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## That Your Education May Be Complete: Implementing the Bishops' Curriculum Framework in Continuity with the Christian Teaching Tradition

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*While the U.S. Bishops' Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework provides robust content guidelines for a national high school Religion curriculum, its successful implementation will depend largely on concurrent development of, and training in, pedagogy suited to Christian education. This paper directs educators to existing catechetical documents that provide some general methodological guidance as well as to several time-tested pedagogical insights gleaned from the writings of ancient and modern Christian educators. The final section applies these insights from the tradition to current efforts to implement the bishops' Framework in order to provide educators with a starting point for the elaboration of pedagogical methods called for by the bishops.*

The publication of the U.S. Bishops' *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework* in 2008 (referred to hereafter as the *Framework*; United States Council of Catholic Bishops, 2008) marked the opening of a tremendous opportunity for the reinvigoration of religious education in our nation's Catholic high schools. Yet, despite this opportunity, it should perhaps come as little surprise that the *Framework* has met with some criticisms and resistance from Catholic educators. While some of those criticisms have been fairer than others, these educators' concerns draw attention to the potential pitfalls to be navigated in implementing the *Framework*. Given the great potential for change, it is imperative to reflect at this crucial moment upon the aims and methods of Christian education so as to implement the *Framework* in a way that contributes to, rather than distracts from, these aims. This paper offers such a reflection by first situating the bishops' *Framework* within the context of recent Church teaching on catechesis. Next, the analysis will look more broadly at the Christian catechetical tradition, gleaning some classic ancient and modern texts for insights concerning Christian pedagogy that might be used to develop further the general pedagogical guidelines outlined in official Church documents. Finally, the study will explore where the *Framework* supports such pedagogical development and where educators will need

to draw upon the pedagogical guidance of the tradition in order to ensure that implementation of the *Framework* results in a genuinely Catholic high school education.

### Recent Catechetical Context

Archbishop Blair (2005) has observed that due to new approaches to catechesis in the years following Vatican II, “many of those being catechized were no longer learning the content of the faith in a way that they could or would remember” (p.1). The research of sociologist Christian Smith (2005) and a recent Pew Forum Survey (2008) corroborate Blair’s assessment. As they became aware of this deficiency, the Church’s leadership took a number of steps to stem the tide of doctrinal ignorance, beginning with the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992) and followed by the revised *General Directory for Catechesis* (1998) and *The National Directory for Catechesis* (2005). The bishops’ *Framework* represents the most recent initiative within this ongoing effort to provide more substantive catechesis to form students such that they not only know but also celebrate, live, and pray the faith (*General Directory for Catechesis*, 1998, para. 84). To this end, the *Framework* aspires not only “to form the content of instruction” for high-school age youth but also “to be a vehicle for growth in one’s relationship with the Lord” (United States Council of Bishops, 2008, p. 1).

One criticism of the bishops’ *Framework* has been that it is pedagogically deficient (O’Malley, 2009; see McBride, 2009 for a response). This criticism is not entirely fair considering the *Framework* does not claim to be a pedagogical text and explicitly calls for further development of pedagogy by publishers, teachers, and catechists (United States Council of Bishops, 2008, p.1). Furthermore, even though the *Framework* defers to educational specialists in this matter, Church leadership does not deprive educators of methodological guidance. In setting forth the core content for a doctrinally sound high school Religion curriculum, the *Framework* presupposes *The General Directory for Catechesis* (1998) and *The National Directory for Catechesis* (2005), which point toward the sort of pedagogy necessary for the effective transmission of this content. Chapter II of Part Three of *The General Directory for Catechesis* (1998), for instance, expounds several elements of methodology (adapted in Chapter 4 of *The National Directory for Catechesis*, 2005), including:

- *Diversity of methods*—The Church commits to no particular method but

rather adopts whatever methods do not contradict the Gospel and suit the particular catechetical context.

