

## CALENDAR

- April 13-16, 2004      **101st National Catholic Educational Association/  
National Association of Parish Catechetical Directors  
Annual Meeting.** Theme: Heritage and Hope: Faithful  
Past, Faith-Filled Future. Contact: Sue Arvo; phone: 202-  
337-6232; website: *www.ncea.org*.
- April 25-29, 2004      **Sixty-Eighth National Conference for Catechetical  
Leadership.** Theme: Catechesis: Spirit of Life in the  
Desert. Convention Center, Albuquerque, New Mexico.  
Contact: Christopher Anderson, 3021 Fourth Street,  
Northeast, Washington, DC 20017; phone: 202-636-  
3826; website: *www.nccl.org*.
- June 14-16, 2004      **Notre Dame Center for Pastoral Ministry Annual  
Conference.** Theme: Music in Catholic Worship: Full,  
Conscious, and Active Participation. Notre Dame,  
Indiana; phone: 574-631-5436; e-mail: *ndcl@nd.edu*.
- June 28-July 1, 2004      **National Association of Pastoral Musicians Confer-  
ence.** Theme: Spirit, Shape Our Song. Hyatt Regency  
O'Hare, Chicago, Illinois.
- July 6-9, 2004      **National Association of Pastoral Musicians Confer-  
ence.** Theme: Sing the Gospel to Light. Loews Hotel,  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- August 3-6, 2004      **National Association of Pastoral Musicians Confer-  
ence.** Theme: I will Praise You, LORD, . . . in the  
Assembly of Your People. Hyatt Regency Hotel,  
Phoenix, Arizona. Contact: NPM, P.O. Box 4207, Silver  
Spring, MD 20914; phone: 240-247-3000; website:  
*www.npm.org*.

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