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AND THE QUESTION BECAME FLESH:
JESUS THE CATECHIST IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

by

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A Paper Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Theology of Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Theology.

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The locus of encounter with Christ is the community at prayer and the Word embodied within that community. The promulgation of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* could arguably be seen then as a turning point moment for the Church as it ritualized its move into the postmodern age. It is postmodern not because it relativizes or waters down faith as some might argue but because it acknowledges the relational dialogic quality of the perception and interpretation of symbol. This paper examines three pericopes from John's Gospel that are integral to the catechumenate and explores the image of Jesus in these pericopes as "Question" who engages the Church in a mystagogy of faith.

This paper may be duplicated.



Signature of Student Writer

July 8, 2005

Date

In 1988, the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)* became the normative ritual process in the United States by which adults were initiated into the Catholic Church. The initiation process for adults prior to the *RCIA* typically consisted of private meetings between the inquirer and a priest during which the tenets of Catholic faith were taught usually from a catechism or other textbook. Once the inquirer learned the standard set of prayers, dogmas, commandments, beatitudes, and works of mercy, he or she was baptized in a private ceremony. This process seemed to exemplify a modernist approach to faith in that what was required to become Christian was to learn the correct answers, receive the truth, and do the right behaviors.

On the other hand, the *RCIA* developed out of an initiatory process that has its origins in the Christian churches of the 2nd to 4th centuries. The process is characterized by the movement of the inquirer within the life of a Christian community through definable stages of deepening faith. The model of catechesis is relational rather than informational, though information is transmitted through participation in the process. The goal is formation into a life of discipleship rather than the acquisition of intellectual knowledge of God and the Catholic faith. The locus of encounter with Christ is the community at prayer and the Word embodied within that community. The promulgation of the *RCIA* could arguably be seen then as a turning point moment for the Church as it ritualized its move into the postmodern age. It is postmodern not because it relativizes or waters down faith as some might argue but because it acknowledges the relational dialogic quality of the perception and interpretation of symbol. From a postmodern perspective,

it could be argued that the Word of God is only the Word to the extent that it is received, responded to, and contextually appropriated by one with faith to believe it.¹

The *RCIA* makes three Johannine pericopes the focal points for the elect and the Church during the final period of preparation for baptism. This should come as no surprise if one understands the Logos as presented in the Fourth Gospel to be not simply the *Word* but the *Question* of God. However, this Question does not fit the conventions of the Q & A modern world: that with hard work and one's intellect, one can find the correct answer to any question. Rather, the Question of God that pierces human history does not have nice tidy answers that can be packaged into a catechism, downloaded from the internet, and memorized like an answer-key. The "answer" that the Question of God seeks is not a disembodied object but an action, a verb, enfolded in the human life it encounters and revealed through the mutual give and take of human relationships. The Question of God is adequately answered only by intimate faithful relationship with Jesus.² This uniquely Johannine Christological image³ and paradigm of discipleship, implicitly present in the *RCIA*, must be the basis for formation of any new disciple and the ongoing mystagogy of Christians, lest the Word of God become a static textbook unable to respond to the questions of the Church in a postmodern world. This paper will attempt to support this thesis by examining the question/answer dialogues of the three scrutiny rite pericopes of John that are used in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* and by connecting the

¹ In "Faith and Revelation" Avery Dulles states, "External events and spoken or written words, though integral to the process of revelation, are not revelation until their divinely intended meaning is perceived and accepted" (*Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, Vol. I., ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991], 96).

² Pope John Paul II states that "the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in community, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ..." (*Catechesi Tradendae* [1979], #5).

³ In the Gospel of John, New American Bible translation, within its 21 chapters, there are 175 questions. Mark, the shortest Gospel, has 117; Matthew, six chapters longer than John, has 173; Luke has 159. It should be noted that in the Greek text, punctuations such as question marks were not employed. A question would be identified by the presence of an interrogative pronoun. However, the lack of punctuation in the original text in no way should distract us from the fact that John's Gospel in most standard English translations today includes an unusually large number of questions compared to the Synoptics.

implications of their exegesis to some of the current catechetical and liturgical practices of the Catholic Church today.