- *Interrelatedness of method and content*—The appropriateness of a method is determined by the content of catechesis, its sources and language, and the particular circumstances of the audience.
- *Inductive and deductive method*—Presenting the meaning of facts as they relate to divine Revelation (inductive) and vis-à-vis their natural causes (deductive) are both acceptable means of communicating the faith.
- *Human experience*—Human experience must be continuously drawn upon in its catechetical functions, which include provoking questions and motivation, making the Christian message more intelligible, and manifesting salvation.
- *Memorization*—Knowing by heart the principal formulae of the faith and biblical texts forms a constitutive aspect of the pedagogy of faith.
- *Role of the catechist*—The educator’s Christian qualities and mediating presence are essential in ensuring the salutary use of other educational tools. On a related note, *The National Directory for Catechesis* (2005) highlights the importance of “learning by apprenticeship” (pp. 104-5).
- *Activity and creativity of the catechized*—Active participation of students is in harmony with the economy of Revelation and salvation and should therefore be encouraged. Remarks in the *The National Directory for Catechesis* (2005) about “learning by discipleship” (pp. 98-99), and “making a commitment to live the Christian life” (p. 104), likewise emphasize the importance of students acting upon what they learn from their teachers.
- *Community*—When proposed as a source, locus, and means of catechesis, the community becomes a foundational point of reference for individuals’ faith journeys.
- *Importance of the group*—Working in groups not only creates the opportunity for witness but also provides an experience of community and ecclesial life.
- *Social communication*—Given the proliferation of social media in our time, the use of such media for catechetical purposes is imperative for reaching today’s youth.

When these methodological guidelines are observed alongside the content guidelines of the *Framework*—i.e., when pedagogy as well as content reflects Catholic values—Catholic education has the greatest chance of achieving “the definitive aim of catechesis,” namely, “intimacy with Jesus Christ” (United

States Council of Catholic Bishops, 2008, p. 1; cf. John Paul II, 1979). Even still, the bishops do not presume that this general methodological guidance is sufficient. *The General Directory for Catechesis* (1998), *National Directory for Catechesis* (2005), and the *Adaptation of Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework* (2010), which the bishops no doubt wrote with critiques of the *Framework's* pedagogy in mind, all reiterate that the Church endorses no particular method and entrusts publishers and educators with the task of developing the pedagogical methods best suited to their audiences. In the words of the *General Directory*, “It will be necessary to elaborate with care that the pedagogical method which is most appropriate to the circumstances of an ecclesial community or of those to whom catechesis is specifically addressed” (*General Directory for Catechesis*, 1998, para. 18). This elaboration of pedagogy is the primary task for which educators will be responsible as they implement the bishops’ *Framework*.

With this end in mind, the remainder of the paper will examine several characteristics that have traditionally defined Catholic pedagogy, explicating why each is essential to formation of students in faith. Given the constraints of this paper, I will focus my examination on five pedagogical characteristics that predominate across ancient and modern educational texts, leaving it to educators to further examine those guidelines already made explicit in *The General Directory for Catechesis* (1998) and *National Directory for Catechesis* (2005). In this way, I hope to offer an initial elaboration of pedagogical method of the sort called for by *The General Directory for Catechesis* from which other Catholic educators can further develop the methodology that will best suit the needs of their particular learning communities.

## Characteristics of Christian Pedagogy in the Early and Modern Church

### I. Scriptural

St. Jerome’s (1963) assertion, “ignoratio scripturarum, ignoratio Christi est,” warns of the risk involved in teaching the faith divorced from Scripture (p. 1). Inspired authors and great Christian educators have consistently turned to Scripture in order to help their audiences make sense of Christ and of themselves. One early (second century) example is the *Didache*, or *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (1996), which, in addition to making some 69 references and allusions to Scripture in only 189 lines, also borrows its dominant motif of the “two ways” from Deuteronomy 30:15–20. The early dating and authority attributed to this text testify to the central place of Scripture in Christian teaching

from its beginning.

This scriptural-mindedness is no less evident as one looks to the latter part of the second century and Clement of Alexandria. Commenting upon Clement's text entitled *Paidagogos*, or *Christ the Educator* (1954), translator Simon Wood notes:

There are copious quotations from Old and New Testaments, constant allusions and turns of thought too numerous to be noted. And for Clement, Scripture is the final appeal; when he says, as he often does: *grapherai* ('it is written'), he is invoking authority from which he feels there is no appeal. The Alexandrian school may have stressed Christian philosophy, but it is a philosophy drawn from the pages of Scripture. (p. xi)

Scripture underlies Clement's thought and argumentation, forming his understanding of how God instructs His children, and filling out his view of what it means to live a Christian way of life. There is no doubting the centrality of Scripture for this great pedagogue and for his catechetical school in Alexandria, the most highly regarded of his time.

