

The National Catechetical Directory: Chapter One

1. Catechists have the twofold task of keeping the Church mindful of its mission to announce the good news of salvation to all people while at the same time realizing that the unique political, cultural and educational conditions of the United States have shaped and will continue to shape the way the Gospel is presented.

2. Catechists must support the faithful as they cope with the changes taking place in every area of American life.

3. A comprehensive catechesis examines the opportunities and challenges as well as the dangers brought about by advances in science and technology.

4. American Catholics are not free to ignore their solidarity with the rest of mankind.

5. The American Dream cannot be allowed to blind Catholics to failure or to present the inequities and injustices of today's society.

6. The catechists must recognize the strengths of secular society in forming moral values and be aware of the danger this presents to Christian principles of charity and justice.

7. It is the task of catechesis to foster the creative tension between the need of the Church to become a cooperative participant in the public life of today's society and at the same time not lose its identity as Church.

8. Religious education takes into account the new shapes and forms emerging in American culture as well as opportunities offered by advances in learning and practical pedagogy.

9. Catechists are well-advised to be wary of the twin dangers of chasing every fad, on the one hand, and clinging blindly to traditional methods and materials on the other.

10. Catechesis should actively involve the participation of native Americans, the Black community and Spanish-speaking Americans.

11. Catechists are called upon to meet the challenges posed by the great number of half-hearted and indifferent Catholics.

12. It is the task of catechists to help the faithful read the "signs of the times" realistically and with hope. Realistically, Catholics must face the overwhelming problems in the educational ministry of the Church today. In hope, they face the future with assurance that the Holy Spirit will guide their efforts.

On Chapter One: The Catholic Church in the United States

By SISTER M. JAMES LYNCH

It is refreshing to pick up a Church document which begins by painting the scene in which the Catholic Church was born, developed and finds itself in America in 1975. One might look for an authentic description of our immigrant roots, our Catholic cultural experience, and our significant turning points as Church; how we've been both true and, at times, unfaithful to proclaiming the gospel credibly in this country. Unfortunately, Chapter One fails to achieve this.

The discussion of this first chapter should concentrate on remedying a glaring superficiality in its treatment of the Black and Spanish American experience and critically examining its assumptions in regard to the conflict between secularism and religion in American society. The writers give selective, but distorted treatment to the various elements shaping our religious spirit. They include the diversity of peoples and geography, but omit significant events such as the Civil and the Vietnam wars, race riots, an increase in our capacity for mass destruction, and the widespread Catholic educational network via Catholic Schools. Surely these are significant

In March 1971, Pope Paul VI approved a General Catechetical Directory, which contains the basic principles for teaching the faith in all countries. Each was directed to prepare its own National Catechetical Directory which would adapt this directory to its own history and culture. The first draft is being evaluated and analyzed by parents, clergy and professional religious educators all over the United States.

In the box above, is a synopsis of the first chapter of the proposed National Catechetical Directory as prepared by the directory staff. Diocesan officials will give a critique of each of the nine chapters of the directory in ensuing weeks in the Courier-Journal. The first chapter is analyzed by Sister M. James Lynch, diocesan coordinator of educational services. Extra copies of the directory are available from the Office of Religious Education, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624. Any comments, suggestions or criticism also should be sent to that office.

cultural influences and have radically shaped our American Catholic spirit.

The treatment of minority groups is sloppy and not at all linked to the patterns of an early immigrant Church, or with our missionary beginnings. Even the placement of the discussion of Native American Indians, Blacks and Spanish-speaking at the end of the chapter speaks volumes about the writers' perspective. It seemed almost an after-thought to include them since the other immigrant groups were dealt with at the outset of the chapter. Inaccuracies also are symptomatic of a failure to represent these peoples justly and sen-

sitively. For example, no attention is paid to the unique slavery experience and the resulting complex inequities of Blacks in our country. In addition, the directory identifies one-fourth of American Catholics as Spanish-speaking without distinguishing between native lands and significantly different cultures. An additional point of neglect is that a successful factor in the flourishing of an earlier immigrant Church was a strong, close-knit, familial community within which effective catechesis and socialization took place. The directory did not pose the questions for the Church to examine its present support systems for the Black and

Spanish-speaking. Recently, the National Office of Black Catholics issued a statement insisting:

"We are at a point when our own thoughtful reflection on our collective experience and history in the Catholic Church must be incorporated into any contemporary blue-print for guiding Catholic ministry among black people."

The National Catechetical Directory might include this and other statements which emphasize the Blacks' desire to design their own contribution within the Church.

Chapter One identifies secular humanism as the most important of the contemporary cultural influences on personal and communal decision-making. It masterfully articulates the tension between Church involvement as cooperator with society and secular forces, and Church involvement as prophet and critic of systems which interfere with, or oppress man's dignity. At one point, the message can be interpreted as "Don't be isolated from the world." At another "Beware, the world is too secular, and therefore dangerous." This

seemingly simplistic division between the secular and sacred is distressing. We would have appreciated the acknowledgment that God's Word is active in both secular and sacred experiences and, at the deepest level of any secular experience, God can be found. The Church is not over or against the world, and we do not want to repeat the tragic mistakes of the 18th and 19th centuries. The only responsible option in 1975 is a vital Catholic intellectual and cultural life which consciously measures and evaluates and adaptation and response which speaks to contemporary man without losing Catholic identity.