The Church proclaims the Johannine pericope of the Samaritan woman at the well (4:4-42) on the Third Sunday of Lent whenever elect (those chosen for baptism at the upcoming Easter Vigil) are present for the first scrutiny rite. (This and the other two Johannine pericopes we will examine are so integral to the scrutiny rites that the *RCIA* requires them to be proclaimed regardless of liturgical year, even when the scrutinies are celebrated outside of Lent, and always in the order of woman at the well, curing of the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus.⁴)

The story of the woman at the well is at once a mirror of the elect's journey and a job description for every disciple. In it, the elect recognize themselves as the woman who, by Jesus' word, grows gradually in her understanding of who she is encountering. The Church as well recognizes its mission enacted through the woman, who by her word, brings a town of people to encounter for themselves the Messiah. In this "type scene" or "type story" of well-meetings between the groom and his future bride,⁵ the contemporary hearer (if heard in faith) is connected to the long line of ancestors whose destinies were changed by a conversation at a well.

In this scene, eight questions are asked:

Interrogative Structure of John 4:4-42⁶	
Woman to Jesus:	How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?
Woman to Jesus:	Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep; where then can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this cistern and drank from it himself with his children and his flocks?

⁴ International Commission on English in the Liturgy and Bishop's Committee on the Liturgy, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1988), #146.

⁵ R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1998), 138; Sandra M. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 135.

⁶ All scripture quotes in this paper are from the New American Bible translation.

Unspoken thoughts of Disciples:	What are you looking for? Why are you talking with her?
Woman to Town:	Could he possibly be the Messiah?
Disciples to each other:	Could someone have brought him something to eat?
Jesus to Disciples:	Do you not say, "In four months the harvest will be here"?

Notice that only the woman and Jesus ask boundary-breaking questions while the disciples cannot even dare to ask a question beyond the boundaries of their own clique. Their questions reveal a defensiveness that seeks only to fortify the boundaries. Culpepper names four boundaries that are crossed in this scene: 1) gender (male/female); 2) nationality (Judea/Samaria); 3) race (Jew/Samaritan); and 4) religious (Jerusalem/Mt. Gerizim); and by their crossing, "community is created."⁷ If life comes out of breaking the accepted social boundaries, were the boundaries life-giving to begin with? This is the main question Jesus, the Question, is posing. In order to understand fully this underlying question, we must look first at what is meant by calling Jesus, "the Question of God."

Because God creates, the very nature of God causes division.⁸ This division however is not chaotic or oppressive but rather is ordered creation. In the beginning, the relationship between God and Chaos gave birth to creation—different yet ordered, distinct yet united by God's proclamation of its goodness (Gn 1:31). Through sin, this divine ordering became division, and each creature's distinction became a cause for oppression. Thus, the on-going thirst of creation is to place its chaos once again into relationship with God so that a new (united yet distinct) creation can be born.

⁷ Culpepper, *The Gospel*, 139.

⁸ The material of this paragraph is from Charles Bobertz, class on "Johannine Tradition", summer 2004, Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minn.

When the Word became flesh in human history, its very presence was an enigma, a question that caused and proclaimed division—above/below, divine/human, light/dark, sight/blindness, faith/unbelief. Yet, by engaging the societal boundary lexicon, the Question undermined it, *relexicalizing*⁹ the chaotic language of division into a new language that re-ordered the boundaries. In the event of the Samaritan woman, the borders were redrawn not with the language of gender, nationality, race, or religion, but with the language of mission that divided people into those who would cross the lines to bring others into relationship with God and those who would instead reinforce the walls to keep others out, allowing only lunch delivery to pass through. In this scene, Jesus, the Question, seems to ask: “Are the boundaries that you create life-giving and mutually satisfying? No? Then pour me a drink, and let me create something new.” As compelling as the Question is, Jesus can only create if there is an appropriate response. In other words, to re-establish right relationship, Jesus can only do so *by* relationship, since “[r]evelation is the dynamic of manifestation and response, or, as John says, divine witness and human believing, both of which are constitutive of the reality.”¹⁰

The pericope of the man born blind (9:1-41) proclaimed on the Fourth Sunday of Lent, portrays this manifestation/response dynamic in action. Jesus has just proclaimed himself to be “the light of the world” and that whoever follows him “will have the light of life” (8:12). The remainder of chapter 8 consists of Jesus sparring with the Pharisees who remain “impervious to revelation”¹¹ and are ready to stone him. This rejection of the manifestation juxtaposes and sets up the scene that will complete the relational dynamic of Jesus’ revelation.