Looking to the fourth and fifth centuries, one recognizes the continued importance of Scripture in the teaching of the Church's great pedagogues as, for example, in the *Logos katechetikos*, or *Address on Religious Instruction*, of Gregory of Nyssa (1954). As with Clement, Scripture thoroughly saturates Gregory's thinking such that, even though *Logos katechetikos* was written largely in dialogue with Greek thought, the worldview ultimately conveyed can only be described as scriptural. The questions he engages (e.g., why God assumed human nature and why not all believe) and the responses he offers reflect the mindset of his Greek interlocutors, yet if one pays careful attention one will observe that hardly a page goes by that Gregory does not allude to some passage of Scripture. We see much of the same in St. Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* (1996). In reading *De doctrina*, it appears a foregone conclusion for Augustine that the proper method of teaching Christianity is instruction on Scripture. He offers no justification for this pedagogical decision in the prologue, yet the entirety of this book dedicated to teaching the faith is occupied with the interpretation and instruction of others in Scripture.

With the rise of medieval scholasticism and then the manual approach to theology in the modern era, this focus on Scripture was sometimes obscured. Nevertheless, the twentieth century Ressourcement movement led by theolo-

gians like Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar as well as the kerygmatic movement initiated by Josef Jungmann began to draw the Church's catechetical center of gravity back to its rightful place. This renewed emphasis is reflected in *The National Directory for Catechesis* (2005), which declares Scripture, along with tradition, the "principal source of catechesis" (p. 53).

## II. Teacher-Dependent

As researchers and educators have sought desperately to identify the causes of the education crisis in our country, one factor in particular has emerged as the single greatest predictor of students' academic achievement—the quality of the teacher (Rice, 2003). Even without the benefit of modern sociological research methods and analysis, the importance of the teacher was evident to early Christians. *The Didache* (1996), for example, draws attention to the correlation between one's conduct and how one's teaching ought to be received, warning, "And every prophet who teaches the truth, but does not do what he teaches, is a false prophet" (xi.16). St. Augustine (1996) similarly warns, "But whatever may be the majesty of the style, the life of the speaker will count for more in securing the hearer's compliance" (iv.27). Such reflections highlight the great burden placed on educators by the visibility of their office. At the same time, this responsibility is accompanied by a unique power. Relationships between teachers and students are the texts where students see written most vividly the truth of Christianity.

Theologian Yves Congar (1964) captures the essence of this unique power in his reflections on the transmission of Church tradition:

Education does not consist in receiving a lesson from afar, which may be learnt by heart and recited, thanks to a good memory, but in the daily contact and inviting example of adult life, which is mature, confident and sure in its foundation, which asserts itself simply by being what it is. (p. 26)

A crucial point brought out here by Congar is the necessity of Christian educators, as witnesses of faith, possessing a "mature, confident" understanding of the tradition. We see a similar emphasis on understanding in Augustine's *De doctrina* (1996). "It is plain we must set far above these the men who are not so retentive of the words, but see with the eyes of the heart into the heart of Scripture" (iv.5). Obviously it is best that a teacher both memorizes and un-

derstands what he or she teaches, but the essential thing is the understanding. No matter how much information teachers memorize, they are unlikely to lead their students to faith if they do not manifest the truth of the Christian faith on a personal level. Pope Paul VI (1975) put it poignantly when he stated, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (p. 41).

Josef Jungmann (1962) offers another insight concerning why it is so important for teachers to possess a profound understanding of the faith. Although the context of his words pertains most specifically to the priest, they ring just as true for the lay teacher when he says that he "should acquire an intellectual steadfastness by his own work of testing and acquiring information so that, as a herald of God's word, he may worthily proclaim that message amid the present welter of opinions," adding that he "should acquire from his study of speculative theology... *a greater capacity of adjustment* to the needs of his hearers" (pp. 31-32). Students are constantly exposed to a barrage of views and truth claims outside of school walls. Teachers must, therefore, understand Christian beliefs well enough to respond to all the various questions and concerns students bring into the classroom from the outside and to show them why those beliefs in particular embody the truth most fully.

