

Catechumenate Inspiration for All Catechesis

Tana Hoban, writer of children's books, authored in 1971, *Look Again*. It became a classic and continues to intrigue children. She dedicates the book "To E., who taught me to see." A white page with a square cut out allows one to see a small portion of the full photo on the next page. The pattern is repeated throughout the book. She uses plants, birds, fruits and animals. Some of the pictures in the small squares are easy to recognize and others are far more difficult.

In 1997, the Vatican, through its Congregation for the Clergy, promulgated the *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC). It is one of several documents published in the last few years that focus on the Church's mission of catechesis and the importance of that mission. This document has a counterpart in the United States, *The National Directory for Catechesis* (NDC). This document of the American Bishops takes into account the culture of our country and its influence on catechesis for good or ill.

Of particular interest in the GDC, is its emphasis on the catechumenate as inspiration for all catechesis. The Church is calling us, as the children's' book mentioned above, to "Look Again" at the full picture. The Church is saying that the baptismal catechumenate and post-baptismal catechesis are interrelated, intertwined, and interlaced. The two, however, are not the same. Pre-baptismal catechesis leads to conversion and initiation. "The basis of the conversion for post-baptismal catechesis is the Baptism already received. and whose powers must be developed." (GDC 90) The GDC points to the gradual nature of the catechumenate, the steps involved and urges all catechesis to adopt a similar method in presenting the faith. Simply put, it is good teaching to present content gradually.

The GDC does not want post-baptismal catechesis to be a perfect replica of the catechumenate. The GDC warns: "post-baptismal catechesis, without slavishly imitating the structure of the baptismal catechumenate...does well, however, to draw inspiration from this preparatory school of the Christian life and to allow itself to be enriched by those principal elements which characterize the catechumenate." (GDC 91) Most catechists realize that the ceremonies of the catechumenate are not to be a part of post-baptismal catechesis e.g., the *Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens* and the *Sending of the Catechumens for Election*. These are specific to the Catechumenate.

It may be interesting to have the catechists and the RCIA Team meet once a year and listen to what components of the RCIA the team discerns as inspiring. The catechists may in turn share what they find inspiring in their own process of catechesis. This may be especially effective with the RCIA Team and Confirmation catechists. As in our storybook, "Look Again" we may see a bigger picture and realize the interconnectedness of our parish community.

The following diagram may show what we have said about the catechumenate and its inspiration for all catechesis and bring us to the specific elements that the Church says should be in both the catechumenate and all catechesis (listed under the second arrow):

Baptismal Catechumenate: Inspiration for Catechesis in the Church

missio ad gentes (mission to the nations-Mt. 28:16-20)
paradigm for all the Church's missionary activity



baptismal catechumenate is the model of the Church's catechizing activity
fundamental difference between pre-baptismal catechesis and
post-baptismal catechesis



Some Elements of the Baptismal Catechumenate Considered the Source for Post-Baptismal Catechesis

Importance of the function of Initiation

Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist

The baptismal catechumenate constantly reminds the whole Church of the fundamental importance of Initiation and the basic factors which constitute it: catechesis and the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.

Spiritual Maternity of the Church

The baptismal catechumenate is the responsibility of the entire Christian community. Post-baptismal catechesis should also be shared by the community.

The Mystery of Christ's Passover

The baptismal catechumenate is also completely permeated by the mystery of Christ's Passover. For this reason, all initiation must reveal clearly its paschal nature. The Easter Vigil, focal point of the Christian liturgy, and its spirituality of Baptism inspires all catechesis.

Initial Locus of Inculturation

The Church receives catechumens integrally, together with their cultural ties. All catechetical activity participates in this function of incorporating into ... the Church, authentic seeds of the word scattered through nations and individuals.

A Process of Formation and a True School of Faith

The baptismal catechumenate offers post-baptismal catechesis its gradual nature ...its connection with meaningful rites, symbols, biblical and liturgical signs; its constant references to the Christian community.

(Cf. GDC # 90)

We could borrow Tana Hoban's dedication: "To E. who taught me to see", and say the Church is teaching us to see the inspiration of the catechumenate on all catechesis. Also, just as some of the pictures in the small squares are easy to decipher and some difficult so we will find this inspiration of the catechumenate sometimes self-evident and sometimes difficult to understand.