

Catholic Hymnody at the Service of the Church: An Aid for Evaluating Hymn Lyrics

USCCB Doctrine Committee

Expressing concern for the doctrinal soundness of lyrics of some Catholic hymns now available for use in Catholic liturgies, the U.S. bishops' doctrine committee suggested guidelines for bishops in evaluating hymn lyrics and for selecting hymnals being considered for use in churches. The committee document identified six areas of particular concern, a principal one being the treatment of the Eucharist. It warned that "a steady diet" of doctrinally deficient hymns "would erode Catholic sensibility regarding the fullness of Eucharist teaching, on the Mass as sacrifice and eventually on the church as formed by that sacrifice." The report discussed several areas of doctrinal deficiency in some contemporary hymns and suggests two guidelines in "determining whether a hymn is doctrinally suitable for liturgical use": "Is the hymn in conformity with Catholic doctrine?" and "Is the hymn expressed in image and vocabulary appropriately reflective of the usage of Scripture and the public liturgical prayer of the church?" The report focused on six key deficiencies in some current hymns: the presentation of eucharistic doctrine; the presentation of Trinitarian doctrine; deficiencies in the doctrine of God and his relation to humans; "hymns with a view of the church that sees her as essentially a human construction"; "hymns with doctrinally incorrect views of the Jewish people"; and "hymns with incorrect Christian anthropology." The committee singled out specific hymns that it said are doctrinally deficient. The report was dated September. It follows.

Preface

The beauty of Catholic hymnody is constitutively related to the truth of the mystery of faith it proposes for our wonder and praise. In the living tradition of Catholicism, beauty and truth are convertible terms and thus there can be no competition, much less contradiction, between the two. The truth of

the faith need not be — and indeed must not be — compromised or subordinated to the canons of compositional style or the needs of musical or poetic form.

At the same time, the beauty of the faith cannot be neglected — indeed it must be revered and highlighted — in the desire to communicate effectively the truth of what has been revealed. Catholic hymn writers and composers necessarily inhabit a realm of creative interplay: They have the privilege and vocation of honoring and communicating the mystery of faith in word and music and this requires genuine artistry, industry and fidelity.

While there are a number of factors that affect the suitability of hymns for use in Catholic liturgy such as singability, beauty of language, poetry, etc., in this resource we are concerned with their doctrinal content.

The church's liturgy is the milieu in which the word of God lives. The sacred Scriptures in particular provide the normative idiom for the expression of the mystery. The Scriptures themselves, inspired and authoritative, are the fruit of the church at prayer; the liturgical or doxological matrix intrinsic to the church's life is the locus in which and from which the texts privileged as canonical arose.

There is a necessary and direct relationship between the living Word of God and the church's worship. Thus, the sacred texts and the liturgical sources which draw on the living Word provide something of a "norm" for expression when communicating the mystery of faith in liturgical poetics or hymnody.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it this way, following the texts of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*:

"The harmony of signs (song, music, words and actions) is all the more expressive and fruitful when expressed in the cultural richness of the people of God who celebrate. Hence 'religious singing by the faithful is to be intelligently fostered so that in devotions and sacred exercises as well as in liturgical services,' in conformity with the church's norms, 'the voices of the faithful may be heard.' But 'the texts intended to be sung must always be in conformity with Catholic doctrine. Indeed they should be drawn chiefly from the sacred Scripture and from liturgical sources'" (No. 1158).

Christian tradition, both Eastern and Western, has from antiquity been acutely aware that hymns and other songs are among the most significant forces in shaping — or misshaping — the religious and theological sensibility of the faithful.[†] It is all the more important, then, that hymnody select-

which has not only caused a global pandemic and led to a huge loss of life but has also placed a great burden on health care workers and systems.

Each of us has a duty to protect others from infection with its danger of serious illness and, for some, death. A vaccine is the most effective way to achieve this unless one decides to self-isolate.

At present, debate concerns the use of the vaccines developed by Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna and AstraZeneca. Some have questioned the use of the Astra Zeneca vaccine since it has been developed from cell lines originating from the cells of an aborted fetus in 1983.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pontifical Academy of Life have expressed the view that one may in good conscience and for a grave reason receive a vaccine sourced in this way, provided that there is a sufficient moral distance between the present administration of the vaccine and the original wrongful action.

In the COVID-19 pandemic, we judge that this grave reason exists and that one does not sin by receiving the vaccine.