Given the need for such flexibility and creativity in the classroom, one can appreciate the high degree of skill exhibited by teachers who are able to effectively form their students in the faith. This is why Jacques Maritain (1971) declares, "Teaching is an art; the teacher is an artist" (p. 30). By this he does not mean to suggest that all is improvisation, but rather a combination of science and craft that depends upon who the teacher is and how the teacher enters into relationship with his or her students. As Thomas Groome observes (1991), the tremendous responsibility placed on Christian educators demands their full intellectual, personal, and spiritual commitment. Groome writes, "these sentiments cannot be developed and maintained by academic study alone. Educators have that responsibility but also need to pray and live their way into ever deepening personal appropriation of the richness of Christian tradition" (p. 245). This is why *The General Directory for Catechesis* (1998) devotes a full chapter to formation of catechists, which includes formation in faith and community as well as in knowledge of Church teaching. The implication is that, while non-Christians can certainly further students in their intellectual and faith formation, it is the authentic Christian who provides the most authentically Christian education.



### III. Student-Centered

When the Church speaks of transmitting the faith from one generation to the next it uses the term “tradition,” meaning “handing on.” This word choice is apt in that it brings to light the interpersonal nature of this transmission. It is not a matter of an individual pouring information into a passive receptacle or shaping a formless mass. It is a “handing on” in which one reaches out to give and another reaches out to receive.

Clement (1954) suggests such consideration for the learner in observing that Christ first “persuades men to form habits of life” (1.2). Persuasion, as opposed to coercion, implies a respect for the agency of those instructed. The initial move is not to impose demands or beliefs, but rather to appeal to the free will of the student. This same respect for the instructed features in Augustine’s writing (1996), where he insists all teachers of Scripture must “teach, delight, and persuade” (iv.27). While he acknowledges the importance of the teacher, Maritain (1971) notes that “the principle agent in education...is the internal vital principle in the one to be educated; the educator or teacher is only the secondary” (p. 31). Bernard Lonergan (1993) in his lectures on philosophy of education highlights the necessity of preparing adolescents for the inevitable “intellectual crisis” during which they reject the values that have been imposed on them from their youth in an attempt to assert themselves (p. 101). In Lonergan’s mind, educators do students a disservice if they do not “prepare them to go through this period in which they become their own masters” (p. 101). Building on the work of his predecessors, Groome (1991) emphasizes the importance of engaging people as “agent-subjects—in our personal ‘aliveness’” (p. 86). For Groome (1991), engaging someone in a learning experience as an agent-subject means engaging all of that individual’s cognitive, affective, and volitional capacities.

In addition to recognizing students as rational agents, the imperative of addressing the particular needs of each individual emerges clearly in the Christian teaching tradition. Nyssa (1954) prescribes, “we must adapt our method of therapy to the form of the disease” (p. 268). Augustine (1996) likewise says of the interpreter and teacher of Scripture, “it is his duty to win over the hostile, to stir up the slack, to point out to the ignorant what is at stake and what they ought to be looking for” (iv.4). I have already commented upon Gregory’s method of beginning from the students’ questions in order to lead them to Christian truth. Augustine similarly advises teachers of Scripture to anticipate the questions their students might ask, adding the caveat that teachers ought

not to take on “something we cannot dispose of” (iv.20).

Some of our modern authors suggest that an essential part of recognizing the agency of students is respecting the means by which we all understand ourselves and our world. Jungmann (1962), for example, advises that, rather than presenting the doctrines of the faith in the sort of “ontological order” more appropriate to academic theology, it is better to arrange the material with consideration for the psychology of the student (p. 34). Maritain (1971) likewise enjoins, “the teacher has further to comfort the mind of the pupil by putting before his eyes the logical connections between ideas which the analytical or deductive power of the pupil’s mind is perhaps not strong enough to establish by itself” (p. 31). Groome (1991) helpfully suggests that when students bring their own “stories” (i.e., their own questions and experiences) into dialogue with the Christian story, they are able to appropriate it on their own terms (by which we should not understand that students pick and choose the aspects of Christianity that they find personally congenial). Jungmann (1962), Maritain (1971), and Groome (1991) thus all echo the insight of the early Church’s great pedagogues that in order for students to truly understand the Gospel they must claim it for their own. As argued in *The General Directory for Catechesis* (1998), “the recipient [of education] must be an active subject, conscious and co-responsible, and not merely a silent and passive recipient” (para. 67).

