

# The National Catechetical Directory: Chapter Two

1. In communicating what God has revealed catechists must give the Biblical disclosure of that revelation and include nature, God's chosen people, and Christ, the fullness of revelation.

2. God still reveals himself through the creatures he has made, the events of daily life, crises in history and the struggles of people. He answers prayers and

communicates himself through the Sacraments and teaching of the Church. Catechesis, therefore, must make persons aware of this and help them to discern the work of the Spirit.

3. Catechesis has as its purposes to enable persons to respond to God's revelation in faith.

4. Catechesis must serve to promote God's purpose in revealing himself in Christ, i.e., to draw all to him in faith and love.

5. Catechesis must strive to keep alive a sense of God's saving presence and work in today's world. It proclaims that in the Church the Lord calls people to community and sends them forth to bring Christ's good news to all people.

## On Chapter Two: The Mystery of Revelation

By DR. PADRAIC O'HARE

The second chapter of the present draft of the National Catechetical Directory is entitled "Mystery of Revelation." It is intended, since it treats the primary theological category "Revelation," to be the conceptual underpinning for this draft of the NCD. As such the whole draft is in deep trouble. And the trouble comes from an understandable, but nevertheless, unacceptable, theological vacillation. Chapter two wants Revelation that is mysterious and "perfectly clear," it wants infallible language of doctrine and it wants ever deepening understanding, it wants us to understand (or define) Revelation as Jesus Christ and as scripture and tradition, it wants us to believe that things Religious are both ultimately mysterious and fully

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 weekly in the Courier-Journal. The second chapter is analyzed by Dr. Padraic O'Hare of the diocesan Department of Education. 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.

known. (It even wants to assert an absolute continuity in teaching among the last three general councils of the Church which was my first clue that something was not right).

It becomes clear that this is a real vacillation and not simply a dilemma if we step out of the directory for a moment and explore the importance and the implications of the quest for an understanding of Revelation to Catholic Christian life. It

I often thought that there were strong analogies between Pat Crowley and John Courtney Murray. They both come out of legal backgrounds. They both were easy and relaxed in their convictions. They both were thoroughly and incorrigibly American. They both stood for the kind of calm and expansive self-confidence which is so lacking among most "concerned" Catholics. They both were a mixture of conservatism and liberalism, which made it impossible to put a label on them. They both had an immense influence on the world around them because they were quite incapable of being alienated—and would not have wanted to be if they could.

I am not sure what it takes to produce such intellectual and personal security. I would be tempted to say that they were both aristocrats in the good sense of the word, except many other who came from similar backgrounds show none of the aristocratic security, generosity, and ease as did Murray and Crowley. I just know that we desperately need such people. We do not have very many. And now we have one less.

There will come a time, eventually (I once mistakenly thought it would be soon), when we will be able to understand far more about the American Catholic experience than we do now. Then, I suspect, we will see that a man like Pat Crowley, quite unself-consciously, was in touch with the deep and powerful currents of the American Catholic genius. He might not have been able to articulate the insights of this genius (it is not necessary to do so) but he "felt" it. The work he and his wife did with the Christian Family Movement was successful precisely because they intuited at a visceral level where American Catholic families were, what they needed and how to talk to them. You might disagree with the Crowleys on occasion (and I did) but you still know that they were "our kind of people." And that they understood what the phrase meant proved that it was true of them.

I had thought that there would be many more such laity emerging in the American Church. That Pat would be the first of a new breed. Now I think he may have been the last.

And that makes his premature death all the more tragic. For Pat Crowley a typical Irish epitaph that he would appreciate, "We shall not see his like again."

becomes clear that the question is not a dry, rationalistic pursuit for pedants. For around the questions of "What is Revelation?" or "What is revealed?" revolve such gut-level questions as: "How shall we worship?" "What should I teach my kids?" (or "What should they be teaching my kids?") and "What shall I believe?" It really makes a difference in the actual conduct of Catholic Christian life, now, how we resolve the quest for Revelation in our times, and thus the second chapter of the NCD does us a disservice when it casts its language over clear, and resolvable contradictions as if they didn't exist (and for the theologians reading this: notice the implication for the use of religious and theological language as a kind of vacuous, Homiletic device which resolves no conceptual issues).

The question of Revelation is the same as the multiple question "What is God's will? What do we know from God? Where is it?" (the "Whatever it is" that we know from God); and "how shall I be true to my religion?" This question (or these questions) are resolvable down to two others. The first is: "Is Jesus Christ God's Revelation?" (God's complete, final and sufficient Revelation), or are scripture and tradition, God's Revelation? We can't have it both ways, and there must be an answer and answering one way rather than another must matter.