Both the Pfizer & BioNTech and Moderna vaccines have a different source since they are mRNA-based vaccines. On Dec. 2, 2020, the Pfizer & BioNTech vaccine was approved for use in the U.K.

Each Catholic must educate his or her conscience on this matter and decide what to do, also bearing in mind that a vaccine must be safe, effective and universally available, especially to the poor of the world.

Catholics may in good conscience receive any of these vaccines for the good of others and themselves. In good conscience, one may refuse a particular vaccine but continues to have a duty to protect others from infection.

ed for the liturgical life of the church successfully draw out the beauty of the Christian mysteries themselves.[†] This cannot be done if language is used that is out of keeping with the sensibility created by scriptural texts and universal liturgical usage.

Two General Guidelines

Based on the text quoted above, we can derive two general guidelines for determining whether a hymn is doctrinally suitable for liturgical use:

1. Is the hymn in conformity with Catholic doctrine?
2. Is the hymn expressed in image and vocabulary appropriately reflective of the usage of Scripture and the public liturgical prayer of the church?

With regard to Guideline 1: An accurate assessment of conformity with Catholic doctrine requires a familiarity with Catholic doctrine itself, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church is the best resource available. Hymns do not have to be composed of doctrinal formulas (though hymns have used doctrinal formulas to good poetic effect, for example, the last verse of *Pange Lingua*).

It is important to avoid language that could be easily misconstrued in a way that is contrary to Catholic doctrine. The poet always has a certain license for language chosen to serve an aesthetic purpose. But in assessing whether a paraphrase or restatement is an appropriate use of poetic license or an inappropriate distortion, Guideline 2 can provide assistance.

These guidelines can also be helpful in assessing a grouping of hymns and other songs such as those commonly used in a given parish for the Communion hymn (for example). Different hymns may legitimately express or reflect different aspects of one doctrine, but if all of the hymns relevant to a particular doctrine express only one dimension of the doctrine to the exclusion of others, then the catechesis offered by the hymnody would, as a whole, not be in conformity with Catholic doctrine.

(For example, a collection of hymns that emphasized the Eucharist as table fellowship to the exclusion of the vocabulary of sacrifice, altar and priesthood, would not represent the fullness of Catholic teaching) and therefore would catechize those singing such

hymns every Sunday with a deficient sacramental theology.

Examples of Application of the Guidelines

In 1997, Archbishop Daniel Buechlein, speaking for the newly formed Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism, identified a consistent trend of incompleteness and imprecision in catechetical texts being published at that time in the United States. He summarized this trend in a list of 10 categories (see Appendix 1 below).

Contemporary hymnody seems to have fared better than the catechetical texts Archbishop Buechlein's committee examined and in some cases (such as No. 2) dramatically better. But since contemporary hymnody and contemporary catechetical texts evolved to some extent together, it can be useful to use this list of 10 imprecisions to alert a bishop, pastor or liturgical music minister to deficiencies they may find in hymns or in a collection of hymns as a whole.

From our own reading of approximately 1,000 hymns composed and published mostly in the period 1980-2015, we would advise pastors and liturgical music ministers to be especially attentive to the following categories of potential deficiencies:

1. Deficiencies in the Presentation of Eucharistic Doctrine

a. This deficiency, by far the most common and the most serious, corresponds to No. 7 in Archbishop Buechlein's list, "inadequate presentation of the sacraments." Since the Eucharist is the "source and summit of the Christian life" (*Lumen Gentium*, 11), deficiencies in eucharistic doctrine affect other teachings such as the church (because "the Eucharist makes the church," CCC, No. 1396) and the priesthood (because the priest effects the sacramental presence of the sacrifice of Christ the High Priest).

Catholics nurtured on a steady diet of certain hymns will learn from them that at Mass we come together to share bread and wine, which remain bread and wine, a common meal, even if under special circumstances. They will learn that the bread and wine signify in some vague way the presence of Jesus, but they will not be given a basis to

understand the Catholic belief that the eucharistic elements can be worshipped because under their appearance is a wholly unique, substantial presence of Christ.

These hymns correspondingly also downplay or eliminate entirely reference to the sacrifice of Christ, his priesthood and his status as both priest and victim as well as to the role of the ministerial priesthood in the church. A steady diet of these hymns would erode Catholic sensibility regarding the fullness of eucharistic teaching on the Mass as sacrifice and eventually on the church as formed by that sacrifice.

b. Catholic teaching on the Eucharist is summed up in the Catechism, Nos. 1322-1419; Appendix 2 provides a summary account useful for assessing hymn lyrics with regard to the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, a distinctive and unique presence.

c. Eucharistic doctrine has developed and depends upon a high degree of precision of language. For example, Christ is not present "in" bread and wine, but rather the substance of bread and wine ceases to exist as such and Christ is substantially present under the appearance of bread and wine. Hymn lyrics do not have to reproduce technical language, but they should be guided by the customary usage of Scripture and liturgical tradition. This would mean:

i) Language that implies that the elements are still bread and wine after consecration should be avoided.

ii) Language that implies the bread and wine, still bread and wine, are merely symbols of another reality or person should be avoided.

iii) Poetic license should conform to customary usage of Scripture and liturgical tradition.

Bread, Bread of Life, etc., are scriptural synecdoches for the Eucharist itself and so are permitted; however, *wine* is not used in the same way and to call the consecrated element wine gives the impression that it is still wine. This, in turn, has an impact on the way the word *bread* is heard, so that legitimate uses of the word *bread* are heard differently, not as a synecdoche for the Eucharist as a whole but as a reference to the element which remains bread. Scripture speaks of the cup, not of wine (see 1 Cor 10:16, 17).

d. Examples:

i) "God Is Here! As We His People"¹ — This hymn speaks of "symbols to remind us of our lifelong need of grace." We hear that "as bread and wine are taken, Christ sustains us as of old." Bread and wine are still bread and wine.

ii) "Now in This Banquet."² — "Now in this banquet, Christ is our bread; Here shall all hunger be fed. Bread that is broken, wine that is poured, love is the sign of our Lord." "Bread that is broken" is scriptural, but when this phrase is paired with "wine that is poured," both become indications of simple bread and wine. There is no scriptural language that calls the Eucharist, outright, wine. The hymn singer receives the impression that the wine is still wine and that this is a banquet where love is the sign and Christ, in some spiritual sense, is our bread.

Catholic usage has bread and wine as the "signs" under whose appearance Christ's sacrificial love is substantially present. Love is not the sign but the reality. Again, the image is that of the Eucharist as a spiritual banquet with ordinary food, bread and wine. The words offer no hint that the Mass is the sacrifice of Christ re-presented.

iii) "All Are Welcome."³ — "Let us build a house where love is found in water, wine and wheat; a banquet hall on holy ground where peace and justice meet." The image of the Eucharist is of an ordinary banquet where one drinks water and wine and eats wheat bread. Further, water is not on the same level as bread and wine as matter for the Eucharist and to list them in sequence therefore only increases the implication that we are at a banquet eating ordinary food together.

There is nothing else in the hymn to mitigate this impression. Someone who sings this song frequently would have a hard time imagining that the Eucharist can be and is worshipped or is in any sense a sacrifice. The hymn is also objectionable throughout on ecclesiological grounds as well, since it repeats the phrase let us build a house as though our actions make the church.

This hymn shows the relationship between faulty eucharistic theology and faulty ecclesiology. As the catechism says (see above), "The Eucharist makes the church," and this idea is intimately connected with the Eucharist as

re-presenting the sacrifice of the cross which makes the church. This song therefore exhibits deficiencies Nos. 3, 5 and 7 from Archbishop Buechlein's list.

iv. "Let Us Break Bread Together on Our Knees."⁴ — Verse 2: "Let us drink wine together on our knees." Here, too, the reference to wine is used in a way that indicates only the presence of ordinary wine.

v. Some eucharistic hymns, both new and old, without these deficiencies: "Ave Verum Corpus," "Taste and See," "You Satisfy the Hungry Heart," "Seed Scattered and Sown," "I am the Bread of Life," "One Bread One Body," "Eat This Bread," "Look Beyond," "At That First Eucharist," "O Sacrament Most Holy," "O Salutaris Hostia," "Adoro Te," "At the Lamb's High Feast" (uses the word *wine* but in a way that makes it clear that it is not wine but Christ's blood), etc.