#### iv. Holistic

Hinted in what has been said here concerning the roles of teacher and student is that Christian education is not a strictly intellectual affair. The Church’s constant vigilance against such gnosticism is evident today in its schools, which often vaunt slogans about educating the whole person; educating the heart, body, and mind, etc. These slogans stand upon millennia of tradition. The teachings of Clement (1954) argue that the culmination of Christian education is not knowledge but action in the service of the Lord. Indeed, “the deed of the Christian soul is the work of its reason accomplished” (xiii.102). Likewise, Augustine (1996), for all his emphasis on interpreting Scripture rightly, recognizes that even knowledge of Scripture is not the end in itself. He notes that “a man who is resting upon faith, hope and love, and who keeps a firm hold upon these, does not need the Scriptures except for the purpose of instructing others” (1.39).

The same desire for an education that goes beyond the intellectual is evident in the writings of modern educators. Jungmann (1962) sets as his goal “a

vital consciousness of the faith...of paving the way to an ever more intense participation in the life of the Church” (p. 165). This vital consciousness “involves us in the thousand and one ramifications of economic, political and civic life, as well as those of science, art and education,” in short, “on the furthest reaches of human activity” (pp. 161-2). In a similar vein, Maritain (1971) describes education as “a human awakening” (p. 9). Because he regards education as an endeavor pertaining to the human being holistically conceived, Maritain (1971) insists that all academic disciplines, unified by the wisdom of God, contribute to this awakening. Lonergan (1993) for his part insists upon the need for education to counteract the specialization and fragmentation that characterize modernity. To these dehumanizing trends he opposes the educational aim of fostering in students “a real apprehension of the human good in all its dimensions,” the fruit of which is “being themselves before God” (p. 102). Groome (1991) otherwise encapsulates this aim of a fully integrated, fully actualized person in the term “conation” (alternatively, “wisdom”). In his vision, Christian education should engage all of the human being’s capacities such that “[n]othing of our human condition should be excluded” (p. 97). Indeed, to teach students what it means to be Christian is to teach them what it means to be fully human.

This goal of actualizing our full humanity is implicit in the structure of the *Catechism*. Its analysis of Christian life into profession of the faith, celebration of the faith, moral living, and prayer helps us to understand more concretely the contours of the life “to the full” promised by Christ (Jn 10:10). Correspondingly, *The General Directory for Catechesis* (1998) acknowledges the need for diverse, interrelated tasks in promoting a full life in Christ—promoting knowledge of the faith, liturgical education, moral formation, and teaching to pray being primary among these (para. 84). The various articulations of aims and tasks offered in this section employ different language and categories, but the general thrust is to repeat in so many words the command God gave to His people long ago: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut 6:5).

#### v. Humble

This final characteristic is perhaps the most easily forgotten but, ultimately, the most important. Due to the complexity of the educational task, educators must draw upon all the resources available to them from the social sciences, educational theory, philosophy, theology, and elsewhere in order to ensure a quality

education for their students. Yet amidst the flurry of analyzing data, sharing best practices, and poring over journals, Christian educators need remember one thing—by the grace of God alone do we achieve our aim. There can be no doubt that Clement (1954) was aware of this fact. He writes, “That education is the training given children is evident from the very name” (v.12). And who are the children? “We are the children” (v.12). Clement carries this motif through the whole of the work, making clear that even the most learned of us is never more than a child in the eyes of God, dependent on our Educator for guidance and well-being (III.9). Augustine (1996) similarly reminds us, “None of us, though, should claim our understanding of anything as our very own, except possibly falsehood” (Prologue, 8). If some light of truth scatters the darkness of our thinking, this can only be a gift from God. Even the teacher (and perhaps the teacher especially) should take counsel that “so far as he succeeds, he will succeed more by piety in prayer than by gifts of oratory...who knows what it is expedient at a given moment for us to say, or to be heard saying, except God who knows the hearts of all?” (IV.15)

Maritain (1971) strikes the same chord. He puts the role of schools into perspective, observing that education is a lifelong process. In his view, “no illusion is more harmful than to try to push back into the microcosm of school education the entire process of shaping human beings” (p. 25). More realistically, the role of formal schooling amounts to two simple tasks: (1) “to avoid deforming or wounding [the students] by pedagogical blunders,” and (2) “tilling the soil” of morality (p. 27). Ultimately, one’s moral perfection is not achieved by submitting to a school or university but rather by letting “yourself be led by Another where you did not want to go” (p. 36). Groome (1991), too, affirms such an understanding of educators’ limitations. Admitting that God alone bestows faith, he asserts that it is the humble task of educators to “make accessible and nurture people in the specificity of [the Christian community’s] faith tradition” (p. 18). Archbishop Miller (2006) puts it even more simply: “Christ is the Teacher in Catholic schools...Catholic schools have the task of being the living and provocative memory of Christ” (p. 26). The wisdom of the tradition thus speaks resoundingly on this point—though God calls us to bring all our talents, energy, and resources to bear upon this important task, the goal of intimacy with Himself is one that God alone can bring to fulfillment.