Chapter two of this draft of the NCD (God grant there will be another, revised, draft, but no more articles on the revised draft) says that Jesus is God's Revelation and that Revelation is scripture and tradition. What is wrong, terribly wrong, with this? The answer:

A. Scripture is part of Tradition.

B. Thus, the choice here is between Jesus and Tradition.

C. And Tradition is always alluded to precisely this way, with a capital "T" and in the singular.

Now there is only one thing more destructive to the life of a community of people than having forgotten their past (having no past) and this is: having only a past. We cannot choose tradition as the locus of Revelation over Jesus Christ because whenever a Religious Community does so it gets into the "idol" worship of the past. But Jesus is still with us in His spirit as an event. There are more traditions (plural) to be made. This is a call for a choice not an exclusion.

Reversing the order - placing traditions as the primary vehicle of God's will in history (and then talking as the NCD does an incredibly unhistorical vein about Tradition, as if Catholics for example are the recipients of one big tradition, when in fact the very making of a tradition assumes a change from something prior to the tradition) keeps us in the vicious situation of being a people who believe primarily in statements from the past. Acknowledging Jesus Christ, alive in the Spirit, working, breathing now in our world as the Revelation of God and then (and only then) reverencing, studying, preserving and altering our traditions (especially the traditional propositions of faith) gives us, some hope that our doctrine, our worship, our action in the world, our religious education will be that of a living, growing, religious community.

The second question I referred to which is only a question because of our problem with resolving the first question is what to do with doctrines from the point of view of their language. It's an immensely complex question, involving other questions like what is true about a doctrinal formulation? Can the language be altered? Does doctrine develop? What is the relationship of the infallible

teaching authority to the fact that language is historically conditioned (for example, words lose their meaning, change meaning, etc.)? This draft attempts to address this question. Here is its try "Since these formulas have been put into human language of a particular time and place, traditional expressions of church dogma, which remains ever true, sometimes give way to new ones which, proposed and approved by the Sacred Magisterium presented the same meaning more clearly and more completely." (quote within the quote is from Vatican II document).

If you think I've used the opportunity to critique Chapter Two and grind an axe, I must plead not guilty. Read it; it's quicksand. It's just different enough to infuriate the "morbidly conservative," hedging enough to anger the "liberal" and unhistorical and unfocused enough to disappoint those of us who are "true religious conservatives." By failing to acknowledge the problematic nature of its topic, Chapter Two creates a void where it intended to create a basis for the religious educational guidelines which are promised in subsequent chapters. Left as is, Chapter Two will do nothing to bring direction (in the sense of common purpose) to the American catechetical scene. It has forgotten what Rahner has said (as he echoes as well as forms much of the best thinking about Revelation):

"... the real understanding of what is revealed and its existential appropriation by men is wholly dependent on the transformation of the propositions of faith as they were originally heard, into propositions which relate what is heard to the historical situations of the men who hear..." Page 47.

"Revelation is an historical dialogue between God and man in which something happens... Revelation is a saving happening and only then and in relation to this a communication of truths!"

(Theological Investigations, Vol. 1, p. 47)

### The Church 1975



Fr. Andrew Greeley

We will all miss Pat Crowley.

The late co-founder of the Christian Family Movement was one of the great Catholics of the era. His contribution to the Church was immense and the example of his personal life had extraordinary influence on all who knew him. The kind of upper-middle-class Catholic zeal which Pat represented is currently out of fashion among the more intense types, like the Center for Concern kooks, but it is authentically American and speaks to the American Catholic laity in terms they can understand.

Pat was classy. He was a well-to-do Notre Dame graduate who felt no need to apologize for who and what he was. You can only be classy if you are that secure in your own identity. I doubt Pat ever experienced alienation and I'm sure he had a hard time understanding self-hatred.

So he could be an open, expansive, generous man. His convictions—and he had some very strong ones—did not exist to give him an identity which he otherwise lacked. His commitments to various causes were not attempts at self-validation. His zeal was not an effort to prove anything. His liberalism was not a self-righteous demand that others convert to his superior morality.

He even liked Republicans, though I think he liked Democrats more.

Causes, convictions, commitments were fine, but what counted for Pat was people. He was a man fascinated by people, one who found everyone interesting. When Pat dealt with you, you were not a cause to be ministered to, nor a convert to be won over. You were someone he wanted to know better. Even when you disagreed with him, you couldn't help but like him because you knew he liked you.

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