2. Deficiencies in the Presentation of Trinitarian Doctrine

a. These deficiencies correspond to tendency No. 1 on Archbishop Buechlein's list, especially as he explains that these deficiencies often result from "a reluctance to use *Father* for the first person of the Trinity."

b. Use of the guidelines here would involve:

i) Avoiding language that implies God has "parts" (since the substance of God is undivided).

ii) Avoiding doxologies or Trinitarian invocations that mix words that designate relations (i.e., that designate the persons, who are distinct in relation and relation only) with other kinds of predication that can apply to all three persons equally. For example, *Creator* can apply to all three persons, while *Father* and *Son* apply uniquely to the two persons designated by these relational names.

iii) Adherence to the language of the baptismal formula as the "default" mode, since departing from it frequently implies that the formula is arbitrary and optional, whereas this language is essential for the valid administration of baptism.

iv) Use of masculine pronouns for God and for each person of the Trinity, in accordance with *Liturgiam Authenticam*, No 31.

v) Substituting *Lord* for the name

Yahweh (the sacred Tetragrammaton), in accordance with *Liturgiam Authenticam*, No 41.

c. Examples of Application:

i) "The Play of the Godhead."⁵ — Verse 1: "With God the Creator and Christ the true Son, entwined with the Spirit, a web daily spun." Because of reluctance to use the word *Father* this is an example of the use of a word (*Creator*) that can apply to all three persons mixed with words (*Son* and *Spirit*) that designate unique relations. It implies, therefore, that the first person is God and the others are not. This is Arianism, however unintentionally. According to Catholic doctrine, the Son and the Spirit are equally "God the Creator."

ii) Other instances are relatively commonplace; for example, one contemporary setting of both the Magnificat and the Benedictus ends with the doxology, "All Glory be to God, Creator blest, To Jesus Christ, God's love made manifest and to the Holy Spirit, gentle Comforter, all glory be both now and evermore." This doxology looks even more Arian than the first, because "God, Creator blest" stands in an ambiguous relationship at best with "Jesus Christ" and "Holy Spirit."

In fact, both could be called "God, Creator blest," but this doxology makes it look as if they are less than "God, Creator blest."⁶

iii) "Led by the Spirit."⁷ — Verse 4: "Led by the Spirit, now sing praise to God the Trinity: the source of life, the living Word made flesh to set us free, The Spirit blowing where it will to make us friends of God": *Source of Life* is applicable to all three persons and in particular to the Holy Spirit, who is confessed in Catholic usage as "Lord and giver of life." This doxology is therefore most ambiguous. Is the Word God? What relation does he have to "source of life"? This doxology, in trying to avoid both *Father* and *Son* language, in effect deconstructs the Trinity into three names whose status, except for the first, is ambiguous at best and who seem unrelated. We are very far from the baptismal formula here.

3. Hymns with Deficiencies in the Doctrine of God and His Relation to Humans

a. Catholic doctrine regarding God is that "he transcends the world and

history" (Catechism, No. 212) and yet has revealed his name in an act of self-emptying love, "handing himself over" by making his name known, though it is a name as mysterious as God is (see Catechism, Nos. 203, 206). Although God transcends all creatures, nevertheless language drawn from the perfection of creatures, while always falling short of the reality, "really does attain to God himself" (Catechism, No. 43, see No. 42).

b. This means that language which makes it seem that God is "beyond all names" is misleading and language that makes God seem in any way dependent upon human beings or any creature is incorrect.

c. Examples:

i) "God Beyond All Names."⁸ — "God beyond all names ... All around us we have known you./ All creation lives to hold you/ In our living and our dying we are bringing you to birth." This fails to respect God's transcendence. God is not dependent upon human actions to bring him into being. Furthermore, God is not "beyond all names" either in the sense of his revelation of his name or in the sense of analogical language. In the public liturgy of the church, God is not nameless, but is addressed as *Lord, Father*, etc.

4. Hymns With a View of the Church That Sees Her as Essentially a Human Construction

a. Catholic teaching about the church is summed up in the Catechism, No. 766, where it is explained that the church is born primarily from Christ's total self-gift, anticipated in the institution of the Eucharist and fulfilled on the cross and that as such she is the new Eve born from the side of the new Adam.

"Because she is united to Christ as to her bridegroom, she becomes a mystery in her turn" (Catechism, No. 772) and thus "is in history but at the same time transcends it" (Catechism, No. 770).

b. Hymns should avoid giving the impression that it is primarily our work that builds or makes the church or the kingdom of God. Tendencies Nos. 5 and 10 and to a lesser extent No. 3 from Archbishop Buechlein's list are what is at stake here.

c. Examples:

i) "Sing a New Church."⁹ — Refrain:

"Sing a new church into being, one in faith and love and praise." This implies or even states outright that the church is essentially our creation. It also leaves open the possibility that there could be a new church replacing the old one.

ii) "As a Fire Is Meant for Burning."¹⁰ — Verse 1: "As a fire is meant for burning, with a bright and warming flame, so the church is meant for mission, giving glory to God's name. Not to preach our creeds or customs but to build a bridge of care, we join hands across the nations, finding neighbors everywhere." This seems a seriously deficient account of the evangelizing mission of the church, particularly the rejection of preaching "our creeds and customs."