⁹ Robert Kysar, *Preaching John* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 30-31.

¹⁰ Schneiders, *Written*, 70. This reinforces Dulles’ idea that revelation cannot be called revelation unless there is the response of human believing (cf. n. 1).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

There are many more questions asked in this scene. This time, the disciples take a minor role and simply ask the question that begins the relational dynamic.

Interrogative Structure of John 9:1-41	
Disciples to Jesus:	Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?
Neighbors/witnesses to each other:	Isn't this the one who used to sit and beg?
Neighbors/witnesses to Man born blind:	(So) how were your eyes opened? Where is he?
Pharisees to each other:	How can a sinful man do such signs?
Pharisees to Man born blind:	What do you have to say about him, since he opened your eyes?
Pharisees to Man's parents:	Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How does he now see?
Pharisees to Man born blind:	What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?
Man born blind to Pharisees:	Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?
Pharisees to Man born blind:	You were born totally in sin, and are you trying to teach us?
Jesus to Man born blind:	Do you believe in the Son of Man?
Man born blind to Jesus:	Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?
Pharisees to Jesus:	Surely we are not also blind, are we?

True to form, the response Jesus gives the disciples “shifts the problem of providence and suffering but does not resolve it.”¹² Jesus, the Question, avoids the easy answer and reorients our perspective to the real question at hand—what is sinful in the presence of the Word?

The reader/hearer/elect is given a clue to the answer when the blind man is commanded by Jesus, “Go wash in the Pool of Siloam” (9:7). It is through his washing that the healing occurs and sight is created. Brown reveals the baptismal quality of this command by reminding us that “[t]his pool, bearing a name interpreted as ‘sent,’ stands, in John, for Jesus, who is the

¹² Culpepper, *The Gospel*, 175.

one *sent* by the Father.”¹³ Thus, the command hints that salvation is not simply something we “receive” as sight might be given by a miracle-worker. Rather, salvation is something we immerse ourselves into like water by entering into relationship with Jesus, mixing our lives with his. Only by that relationship are we healed.

The questions asked by the neighbors and witnesses show that they are distracted by the superficial appearances and mechanics of the sign—this man *looks* like the one they know to be blind; how did he do it?—and are interested only for the sign’s novelty. They could represent those Christians who notice only the miracle (e.g., the consecrated host, the wine turned to blood), who ponder only the “magic moment” of transubstantiation, and miss the deeper transformation that is taking place (that a disparate group of people are transformed into one body willing to die for each other). This confusion among the neighbors calls to mind the issue of outward appearances after an encounter with the Word. As in our sacraments (where we ritually join Chaos with the Holy), the outer appearance of things does not change—the bread still looks like bread, the neophyte still looks the same as before baptism—but something *has* radically changed. As in the sacraments, Jesus in these scrutiny stories continues his subversive transformation of creation—he changed the Samaritan woman (she is still Samaritan, she is still a woman, but she is now on mission); he changed the blind man (he still looks the same, but now he sees); soon, he will cause the greatest change in a human body that will turn the sleep of death into the consciousness of life.¹⁴

Connected to this relationship between outward appearance and inner transformation is the gradual growth in likeness of the blind man into the image of Christ. After he washes and gains his sight, his neighbors debate his identity. With Christ-like undertones, the man now able

¹³ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John: A Concise Commentary* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1988), 56.

¹⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 175. Brown notes the allusion to God’s creation of humanity in Jesus’ re-creative act of molding clay.

to see proclaims, “I am [the one who had been blind]” (9:9). His attempts to explain who Jesus is incite the anger of the Pharisees in a similar way that Jesus’ teachings cause division and anger among those who hear him. The Pharisees’ accusation that the man was born in sin and thus unworthy of their attention is the same accusation they give to Jesus who some believe must be a sinner because he worked on the Sabbath (9:16). This kind of blurring of roles and identities between Jesus and those he encounters is a recurring theme throughout John’s Gospel (compare for example, 1:39 – Jesus calls the first disciples with “Come and you will see” with 11:34 – those at the tomb of Lazarus tell Jesus, “Sir, come and see”; 11:34 – Jesus asks “Where have you laid him?” with 20:15 – Mary of Magdala cries “tell me where you laid him”; 12:3 – Mary anoints Jesus’ feet, with 13:5 – Jesus washes his disciples’ feet). It seems that those who are willing to enter into a relationship with Jesus begin to take on some of his characteristics, so that by the end of Jesus’ life those who have accepted his words are also sent into the world as he was sent (17:18), as the Son is in the Father, so too are these in them (17:21), and as the Father gave the Son glory, so too does the Son give his disciples glory (17:22).

