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Spiritual

Teaching as Jesus Did

by Reverend Louis J. Cameli, STD

As catechists, you study the many stages of human growth and explore appropriate methodologies for addressing them because you want to do the best possible job fostering faith in your learners. You can gain many insights in how to do so simply by watching the teaching ministry of Jesus

As we observe Jesus in the course of his public ministry, one thing stands out as absolutely clear and consistent in his "method." He never just delivers a teaching, never just communicates a truth, never just offers a conclusion and then walks away. All his teaching is permeated with a desire to bring people along, to ensure that they really understand what he is saying, to give them every opportunity possible to make his truth their own.

Jesus adapts to the state and condition of his listeners. With the clever and the learned, he employs those arguments and expositions that rely on precedents in the Old Testament. With the simple and the unschooled, he uses simple examples drawn from daily life.

If you are committed to teach as Jesus did, then you would do well to watch him in action and follow in his footsteps. This means utilizing whatever can help meet young people where they are.

There is a kind of spiritual formation that is necessary for the teacher and catechist to enable him or her to engage the task of catechesis in the model and pattern of Jesus. It begins with a conviction and a passion for communicating the Lord in a way that will be effective for a particular audience, such as a particular grade level. It continues patiently and persistently to do whatever is necessary without tiring. It rejoices when faith has taken deeper root.

An interesting place to see how this works in the ministry of Jesus can be found in his encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. (See John 4:1-42.) Essential elements of the catechetical

We all have within us a foundational religious experience that has remained with us since we were very young.

Reflection

method are evident in this meeting with the woman who came only to draw water but, in the process, discovered the Messiah. Jesus connects with her, making sure that there is a real relationship. He stays with her, even as she misapprehends his words. He asks her questions that are meant to draw out her experience. He confronts her with his own identity as the Messiah at the appropriate moment. He follows up with her and her neighbors.

If a teacher or catechist were to follow the pattern of Jesus in his encounter with the Samaritan woman, it would require a real spiritual cultivation of the heart. Connecting and relating authentically, patiently staying with the person, framing appropriate questions, accurately proclaiming the truth at the right moment, and accompanying those who believe as they continue the journey—all this requires spiritual preparation in ongoing prayer and reflection.

The catechetical formation of children and adults requires methods that are appropriate for each specific age level. What remains constant, however, is the steady commitment of teachers and catechists to teach as Jesus did. That commitment is a matter of personal and spiritual formation all along the way.

For Reflection

- What other teaching skills have you acquired by observing the teaching ministry of Jesus?
- What do you see in the way Jesus encourages faith in others that you wish you could imitate?

Louis J. Cameli is a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago and pastor of Divine Savior Parish in Norridge, Illinois. He completed his theological studies at the Gregorian University in Rome and obtained a doctorate in theology with a specialization in spirituality. He is the former director of ongoing formation of priests in the Archdiocese of Chicago and director of the Cardinal Stritch Retreat House, Mundelein, Illinois. In February, 2002, he received the Pope John XXIII Award from the National Organization for the Continuing Education of Roman Catholic Clergy (NOCERCC) for his contributions to the continuing education and ongoing formation of priests. He has authored numerous books on spirituality and also served as a writer and theological consultant for RCL's *Faith First* and *Faith First Legacy Edition* K-8 curriculum.

Gifts of a Loving God

*Almighty God,
you created me in your **image**.
You breathed into me your Spirit,
that your life in me can grow. I praise and thank you, O God,
for the marvels of your wondrous deeds.*

*All-knowing God,
you gave me the power to grow in **knowledge**.
Grant me the **understanding** to recognize the process of this growth,
that I may help others know you.*

*All-loving God,
you gave me the ability to grow in relationship.
Grant me the **awe and wonder** to reverence all growth,
that I may guide others in their desire to relate to you.*

*All-creative God,
you endowed me with the **ability to choose**—
between good and evil, between right and wrong,
between life and death, between growth and stagnation.
Grant me the **wisdom** to know the steps that lead to right choice,
that I may encourage others along the way.*

*All-generous God,
you give me the gift of **faith** in you,
as you help me believe in myself.
Lead me to grow from the dependence of a child,
through the **commitment** of a disciple,
to the deep **peace** of a steward in the service of your reign.*

I ask this through Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

Overview: **The Learner**

The *National Directory for Catechesis* reminds us that “God reveals himself to us gradually and in stages, drawing us ever closer in order to prepare us to welcome the culmination of God’s self-revelation in . . . Jesus Christ” (NDC 16A). Just as our God is patient with us, so we must catechize in light of our learners’ needs. This module will introduce you to the continuous cycle of growth and development that occurs throughout life. You will explore this process of growth from four perspectives: cognitive, psycho-social, moral, and faith growth.