5. Hymns With Doctrinally Incorrect Views of the Jewish People

a. See Appendix 4 for a summary of Catholic doctrine on the Jews and their relationship to the death of Christ. To blame the Jews indiscriminately for Christ's Passion is to ignore the doctrine that all sinners are responsible for Christ's Passion. The Second Vatican Council made it clear that "what happened in his Passion cannot be charged against all the Jews without distinction then alive nor against the Jews of today" (*Nostra Aetate*, 4). This deficiency reflects deficiency No. 8 on Archbishop Buechlein's list, an inadequate appreciation of the doctrine of original sin.

b. Application of the guidelines here will rule out hymn verses that imply that the Jews as a people are collectively responsible for the death of Christ.

c. Examples:

i) "The Lord of the Dance."¹¹ — Verse 3: "I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame. The holy people said it was a shame. They whipped and they stripped and they hung me high. And they left me there on a cross to die." The phrase *holy people*, referring to the Jews, is used sarcastically. And the whole holy people did not reject Jesus nor crucify him. Some Jews and some Romans did it. (NB: The classical "Reproaches" should not be placed in this category because the phrase *my people* can and does refer equally well to the pilgrim people of God, the church.)

ii) "O Crucified Messiah."¹² — Verse 1: "Scorned, denied and beaten, mocked and defiled, forsaken by his people,

given up to die," is simply untrue and therefore unorthodox. Jesus was not forsaken and left to die by his people as a whole. Again, Archbishop Buechlein's No. 8, on original sin, is relevant, because "all sinners are the authors of Christ's Passion" (Catechism, No. 598) means that all sinners need redemption because of original sin.

6. Hymns With Incorrect Christian Anthropology

a. This category intersects with some of the above categories, but in other cases stands alone. One or more of Archbishop Buechlein's Categories 4 and/or 8 and perhaps also 5 apply.

b. Example: "Canticle of the Sun."¹³

— Verse 6: "Praise for our death that makes our life real, the knowledge of loss that helps us to feel." Death is the punishment of original sin. Far from making our life real, it makes our life less "real" than it was in Adam. This verse teaches that death is natural and necessary for our life to have something at stake and thus be "real." In fact, it is the resurrection of Christ that makes our life "real," restoring what we had lost in Adam, and it is the Passion of Christ, not death per se, that "helps us to feel." Death is not a necessary part of human nature (see Catechism, Nos. 400, 402, 405).

Conclusion

The Second Vatican Council was quite emphatic about the importance of sacred music in the church's liturgical worship: "The musical tradition of the universal church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 112).

The council also made it clear that this great value derives precisely from the union of music and words: "The main reason for this preeminence is that, as sacred song united to the words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy" (No. 112). When the council exhorts composers to "produce compositions which have the qualities proper to genuine sacred music" (No. 121), chief among these qualities must be the use of words that are appropriate for liturgical worship.

In this document we have endeavored to identify and to reflect on the role that these words — the lyrics —

have in music intended for use in the liturgy. It is our hope that this guideline will help ensure that all the sacred music employed in liturgical celebrations will achieve its purpose, “which is the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful” (No. 112).

Notes

- * The guidelines offered in this document apply to lyrics composed for any music intended for use in the sacred liturgy or in public devotions such as the Stations of the Cross.
- † The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes the liturgy as “the privileged place for catechizing the people of God” (No. 1074).
- ‡ The July 23, 2019, report by the Pew Research Center, “What Americans Know About Religion,” presents a sobering account of the extent of the lack of understanding of basic points of Catholic faith on the part of many American Catholics (<https://www.pewforum.org/2019/07/23/what-americans-know-about-religion>). For example, the researchers found that only half of Catholics were able to answer correctly “a question about official church teachings on transubstantiation — that during Communion, the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ. The other half of Catholics incorrectly say the church teaches that the bread and wine used in Communion are just symbols of the body and blood of Christ (45%) or say they are not sure (4%)” (p. 22).
- ¹ © 1979 Hope Publishing Co.; see *One in Faith*, No. 809 (Franklin Park, Ill.: World Library Publications, 2014).
- ² © 1986, GIA Publications Inc.; see *Gather*, No. 833 (Chicago: GIA Publications, 3rd Ed.).
- ³ © 1994, GIA Publications Inc.
- ⁴ See *One in Faith*, No. 572 (Franklin Park, Ill.: World Library Publications, 2014).
- ⁵ © 2002, 2003 GIA Publications; see *Worship*, No. 552 (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2011, 4th Ed.).
- ⁶ See *Breaking Bread* 2008 (Portland: Oregon Catholic Press, 2007), Nos. 832-33.
- ⁷ © 1996. Published by Oregon Catholic Press; see *Breaking Bread* 2008, No. 119.
- ⁸ © 1990. Published by Oregon Catholic Press.
- ⁹ © 1991, Sisters of St. Benedict. Published by Oregon Catholic Press.
- ¹⁰ © 1992, GIA publications.
- ¹¹ © 1963, Stainer & Bell; see *One in Faith*, No. 631 (Franklin Park, Ill.: World Library Publications, 2014).
- ¹² © 2003. Published by OCP.
- ¹³ © 1980, GIA Publications.