Those who are transformed and re-imaged into the likeness of Christ are those who have seen Jesus’ signs, made themselves vulnerable to their transforming mystery, and have responded with belief in the one who manifested the signs. This process of engaging the sign and responding to it is similar to what is typically called mystagogy. The process of mystagogy involves the experience of a significant event, paying attention to the sensory memory of the event, asking questions of personal and communal meaning and tradition about the event, connecting that event/meaning with the larger story of Church and discipleship, and finally moving toward a conversion or renewal of perspective and action. The mystagogical quality of the man born blind pericope—in which the healing is not the climax of the scene but its

catalyst—makes this Johannine healing unique from other similar scenes in the Synoptics.¹⁵ The mystagogical steps in this pericope can be outlined in this way:

Mystagogical Structure of John 9:1-41	
1) Experience of event:	Jesus cures the man born blind (9:6-7).
2) Remembrance of sensory elements of event:	Man recounts how Jesus made clay, anointed his eyes, and told him to wash (9:11).
3) Questioning of meaning and tradition:	Pharisees debate how Jesus can come from God if he does not observe Sabbath (9:16).
4) Connecting with the larger story:	Man recalls tradition that teaches that God does not listen to sinners (9:31).
5) Conversion or renewal:	“I do believe, Lord” (9:38).

Though the Pharisees seem to play a role in this mystagogical process, they are not really participating in it, and this is what is sinful in the presence of the Word—refusal to engage and participate in the sign witnessed, that is, refusal to participate in the relational dynamic of Jesus. Schneiders states that “the Pharisees in the encounter with the man born blind are usually precisely those who do not know who Jesus is and are not really open to finding out even though they may seem to be inquiring.”¹⁶ Thus, there is a difference between being a witness to and a participant of a sign. The neighbors and Pharisees witnessed the sign; the man participated in it. This is not to say that he participated in the sign because he received the healing. One could say that he received the healing *because* he participated in the sign. “By nature, the symbol demands involvement....[T]he initiation commitment that enables one to encounter the transcendent in the symbolic is only the beginning of the relationship that must develop in a continuously deepening commitment or die. It is this relationship of ever deepening commitment that gradually transforms the person.”¹⁷ The Pharisees could not participate in the sign they witnessed because

¹⁵ Culpepper, *The Gospel*, 175.

¹⁶ Schneiders, *Written*, 53.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

they could not “be shaken loose from the convictions, the verities, the prejudices, the commonsense assumptions that constitute [their] everyday ‘knowledge.’”¹⁸ Because of this, the sign they witnessed was not a manifestation of God but an attack to their own religious understanding and tidy answers.

“The conflict, according to the Gospel, is between an idolatrous attachment to the Jewish religious institution and the inbreaking of divine revelation to Jesus. Attachment to their own interpretation of the law rendered the officials of Judaism incapable of responding to divine revelation, impervious to the truth to which the Law and the Prophets witnessed. The Jewish authorities had become committed to their commitment rather than to God.”¹⁹

By clinging to their obstinate preconceived knowledge, their self-sufficiency in their belief, and their refusal to be vulnerable through dialogue and relationship,²⁰ they saw Jesus only as an enigma and were blind to Jesus, the Son of Man.

The final pericope in the scrutiny rites is the raising of Lazarus (11:1-45) proclaimed on the Fifth Sunday of Lent. In this pericope, Jesus asks the most questions of all the characters.

Interrogative Structure of John 11:1-45	
Disciples to Jesus:	Rabbi, the Jews were just trying to stone you, and you want to go back there?
Jesus to Disciples:	Are there not twelve hours in a day?
Jesus to Martha:	I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?
Jesus to those weeping at the tomb:	Where have you laid him?
Some of the Jews to each other:	Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?
Jesus to Martha:	Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?

In this pericope, the sign comes at the end of the scene while the preceding dialogue between Jesus and the various characters serve to “interpret the meaning of the sign before the raising of

¹⁸ Ibid., 32.

¹⁹ Ibid., 82.

²⁰ Note that the Pharisees, like the disciples at the well, never ask Jesus anything except in defense of themselves.

