



EVANGELIZING

New Vision - New Directions

CATECHESIS

2016 Reflections

Article 7. Divine Pedagogy & Methodologies

by Dr. Joseph White

Since Judith Dunlap's 2000 article on divine pedagogy, there has been a great deal of discussion on this topic. One example is an international meeting on the pedagogy of God held in Rome in 2009. In his introduction to that conference, Dr. Petroc Willey asserted that, properly understood, the references to divine pedagogy in our catechetical documents point neither to content nor to method per se, but rather to "overarching principles of transmission that govern the nature of catechesis precisely as transmission of the Faith."¹

In my own work on this topic², I propose five aspects of the pedagogy of God, some of which are analogous to points made by Dunlap in the article above:

1. **The pedagogy of God is invitational and person-centered.** God begins by reaching out to us, not by waiting for us to come to him. God also *accommodates for our particular needs*. Catechesis based on the divine pedagogy invites the learner into the process, maintains an environment of welcome, and accounts for special needs.
2. **God's pedagogy is incarnational.** God's plan of salvation is characterized by his words and deeds, and the unity between the two. From speaking the universe into existence, to his promise to Noah and his covenants with Abraham and Moses, to the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ, it is clear that God's word becomes action. Catechesis based on the divine pedagogy makes the faith concrete through witness, multisensory methodologies and a Christocentric perspective.
3. **The pedagogy of God is relational, familial and communal.** God reveals himself as a communion of persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—and creates human beings to be in relationship with one another. Catechesis based on the pedagogy of God supports and involves the family and assists learners in living the Christian life in the context of community.
4. **God's pedagogy is structured, systematic, and comprehensive.** In salvation history, God reveals himself to humanity gradually as people are able to understand. This self-revelation culminates in the person of Jesus Christ. Catechesis based on the divine pedagogy follows a scope and sequence, based on human development, revealing God's truths gradually as the learner is able to hear and understand them. The integrity of the faith is respected, and the hierarchy of truths is presented comprehensively.

5. **The pedagogy of God is perpetual.** God's truths are handed on through the generations through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, which is the living memory of the Church. God's covenants do not end, but come to greater fulfillment and realization. Catechesis based on the pedagogy of God is a process of continuing conversion, forming lifelong disciples that will share the Gospel with others in both word and action.

In the years since the dawn of the Millennium, the challenges we face in handing on the faith have only grown. While we sometimes might feel discouraged, we remember the words of Jesus, who said, "for God all things are possible."³ Let us look to the pedagogy of God, the Master Teacher, as we form the faith of future generations.

End Notes

¹ Willey, P. (2011). An original pedagogy for catechesis. In C. Farey, W. Linnig, and M. J. