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Catechesis for a Practicing Church

Jim Fox
Master's Thesis
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Catechesis for a Practicing Church

In “Catechesis for a Practicing Church” I will survey the history of Christian catechesis (looking for norms regarding content and structure), explore methods and styles of contemporary experts in secular and Christian education, and reflect on the context of a practicing church as observed specifically in Vineyard Community Church (VCC) to define and build a contemporary catechesis for VCC (the model) as well as for the larger practicing church.

Chapter 1: Introduction – What is meant by catechesis?

“Catechesis” is a strange word. Many protestant Christians (including those who have been catechized) aren’t even sure what it means. And even among those who do “know,” there is rarely a singularly agreed upon meaning - let alone model of implementation.¹ So, the first hurdle in the development of catechesis for a practicing church is just figuring out exactly what catechesis is.

One of the leading contemporary scholars on catechesis and Christian education is John H. Westerhoff III. Westerhoff explains catechesis in very simple terms: “the process by which persons are initiated into the Christian community and its faith, revelation, and vocation.”² But, according to Westerhoff, catechesis is also more than that. Critical of traditional, cognitive, and argumentative models, he professes catechesis as a lifelong process, understood as every activity the church uses to introduce people to a Christian lifestyle and form people in the ways of the Christian faith and community. Westerhoff would say that catechesis is not only everything the local church does but also what it does *not* do, so, even the lack of formal catechesis is functionally catechesis. This approach opens the door to new and creative implementations while ushering in a sense of freedom for churches already familiar with the practice of catechesis. Unfortunately, this position does little to help a practicing church with a definition. It is so vague and all encompassing that it offers nearly no guidelines or boundaries for application in a community pursuing their first exploration into the discipline of catechesis. But,

¹ John H. Westerhoff III, "The Challenge: Understanding the Problem of Faithfulness," in *A Faithful Church*, ed. John H. Westerhoff III and O.C. Edwards, Jr., 1.

² Ibid.

practicing churches certainly have an ally in Westerhoff. Together, they profess and agree that Christian formation happens over a lifetime and is a byproduct of relational service and mission – but, does this mean *catechesis* is happening?

This distinction is particularly necessary and critical in my context of ministry because of a man named Willy. Willy walked into my church with a fresh, new, immature faith and lots of energy. Within a couple of months, Willy was baptized and was fully engaged with the community in service, mission, and worship. But, why? Why was Willy doing what he was doing? What did Willy believe he was doing? And, what did Willy believe *in*? The question was glaring: how would this small practicing church instruct, form, and educate a new member of the body of Christ? We did not have a defined plan. Instead, our belief was that semi-random, organic, missional, relational experiences would suffice. However, they weren't enough. I believe we need an established program of formation and instruction for believers with a shallow faith seeking initiation into and continued belonging to a Christian community. We need catechesis.

The culmination of this project is, what I term, an “established program of formation and instruction” for VCC specifically and recommendations for practicing churches in general. Leaders within other denominations can look to their own polity and history in order to form and develop programs of catechesis. However, even a quick look at the Vineyard movement³ (officially the Association of Vineyard Churches or AVC, but better known as “the Vineyard”) reveals there is no clear

³ In “the Vineyard” we do not refer to ourselves as a denomination because the requirements for belonging are very loose. Instead, we have referred to ourselves as a movement in an attempt to talk about our entire “tribe” or community of churches in a way that feels appropriate.

history of catechesis, let alone a defined approach – and there never has been. Instead, the Vineyard has a history of instruction that is fluid and Spirit-led and rarely systematic or dogmatic. The movement has not moved from theology into practice, but from practice into theology.

Catechesis in the Vineyard

The story of the Vineyard begins in 1962 when a completely un-churched young man named John Wimber became a Christian. Over the next two decades, Wimber became a church planting expert in the Quaker church, a pastor in the Calvary Chapel system, a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, and a world-renowned instructor on Charismatic gifts..

Much of Wimber’s theology was determined by his experience – and, more than once, his experiences with the Holy Spirit caused a 180 degree shift in his theology. On topics as foundational to the Vineyard as healing and spiritual gifts, Wimber’s intellectualized theology was completely erased and replaced by his experience of the work of the Holy Spirit. More than once this led Wimber to leave denominations as his theology.⁴

It is no wonder then that Wimber’s approach to not only Christianity but also to instructive formation has always been experiential. As early as 1978, Wimber was using “clinics” to teach his people about healing and spiritual gifts. From that point forward, Wimber always paired teaching with modeling. It was sometimes referred to as tell and show – and, also became known as “doing the stuff”; Wimber would

⁴ For further reading, see Carol Wimber’s *The Way It Was* and John Wimber’s *Everybody Gets to Play*.

teach on a subject and then demonstrate the process on a volunteer.⁵ After Wimber had demonstrated, students would “do the stuff” while John watched.

VCC’s denominational roots and traditions have paved the way to an experiential, relational, hands-on catechesis but has offered little else. The history of the Vineyard informs the modality of catechesis but the questions of content and form or method are still unanswered. It would seem Wimber’s catechesis is as vague and ambiguous as Westerhoff’s. Functional catechesis is too mushy; in a practicing church, catechesis needs to be an established program of formation and instruction for believers with a shallow faith and who are seeking initiation into and continued belonging to a Christian community. So, in order to determine a contemporary content and form, it will be necessary to look beyond the Vineyard’s 25 year history to find clues and suggestions from the *historical* church.

⁵ Bill Jackson, *The Quest for the Radical Middle* (Cape Town: Vineyard International Publishing, 1999). 71

Chapter 2: The History of Catechesis

To create an effective system of catechesis for a practicing church, it makes sense to examine the religious instruction of individuals in the Christian tradition as far back as possible. It is not my intent to create something new simply for the sake of being new or different. Instead, my intention is to determine the *ethos* of catechesis throughout the ages in order to capture its spirit for the present and into the future – not continue a derivative formula that leads further and further away from the original intent. Therefore, the following is a survey of the history of Christian religious instruction, not an evaluative history of Soteriology. Especially evidenced in the Reformation, catechisms are shaped by the writer’s notions of salvation and what is necessary to obtain said salvation. For the purposes of this paper, I am only interested in *what* the catechism contained, how it differed from previous versions and/or continued the historical tradition, and *why* it contained what it contained—not the theology behind the content.

Pre-History

The idea of catechism predates the ancient church and even Jesus himself. Catechesis, understood as the religious education necessary for initiation into the Christian community, had a vital and important role in the Jewish world of Jesus. Approximately 100 years before the birth of Christ, the separatist Jewish movement known as the Qumran Community used in part what would later be known as the

Dead Sea Scrolls as a community rule to teach hopeful converts.⁶ Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish writer predating Jesus by approximately 20 years, wrote in detail about his personal approach to the intellectual training needed for success in the religious life.⁷ And, in more conventional Judaism, rabbinic literature and the Babylonian Talmud became the foundational religious literature.⁸ Describing any of these forms of religious education via written material as truly comparable to the catechesis of the Christian church (from the very earliest church all the way to the contemporary organization) would be intellectually dishonest and a far reaching exaggeration. However, these three examples do serve as the predecessors to Christian catechesis, grounding the practice in our Jewish heritage.

As early Christians developed their own version of catechesis, Judaism was not the only influence. "When Christianity came on the scene, there was already in place a well-developed system of moral formation in the Greco-Roman world."⁹ This system was intended to teach people how to lead a "happy life,' that is, a life directed toward those ends appropriate for human beings."¹⁰ This training revolved around the virtues – believed to not be given at birth but learned through practice. "Moral philosophy was a practical undertaking directed at *doing* something, not at *knowing* something. Ethics had to do with the formation of character, the making of

⁶ Robert Goldenberg, "Religious Formation in Ancient Judaism," in *Educating People of Faith*, ed. John Van Engen, 30 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004).

⁷ Ibid., 34.

⁸ Ibid., 37.

⁹ Robert Louis Wilken, "Christian Formation in the Early Church," in *Educating People of Faith*, ed. John Van Engen, 48-62 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004).

¹⁰ Ibid., 49.

a certain kind of virtuous person.” (emphasis mine)¹¹

However, Christianity was not simply a new philosophy developed during the Classical period and shaped by the Greco-Roman tradition of moral philosophy. Birthed in Judaism, it could never be completely divorced from that tradition’s thoughts and beliefs. More than an influence, Judaism was both Christianity’s base and springboard. Christian catechesis was influenced by both the relational knowing of the Jewish world and the doing/being of the Greco-Roman world. This synthesis is hinted at in the words of Jesus from the gospel of Matthew, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matt. 5:48, NRSV) The command is of the doing/being nature (“be” perfect) and at the same time a result of relational knowledge of God as parent. Humanity is made in God’s image, therefore the ends appropriate for human beings is fellowship with God, in loving imitation and service. Their *telos* was love of Christ and communion with the triune God. But, the technique to fulfilling that end was ethical formation taught by master to disciple.¹²

The Early Church

For insight into the practices of the New Testament church, one source historians typically look to is Hippolytus’ *Apostolic Tradition*. Although written in the second century, it records the practices of and offers insight into the church of the first century. In *Apostolic Tradition*, Hippolytus recorded “how” the process of catechesis was performed. During the 100 years of the church before his writing, catechesis became institutionalized and understood as the three-phase process of the

¹¹ Wilken, *Educating People of Faith*, 49.

¹² Ibid., 50-52.

catechumenate entering into the fellowship of believers. These stages were as follows: catechumen, chosen, and candidate. The process was quite simple. The new believer would make the initial contact and the church's leadership would interview and scrutinize the inquirer to determine if their lifestyle fit the standards required of the catechumenate. As long as the inquirer was not involved in an unrepentant life of sin or a profession of ill repute (a prostitute, thief, manufacturer of idols, etc.), the minister sought to convince them to join the catechumenate. Once admitted, the inquirer was considered a catechumen and began a period of realigning their lifestyle towards the way of Christ. These candidates for baptism "had their lifestyle scrutinized, memorized the Creed [*sic*], and learned the Lord's Prayer."¹³ Initially, the catechumens were expected to spend three years as hearers of the word before continuing to the next phase of their journey. But, according to the writings of Egeria, by the 4th century this three year period had been reduced to 40 days (during the season of Lent).¹⁴ It would appear that during the first four centuries of the early church, the duration of the catechumenate was in flux - lasting anywhere from 40 days to 3 years. However, the deciding factor in their candidacy for baptism was not the length of instruction but the catechumen's changed conduct. During this time, they participated in the majority of the community's liturgical activity but

¹³ Berard L. Marthaler, *The Catechism Yesterday and Today* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 9. In this citation, the author refers to the oldest known Christian creed as "the Creed" with the implication of a proper noun. My understanding is that this statement of belief was never officially adopted nor given the name "The Creed." The use of the proper noun here can be misleading, possibly referring to one of the church's major, orthodox creeds such as the Apostle's Creed or the Nicene Creed.

¹⁴ Leonel L. Mitchell, "The Development of Catechesis in the Third and Fourth Centuries: From Hippolytus to Augustine," in *A Faithful Church*, ed. John H. Westerhoff III and O.C. Edwards, Jr., 56 (Wilton: Morehouse-Barlow, 1981).

were excluded from the agape love feast and other portions of the worship service. “The picture which emerges from *The Apostolic Tradition* is of catechumens forming a separate class in the church, distinct from the baptized faithful.”¹⁵ They were treated similarly to the way modern fraternities treat “pledges.”¹⁶

At the end of this initial period of training, those who were to be baptized were picked out of the catechumenate and would be referred to as “the chosen” (as opposed to those still in the catechumenate who were called “hearers” because they were simply allowed to hear the word).¹⁷ They would now be examined about the type of life they had led while catechumens. Had they lived good lives? Had they taken care of the widows and visited the sick? Had they done good works?¹⁸ If their sponsors testified that they had done all of these things, they were admitted and were considered candidates for baptism. They continued their preparation for baptism with a short period of daily instruction, exorcism, and other liturgical activities during which they received lectures on Scripture, creed, and the Lord’s Prayer.¹⁹ This instruction concluded with baptism and full participation in the community.

Of interest for this study is the fact that during this period of catechetical development,

[n]o questions are asked concerning their understanding of Christian doctrine, or even their acceptance of Jesus Christ, although presumably some form of rudimentary belief must have been responsible for their initial approach to the church. This confirms our

¹⁵ Westerhoff & Edwards, 51.

¹⁶ Mitchell, *A Faithful Church*, 51.

¹⁷ Westerhoff & Edwards, 51.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Mitchell, *A Faithful Church*, 75-76.

view that the instruction which they received was primarily in Christian living and was to enable them to adopt what we would call a Christian lifestyle, not to make them theologians.²⁰

Doctrine should, in no way, be understood as antithetical to a Christian lifestyle.

Likewise, doctrine should, in no way, be held as a replacement for or synonymous with a Christian lifestyle. As we will see later, catechists for centuries would wrestle with this dilemma, often times erring toward one extreme or the other, and only occasionally finding a proper balance.

The Didache

The New Testament church's emphasis on personal formation and moral transformation can also be seen in the *Didache*, assumed to be the earliest written Christian catechism text, dated to the first century (as testified to in the writings of Eusebius and Athanasius).²¹ The *Didache* consists of four sections: baptismal catechism (also known as the "Tractate on the Two Ways"), liturgical instruction, church order, and an eschatological epilogue.²² The *Didache* is a collection of four distinct genres, compiled from distinct extant sources. "It purports to be a collection of instructions given by Jesus, through the twelve apostles, to provide catechesis for new Gentile converts prior to baptism."²³ This claim gives the *Didache* (specifically, its first section) a position of paramount importance in the history of Christian catechesis.

²⁰ Mitchell, *A Faithful Church*, 52.

²¹ Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 4.

²² *Ibid.*, 112.

²³ Jonathon A. Draper "The Apostolic Fathers: The Didache," *The Expository Times* 117, no. 5 (2006): 177.

The *Didache* begins the tradition of the Church's catechetical writings defining in simple terms what it means to be a Christian. Catechesis, from the very beginning, was designed to inform and form the piety and practices of the ordinary Christian's daily existence. This first catechism was intended to shape the way new converts to Christianity acted and thought, forming the habits necessary to follow Jesus.

"The Tractate on the Two Ways" begins the *Didache*²⁴ and, with its first words, grounds baptismal catechism in virtuous practices. The education of new converts initially places them at a point of bifurcation, hands them a simple choice between two options, and requires a decision. Before them lies two ways: one leads to life and one leads to death. Accepting baptism, becoming a Christian, and following Jesus corresponds with a certain way of living – the way that leads to life. This way (instructionally) leads from decision (seeking initiation into the community) through life in the community of the church (on virtues and vices).

The way of life is simple: love God and love your neighbor. This "way" finds its traction in the biblical tradition - beginning in the Pentateuch with Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 all the way through the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This moral dictate grounds everything that the baptismal candidate will do while at the same time cementing the fledgling Christian religion in the ancient way of the Jews. The remainder of the teaching on the way of life explains and expands this simple command to love. The "Tractate" develops it in several ways: bless those who curse and cause you violence and pray for your enemies; actions and *attitudes* to

²⁴ I am using Kurt Niederwimmer's translation found in the Hermeneia commentary series' *The Didache* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998).

avoid; and, specific and general behavioral precepts. It may appear that the “Tractate’s” way of life is a collection of lists that outline what the Christian should and should not do. However, it does not read as a checklist (as one might characterize the Decalogue), instead the lists describe the kind of people the Christians are to *be* and the type of lifestyle they are to lead. Not only are they, for example, to not lie, but they are also to not be arrogant, superior, or aggressive and are to be patient, quiet, and gentle. This is a distinction between prohibited actions and the development of one’s character or essence.

The way of life is not merely *via negativa*. Finding life is not simply a matter of not doing “bad things.” The avoidance of these vices is presented *via affirmativa*. “To avoid” is a positive action that leads to life. The redactor here chose the avoidance of some vices as the path to life, while retaining other vices as the descriptors of the way to death. The way of death is direct and short – sometimes translated as one long sentence divided into three sections: characteristics of the evil and accursed; a description of one who is anti, or actively opposed to, the good and righteousness; and, a description of one who ignores those in need.

The catechism, the story of two ways of living – one leading to life and one leading to death – ends with a warning. The redactor urges the catechumens to be delivered and allow none to lead them into error, and offers pragmatic encouragement: if you can do it all and be perfect, do so, but if not, do what you can. The function of this first section of the *Didache* was to provide catechesis for the preparation of new Gentile converts. It appears that the earliest Church’s primary concern for them was their behavior and their long term formation as virtuous

individuals of strong moral character, trained and shaped by a particular, Biblically based code of ethics.

Conclusion

Christianity was birthed out of the Jewish religious tradition during the Classical period in which Greco-Roman moral philosophy was prevalent. The catechesis of the early church reflects this context. After 100 years, a system that prepared new converts for baptism with a lengthy and committed period of learning evolved and emerged. As evidenced in the *Didache*, Christian virtues and the lifestyle appropriate for a follower of Christ were the primary concerns of catechesis during this period.

The Patristic Period

2nd & 3rd Centuries

Catechesis was fluid during the first century of the church. And, in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, little stabilization occurred – in either process or content. This diversification is well documented in two of Hippolytus’ successors, Origen and Cyril.

In the 2nd century, students from all around came to the catechetical school of Alexandria to learn from Origen - one of the most prominent Christian philosophers and Biblical scholars of his day. Origen’s school was not any sort of organized institution, but a group of disciples learning Christianity from a master. Much of what we know about Origen’s “school” comes from the writing of his student, Gregory. In his own words, Gregory came to Origen seeking an education in argument and intellectual debate. However, Origen expected him to adopt a new

way of life – a life transformed, a life of virtue. As cited by Wilken, Gregory wrote of Origen, “he taught us to *practice* justice and prudence.”²⁵ Origen’s method was the personal guidance of a teacher – a spiritual director – that Gregory referred to as “friendship.” The content of Origen’s catechesis appears to have been a virtuous life.

To be fair, Origen was an intellectual powerhouse and was very concerned and interested in the advancement of Christian rhetoric and thought. In *A Faithful Church*, Mitchell asserts that Origen was highly motivated by intellectualism, even suggesting that he created a multi-tiered system where some students’ instruction was limited to the basics and the more intelligent and advanced students were introduced to the more philosophical or esoteric subjects.²⁶ However, there is some debate as to how this influenced his method of instruction. In *Educating People of Faith*, Wilken clearly paints a picture of Gregory pursuing this higher level of intellectual engagement (that Mitchell believes Origen offered) only to be disappointed. Origen, to Gregory’s chagrin, was focused on a virtuous life and shaped his school around this ultimate goal. In this disagreement, I am swayed by Wilken’s perspective. Origen, surely, was offering highly intellectualized content, but it was not in place of or prior to the formation of a Christian lifestyle. In light of Origen’s proclivity towards rhetoric, this emphasis on relational, virtuous formation carries even more weight. It may not have been his natural tendency, but he believed in it enough to make his personal preferences, interests, and even strengths penultimate.

With this in mind, it is important to note that in his writings, Origen clearly

²⁵ Wilken, *Educating People of Faith*, 52.

²⁶ Mitchell, *A Faithful Church*, 53-55.

outlines at least three doctrines which he considers to be of the highest importance and essential for Christian faith. These doctrines are the unity of God; Jesus as the Christ; and the unity in honor and dignity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Origen's basic catechetical education also included "the temporal creation of the world and therefore the necessity of its end, the reward and punishment of the human soul after death, the resurrection of the body, the freedom of the human will and the reality of the moral struggle, and the existence of good angels and of the devil and his angels."²⁷

Simultaneously, Cyril was taking a different approach in Jerusalem. According to the witness of Egeria, catechesis in Jerusalem was far more structured, lasting exactly 40 days (the 40 days of Lent – an eight week period with Saturdays and Sundays exempt from the fasting and instruction) and consisting of 20 lectures.²⁸ Her writings describe 40 days with one lecture every day. Unfortunately, only 20 lectures survive. There is no solid conclusion for this discrepancy. During the 40 days, Cyril would take the catechumens through the Bible, beginning with Genesis, and provide both the literal and spiritual meaning of each passage. After the fifth week, candidates received the creed which was explained to them, article by article in a series of 13 lectures. Cyril not only gave lectures on the creed, he also expected believers (with the giving of the text of the creed, catechumens became believers) to memorize it. "This doctrine I want you to commit to memory word for word and say it over to one another as much as you can, not writing it on paper but

²⁷ Mitchell, *A Faithful Church*, 55.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

using memory to engrave it on your heart.”²⁹ Candidates also received instruction in the sacraments (baptism and Eucharist) and daily exorcisms, although these were not considered by Egeria part of the “catechesis.”³⁰

During the 2nd and 3rd centuries, the process and content of catechesis appears to have become diversified and slightly muddled, losing its way on the road to becoming a unified institution for the global church. Instead, different schools, churches, cities, and instructors were pursuing catechesis in their own ways. But, this diversity did not kill catechesis and did not leave it impotent. Instead, the catechumenate, in its varied forms, continued to lead “people through an experience that was itself transformative, renewing the mind and the will and also the heart.”³¹

Augustine (354-430)

In 421, Augustine wrote *Enchiridion: On Faith, Hope, and Love* and began the process of unifying catechesis. This catechism was created in response to a request for a handbook (an *enchiridion*) that would communicate the essential Christian doctrines in the simplest way possible. Augustine, almost sarcastically, responded that the shortest and most complete summary of what God expects of humanity is faith, hope, and love – and, so *On Faith, Hope and Love* came to be.³²

Enchiridion begins with Augustine laying out his objective and intention for the book. In his own words, his greatest desire for his audience (individualized in

²⁹ Mitchell, *A Faithful Church*, 61.

³⁰ Ibid., 58-59.

³¹ Wilken, *Educating People of Faith*, 60.

³² Augustine, *Confessions and Enchiridion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), 21.

the singular man, Laurence) is “wisdom” – explained and understood as piety, synonymous with the worship and/or service of God. Humanity’s service to God is both the source and the result of wisdom. In this way, Augustine’s contribution to catechesis continues the tradition he inherited by highlighting the importance of the Christian lifestyle. However, by the 3rd paragraph, he presents a truly unique spin. Augustine answers the sweeping request for a handbook that answers the question “What is the certain and distinctive foundation of the catholic faith?” with three simple words: faith, hope, and love.³³ Then, as soon as he has reduced the Christian faith to three words, he magnifies, expands, and expounds them by correlating them to the baptismal Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the twofold commandment of love.

Augustine’s innovation shaped catechisms for at least the next 1600 years. Prior to Augustine, catechism had no overarching form that guided the content, let alone interacted with larger themes of the Christian life or doctrine. After Augustine, every catechist was simply reacting to his blueprint in their approach to the shaping of a new catechism. Augustine took the content out of the realm of disconnected doctrines on the one hand and universal virtues on the other and brought the two together in a way that made sense through the application of the Biblical witness. The three greatest virtues directly corresponded to the three pillars of Christian doctrine.

However, where Augustine’s *Faith, Hope, and Love* excels in concept, it falters in execution, for Augustine’s catechism is unnaturally weighted in favor of faith. Certainly, he never asserts, in opposition to the apostle Paul, that faith is greater

³³ Augustine, *Enchiridion On Faith, Hope, and Love* (Kindle Edition, 2010), Kindle Locations 59-61.

than hope and love. However, in sheer abundance of words, let alone topical importance, Augustine elevates faith to the primary position. He begins with faith and continues to write through the perspective of faith. Faith never gives way to hope and love, but becomes the way to understand them. In an ironic twist, even as Augustine presumably downgrades faith in favor of love, his argument is still developed solely through the lens of faith, making faith the star and love an after thought.

As Augustine sets out to describe the relationship between faith, hope, and love he concludes that “without faith nothing else is possible.”³⁴ Here, he is playing a rhetorical game to make a point. He is not, in fact, elevating faith over hope and love. This is not a hierarchy of value. Instead, Augustine is developing a hierarchy of development. “[L]ove is not without hope, hope is not without love, and neither hope nor love are without faith.”³⁵ Faith simply comes first. In fact, faith appears to be the lowest common denominator as all of humanity (Christians, heretics, and pagans alike) has faith. We believe certain ideas about ourselves, others, and *all* things. But, this belief is not necessarily Christian belief. Likewise, the demons believe – in many of the same things as a Christian. But, the demon’s belief is not Christian, because it does not result in hope and is not expressed as love. Faith works by love, and it exists with hope.

Still, all of this is discourse *on* faith. Even in his explanation of the place of faith as the least of these three virtues, Augustine gives faith significantly more

³⁴ Augustine, *Enchiridion On Faith, Hope, and Love* (Kindle Edition, 2010), Kindle Location 91.

³⁵Ibid., Kindle Locations 122-123.

attention than hope and love. In this book of 33 chapters, hope and love don't take center stage until chapter 30 and 31. Augustine's catechism, based on his stated purpose and desire, falls prey to his genius as a rhetorical theologian. "Belief" was his business. It is unreasonable for us to expect him to be something other than he was. In this way, *Augustine's Faith, Hope, and Love* needs to be rescued from Augustine.

Augustine's inclination toward faith aside, for the purposes of this particular project it is more important to analyze this work through a pastoral, rather than theological lens. By the end of the third chapter, Augustine has moved beyond the "basics" of piety and service to God into the esoteric necessity of an a priori existence of humanity's goodness for the possibility of evil's existence. For Augustine, "certain and distinctive foundations" are advanced rhetorical and theological elucidations. *The Enchiridion* was intended to lead Christians down the path of a pious, zealous, virtuous active life of service to God. However, nearly 85% of the content is erudite doctrine.

Augustine himself would make a fine advocate in my pastoral critique of his *Enchiridion*. He also writes about the relationship of faith, hope and love in *On Christian Teaching*. Here, he finds faith and hope to always be in service to love. "But sight shall displace faith; and hope shall be swallowed up in that perfect bliss to which we shall come: love, on the other hand, shall wax greater when these others fail."³⁶ In fact, he writes about love significantly more in this work on the proper instruction of Christians than he does in his work instructing Christians on faith, hope and love. However, it is not fair to hold Augustine accountable for this unintentional shortcoming. For here, we find a

³⁶ Augustine, *On Christian Teaching (On Christian Doctrine)* (Kindle Edition, 2010), Kindle Locations 632-633.

prime example of the difficulties the church faces when theologians are expected to fulfill pastoral tasks.

His own catechism may read more like a theological treatise than a handbook on how to love, but his influence was immeasurably important.

This emphasis by Augustine of Hippo permeates the theology of the medieval era. Salvation required a faith activated and perfected by acts of love (*fides caritate formata*). Faith, understood primarily as an initial intellectual assent to God's grace, was not by itself enough for salvation. Since even the demons could have faith, albeit a dead faith (*fides mortua*), love, not faith, was the religious glue that held the entire system together. Piety was revealed, therefore, not simply by what a person confessed or how fervently one prayed, but by how one loved God and the neighbour, according to a moral standard.³⁷

Conclusion

During the Patristic period, catechesis saw significant changes in both process and content. Midway through this period, it appeared as if the catechumenate may become a hopelessly stratified system, so rooted in local contextualization as to nearly deny the concept of the church universal. However, with the work of Augustine, diverse threads were united and twisted into one, solid rope that would last for more than a thousand years. *On Faith, Hope, and Love* brilliantly joined morality and the fundamentals of Christian belief, passing the torch of a reasonably contextualized ancient catechumenate on to the next generation.

The Middle Ages

Early Middle Ages (500 – 1200)

As Christianity spread as the official religion of the empire, infant baptisms became

³⁷ Jensen, "Shaping Piety Through Catechetical Structures," 226.

the norm – christening a baby not just into the Christian community but also into national citizenship. As baptism became the era’s equivalent of a Social Security Number (something given to everyone at birth), catechesis generally fell out of practice, considered far less important than it previously had been.³⁸ At the same time, missionary work to the German people resulted in mass conversions – lots of baptisms, but little to no instruction. By the mid 8th century, a “missionary catechesis” inspired by the *narratio* of salvation history from Augustine’s *Catechizing the Uninstructed* had become the norm. The needs of the church changed, and catechesis changed to meet those needs. “St. Boniface, for example, compiled a pastiche of biblical texts to give an account of salvation history from creation through the Fall to the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ, culminating with Christ's instruction to preach the Gospel to all the world. After describing the rite of baptism, he tells the newly baptized that a ‘Christian is one who imitates and follows Christ in all things.’ Then follows a lengthy summary, laced with biblical quotations, describing Christian behaviors—sins to avoid, virtues to practice.”³⁹ Catechism was evangelism, not deep formation or detailed instruction.

Under these circumstances, it is no wonder that the typical layperson was almost completely ignorant of Christian beliefs and morals. The only instruction or formation they had received was a brief introduction to salvation. By the ninth century, church hierarchy became concerned with widespread ignorance of Christian beliefs and morals. The provincial councils and leaders were, rightly so,

³⁸ Berard L. Marthaler, "Catechesis: 'A Semantic Evolution'?", *Liturgical Ministry* 18, Winter (2009): 3.

³⁹ Ibid.

concerned. Out of this ecclesial low point, the resulting solution was a major advancement - religious instruction began to be delivered in the vernacular. Informal catechesis became very accessible to all in the church. Formal catechesis, lists of virtues and vices, basic moral instruction, and sermons were now presented in a language the parishioner spoke. This was one of the great triumphs in the contextualization of catechesis.

Late Middle Ages (1200-1500)

For the next three centuries, church leadership continued to respond to the problem of religious ignorance. By the 13th century, the church was moving towards a more systematic and theological approach to catechetical instruction as the scholastics gained influence.⁴⁰ Ironically, what followed was a fear that orthodoxy was on the decline as religious thought became mixed with misinformation and superstition. Put a different way, as religious instruction moved away from a historic-narrative structure (story telling) and towards an intellectualized and systematic approach, the church became concerned that the people's learning was in decline.

In the late 1200's, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the great reformer John Pecham responded to this issue. His solution was better catechetical instruction, beginning with the priests. Catechesis, continuing in the local vernacular, was expanded to include the regular presentation of the fundamentals of the faith in

⁴⁰ Marthaler, "Catechesis: 'A Semantic Evolution'?", 4.

simple and clear terms. Pecham's work became the basis for many catechetical manuals throughout the 14th and 15th centuries.⁴¹

Soon, the desire to instruct the laypeople on issues of faith and morals in a way and language that ordinary people could understand resulted in an over emphasis on doctrine and memorization.⁴² The prime example of this phenomenon is the *ABC's of Simple Folk*. With the good intention of instructing the common person using understandable language in a memorable fashion, Christianity was reduced to short lists of do's and don'ts and ideas to believe. And, with printed materials in short supply, memorization was the only method for an individual to maintain access to the information for a lifetime. According to the *ABC's*, the list of basics Christians needed to know was: the five bodily senses; the seven mortal (deadly) sins; the contrary virtues (humility, love of neighbor, industry, patience, etc.); the seven petitions of the Our Father; the Hail Mary; the Creed (twelve articles); the Ten Commandments; the seven virtues (faith, hope, charity; the moral virtues); the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit; the seven Beatitudes; the seven spiritual works of mercy; the seven corporal works of mercy; the seven orders (porter, lector, exorcist, etc.); the seven sacraments; the seven offshoots of penance (fasting, almsgiving, prayer, etc.) the seven privileges of the glory of paradise (three of the soul, four of the body); the four counsels of Christ; the principal joys of paradise (e.g., day without night, wisdom without error); the pains of hell."⁴³ The basics of

⁴¹ Marthaler, "Catechesis: 'A Semantic Evolution'?", 5.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Marthaler, *The Catechism Yesterday and Today*, 14-16.

Christianity had been twisted and bent like a side show contortionist until they fit into short lists that were easy to memorize.

Conclusion

The Medieval history of catechesis represents a significant shift in Christian education. The teaching of the fundamentals of Christian belief and morality found in the ancient catechumenate declined with the introduction of catechisms. “[T]he great sacrament of Christian initiation lost its coherence... This was a development in which Christian initiation virtually lost its original educative function.”⁴⁴

Early attempts at reform had three unexpected consequences. First, the desire to simplify Christianity to its absolute basics did anything but. Secondly, catechesis evolved from a process-oriented formation with the aid of a mentor into long lists of “sevens” to memorize. Finally, to oversimplify, virtues were no longer something one did, they were something one memorized.

The Reformation

Ironically, the more catechesis became identified with instruction alone, the more ignorant the church became.⁴⁵ The Reformation saw an explosion in the sheer number of catechisms, as each reformer and each reformer’s successors felt the need to stake their claim in the new Protestant Church. The 16th century became the age of orthodoxy as each new denomination in Western Europe created a catechism

⁴⁴ William P. Haugaard, "The Continental Reformation of the Sixteenth Century," in *A Faithful Church*, ed. John H. Westerhoff III and O.C. Edwards, Jr., 103 (Wilton: Morehouse-Barlow, 1981).

⁴⁵ Marthaler, "Catechesis: 'A Semantic Evolution'?", 6.

or confession of faith as identity markers to provide a sense of what the denomination stood for in contrast to any other denomination. “Right Belief” became segmented and more and more derivative in this, characterized by Dr. Richard Steele as the “age of argument.” With each new orthodoxy came a new catechism.⁴⁶

Erasmus

In 1499, Erasmus travelled to England and heard the lectures of John Colet, one of the first humanist scholars in England. “Colet’s piety and fresh approach to the Scriptures inspired Erasmus and modeled the way to use the new learning for the moral guidance and the cause of reform.”⁴⁷ Erasmus began writing his *Enchiridion*, a handbook addressed to a layman – a soldier whose wife feared for his faith. In the *Enchiridion*, Erasmus describes the weapons to use and the rules to follow for a Christian’s battle against sin – prayer and knowledge of scripture. His handbook criticized outwards signs and the multiplication of devotions (ie, *ABC’s of Simple Folk*). In this catechism, Erasmus emphasized virtue and vice, positioning Christianity as a way of life rather than a collection of doctrines. He beckons the Christian soldier to return to a simple gospel and the inward love of God and neighbor.

⁴⁶ taken from lectures in Dr. Steele’s GCH2 course, including the portrayal of the “age of argument.”

⁴⁷ Marthaler, *The Catechism Yesterday and Today*, 16.

Luther

In 1529, Martin Luther published his *Small Catechism*, and catechesis, again, was revolutionized. Luther's contribution was simple yet profound – one of his greatest achievements was stating profound thoughts in simple terms. “The popularity of the Small Catechism owed much to Luther's talent for going to the heart of the matter and explaining serious issues with the utmost simplicity.”⁴⁸ Furthering the advancements of the Archbishop of Canterbury some 300 years earlier, Luther worked to put a catechism into everyone's hands - *in their own language*. The result was theologically rich education for ordinary people in common language.

Of great importance to this particular study is the context of Luther's work. The early years of the Protestant Reformation were a very disarming and disorienting time for many people. The day before, the ordinary person considered themselves a Christian in good standing in the one universal church. Now, they were told they needed to be reformed because the one universal church had been wrong. The church, and therefore their religion, was literally changing around them.⁴⁹ The Church in Rome of Luther's time had lost its way and had, become devoted to bad doctrine. So, Luther's plan to re-form Christendom into Christianity began with a return to antiquity.⁵⁰ His strategy was to “leapfrog” recent history and go back at least 500 (or 1,000 years) to find “purer” theology and doctrine. In this process of

⁴⁸ Marthaler, *The Catechism Yesterday and Today*, 23.

⁴⁹ David C. Steinmetz, "Luther and Formation in Faith," in *Educating People of Faith*, ed. John Van Egen, 253 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004).

⁵⁰ In the Vineyard, the term “post-Christendom” has become popular in conversations about the future of the church in a secular or pluralist world – one that has moved beyond the sole influence of Christianity. “Christendom” represents a context in which Christianity is the only (significant) choice of religion.

re-forming and purifying the doctrines of Christianity, Luther wrote his catechism and innovated catechesis (specifically, the catechism) in three ways.