Lazarus is actually narrated.”²¹ Jesus plays the role of the Good Catechist by preparing his hearers to participate in the sign, just as a catechist would prepare a catechumen for the sacrament of baptism. Yet, the catechesis that Jesus engages in is not textbook explication and examination that seeks a “correct” answer. It is not head-knowledge or “a presentation of eschatological propositions but a self-disclosure calling for personal response.”²² In other words, Jesus teaches about eternal life not by explaining it but by revealing it: “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25). In response, he asks for faith. In the face of the Christian paradox of human death and eternal life, faith “is not theological assent but personal spiritual transformation,”²³ and what is required of the disciple at this moment of ultimate chaos is not “reflection on revelation [but] personal commitment to the one who reveals.”²⁴ When the elect stand at the font, they will be asked to profess *faith*, not *understanding*. When they come to the edge of that watery tomb, they will explain the meaning of death for a disciple not through words and apologies but by being submerged into that death.

Yet even here, what is required is not perfect faith. At the last moment, even Martha who had made the highest profession of faith (9:27) is gently admonished and prodded by Jesus to deepen that faith (9:40). Only after Lazarus is raised will she understand what she professed. It is her belief in and love for Jesus that allows her to be ready for whatever he will do despite her human knowledge that death is death. “Like Peter, who did not fully understand the bread-of-life discourse, Martha believes not in *what* she understands but in the *one* who has the words of eternal life (cf. 6:68).”²⁵

²¹ Culpepper, *The Gospel*, 185.

²² Schneiders, *Written*, 158.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 158, n. 26.

When the three scrutiny readings are examined in this way, we begin to understand what the *RCIA* means when it says that Lent “is intended as well to enlighten the minds and hearts of the elect with a deeper knowledge of Christ the Savior.”²⁶ The catechesis that takes place during this time does not give answers about faith but asks the questions of the Johannine pericopes: Could he possibly be the Messiah? Do you believe in the Son of Man? Do you believe this? The things that keep the elect from responding “yes!” are the defensive barriers that protect entrenched boundaries, the adherence to life-draining laws, and the fear that the reality of death is the definitive reality. The place where the elect peel away these protective but sinful layers and learn how to answer “yes!” is in the community. “[T]he community is the place of encounter between Jesus and his disciples...[where] interpreting [the Gospel of the Beloved Disciple] is a never-ending enterprise because it deepens as our experience of union with Jesus deepens.”²⁷ Through participating in the life of the community, the elect learn faith by hearing and by seeing how believers profess “yes!” in the chaos of life. The grouping and order of the scrutiny pericopes model this relational catechesis of hearing and believing (Samaritan woman), seeing and believing (man born blind), and finally believing without proof (Martha and Lazarus) at the most chaotic moment of life—death.

As loudly as this type of catechesis speaks in these pericopes and throughout the Gospel of John, too often are catechumens taught by catechists who depend solely on textbooks to bring them to that paradoxical faith. The reason many give for clinging to school-room style catechesis is that they do not know how to teach as Jesus taught or that it is frightening to address catechumens without some kind of text. To teach as Jesus taught is indeed a frightening task, and other problems in ecclesial life only make the task more difficult. If the primary

²⁶ ICEL, *RCIA*, #139.

²⁷ Schneiders, *Written*, 62.

textbook for the catechumen should be the liturgy,²⁸ then mystagogical catechesis is almost impossible when the signs and symbols of the liturgy are meagerly manifested by poor preaching, perfunctory presiding, unskilled musicians, halfhearted proclamation, minimalist ritual, and apathetic assemblies. If the primary aim of catechesis is intimacy with Jesus,²⁹ then relational catechesis will be stilted if catechists are unable to express their faith in intimate personal conversation rather than scripted workshop, empty formulas, and lofty platitudes. If “[t]he ‘final examination’ in this ‘course’ on love is the willingness to lay down one’s life for those one loves after the example of Jesus”,³⁰ then revelatory witnessing through the life of the community will remain distorted until the Church itself, within its very structures of authority, leadership, and accountability, passes the same exam.