Appendix 1

Archbishop Buechlein's Report on 10 Common Deficiencies in Catechetical Materials

1. *There is insufficient attention to the Trinity and the Trinitarian structure of Catholic beliefs and teachings.* Catechetical texts fail at times to present the Trinity as the central mystery of the Christian faith. The language used in referring to the persons of the Trinity contributes at times to a lack of clarity. This is most evident in the reluctance to use *Father* for the first person of the Trinity and at times to substitute *Parent God* for God the Father. Particularly, the relationship between Jesus and the Father is often weak. There are times

where the word *God* is placed in a sentence where one would expect to find *Father* or *God the Father* since the reference is precisely to the relationship between the first and second persons of the Trinity.

2. *There is an obscured presentation of the centrality of Christ in salvation history and an insufficient emphasis on the divinity of Christ.* Texts fall short at times in presenting Jesus as the culmination of the Old Testament and the fulfillment of God's plan for our salvation. The indispensable place of the Incarnation in the plan of salvation is not always sufficiently presented. Jesus the Savior is often overshadowed by Jesus the teacher, model, friend and brother. It is a question of imbalance.

Some texts do not present the mystery of the Incarnation in its fullness. Often there appears to be an imbalance in the instruction on the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ. At times, we detect a negative undertone in speaking of the divine nature of Christ, as if divinity is equated with being “distant and unreal.”

3. *Another trend is an indistinct treatment of the ecclesial context of Catholic beliefs and magisterial teachings.* Catechetical materials do not always clearly present the church as established by Christ to continue both his presence and his mission in the world. The teaching function of the church and its apostolic nature, as well as the role of the hierarchy and the concept of the leadership of bishops and priests in teaching the word of God are often undertreated. The mark of unity in the church is at times eclipsed by an emphasis on the church's catholicity and diversity.

4. *There is an inadequate sense of a distinctively Christian anthropology.* By and large the catechetical texts do not seem to integrate the fundamental notions that human persons are by nature religious, that the desire for God is written in the human heart and that the human person is inherently spiritual and not reducible to the merely material. Neither are the texts generally clear that it is precisely in Christ that we have been created in the image and likeness of God. Nor do they emphasize that Christ has restored to us the divine image of God, an image disfigured by sin. Rather, too often the impression is

left that the human person is the first principle and final end of his/her own existence.

5. *There is a trend that gives insufficient emphasis on God's initiative in the world with a corresponding over-emphasis on human action.* Texts do not adequately emphasize that human action is intended to follow upon God's action and initiative in the world. When the methodological starting point is predominately human experience, the texts leave the impression that our human initiative is the prerequisite for divine action. God's initiative at times appears subordinate to human experience and human action.

6. *We have detected an insufficient recognition of the transforming effects of grace.* The catechetical texts tend to present an inadequate understanding of grace. Rather often it is described as God's love, then not much more is said about it. That the preparation of the human person for the reception of grace is already a work of grace is not clearly presented. Grace is not generally treated as God's initiative which introduces humanity into the intimacy of Trinitarian life and makes us his adopted children and participants in his life. The texts are generally weak in treating the particular efficacy of the grace proper to the respective sacraments.

7. *We have found a pattern of inadequate presentation of the sacraments.* Catechetical texts often do not treat the sacraments within the paschal mystery, that is, the sacraments are not explicitly presented as the means by which we share in the new life of Christ through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Sacraments are often presented as important events in human life of which God becomes a part, rather than as effective signs of divine life in which humans participate. Consequently, this leads to a deficient understanding of the divine action and the graced transformation that is at the heart of each of the sacraments. Particularly, the sacraments of the Eucharist and holy orders evidence deficiency because the texts usually do not present the character and role of the ordained minister in the life of the ecclesial community.