### **The Profit and Potential Pitfalls of Implementing the Bishops’ *Framework***

Though the above survey makes no pretensions of comprehensiveness, the

texts that I have been able to gloss within the space allotted speak consistently to the sort of pedagogy to be expected of Catholic schools—pedagogy that is scriptural, teacher-dependent, student-centered, holistic, and humble. In this final section of the paper, I will identify a few areas in which the bishops' *Framework* supports pedagogy embodying these characteristics and the more numerous areas in which educators will need to make a more concerted effort to retain these characteristics as they implement the *Framework* in their respective learning communities.

### I. Scriptural

As evidenced in the writings of all the educators cited above and especially for early Christians like Clement, Gregory, and Augustine, Christianity simply cannot be taught apart from Christian Scripture. Scripture provides the language through which educators pass on the faith and the lens through which they help their students to see the world. If teachers stray from Scripture, their lessons run the risk of becoming severed from the texts that give Christian doctrines and principles their life and meaning. The bishops' *Framework* clearly acknowledges the importance of Scripture. It places a Scripture course first in the recommended sequence of courses, establishing study of Scripture as the cornerstone of the curriculum. The course sequence as a whole follows the ordering of the *Catechism*, which derives from the narrative of salvation history contained in Scripture. Furthermore, the *Framework* makes some provision for training students how to interpret Scripture responsibly in addition to knowing about its contents (United States Council of Catholic Bishops, 2008, p.3.). In this manner, the *Framework* provides a source for the biblical language and worldview to be employed by teachers in presenting the faith.

Despite these merits, the *Framework* in itself is insufficient to guarantee a robust formation in Scripture. Though the contents of the *Framework* derive from the *Catechism*, which is utterly saturated with and guided by Scripture, educators will have to make these connections with the *Catechism* and Scripture explicit in order to ensure that students develop genuine biblical literacy. By way of illustration, the Course I outline presumes the narrative of the Old Testament, and, therefore, lacks explicit guidelines for teaching its contents (e.g., mention of specific Old Testament books or even specific covenants). To neglect treatment of the Old Testament is to risk eclipsing the narrative of how God prepared His people for salvation and presenting students with an abridged version of salvation history. Given that the Course I outline devotes

less than one page to the actual contents of the Bible, educators will have to draw material from elsewhere in the *Framework*. Course III, “The Mission of Jesus Christ,” offers a more adequate sketch of salvation history that, if integrated with Course I, would afford students a more complete view of the import and scope of the events of the Old Testament. Educators might also consider either making Elective A, “Sacred Scripture,” a required course or integrating this fuller treatment of Scripture into Course I. The *Framework* leaves much to be done in terms of helping students grasp the full Christian narrative necessary for making sense of themselves and the person of Christ. In order to achieve this end, educators will have to (1) set forth explicit guidelines for treatment of biblical elements not mentioned in Course I of the *Framework* and (2) develop pedagogical techniques for drawing students into the world of Scripture. If such work is not done, we risk producing a generation of students likely to perpetuate the stereotype of Catholics as ignorant of Scripture.

## II. Teacher-Dependent

A significant finding of Smith’s (2005) study of adolescent religiosity is the correlation between teens’ religious devotion and positive relationships with adults (parents especially, but also with other adults in their faith community). The writings of Christian educators examined in this paper corroborate Smith’s conclusions—students’ relationships with religiously committed adults play a major role in their faith formation. Teachers occupy an especially privileged position in this dynamic. They provide students with a living witness to the faith and facilitate the day-to-day growing process by a thousand subtle actions and adjustments that could never be anticipated or scripted by a teacher’s manual or catechetical document. The bishops’ *Framework*, in delegating matters of pedagogy to publishers, catechists, and teachers, acknowledges the special competence of religious educators in this matter. It should thus be clear that successful implementation of the *Framework*, like that of any learning tool, will depend heavily upon the quality of educators using it. The bishops have provided in this document a helpful doctrinal basis for unifying and substantiating religious instruction in our nation’s Catholic schools. The second and equally important step in revitalizing Catholic education will be training and/or recruiting a workforce of teachers equipped with the pedagogical skills needed to facilitate students’ meaningful integration of the *Framework’s* content.