First, he rearranged the elements of the Medieval and Augustinian catechisms in order to make a larger theological statement about the law and gospel. He reordered the sequence of Creed, Lord's Prayer, and commandment to love, placing the commandments (the Golden Rule, 10 Commandments and/or "law") first because they "indict people, bringing them to know themselves as corrupt and guilty of sin."⁵¹

Luther's other innovations were pedagogical. He explained the Creed in just 3 questions instead of the existing 12 articles. He was also responsible for introducing and popularizing the question and answer format. Previously, readers would have to wade through pages and pages of Augustine's or Erasmus' prose to find the key theological points. In Luther's *Small Catechism*, the content was clearly outlined and delineated by guiding question.

Zwingli

As Luther was writing his *Small Catechism*, the Swiss reformer Zwingli looked in a different direction from catechesis and catechism for the formation of the faithful. To be sure, Luther's Germany was a greatly different context than the "theocracy" of Zwingli's Zürich. However, Zwingli's approach – or, rather lack of approach – to catechesis should have a voice in and influence on this particular study, too.

There is considerable debate among historians how much 'the common people,' the laity, 'understood' of the theology so vehemently

⁵¹ Marthaler, *The Catechism Yesterday and Today*, 23.

debated in the sixteenth century. For Zwingli the very question itself is badly posed, its conceptual divisions misplaced: the knowledge of God and the formal study of theology were not to him the subject of study and its discipline of study, but two distinct entities. Knowledge of God could come through the formal study of theology... but for Zwingli, that study was not the best medium for increasing one's knowledge of God.⁵²

Zwingli insisted that education of the laity was about ethical formation and not intellectual affirmations. Unfortunately, his prescribed response was a multi-pronged approach that spilled out from private life into public life in a way that can only be classified as a church run city-state.

Calvin

John Calvin made many positive contributions to the protestant church and theology. However, not everything he offered to the field of catechesis resulted in a beneficial outcome. Like Zwingli, Calvin's influence on catechesis came as part of a reformation theocracy. In 1541, he returned to Geneva from exile and immediately began working with the city's civil government to draft ecclesial ordinances, including an expanded catechism.⁵³ Probably the most basic change in religious education during Calvin's time in Geneva was the movement of instruction out of the home and into one of three parishes.⁵⁴

⁵² Lee Palmer Wandel, "Zwingli and Reformed Practice," in *Educating People of Faith*, ed. John Van Egen, 274 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004).

⁵³ Marthaler, *The Catechism Yesterday and Today*, 28.

⁵⁴ Robert M. Kingdon, "Catechesis in Calvin's Geneva," in *Educating People of Faith*, ed. John Van Egen, 300 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004).

The catechism “provided a formula that each child could use to declare his Christian beliefs.”⁵⁵ And, this was important in a city where the civil authorities could question (and punish) individuals on their religious practices and knowledge of the catechism at any time. The catechism consisted of the Creed, the 10 Commandments and Jesus’ two great commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, and sacraments. Anyone who could repeat from memory a set of basic summaries of the faith was accepted as a member of the Christian community. The emphasis was truly on memorization and recitation over and against morality and virtues.

Frederick III and the Heidelberg Catechism

In 1559, Frederick III came to power as Palatinate of the Rhine. By this time, the 2nd wave of Reformers had emerged and intellectual battles raged on many topics – particularly, on the form of the liturgy and the Lord’s Supper.⁵⁶ “In Luther’s mind the printed catechism (both large and small) was to serve as a means of instruction and instrument of reform. In the hand of later reformers, however, catechisms took on a polemical tone and became measures of orthodoxy.”⁵⁷

However, Frederick desired unity. His strategy to attain this goal was the Heidelberg Catechism - a catechism that while based on Calvinist doctrine (Frederick’s theology of choice) would not alienate Lutherans. It was intended to be the answer to doctrinal differences, an attempt at a *via media*. And, so, it was endowed as the official creedal norm for the church in the Palatinate. As such, it’s

⁵⁵ Marthaler, *The Catechism Yesterday and Today*, 25.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁵⁷ Marthaler, “Catechesis: ‘A Semantic Evolution’?,” 6.

impact and influence has been far reaching – from the Catechism of Trent and the Westminster Catechism, on through contemporary usage.⁵⁸

Conclusion

The great Reformers left significant and long lasting marks on the tradition of educating new converts to Christianity. Erasmus emphasized virtue and vice, reminding us (as the *Didache* did) that Christianity is not a collection of doctrines, but a way of life founded on a simple gospel and the love of God and neighbor. Zwingli followed in his footsteps and questioned the very notion that the knowledge of God lay in theology or theological education. Luther blessed the church with the first of the modern catechisms - a theologically robust handbook for ordinary people in the vernacular of the local language. However, as the Reformation moved on, battles over doctrinal minutia took center stage and divided the church even further. In Calvin's Geneva, the catechism was reduced to the memorization of virtue-free truth statements in order to satisfy the local authorities. Formation was lost and education was replaced with memorization.

The American Church

As we began to see with "Calvin's Geneva," "Zwingli's Zürich," and "Luther's Germany" the Reformation era church quickly fell victim to the same church and state synthesis that appeared during the early Middle Ages. In both Britain and then the New England colonies, it was, once again, assumed that "every Christian was a

⁵⁸ Marthaler, *The Catechism Yesterday and Today*, 31.

citizen and every citizen a Christian.”⁵⁹ This environment led (as it did in the 6th century) to a weakening of formal catechesis. When conversion is non-existent because everyone has been “converted” through baptism as an infant, then the need for the formal instruction of those who have recently been converted becomes unnecessary. Stated positively, the result was an informal process of formation that permeated all aspects of life, including the public schools. All of life was catechesis.

However, as church and state expunged themselves of each other, the laity was left in a lurch. Citizenship was no longer synonymous with baptism and/or conversion. Furthermore, the public education of their children, which had often been handled by ministers and included religious instruction, no longer included doctrinal or moral segments. Within a century, the corrosion of this organic system prompted the enormous need for adult conversion. And, with that, the Puritan, Pietistic, and Methodist revivals were well underway. The revivals and awakenings brought “a much stronger emphasis on *personal conversion* and *heart-felt religion... a quite new understanding of conversion as an individual and momentous experience of spiritual renewal* and revival, accompanied by healings and ecstatic states of mind.”⁶⁰

“Dramatic,” “instant,” “personal,” and “heart-felt” conversions naturally (or, so it was assumed) meant instant transformations that resulted in new, pious lifestyles. “Whether conversion was sudden and dramatic or gradual, it was

⁵⁹ John E. Booty, "Since The Reformation: An Emphasis on the American Experience," in *A Faithful Church*, ed. John H. Westerhoff III and O.C. Edwards, Jr., 261 (Wilton: Morehouse-Barlow, 1981).

⁶⁰ Anton Houtepen, "Conversion and the Religious Market: A theological Perspective" *Exchange* 35, no. 1 (2006): 27.

expected that one could know who was converted and who not by means of their actions.”⁶¹ With the emergence of a conversion that resulted in a changed lifestyle combined with a focus on the heart-felt over against the intellectual, catechesis was left in the dust as a fading remnant of church history. And, the further west the church moved across the North American continent, the more removed formal catechesis became, particularly in rural areas of settlement and emigration. This trend continued all the way through Azusa Street, the Pentecostal movement of the early 20th century, and into the current neo-Pentecostal traditions such as the Assemblies of God, Foursquare, and the Vineyard.

Conclusion

Catechesis has had a varied history that does not form a standard, expected, or predictable trajectory. The first century church’s dedication to investing deeply and relationally in the training and formation of new Christians in the virtuous life of a Christ follower evolved into a simple book of theological thoughts that could be read and understood in isolation from community. At the same time, the type of theological ignorance that results in the indistinguishability between a follower of Christ and a social worker has been addressed in such a way as to allow the common person to wrestle with profound theological thought.

The Christian heritage is rich and our predecessors have bestowed us with significant and applicable endowments:

⁶¹ Booty, *A Faithful Church*, 269.

The Patristics' attention to and focus on morals, virtues, and lifestyle is an important guide in our post-Christendom context. Contemporary catechesis needs to join with *Apostolic Tradition* in asking, "Have you lived a good life?"

Augustine's *On Faith, Hope, and Love* is invaluable. His conception of the three greatest virtues directly corresponding to the three pillars of Christian doctrine indisputably relates theological thought to visible and virtuous action. This is an intellectual structure that reaches far beyond catechesis and has major implications and applications for the Christian life. This structure, additionally, is a significant pedagogical tool.

Luther and Erasmus agreed on very little. However, Luther's theologically rich education for ordinary people in their common language in combination with Erasmus' emphasis on the virtues and vices which position Christianity as a way of life rather than a collection of doctrines represents the tension that must be presented and acknowledged even if it is not solved or relieved.

Finally, Zwingli puts this project into perspective. The theology of the 16th Century was no more debated and no harder to understand than the theology of the 21st Century. With this in mind, we must hear Zwingli's voice as he asks, "how much of this do we expect the 'common people' to 'understand'?" Knowledge of God and learning theology are not the subject of study and its discipline. Instead, they are two distinct entities that inform and influence each other. The knowledge of God (understood Biblically) is as much, if not more, about what one does as what one knows.

The heritage of the neo-Pentecostal movement cannot be ignored in this set of concluding guide posts and boundary markers. While one of the most important (if not the *most* important) aspects of catechesis has, for millennia, been a virtuous lifestyle, a virtuous lifestyle is not synonymous with a Christian lifestyle. We cannot abandon religious or theological instruction in the presence of an already pious life.

Surveying the history of catechesis has its high points and low. If nothing else, the history of catechesis teaches us that this process is contextualized and always has been. It is not that the church has strayed off the one and true given path of the prescribed and defined catechesis. Rather, the church has attempted to form and instruct converts in the basics of Christianity in innumerable contexts - across the globe and spanning nearly 2,000 years. Catechesis has always *served* the church by adapting and changing to meet the church's present-day needs. This realization begs the question: what are the needs of a practicing church?

Chapter 3: Defining the program

In the first chapter, we determined the definition of catechesis as an established program of formation and instruction for believers of shallow faith who seek initiation into and continued belonging to a Christian community. We also determined that the appropriate style of catechesis for a church in the Vineyard movement to be experiential and relational. The history of catechesis has helped to shape and inform the content and purpose: a virtuous lifestyle – developing the three most important virtues (faith, hope, and love) through the application of basic doctrine grounded in Scripture, resulting in a knowledge that forms the individual’s character in order to inform the individual’s actions. Now, with the help of some educational experts (contemporary and ancient), we turn to the task of developing a pedagogically appropriate style for program of catechesis in a practicing church.

In the quest to define and develop a contextually appropriate program of catechesis, this project finds itself in good company. Catechesis has been a field in flux in recent history. Scholars and practitioners (Roman Catholics and Protestants) alike have recognized the need for adaptations in order to meet the needs of contemporary communities of faith. Michael Orsi, director of the Family Life Bureau for the Roman Catholic diocese of Camden, New Jersey notes that the “church has changed its emphasis in religious education away from catechism—the rote learning of dogma and doctrine—and toward catechesis, the attempt to make Christ present through a variety of experiences: word, worship, community, and service to

others.”⁶² The old format of question and answer, memorized from a written, formal catechism does not fit all contexts and needs. However, determining a new structure for the application of content is not, necessarily, *ex nihilo*.

In *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations*, Richard Osmer describes a “pilgrimage” framework as one possible model for understanding education (and, likewise, catechesis). Catechesis as a pilgrimage begins with the realization that the congregation is composed of individuals, each existing at a different point along their unique faith journey. This realization magnifies the need to develop personalized conditions and a relational approach. As pilgrims come to catechesis with their own histories, religious backgrounds, needs, and interests the catechist must learn *from* them conversationally in order to unpack their unique situation and apply the appropriate approach to catechesis. A pilgrim with a 40 year history of following Jesus in a mainline denomination does not have the same needs as a biblically illiterate 30 year old who has no working knowledge of theology or tradition but has had a profound experience of the Holy Spirit. This approach, while creating additional work for the catechist, allows for higher impact catechesis for all involved.

Particularly appropriate to this pilgrimage model is a dramatological approach to catechesis. Here, the catechism is liberated from the negative and intimidating connotations of the constructs of church doctrine, dogmatics, and exegesis and becomes understood as divine and human actions placed within an all-inclusive narrative. In a culture that is saturated with film and television, “story” is

⁶² Michael P. Orsi, "Catechesis in the Third Millenium," *Religious Education* 89, no. 3 (1994): 397.

one thing all catechumens are familiar with – and, almost universally, enjoy. Stories, or narratives, consist of plots that unfold over time to create a unity of action. In this way, narrative development mirrors the experience of life as a pilgrim on a journey. The dramatalogical lens also enhances the students’ perception of Scripture as a narrative. The story found in Scripture continues through the present and into the future, inherently transforming the observer into a player. As Scripture and tradition are interpreted as the setting of divine and human action, so the contemporary world is transformed, interpreted as the locale of God’s present activity. God’s stage is also the pilgrim’s stage, where the human and divine interact. “Dramas are not merely read; they are performed” – placing the story of God firmly in the realm of orthopraxy and not just orthodoxy.⁶³ The narrative (God himself, Scriptures, and tradition) is present and local, in constant interaction with the characters (the church, the catechumen, and the world), driving the plot forward in hope.

Westerhoff also prescribes the metaphor of pilgrimage as an ancient alternative to be applied to contemporary catechesis.⁶⁴ He describes pilgrimages in three modes: affiliative, searching, and integrating. This resonates well with the intention of approaching catechesis relationally. One key component of the program is the actual relationships and friendships the catechumens encounters. They are no longer a lone pilgrim, they are part of a “search party” looking for belief anchors to which they can attach their mystical experience of the divine. All three modes must

⁶³ Richard Robert Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 200.

⁶⁴ John H. Westerhoff III, "Framing an Alternative Future for Catechesis," in *A Faithful Church*, ed. John H. Westerhoff III and O.C. Edwards, Jr., 299.

be given attention. And, for this to happen, a guide is necessary. Pilgrims do not require teachers or technicians, they need a narrator to help make the appearances of God more obvious. In this model, the catechist must be experienced in listening – to the word of God understood through Scripture and tradition and to the existential word of God heard in experience.⁶⁵ The catechist willingly says, “I have no solution, but I will not leave you alone in your quest; I am as lost as you are, but together perhaps we can find the way; I do not know, but I will aid you in your search.”⁶⁶

From a secular perspective, bell hooks mirrors these ideas. In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, she describes an “engaged pedagogy” as the most beneficial, effective, and sacred. According to hooks, the work of the teacher “is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of... students.”⁶⁷ But, engaged pedagogy is not simply about the student. In this model, education becomes “liberative” only when it affects both student *and* teacher. It is not simply about empowering students, it is about creating a holistic environment for learning where teachers learn and grow at the same time as their students learn and grow. In this way, the formational and instructive environment of catechesis could be transformative as all involved feel the responsibility to contribute. Catechesis is no longer understood as a catechist filling catechumens with intellectual affirmations read in a catechism. Instead, catechesis is about guides and pilgrims, seeking God together, responsible with each other for each other’s progress.

⁶⁵ Westerhoff, *A Faithful Church*, 302.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 303.

⁶⁷ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 13.

Yet, a pilgrimage model does not exclude learning. It does not sacrifice knowledge for community or experience. Instead, catechesis must engage various ways of knowing. “Insofar as catechesis is concerned about faith as perception, revelation as experience, and values as goals and norms for life, it must concern itself with the intuitive, the affective, the responsive dimension of human life.”⁶⁸ That is to say that the education of catechesis engages the learning of experience, non-verbal images, imagination, and passion (typically communicated artistically through symbols, myths, and rituals).

With Westerhoff, hooks, and Osmer guiding the mode of catechesis, I am ready to examine and define the context in which I will develop an appropriate program. The catechesis I am developing is very specific – catechesis for a practicing church. And in order to give shape to the term “practicing church,” I will use VCC as the prototype.

⁶⁸ Westerhoff, *A Faithful Church*, 304.

Chapter 4: Our context... What is a practicing church?

VCC is a community dedicated to orthopraxy. The highest value in this community is placed on service (especially to the poor) – loving God by loving others. This value is summed up in the mission statement: we seek to be a community of followers of Jesus who are known for their generosity, kindness, and service to others. VCC differs from other faith communities in their approach to orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Attachment to this community looks more like belong, behave, believe rather than believe, behave, belong (where the initial entry into and highest value of a community is doctrinal agreement).

The Vineyard in Shoreline calls this distinction the difference between a “practicing church” and a “traditional church.” VCC claims to care more about what their community *does* than the details of what the individuals within their community *believe*. Kindness is more important than being right. While this faith community doesn’t allow specific doctrines to determine if individuals are in or out, they *do* value Christian doctrine. And, this community does have beliefs (doctrine) that unite them. They hold steadfastly to a Trinitarian understanding of God, while maintaining a Christocentric approach to incarnational and relational ministry. Additionally, they place a high value on the continuing story of God (as witnessed to in Scripture) in which they find themselves firmly anchored. Finally, they combine kingdom theology and charismatic practices with social justice values.

As a “practicing church,” VCC stands in opposition to what the church experienced in the later Reformation – the age of argument. Where Zwingli and Calvin reacted to Luther and developed and forwarded their own ideas (and

eventually denominations) on baptism, Eucharist, styles of worship and other secondary doctrines,⁶⁹ VCC seeks to be a “big tent” that can hold the varied doctrinal details of individuals while remaining united in praxis. As a pastor of VCC, I am not very interested in one’s personal baptismal preferences – but, I am very concerned with how you intend to serve the poor. VCC does not hold to (and rarely even discusses) doctrinal identity markers to provide a sense of who we are in contrast to any other denomination.

⁶⁹ For the mainline denominations of our day and their historical counterparts, the points of disagreement all lay within the realms and boundaries of acceptable orthodoxy – because individuals who fell outside of orthodoxy on issues of primary importance were deemed heretics. Hence, the characterization of “secondary” doctrines. For instance, SPU’s School of Theology faculty represents no less than five distinct denominations. Yet, all respect the other and consider them to be brothers and sisters in Christ. And, at the same time, each holds tightly to their own convictions on issues of infant baptism, the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the liturgy, etc. Certain doctrines allow for a variety of understandings while remaining orthodox – these are “secondary” doctrines.

Chapter 5: context/(form + mode + content)= Application

The program of catechesis at VCC will resemble a pilgrimage, with guides and pilgrims exploring together. As a result of the initial process of integration, newcomers to VCC may be chosen for invitation to formal catechesis. This “program” begins with relationship, knowing each other’s stories as lives are lived together. Each course meets for 12 weeks. Each of those meeting seeks to incorporate the building of relationships, self-examination in the realm of the lifestyle befitting a follower of Christ, scripture, doctrine, and the development of virtues. Pilgrims meet together every Wednesday night with their guide and begin an open discussion by asking themselves and each other “did you lead a good life this week?” Following this time, scripture will be explored in the development of basic doctrine that is relevant to a typical day. Each evening is built on the frame of Love, Hope, or Faith.

Integration

The system of Integration at VCC begins with regularly scheduled “Newcomers’ Lunches.” These short meetings (following the morning worship meeting) offer information on VCC and its mission, but the focus is listening to each other and the sharing of our stories. In the weeks following this lunch, each participant is visited by the catechist. Together, based on the individual’s personal journey and life experience, they determine the best course of action represented by one of two tracks.

The more spiritually mature, grounded in their beliefs and application through the love of neighbor, are invited to a “New Members Class.” This class lasts

three weeks and consists of more sharing – the individuals’ (both leaders and new members) personal stories and the story, specific vision and mission, and programs of VCC. The particulars of this class fall outside the scope of this current project, but it borrows content and style from the lengthier program of full catechesis.

Newcomers who have just recently begun their journey or perhaps have gotten lost during or taken an extended break from their journey are invited to a 12 week formal catechesis. The determining factors in this decision are threefold: the individual’s understanding of basic doctrine (as outlined below); an understanding and evidence of a commitment to love God through loving others; and, a desire to be rooted in a faith community.

The System of Catechesis: “Faith, Hope and Love... but, the greatest of these is Love.”

As pilgrims accept the invitation to formal catechesis, two things must happen. First, a qualified catechist must be willing and able to act as a guide for the full 12 weeks.

This commitment includes meeting with catechumens outside of the Wednesday night meetings because the guide not only leads the weekly meetings but also acts as an informal sponsor for each catechumen. Realistically, a single guide can handle no more than five pilgrims at a time and this limit should be strictly enforced.

Secondly, the pilgrims are made aware of the seriousness of their involvement. The 12 week program is not intended to be approached half-heartedly and full participation and attendance is expected.

The framework for catechesis at VCC is 1 Corinthians 13:13 (my paraphrase):

“For now there are faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.” The

substance of each week's meeting is structured according to these three virtues. Because this is catechesis for a practicing church, rooted in orthopraxy, we begin with Love and stay there for the first three weeks. The second three week segment looks at Hope – demonstrated in the Kingdom of God, justice, and eschatology. The final segment uses the rubric of faith to discuss obedience, works, and what we confess as demonstrated in the earliest creed. Every fourth week, the pilgrims participate in the Dinner With Friends ministry at VCC. Participation consists of simply sitting down and having dinner with some of the working poor, immigrant families, and economically marginalized in our neighborhood. As we learn and explore the theory of a virtuous lifestyle epitomized by loving God through the love of our neighbors, we put our learning to practice.

Weekly content is built with the intention of demonstrating this basic principle: scripture determines doctrine that results in lifestyle. As often as possible, the content is rooted in a specific scriptural pericope. Lists of disembodied, proof texted memory verses are avoided in favor of seeing scriptural texts within their larger contexts. The guide needs to display how a single text of scripture can be read, understood, and applied. This process brings exegesis and mimesis out of the realm of the “professionals” and into the everyday lives of the pilgrims. The apostle Paul interpreted Israel's scripture with a great deal of creativity and freedom in order to help listeners recognize and place themselves within God's continuing story.⁷⁰ Likewise, the guide will exercise the full measure of their creative story-telling skills when interacting with scriptural texts.

⁷⁰ Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations*, 29.

This program of catechesis relies on certain “Rules of Engagement” to manage discussions and protect the emotional welfare of all participants. These rules pertain to how individuals should act within the larger group – not only in catechesis, but all discussions at VCC. They are intended to help the catechist guide the group and call them back to attention using explicit norms the group has previously agreed upon. The rules are as follows:

1. The truth will set us free... first, it will embarrass us, but then it will set us free
2. Listen with ATTENTION
Speak with INTENTION
Contribute for the sake of the WHOLE
3. What is said here, stays here

*Weekly Meeting Outline*⁷¹

The following represent loose lesson plans for each week in a 12 week program. These are path markers designed to keep the group moving towards a goal, not outlining each step. It is imperative for the guides to remember that they are on a journey along with a group of less experienced pilgrims – not marshaling a forced march. The program begins with love and ends with the creed. It always will. However, the path from beginning to end more than likely looks different with every cohort, every guide, and each offering.

⁷¹ See Appendix 1

Love

Week 1: "But..."

The opening conversation should be extended during the first week to help pilgrims get to know each other and begin to feel comfortable sharing freely. An introduction to the format and idea of "faith, hope, and love" is needed. Include "the rules of engagement." Separate this community "business" with a break and then come back ready for content. But... the greatest of these is love, so we begin with love. The love of Jesus is made manifest in kenosis. This text will serve several functions. First, it makes it explicit that we love because Jesus loved. Secondly, it describes what this love is to look like and what characteristics accompany it. Lastly, and most importantly, this text invites us to discuss the very nature of Jesus and the nature of the Trinity. In this way, both the sacrifice of Jesus and the Trinity are introduced as ways to live, not just doctrine.

1 Corinthians 13:13

1 John 4:8

Philippians 2:1-11

Week 2: "The Greatest Commandment"

The focus of the evening is the commandment to "love God and love each other" from Luke 10. This commandment will lead the group down two different paths. First, will be the interplay between the love of God and the love of other. We will look at the importance of loving others as a way of loving God along with other ways that we can "display" love towards God. The second path is the notion of commandment in the Old Testament. This will be a history lesson about the early days of the Israelites. It will include discussion around the ideas of a God who

commands, and the God of the Old Testament in (non) opposition to the God of the New Testament as seen in Jesus. Finally, we will examine how the story of Scripture influences our actions and how the commandment God gave to the Israelites as his people is the same commandment he gives to us as his people.

Luke 10:27
Deuteronomy 6:5
Leviticus 19:18

Week 3: "How do we love? What does it actually look like?"

Dissect 1 Corinthians 13 and it's list of virtues that are understood as characteristics of "love." This will be a springboard into an understanding of who we are to be as Christians, what our lifestyle is intended to look like. In discussion, use each virtue to push against what our society and culture believes individuals should do in particular situations. In example, how should men respond in the face of challenge or threat? Do we believe that gentleness is of value? Is gentleness synonymous with passivity?

1 Corinthians 13

Week 4: Listening

Before engaging at Dinner With Friends, take 20 minutes to teach on the basics of active listening: body posture; ask questions; do not interrupt; positive reinforcement; probing and focusing (tell me more). Follow up the experience with debriefing on two levels: the mechanics of listening and the experience of being with the poor.

Hope

Week 5: the Kingdom of God

Look at the complete 9th chapter of Matthew. When Jesus “proclaimed the good news of the kingdom,” he said the kingdom was at hand, it was *already here*. But, Jesus was a homeless man who was executed. He had no kingdom. Look at all of chapter 9 and view the interactions and actions of Jesus as the Kingdom’s presence. What, then, does the Kingdom look like? Forgiveness of sin, physical healing, calling of the marginalized, religious freedom, raising the dead, the blind see and the mute speak. Where these things are happening, the Kingdom of God is there. What is Jesus’ final action in this chapter? He has compassion and desires more workers to lead his sheep (see chapter 10 very quickly). Pilgrims need to understand how to see the Kingdom and where they are seeing it. Then, they need to understand that Jesus has called them to be a part of that. They continue the ministry of Jesus. They usher in the Kingdom.

Matthew 9

Week 6: Justice

The theme is simple: because of the justice of the Lord, even the brokenhearted, weak and oppressed have hope. When the Spirit of the Lord is “on” us, this is the work that is done. God’s work is justice. Look at the words of Jesus in Luke. Make a list of the people that Jesus desires justice for. First, talk about what justice would like for them (Jesus gives clues) and then find examples of these same people in our daily lives. When the text from Luke is compared to the texts from Isaiah, use that

opportunity to teach on the prophetic tradition of the Jews. This should include history *and* a short primer on how to read the prophets.