8. *We have seen a pattern of deficiency in the teaching on original sin and sin in general.* In general, the texts

do not clearly teach that original sin is the loss of original holiness and justice transmitted by our first parents and that it wounds human nature in all people. Too often the texts do not address how the doctrine of original sin informs other doctrines, for example, grace, baptism, sin and redemption.

9. *We have found a meager exposition of Christian moral life.* At times an overemphasis on personal identity and self-respect gives the impression that these are the primary “sources” of morality. Too often the source of morality found in God’s revealed law as taught by the church and grounded in natural law are not adequately treated. Where texts could present the binding force of the church’s moral teaching in certain areas, often they do not. In addition, instruction on what is necessary for the formation of a correct conscience is either inadequately or even mistakenly presented.

10. *Finally, we have found an inadequate presentation of eschatology.* The eschatological aspect of Catholic doctrine is often underemphasized. The transcendent, transtemporal and trans-historical nature of the kingdom is not always present. The general judgment, the concept of hell and the eschatological dimensions of the Beatitudes as well as the moral and sacramental orders are not always adequately taught.

—Oral Report to the General Assembly of Bishops by Archbishop Daniel Buechlein, June 19, 1997.

<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catechism/archbishopdaniel-buechlein-report-june-1997.cfm>.

See also C.J. Schroeder (2015). “The USCCB Curriculum Framework: Origins, Questions and a Call for Research.” *Journal of Catholic Education*, 19 (1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.1901022015>

Appendix 2

Summary of Catholic Teaching On the Eucharistic Presence (Selections From the Catechism)

1. **1324** The Eucharist is the “source and summit of the Christian life” (LG, 11). “The other sacraments and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is con-

tained the whole spiritual good of the church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch” (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5).

2. **1366** The Eucharist is thus a sacrifice because it *re-presents* (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross ...; **1367** The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice* [emphasis original].

3. **1374** The mode of Christ’s presence under the eucharistic species is unique. It raises the Eucharist above all the sacraments as “the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all the sacraments tend.” In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist “the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, *the whole Christ is truly, really and substantially contained.*” “This presence is called ‘real’ — by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be ‘real’ too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a *substantial* presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present.”

4. **1376** The Council of Trent summarizes the Catholic faith by declaring: “Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly his body that he was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of the church of God and this holy council now declares again, that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation.”

5. **1378** *Worship of the Eucharist.* In the liturgy of the Mass we express our faith in the real presence of Christ under the species of bread and wine by, among other ways, genuflecting or bowing deeply as a sign of adoration of the Lord. “The Catholic Church has always offered and still offers to the sacrament of the Eucharist the cult of adoration, not only during Mass, but also outside of it, reserving the consecrated hosts with the utmost care, exposing them to the solemn veneration of the faithful and carrying them in procession.”

6. **1396** ... *The Eucharist makes the church* (cf. 766).

Appendix 3

Summary of Catholic Teaching On the Trinity

(Selections From the Catechism)

232 Christians are baptized “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Before receiving the sacrament, they respond to a three-part question when asked to confess the Father, the Son and the Spirit: “I do.” “The faith of all Christians rests on the Trinity.”

234 The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the “hierarchy of the truths of faith.” The whole history of salvation is identical with the history of the way and the means by which the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, reveals himself to men “and reconciles and unites with himself those who turn away from sin.”

255 The divine persons are relative to one another. Because it does not divide the divine unity, the real distinction of the persons from one another resides solely in the relationships which relate them to one another: “In the relational names of the persons the Father is related to the Son, the Son to the Father, and the Holy Spirit to both. While they are called three persons in view of their relations, we believe in one nature or substance.” Indeed “everything (in them) is one where there is no opposition of relationship.” “Because of that unity the Father is wholly in the Son and wholly in the Holy Spirit; the Son is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Son.”

Appendix 4

Summary of Catholic Doctrine On the Jews and Christ’s Death (Selections From the Catechism)

Jews are not collectively responsible for Jesus’ death

597 The historical complexity of Jesus’ trial is apparent in the Gospel accounts. The personal sin of the participants (Judas, the Sanhedrin, Pilate) is known to God alone. Hence we cannot lay responsibility for the trial on the

Jews in Jerusalem as a whole, despite the outcry of a manipulated crowd and the global reproaches contained in the apostles' calls to conversion after Pentecost. Jesus himself, in forgiving them on the cross and Peter in following suit, both accept "the ignorance" of the Jews of Jerusalem and even of their leaders. Still less can we extend responsibility to other Jews of different times and places, based merely on the crowd's cry, "His blood be on us and on our children!" a formula for ratifying a judicial sentence. As the church declared at the Second Vatican Council:

"Neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time nor Jews today can be charged with the crimes committed during his Passion. ... The Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from holy Scripture."

