

Catechumenal Methodology

A Workshop by Rev. Mark Wilson

NAAC Conference 2001 (Santa Fe)

The presenter began by referring to the five characteristics of the postmodern era as outlined in Karen Ward's first presentation at the Conference. She summarized that postmodernism reflects a movement from (a) dogma to deconstruction, (b) reason to intuition, (c) progress to pessimism, (d) creed to community, and (e) commitment to choice. The presenter observed that three of these features, (a), (b), and (d), are reflected in a good catechumenal methodology.

Using Handout 1, he observed that

- (a) formation in the Christian life is centred not in ideas but in taking on a new way of life in the image of Christ;
- (b) formation in the Christian life involved a behavioral change, as evident in the passage from Ephesians. Early Christians were often faced with finding a new profession if they were involved in the making of idols or in teaching (which was largely centered in mythology).

In a series of five handouts, the presenter looked at these features of a catechumenate:

- Scripture Reflection: the Aural Method, or some other
- "Debriefing" the liturgical rites (especially during Mystagogy)
- Ministry in Daily Life
- Examination of Conscience
- Examination of Consciousness
- The Baptismal Covenant
- Rule of Life

Handout 1

Information → Formation

“Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds That is not the way you learned Christ! For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. You were taught to put away your former way of life, you old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

Ephesians 4:17, 20-24; 5:1-2

“I have said it before, I say it now, and I shall say it again and again: unless a person has corrected the defects of his character and has developed a facility for virtue, let him not be baptized The bath takes away the sins, but you must correct the habit.”

Saint John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions*, c. 390 AD

Reflection Upon Experience

“The pedagogical method is one of experience followed by reflection. The learning journey invites persons to hear the Word in Scripture, to engage in ministry, to receive the sign of the cross on the forehead, to hear the Lord’s Prayer, to experience the water of baptism and the laying on of hands, and to share the bread and cup at the Lord’s table, and so to discover the connections to what God is doing in daily life.”

Dan Benedict, *Come to the Waters*, page 60

Some Tools:

- Scripture Reflection: the Aural Method, or some other
- “Debriefing” the liturgical rites (especially during Mystagogy)
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Handout 2

Choosing Healthy Rhythms of Life

Here are some practical questions to consider in formulating a personal rule that fits who you are and where you are in your life right now. Review these, and choose to reflect on the questions that “call your name.”

1. How do I currently live my spiritual life? (You can be honest; there’s no one to fool but yourself.)
2. What is satisfying about my spiritual life?
Unsatisfying or frustrating?
3. What has been most helpful to me in the past?
Is it still helpful, or does my way of prayer or service (or some other practice) seem to be changing? If so, how?
4. What particular practice(s) do I feel especially drawn to right now? (It may be something classic, or perhaps quite unconventional: baking, chopping wood, playing with children.)
5. Where do I need balance in my life?
What would it give to me?
6. What would being more open to God look like?

What would help me with this?
7. What would being more faithful to God look like?
What would help me with this?
8. What would help me focus my life on what is most important spiritually?

*Adapted from material used by Marjorie Thompson
at Saint George’s, Nashville, March 7, 1999*

Handout 3

A Form for Examination of Consciousness

- ❑ Gather the week. Identify the ten or twelve major events of your week, including prayer, particular conversations, meetings, meals, work, and planned or unplanned occurrences. List them in your journal.

- ❑ Review the week. Reflect upon each occurrence listed. Recall what was happening within you, what you were feeling, and how you were reacting or responding. This is the actual substance of your daily life.

- ❑ Give thanks for the week. Thank God for each part of your week, for your life, for the lives of others who were part of your week, and for God's presence in your week. Celebrate the particular gifts you received in the expected and unexpected occurrences that enriched your week.

- ❑ Confess your sin. Acknowledge your faults in thought, word, and deed toward God, neighbor, creation, and yourself. Name the times when you feel you may have ignored subtle promptings or warnings of the Spirit.

- ❑ Seek the meaning of the events. Reflect on the underlying significance of each event. Ask yourself such questions as: What is the theme of the week's events, gifts, and challenges? Where did Jesus experience something similar and how did he respond? What is God saying to me or inviting me to learn? What am I being called to do? Write down what comes to mind.

This form is based on Ben Campbell Johnson's in his book, *Invitation to Pray*. There are many others. It is a way of reflecting on our experience of the day or week and cultivating an awareness of God's presence.

“As the catechumen journeys from inquiry to baptism, there is formation of an ability to discern God's activity in the events of one's life.”

Handout 4

An Aural Method of Experiencing Scripture (The African Model)

Three important principles govern this method of experiencing scripture:

- Confidentiality is always strictly observed. Whatever is said in the group of a personal nature is not to be repeated outside the group. It is not even a topic for subsequent conversation with the individual involved. “What is said here, stays here.”
- Participants are free to “pass” at any time if they cannot think of a response or do not wish to share it.
- When a person is speaking to the group, the group simply listens with no response. No one is to discuss what someone else has said, though sometimes another person’s response may trigger a similar thought.

Step 1. Each person shares his or her experience in the area of prayer since the previous session. (For the first session, begin with Step 2).

Step 2. A person appointed reads the passage slowly. Before the reading, allow a minute or so of silence as the leader reminds people to listen for the word or phrase that catches their attention.

Step 3. Participants take a minute to recall in silence the word or phrase that caught their attention.

Step 4. Beginning with the leader, each person says the word or phrase with the group (no more than just a word or phrase).

Step 5. Someone else reads the passage (opposite sex of first reader).

Step 6. Participants think about: “Where does this passage touch my life today?” (3-5 minutes of silence)

Step 7. Each person shares these: “For me,”

- Step 8. Someone else reads the passage out loud again.
- Step 9. Participants think about: “From what I have heard and shared, what does God want me to do or be this week? How does God invite me to change?” (3-5 minutes)
- Step 10. Each person to share these: “For me,” Leader reminds the group that each person will pray for the person on their left, naming what they share in this Step, so they will want to listen carefully and remember any specifics the person names.
- Step 11. Ask each person to pray for the person on their left, naming what was shared in Step 9, and to pray that prayer daily until the group meets again. (Or a general form prayer; for example, “Christ, may your blessing go with _____. Fill her/him with your love and grace.”)
- Step 12. Say the Lord’s Prayer together.

For variety, the following questions may be used:

- After the first reading, “What does this reading say to you about God?”
- After the second reading, “What does this reading say to you about who you are?”
- After the third reading, “What do you hear God asking you to do or be this week?”

*One of the Bible or lectionary study guides contributed by the members
of the North American Association for the Catechumenate.*

www.catechumenate.org

Handout 5

Benefits of Long Term Use of the Aural Method

- We learn to listen to the Scriptures in a certain way
- We learn to articulate our own struggle with God's call
- We learn to listen attentively to other people
- We become accustomed to silence
- We learn to pray for one another
- We learn to keep confidences
- We experience Christian community as we become companions to one another on our journeys