Luke 4:18,19

Isaiah 61:1-4, 58:6-9

Week 7: Eschatology, the theology of hope

Eschatology is a difficult topic. Even those who have been newly introduced to Christianity have a strong sense of understanding “dying and going to heaven” because it is part of the Western mythos. Secondly, the scriptural witness can be confusing at times, resulting in many varied Christian eschatologies. This meeting should focus on the *hope* of eschatology – that is to say the looking forward to, the expectation, the confidence that in following Jesus there is a future that is better than the present. In this conversation, the guide should not only *not* be afraid to, but purposefully should confess to the ambiguity and tension surrounding this topic. It isn’t something to run away from, but something to hold as an example of the freedom we have. Using 1 Peter, highlight the relationship between love, faith and hope. This text can lead into an explanation of “epistles” – what they are, why they were needed, who the key players were. This should also be an opportunity to introduce Paul – even though he is not the author of this letter.

1 Peter 1:3-9

Week 8: A Good Question

Before engaging at Dinner With Friends, take 20 minutes to teach on the structure and content of a good question: open ended; focuses on emotions not facts; don’t fear silence; the answers guide your conversation. Follow up the experience with

debriefing on two levels: the mechanics of good questions and the experience of being with the poor.

Faith

Week 9: Obedience

Take a cue from the opening discussion and look for examples of obedience during this past week. Talking about those, use them as a bridge to exemplify how we show our faith, or our belief, by acting based on the promises God has made to us. Some of these promises may be first hand, some may be through the church, a lot will be through scripture. We “see” the word of God, we have faith in it, and we act accordingly. This is called “obedience.” Secondly, take this opportunity for an extended telling of the story of Abram including how God chose a people and blessed them so that they would be a blessing. Introduce all the Patriarchs and Matriarchs. Take this story all the way to Moses. As Paul uses a story from Genesis to make his point in Romans, it becomes obvious that his doctrine is based on Scripture. This is another point to highlight.

Genesis 12:1-4, 15:2-6
Romans 4:1-3

Week 10: Works – A Living Faith

This week serves two purposes. First, to reinforce the idea of orthopraxy understood as works by James. To some degree, this is at the heart of a practicing church. The guide must help the pilgrims make the connection that the love they determined to live out in the first week of catechesis is an expression of their *faith*,

their belief that God is good and trustworthy. This text will also serve to introduce the notion of sin and provide a working definition for the group. This evening will end with corporate confession and absolution, complete with detailed explanation that will empower the pilgrim to incorporate confession into their personal journey.

James 2

Week 11: Creed

For the final classroom type experience, we will engage with the creed from

Apostolic Tradition:

I believe in the only true God, the Father, the Almighty, and his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior with his Holy Spirit, the giver of life to everything, three in one substance, one divinity, one Lordship, one kingdom, one faith, one baptism, in the holy catholic apostolic church, which lives forever. Amen.

(Apostolic Tradition 21.12)

The pilgrims begin by creating their own creed – what are the doctrine and principles they have learned during the last 10 weeks that they feel are foundational and basic. Introduce the Creed line by line and compare it to the creed the pilgrims created. Look at the differences, discuss, and educate. It is important for the guide to refrain from lapsing into technical jargon. The creed should be explained and illuminated in relation to the content of previous weeks. By using the earliest creed, links can be made from the catechesis and baptism of the New Testament Church to the contemporary life of VCC. This also allows for short church history survey.

Week 12: Emotional Presence

Before engaging at Dinner With Friends, take 20 minutes to teach on the basics of emotional presence: listening to your body; appropriate reinforcement, not reacting; empathetic listening; sitting with the discomfort of unresolvable issues. Follow up the experience with debriefing on two levels: the mechanics of emotional presence and the experience of being with the poor.

Conclusion

This project was birthed out of a need in my pastoral ministry: how does a practicing church (while honoring the varied doctrinal details held by individual congregants within while uniting them in orthopraxy) train, form, and shape new Christians? Engagement in catechesis is essential. And, for those in my tribe – the practicing church and the neo-Pentecostal Free Church in North America – catechesis is no longer optional. My brothers and sisters in denominations and traditions ranging from the Orthodox and Roman Catholic to Lutheran, Reformed, and beyond are at this very moment training and shaping followers of Christ using their inherited and established systems of catechesis. The purpose of this project is not to question or critique their practices, but to shape an alternative that is appropriate, applicable, and implementable in a practicing church.

In the development of catechesis, the practicing church needs to take seriously its role of *forming* Christians. Followers of Christ are meant to be known by what they do.⁷² To follow Christ is to pursue a life of virtue, action, and practice – because of our theology and doctrine as understood through our scriptures. From the beginning, we (the Christian church) have believed that faith is something one does. The training of Christians cannot be limited to doctrinal statements of belief. As leaders of the church, we must discover (and rediscover) methods of instruction and training that reunite our people’s minds with their hands and feet.

In order to do this, pastors and congregational leaders need to engage the formation of their communities with creativity – either by breathing new life into

⁷² See John 13:35, Titus 1:16, James 1:22, James 2:17, or the book of Acts.

the implementation of their denominations' existing traditions or by establishing their own models. Creativity does not preclude tradition. To the contrary, as demonstrated in this project, the analysis and understanding of history is essential to the advancement and development of the church's praxis. Before leaders and teachers can communicate imaginatively, they must be solidly grounded in the roots of the material. A commitment to approaching catechetical tasks with inventiveness is a commitment to understanding the history of the church, its theology, and doctrine. With a little research, endeavors into creative pedagogy blossom. The "traditions of the church" became everyday practices owned and performed by leaders and laity alike. The imaginations of our communities are awoken as we are empowered to *be* the church, understanding what we do today as a continuation and an expansion of tradition – i.e., the Spirit that dwelled in the church of Acts inspired the thought and practices of the Reformation thinkers and will inhabit the activities of my local community next weekend.

Catechesis for a practicing church finds its roots in the catechesis of the historical church. In the development of this catechesis I have studied what has come before, gleaned the fundamentals, and creatively applied them in a way that works for my context. I have defined catechesis as an established program of formation and instruction for believers of shallow faith who seek initiation into and continued belonging to a Christian community. The goal of this catechesis is to develop a Christian lifestyle made visible in the developed practice of the three most important virtues (faith, hope, and love). These can only be rightfully understood through the application of basic doctrine grounded in Scripture, resulting in the type

of knowledge that forms the type of character that results in action. The mode and style of an affective catechesis will embrace the metaphor of pilgrimage with guides (not technicians) journeying with pilgrims as they engage in intuitive, affective, responsive modes of thinking and knowing Christian doctrine, holy scripture, and a Christian lifestyle.

The development of this catechesis, the culmination of my work, is not the *telos* of this project. The clarion call is for pastors and leaders to unite action with belief, creatively forming followers of Christ who will engage their world, transforming it while they are transformed themselves. Catechesis for a practicing church is the research based, historically grounded answer to the pastoral need in my community. But, it should not end with VCC. This program can be easily adapted and implemented in other contexts and pastors and leaders can repeat the process as they work to find answers for their specific ministerial needs.

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Appendix 1

Topic	Focus	Secondary	Scripture
Love			
<i>"But..."</i>	The "greatest" is the easiest to forget. We love as Jesus did, kenotically and in community (like the Trinity).	The work of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity.	1 Corinthians 13:13 1 John 4:8 Philippians 2:1-11
<i>"The Greatest Commandment"</i>	The interplay between the love of God and the love of other. We will look at the importance of loving others as a way of loving God along with other ways that we can "display" love towards God	"Commandment" in the Old Testament. History lesson about the early days of the Israelites, Exodus to Judges	Luke 10:27 Deuteronomy 6:5 Leviticus 19:18
<i>"How do we love? What does it actually look like?"</i>	Dissect virtues Describe, determine, or define a Christian lifestyle	Societal norms that do not fit within a Christian lifestyle	1 Corinthians 13
Dinner With Friends <i>Listening</i>	The basics of active listening	Debrief the experience of being with the poor	
Hope			
<i>Kingdom of God</i>	What does the Kingdom look like? Forgiveness of sin, physical healing, calling of the marginalized, religious freedom, raising the dead, the blind see and the mute speak. Where these things are happening, the Kingdom of God is there.	We are the workers Jesus desires. We continue the work of the Kingdom.	Matthew 9
<i>Justice</i>	When the Spirit of the Lord is "on" us, God's work of justice is done. Examine who justice is for and what it looks like.	The Jewish Prophetic tradition and "how to read the prophets"	Luke 4:18,19 Isaiah 61:1-4, 58:6-9
<i>Eschatology</i>		The role of epistles in the New Testament and introduction to Paul	1 Peter 1:3-9
Dinner With Friends <i>A Good Question</i>	Structure and content of a good question	Debrief the experience of being with the poor	
Faith			
<i>Obedience</i>	We show our faith, or our belief, by acting based on the promises God has made to us. This is called "obedience."	Abram and the other Patriarchs – especially God's covenant.	Genesis 12:1-4, 15:2-6 Romans 4:1-3
<i>Works – A Living Faith</i>	The orthopraxy of a practicing church	Sin	James 2
<i>Creed</i>	Pilgrims will create a creed, based on what they have learned to this point. This creed will be used to highlight foundations in the Creed.	Catechesis and baptism of the New Testament church.	Apostolic Tradition
Dinner With Friends <i>Emotional Presence</i>	Basics of remaining present to a conversation		