Patrick Tiernan, former department chair for religious education at Boston College High School, has offered some concrete suggestions for the sort of

pedagogical techniques needed to give life to the content of the *Framework*. As a preliminary, Tiernan (2010) emphasizes collaboration among teachers (especially in the early stages of implementation), the insufficiency of teaching from textbooks alone, and the value of integrating the goals of one's school with those of the *Framework* when developing courses. He recommends articulating student learning goals in terms of "action verbs" (e.g., analyze, synthesize, evaluate) and incorporating alternative instructional strategies such as Socratic seminars, jigsaw cooperative group activities, and reflective writing. Given the capacity of these techniques for promoting higher-level thinking, the recruitment and/or training of teachers capable of and willing to implement such pedagogical methods will greatly facilitate the *Framework's* goal of helping students develop "the necessary skills to answer or address the real questions they will face in life and in their Catholic faith" (United States Council of Catholic Bishops, 2008, p. 1).

### III. Student-Centered

As they go about their work, educators must remain ever cognizant of the inherently relational nature of Christian education and of the agency of the students they teach. Essential to the task is leading (not coercing) students into a relationship with God, a fact testified to by the likes of Clement, Augustine, and Maritain and by the *Framework*, which establishes "intimacy with Christ" as its primary goal (United States Council of Catholic Bishops, 2008, p. 1). Since relationship is not something that can be provided by a document, the bishops demonstrate due prudence in deferring to publishers and educators in matters like adapting the curriculum guidelines to particular student needs.

Some educators have already pointed out where work remains to be done on this front. Fr. William O'Malley (2009) criticizes that the *Framework* is "pedagogically counterproductive" in that it presumes a level of faith among students that might have existed 50 years ago but is not there any longer (p. 14). To be sure, the research of Smith (2005) and of the Pew Forum (2008) confirms O'Malley's assessment of the disposition of today's youth. Given the allergy of many youth to Church authority and the general milieu of plurality that characterizes modern culture, O'Malley (2009) seems right to say that an "inflexibly 'top-down,' perceptive, rigorously certain" approach to religious education is the antithesis of the sort of student-centered approach necessary for fostering genuine faith in today's students (p. 14). In this sense, it is true that the *Framework* is not laid out in a way that is conducive to engaging

teenagers in the modern context. On the other hand, as Fr. Alfred McBride (2009) points out, O'Malley's criticism overlooks the fact that the *Framework* does not purport to be a pedagogical text. While not particularly congenial to student-centered pedagogy, the *Framework* not only leaves open the possibility for the development of better pedagogy but explicitly calls for it.

O'Malley's criticism gains most traction when applied to the "Challenges" section at the end of each course outline. As mentioned above, the *Framework* aspires to help young people develop the skills necessary to address real-life questions and challenges to the faith, an aim most evident in these "Challenges" sections. Despite the bishops' efforts to anticipate such questions and challenges, any document such as this will inevitably be limited in its ability to address all the concrete challenges faced by American youths. It thus falls to teachers and catechists to bring the general guidance of the Church into dialogue with the particular questions and concerns of their students. This can be a difficult task, one that requires teachers to possess both a deep understanding of the faith (Jungmann, 1962) and the capacity to be all things to all people (Augustine, 1996). It also means helping students to think for themselves, in which regard O'Malley's plea that philosophy be retained in the curriculum appears sage advice.

#### iv. Holistic

In light of his research, Smith (2005) concludes that, though the majority of teens say religion is important to them, when pressed they are unable to articulate why or how it relates concretely to their lives (p. 129). As noted above, such a divide between religion and "real" life would have been inconceivable for early Christians and for great teachers like Clement, Nyssa, and Augustine. The *Framework* suggests that the U.S. bishops are aware of this troubling divide and are taking steps to bridge the gap. Again, the primary way the bishops support a pedagogy that is conducive to this end is calling upon publishers and teachers to develop the *Framework* in a way that will help students to make connections between their faith and other areas of their lives. In addition, though its genre appeals most naturally to the cognitive dimension, the *Framework* does take some steps toward engaging students in liturgy, personal prayer, and world affairs (e.g., in Elective C). In this way, the bishops gesture towards a pedagogy that educates the whole person— affective and volitional dimensions in addition to the cognitive—as recommended by educators like Augustine (1996) and Groome (1991). Notwithstanding, it is outside the pur-



view of such a document to make all such necessary connections itself.