The writers do acknowledge that the Church has failed, but their posture is somewhat defensive. They point to rapid expansion in population and science as underlying reasons. Broken spirits are attributed to the false promises of the American dream. This is certainly true. But there are other broken spirits, and they stem from the Catholic people's failure to create the gospel dream. Let us stand humbly before this truth. Vatican II and the Bicentennial give all Americans a new chance to heal our divisions and quicken our spirit of gospel commitment.

17,422 Suggestions So Far On Catechetical Directory

Washington, D.C. [RNS] — A total of 17,422 recommendations submitted almost entirely by Roman Catholics from all walks of life was considered in the preparation of the first draft of the National Catechetical Directory, a religious education conference here was told.

Addresses at the third annual East Coast Conference for Religious Education by Msgr. Wilfrid H. Paradis, director of the project, and Sister Mariella Frye, associate director, focused on issues in the Church that have emerged from these recommendations.

Since this first draft of the first National Catechetical Directory ever prepared by the American Catholic Church began to be distributed in mid-December, more than 600,000 copies have been distributed.

The Bishops' Committee of Policy and Review, which has overall responsibility for producing the directory, also specifically invited the religious education leadership of seven non-Catholic religious bodies to submit their recommendations, Sister Frye said.

Preparation of the first draft of the directory with the invitation for recommendations from all parts of the Church is what is called the "second consultation," which began Jan. 1 and will end April 30. The plan is to have a final document, revised in light of recommendations being received

during this second consultation, for the consideration of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1976.

The "unifying concept" for the 40-page directory, printed on newsprint in tabloid size and containing several forms on which recommendations can be written, is "God's loving revelation of Himself and man's faithful and loving response to Him," the introduction states.

There are nine chapters, briefly summarized as follows: Chapter one "depicts the cultural situation in the United States in which the Catholic Church finds herself and in which God's revelation and man's response find expression." Chapter two states the "unifying concept about revelation and faith. It describes the record of such relationships in Scripture and the tradition of the Church."

Chapter three "portrays the Church as the full realization of God's saving action and man's believing acceptance. Further, the Church witnesses God's call to all men to join the community of believers." Chapter four "delineates the qualities and roles of the ministers of God's Word as they work at pre-evangelical, evangelical and catechetical tasks."

Chapter five "outlines the criteria for communicating the Christian message and sets forth the basic teachings in that message." Chapter six "shows

how the Christian message must be implemented in working for justice and love in the world."

Chapter seven "analyzes how human beings grow in knowledge, so progressive response in faith to the divine call may be mature and loving." Chapter eight "considers liturgy as a central experience and celebration of God's saving work, resulting in a faith that takes shape in worship."

Chapter nine "points to the organizational structures which are meant to serve the world of religious education and catechesis, enabling the ministers of God's Word to guide the Catholic people toward the full possibilities of union with God."

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

Church Women United in Rochester & Vicinity will celebrate World Day of Prayer, the most widely observed ecumenical celebration of Protestant, Orthodox and Roman Catholic women, on Friday, March 7, in 35 churches throughout Monroe County.

The World Day of Prayer is observed in 169 countries. Church Women United is designated as the official sponsor in the United States. The 1975 materials have been prepared by the Women's Ecumenical Prayer Fellowship of Egypt.



We were on a family park outing on a damp and very dreary Sunday recently when suddenly I let out a yell. The driver already having difficulty because of the mist and fog to say nothing of the cacophony in the back seat jumped three inches sending the car swerving across the center line. Thankfully there were not too many other nature lovers out and he pulled the car safely back in the right lane, a black look directed at me, full of unuttered epithets.

"The geese, the Canada geese," I was ecstatic. There they were the first we had spotted and a certain (?) sign of impending spring.

As we watched the V formation change slowly to a flying I against the gray backdrop of the sky I wondered if the head goose, like leaders of dog sled teams, was the weakest or slowest member of the group. It didn't seem likely as he (she) winged suddenly left, strongly and purposefully causing the entire flock to shift position, forming a whole new design. It was like

looking through a kaleidoscope where a minute turn of the cylinder would cause shapes to blend and meld effortlessly before the eye.

Calmed down somewhat, the head of the house reminded me it was time to start the nature diary I'm always talking about. It seemed like a good idea. Every year the beech tree at the far end of the yard is the last to leaf out. Since it was the only tree on the lot when we bought it and by far the largest we take its health seriously. Keeping track of its schedule, along with such information as when we can expect to pick the first ripe tomato, enjoy the violets under the privet hedge and expect the new brood of baby pheasants to wander out of the woods, adds greatly to the enjoyment as well as diminishes any anxieties as to Mother Nature's progress.

The day before the drive, which had been mild and sunny and had in fact prompted the plans for the Sunday hike, my gardening partner had taken a walk throughout the back yard inspecting everything that was above the snow line. The little Norway spruces I'd put in last year along the ridge were doing splendidly he reported and lots of other things were popping up.

Like what, I wanted to know envisioning that the alyssum had reseeded themselves and were coming up.

Well, he said, laughing a little. "Mostly just weeds." This time of year — that's good enough.