You will engage in a process of faith reflection using three components: a DVD, this companion booklet, and a CD-ROM. See page 5 for an explanation of how these components complement one another. You began the process on pages 6 and 7 with a reflection on the teaching ministry of Jesus. On the next two pages you will engage in an opening activity that will allow you to look back on the learning process you have been engaged in throughout your life.

The rest of the booklet is divided into four segments that parallel the divisions of the DVD. The topics in *The Learner* are:

- **Building Knowledge.** An exploration of the main insights about cognitive development in the theory of Jean Piaget
- **Relating to Others.** An overview of the predictable stages of psycho-social growth from the perspective of Erik Erikson
- **Learning to Love.** A look at how the process of reasoning

used in moral decision making develops, based on the research of Lawrence Kohlberg

- **Growing in Faith.** A survey of how individuals perceive and express their faith at different ages and stages of life, based on the theory of James Fowler

Each segment in the booklet leads you through a four-page process to reflect on the DVD content and choose ways to apply the content to your catechetical setting.

1. **Introduction:** States the goal and objectives for the session and provides a question for personal reflection
2. **Looking Ahead—Presentation:** Includes a video overview and space to write questions and comments during and after viewing
3. **Looking Back—Reflection:** Includes three questions to check comprehension and offers a chance for group reflection
4. **Looking Beyond—Application:** Includes an opportunity to summarize new insights and apply them to a practical setting

There is an enrichment article at the end of each segment process that extends learning by exploring a topic related to the segment theme.

Catechists need the support and encouragement of other catechists. Try to participate in the learning process of this module in a group setting. If circumstances require that you work independently, find at least one other catechist with whom you can work and share your reflections.

Judith Dieterle, SLL, is a Sister of St. Louis. Her extensive background in religious education and ministry includes serving as Consultant for Catechetical Media and Research for the Archdiocese of Chicago, coordinating the Jegen Center for media and research, and serving for fifteen years as leader of a priestless parish in Brazil. Sr. Judith has more than 30 years experience as a teacher of all age levels, primary through adult. She is a trained spiritual director and has a passion for companionship others in their growth in faith. Sr. Judith has published a number of articles and facilitated workshops on all aspects of human and faith growth at the parish and diocesan levels. She holds a master’s degree from Loyola University in Chicago.

Relating to Others

Human beings are meant to be in relationship with one another. Our psychological and social growth comes through our relationships with God, other people, life around us, and the world as a whole. This growth evolves and develops in predictable, but not uniform ways. In the 1950s, research by Erik Erikson presented us with a model of psycho-social growth as it develops throughout the life cycle. He described the predictable crises of human growth as we move from the total dependence of the infant, through the striving toward autonomy of the young child, to the search for identity of youth, to the abilities for intimacy and generativity of the adult. This segment offers you an overview of this important theory of human growth.

Goal

To appreciate the role of psycho-social growth in faith development

Learning Objectives

- To describe some aspects of psycho-social growth that usually occur during childhood and adolescence
- To identify some strengths and challenges that a person encounters in moving from one psycho-social stage to another
- To apply some of the insights of Erikson's theory to a practical classroom situation

Exercise

Take a few moments to complete the following exercise. Then discuss your responses with another person or with a group.

Return to the time line on pages 10 and 11. Pick two of the ages. Describe new strengths and abilities that gave you self-confidence at each of these ages. Write your responses in the appropriate spaces in the row marked "Relating." What similarities and differences can you see in your faith at the two ages you chose?

Prayer

*Creator God,
you are a God
of relationship.
Through the com-
munion of love of
your Trinity and
your uncondi-
tional love for us,
we learn how we
are to love you,
ourselves, others,
and all your
created world.
Send us the
wisdom of your
Spirit as we help
our learners grow
in confidence and
in their capacity
for relationship.
We ask this in the
name of Jesus,
your Son and
our brother.*

Looking Ahead

This segment explores the cycle of psycho-social growth. Below you will find an outline of the principal content of the DVD that accompanies this segment. You may wish to refer to this outline as you watch the DVD. Below the outline, there is space for you to jot down questions that occur to you during and after the viewing.

Video Outline

- An overview of Erik Erikson's stages of psycho-social growth
- Examples of people at various stages growing in their ability for human relationship
- An explanation and demonstration of the importance of helping learners develop the strengths to move from one stage to another.

Comments and Questions

Use the space below to list questions, feelings, or ideas that occur to you as you view the video.

A large rectangular area with horizontal lines for writing, intended for comments and questions. A vertical red line runs down the left side of the area, creating a margin. There are two binder holes on the left edge of the paper.

The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ.

Catechesi Tradendae
(CT) 5

Watch Segment 2 of the DVD or CD-ROM now.