Fortunately, it is the relational dynamic with Christ that continues to enable the faithful and catechumens to say “yes!” even in the face of what seems to be a church on the edge of utter chaos. Because revelation is an interchange and a process, it “is therefore never ‘complete.’ One does not collect the requisite information about God and then go on to live one’s Christian life accordingly.”³¹ It is good to remember that we are initiated not into baptism but into lifelong friendship with Jesus. “The knowledge of Jesus that the disciple gradually achieves...is the kind of knowledge one has of a friend....It is, quite simply, a deep sharing in life with Jesus.”³² This life, as was the friendship between Jesus and his first disciples, is progressive. In the same gradual way that Jesus catechized his disciples through his signs, the Church is also being gradually catechized through the sacraments, for “[t]he church is a realization of the same

²⁸ Cf. Nick Wagner, *Introducing Liturgical Catechesis: Formation Sessions for the Parish* (San Jose, Calif.: Resource Publications, Inc., 2002). Cf. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* which states that the full and active participation by the faithful in the liturgy “is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit...” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* [1963], #14).

²⁹ Cf. n. 2.

³⁰ Schneiders, *Written*, 55.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

³² *Ibid.*, 53.

relationship between history and symbol as was the earthly Jesus. This amounts to saying that the church as community is sacramental in a much more fundamental sense than simply being the agent of certain sacramental rituals.”³³ The meeting place of Chaos and Holy, of Human and Divine, of Division and Union is the Church, and more specifically, its sacramental life. So like Jesus who used the common language of division to create a new language of community, we too can take what we already have before us—the liturgy—to deepen our friendship and faith in Christ who questions, reveals, and recreates.

Christian ritual action is inherently relational (communal).³⁴ It requires the collaboration of several people exercising various roles and only their roles (ordered distinction).³⁵ Through spoken and sung dialogue and the question and answer dynamic, the relational character of worship is expressed and heightened (manifestation/response).³⁶ By giving some attention to these dialogic and relational qualities of ritual, perhaps we can improve our listening skills to help us hear not only the Word in scripture but embodied in each other, make our eyesight more keen to see the dignity of all the body’s members, and relexicalize the language of death into a life-giving word able to respond to the questions of our day.

The questions of a postmodern world cannot be addressed by modernist thinking. “[T]he New Testament is not a catechism or an answer book supplying prescriptions for the solution of problems not ever envisioned by its authors.”³⁷ The challenge of the *RCIA* and of the Question of God we encounter in John’s Gospel is faithful relationship even when there seems to be no answers or clear remedies to the crises we face. Jesus came not to remove boundaries but to redefine them, not to teach us how to escape the suffering and rejection of human life but to

³³ *Ibid.*, 69.

³⁴ Cf. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, #26-27.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, #28.

³⁶ There are 16 questions found in the rites of acceptance into the order of catechumens, election, and baptism.

³⁷ Schneiders, *Written*, 95.

transfigure them by the resurrection of his life, not to negate the reality of death but to use it to “[serve] the purpose of God, which is to bring all believers into union with God in Jesus.”³⁸

Ultimately, we are being catechized by questions and not answers, by love and not law. Re-examining catechesis, liturgy, and even ecclesiology in this light would make our catechesis more effective for catechumens and baptized alike, would reinvigorate the commitment to liturgical reform, and might even offer new insights into issues such as church leadership, the role of women, and evangelization in the 21st century. However we must be careful that we do not simply trade in one textbook for another, packaging the old ways of forming faith into seemingly new structures and calling that transformative relationship.

One may turn an altar around and leave *reform* at that. But one cannot set an adult catechumenate in motion without becoming necessarily involved with *renewal* in the ways a local church lives its faith from top to bottom. For members of an adult catechumenate must be secured through evangelization; they must be formed to maturity in ecclesial faith through catechesis both prior to baptism and after it; and there must be something to initiate them into that will be correlative to the expectations built up in them through their whole initiatory process. This last means a community of lively faith in Jesus Christ dead, risen, and present actually among his People. In this area, when one change occurs, all changes.³⁹

We must remain committed to this ever-questioning God who is constantly incarnate in the ever-changing situations of human life. If our commitment is true, if we can let go of our “we’ve always done it this way” mentality, a new generation of inquirers will be able to respond with faith because of what they have seen and heard and have come to believe in our midst.

³⁸ Ibid., 156.

³⁹ Aidan Kavanagh, “Christian Initiation in Post-Conciliar Catholicism: A Brief Report,” in *Living Water, Sealing Spirit: Readings on Christian Initiation*, ed. Maxwell E. Johnson (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 8.

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