All sinners were the authors of Christ's Passion.

598 In her magisterial teaching of the faith and in the witness of her saints, the church has never forgotten that "[all] sinners were the authors and the ministers of all the sufferings that the divine Redeemer endured." Taking into account the fact that our sins affect Christ himself, the church does not hesitate to impute to Christians the gravest responsibility for the torments inflicted upon Jesus, a responsibility with which they have all too often burdened the Jews alone:

"We must regard as guilty all those who continue to relapse into their sins. Since our sins made the Lord Christ suffer the torment of the cross, those who plunge themselves into disorders and crimes crucify the Son of God anew in their hearts (for he is in them) and hold him up to contempt. And it can be seen that our crime in this case is greater in us than in the Jews. As for them, according to the witness of the apostle, 'None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.' We, however, profess to know him. And when we deny him by our deeds, we in some way seem to lay violent hands on him." ■

Message for International Day of Persons With Disabilities

Pope Francis

Marking the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, Pope Francis again insisted that all Catholics with disabilities have a right to receive the sacraments, and he suggested that Catholic parishes make real efforts to welcome and train persons with disabilities to serve as catechists. "Creating a fully accessible parish requires not only the removal of architectural barriers but above all, helping parishioners to develop attitudes and acts of solidarity and service toward persons with disabilities and their families," the pope said in his message, published Dec. 3. For the church, he said, "our aim should be to speak no longer about 'them,' but rather about 'us.'" The U.N. theme for the 2020 celebration of the international day was "Building Back Better: Toward a Disability-Inclusive, Accessible and Sustainable Post-COVID-19 World." In a throwaway culture, the pope said, "some parts of our human family, it appears, can be readily sacrificed for the sake of others" or simply pushed aside and ignored. Such an attitude "ignores the inevitable fact that frailty is part of everyone's life," he said. And, in fact, some people "with even severe disabilities, despite great challenges, have found the way to a beautiful and meaningful life, whereas many 'able-bodied' people feel dissatisfied or even desperate." To "build back better," he said, inclusion is key because "the strength of a chain depends upon the attention paid to its weakest links." The message follows, copyright © 2020 by Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

This year's celebration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities is an occasion to express my closeness to those experiencing situations of particular difficulty during the crisis caused by the pandemic. All of us are in the same boat in the midst

of a turbulent sea that can frighten us. Yet in this same boat some of us are struggling more; among them are persons with serious disabilities.

The theme of this year's celebration is "Building Back Better: Toward a Disability-Inclusive, Accessible and Sustainable Post-COVID-19 World." I find the expression building back better quite striking. It makes me think of the Gospel parable of the house built on rock or sand (cf. Mt 7:24-27; Lk 6:46-49). So I take this special occasion to share some reflections based on that parable.

1. Threat of the Throwaway Culture

In the first place, the "rain," the "rivers" and the "winds" that threaten the house can be identified with the throwaway culture widespread in our time (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 53). For that culture, "some parts of our human family, it appears, can be readily sacrificed for the sake of others considered worthy of a carefree existence. Ultimately, persons are no longer seen as a paramount value to be cared for and respected, especially when they are poor and disabled" (*Fratelli Tutti*, 18).

That culture affects especially the most vulnerable, among whom are the persons with disabilities. In the last 50 years, important steps forward have been taken on both the civil and ecclesial levels. Awareness of the dignity of each person has grown, and this has resulted in courageous decisions to promote the inclusion of those experiencing physical and psychological limitations.

Yet on the cultural level, much still stands in the way of this trend. We see it in attitudes of rejection due also to a narcissistic and utilitarian mentality that give rise to marginalization that ignores the inevitable fact that frailty is part of everyone's life. Indeed, some with even severe disabilities, despite great challenges, have found the way to a beautiful and meaningful life, whereas many "able-bodied" people feel dissatisfied or even desperate. "Vulnerability is intrinsic to the essential nature of humanity" (Oct. 21, 2017, address to the conference "Catechesis and People with Disabilities").

Consequently, it is important on this day to promote a culture of life that constantly affirms the dignity of every