Looking Back

Reflect silently on one or more of the questions below and then jot down your response(s). Then share your thoughts with another person or with a group.

1. Name one or more stages of psycho-social growth related to the stage(s) that you observe in the age group that you are teaching. Give an example of a developing strength you have noticed that could assist further growth.
2. As you look at your learners, what challenges do some of them seem to be facing in their psycho-social growth? What could you do to assist them?
3. Young people grow in their ability to find meaning through their relationships with others. What new insights did you gain from this video that will help you assist your learners to interact with one another more successfully?

Remember . . .

We grow in our ability to relate to others.

Erikson discovered eight lifelong stages of sequential growth in relational abilities.

Each stage has a challenge and a corresponding strength.

Each stage must be executed successfully for the next to develop.

The strength of one stage can become a weakness in another.

We never achieve the fullness of any stage.

Looking Beyond

Understanding the human life cycle not only will help you assist your learners in their psycho-social growth but also help them appreciate their responsibility to care for others. The following activity will help you understand these connections.

PRACTICE FOR CATECHISTS

Helping Others Learn

Examine the catechist manual you are currently using. Find a suggested activity that seems designed to help your learners grow in their awareness of the needs of others. Describe the activity. What strengths could this activity help develop in your learners? In what ways might you like to adjust it to the psycho-social challenges you observe in your learners?

Activity

Strengths

Challenges

Activity	Strengths	Challenges

What Did I Learn?

In this space summarize the most important insights you gained in this segment.

What Will I Change?

In this space write one thing you will do differently as a catechist because of what you learned in this segment.

We are called to be leaven in society, applying Christian values to every aspect of our lives.

NDC 43B



The article on pages 23 and 24 will help you relate the insights of Erikson's theory to faith formation.

Psycho-social Growth and the Evolution of Faith

by Jo Rotunno

Learners do not come to us as blank slates. The seven-year-old in your class may be well adjusted, trusting of his environment, and filled with confidence and eagerness to enter into tasks. His home life may either be secure or in crisis. The thirteen-year-old may still be experiencing the childhood challenges of learning to work well with others and complete tasks, or she may be moving into adolescence, with all its physical changes and issues of identity.

Just as we grow in our ability to think about the world, we also grow in our understanding of ourselves and our relationship to others. There is a pattern to this psychological and social growth. Erik Erikson presents us with a model for human growth that holds a number of key insights for religious educators. First of all, our personal growth is bound up at every level with our relationships to those around us. Second, our psycho-social growth is intended to continue throughout our lives, from birth to death.

As we examine each of Erikson's eight stages of life, we see how each carries within it a central task. If met well, it will result in the development of a skill, which Erikson calls a virtue. The infant must learn to trust its world and put on an attitude of *hope*. The toddler must learn to walk and explore, and so develop confidence and *will power*. The preschooler must learn to play with a goal in mind, and so develop a *sense of purpose*. The school-age child is entering the wider world and learning to manage the tools and tasks that will result in a sense of *competence*. Teenagers are challenged to establish their unique identities—who they are, beyond what they know how to do. With a strong sense of self comes a *fidelity* to themselves and to what they choose for themselves.

Without a strong sense of personal identity, an individual cannot negotiate successfully the passages

*Each age
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an opportunity for
growth and religious
conversion.*

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of adulthood. The challenges of adult life may appear at differing ages, but the strengths of each of Erikson's three stages of adult growth follow a predictable sequence. We are called first to develop the ability for true intimacy, whether in the form of deep friendship or married love. With the resulting virtue of *loving* deeply and well, one moves naturally to the responsibility of generativity, of creating, *caring* for, and nurturing life in the world. Eventually, each of us reaches an age where we evaluate the choices we have made in our lives and reconcile ourselves with the lives we have lived. The ability to integrate the fragments of our lives into a sensible whole, rather than succumbing to bitterness and regret, is the beginning of *wisdom*.

As we look at the pattern Erikson's eight stages of life offers us, we see

an ever-widening circle of awareness of the world around us that allows us to understand and appreciate the perspective of others. At every stage, awareness should be accompanied by a deepening concern and care for others. Helping awareness grow into care and commitment is a key task of the catechist, for this widening circle of concern for all God's creation is at the heart of the Gospel message.

Each age in our lives holds an opportunity for growth and for religious conversion. There is something which can be gained or lost at each step along the way. God's grace is available at each moment to turn the crises of human life into opportunities for growth. The catechist can serve as a kind of midwife, facilitating the inbreaking of God at opportune moments in the faith journeys of our learners.



For Reflection

- As you reflect on your own psycho-social growth, in what ways can you see that you have grown in your ability to understand the perspective of others?
- What is challenging you now toward a new stage of growth?