

Book Review

Educating in Christ: A Practical Handbook for Developing the Catholic Faith from Childhood to Adolescence For Parents, Teachers, Catechists and School Administrators

By Gerard O'Shea (Angelico Press, 2018, 290 pages)

Following the Second Vatican Council, the universal Church has given us three significant documents on catechesis: the *General Catechetical Directory* (1971), Pope John Paul II's *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979), and the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997). The many texts on Catholic education from the Congregation for Catholic education, as well as numerous Bishops' Conferences guidelines, make up a veritable forest of documents.

Gerard O'Shea's fine new book is an important contribution to the Church's catechetical and educational mission. It is a set of signposts leading us through the documentary forest alluded to above. As the long title reveals, it is ambitious in thematic scope and intended audience. The claim to be a "handbook" is instructive but might unintentionally undersell what is: a well-argued and academically rigorous map through the many challenging features of contemporary catechesis. Dr. O'Shea succeeds in bringing together insights from wider educational thought and classic Catholic thinking on education. The text offers practical suggestions for those on the front line of catechesis. Dr. O'Shea often draws on his long experience of teaching (and parenting!) to offer something warm and personal to underpin his deep scholarship.

The book has sixteen chapters, divided into two sections: Part 1 deals with "Religious Education for the Human Person"; Part II explores "Religious Education for the Classroom." Dr. O'Shea locates his work in the tradition of Maria Montessori and the "movement" known as the *Catechesis for the Good Shepherd*, which presents catechesis for the contemporary age according to Montessorian principles. This historical/contemporary interaction, which roots the work in solid Catholic tradition, is complemented by frequent reference to ideas current in wider educational thought. The many allusions to the work of John Hattie remind us that Catholic educators are obliged as professionals to be engaged in wider scholarship. As seekers of the Truth, there is nothing to fear!

The chapter headings outline the trajectory of the work: Union with God-Our Ultimate Goal; Catechesis according to Age and Stage of Development; The Data Gatherer; The Big-Picture Seeker; Testing and Analyzing

the Big Picture; Personalizing and Reconstructing; Faith and Reason in Religious Education; Moral Formation and Moral Reasoning; Mystagogy: Reaching Spiritual Realities through the Liturgy; The Scriptures and Typology; Prayer; The Indispensable role of the Family; Effective Teaching Practice; The Pedagogy of God; Classroom Methods for Religious Education/Catechesis; and finally, Catholic Education, Religious Education, and Catechesis in the Documents of the Church since Vatican II. There are also two appendices on curriculum structure.

This overview provides us with a clear picture of the book's interrelated themes. While there is a logical order in the chapter progression, each chapter can be read independently of the others. There are many highlights, but I will focus briefly on two:

- Chapter 10, The Scriptures and Typology, is especially good. The introductory definitions of *Mysterium*, *Figura*, *Umbra*, *Species* and *Imago* are followed by an explanation of typology and how it can inform effective classroom practice in teaching Creation, the Fall, the Flood, Abraham and Exodus. This excellent chapter deserves a wide audience;
- Both appendices offer outlines of an age-related spiral curriculum for catechesis /religious education. While this is aimed specifically at Australia, the suggested sequence of topics/themes is a welcome practical addition. This enhances the text considerably.

This book should be essential reading for those interested in Catholic education, not just those on the front line of catechesis and religious education. The wider challenge, however, is the complexity of Catholic education in this secular age: what does this mean for the family, the Catholic school, and the Catholic College/University? I suggest that a reappraisal of how we conceptualize Catholic education is now essential. Dr. O'Shea's volume will be one of the texts Catholic leaders should read if we sincerely wish to be a "light to the nations."

Reviewer

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