Consequently, implementation of the *Framework* in a manner conducive to holistic formation of students in the faith will depend in great part upon Catholic schools and teachers. School administrators should seek to follow the guidance of Maritain (1971) and Lonergan (1993) by integrating their curriculum, activities, and relationship to the wider community so as to manifest the interconnectedness of the faith with all aspects of life. Again, in this respect O'Malley (2009) is right to advocate for the traditional place of philosophy and the humanities in Catholic education. Teachers, for their part, ought to aspire to promoting the sort of “vital consciousness of faith” spoken of by Jungmann (1962) or “wisdom” described by Groome (1991). They must go beyond textbook definitions and help students to see how Catholic teaching bears upon and illumines every aspect of their lives. In keeping with the teaching of Clement (1954), they should guide students toward a total existential commitment—i.e., toward a life of Christian service—through the development of their minds.

#### v. Humble

Awareness of one's limits is no less essential in this task today than it was when Augustine advised fourth century catechists that they succeed in handing on the faith more by virtue of their prayers than by personal gifts or effort. The bishops recognize the limits of the *Framework* by requesting the help of educational specialists in further development of the curriculum. Their call for further development should make it clear to all educators that the *Framework* is not a tool for direct instruction and certainly not a panacea for the challenges facing Catholic educators in this country. While providing guidance for safeguarding the orthodoxy of the faith in religious instruction, the document (like every new tool or theory) also presents the temptation of thinking that faithful presentation of its contents will guarantee the faith of students. Though fidelity to the teaching of Christ's Church is essential, educators cannot expect their students to have faith without themselves remaining open to God working in their midst. This is why Groome (1991) limits the role of teachers to making the tradition accessible to students and Maritain (1971) to preparing the way for subsequent moral development.

Speaking concretely, teachers ought to pray with their students and otherwise witness to the faith alive in them—faith that is evident in the worldview they evince as they teach, in the passion they show for the tradition, and in their treatment of students and colleagues. In addition, even as they adhere

to the standards of orthodoxy delineated in the document, teachers must be willing to take certain measured risks by asking and entertaining difficult questions and occasionally venturing forth from the neatness of the *Catechism* into the messiness of lived experience, demonstrating how each illuminates the other. It is in just such moments that students tend to be most attentive and therefore most likely to experience genuine growth in faith. Such ventures always involve some risk, yet it is in these moments (though not only these) that we can allow the Holy Spirit to work in our midst. Part of the humility of the educational task is realizing that the most important thing we do as educators is to allow God to work on our students in this way.

### Conclusion

At the close of this paper I would once more draw attention to the great opportunity presented to Catholic education in our nation by the publication of the bishops' curriculum *Framework*. In this moment, Catholic educators across the country have been encouraged and empowered to reexamine their practices and refocus their goals. To this end, the bishops have provided invaluable guidance concerning what should be taught in Catholic schools in order to ensure a genuinely Christian education. However, the *Framework* largely defers concerning the specifics of how to go about that teaching. This act of subsidiarity should not be mistaken for a claim that orthodox content is sufficient for forming students in the Christian faith. Quoting *Dei Verbum*, *The General Directory for Catechesis* (1998) clearly asserts, "This economy of Revelation [of which catechesis is a part] is realized by deeds and words, which are intrinsically bound up with each other" (para. 8). The *Framework* seeks to ensure that the words Catholic teachers speak echo those of the Master Teacher, but it also calls upon them to mirror His deeds in their teaching. How precisely to embody this divine pedagogy through the best modern teaching strategies and techniques is the primary task to be addressed by educational professionals in implementing the bishops' *Framework*. I have endeavored to draw out in these pages some guidelines from recent Church documents and from the broader Christian tradition concerning the sort of pedagogy to be developed. It is my hope that as Catholic educators move forward in this process they will seek methodological guidance from the General and *National Directory for Catechesis* as well as from the wider tradition of Catholic intellectual thought and ensure that the pedagogy they develop from those sources bears the marks that have consistently characterized the Church's teaching tradition—scriptural,

teacher-dependent, student-centered, holistic, and humble.

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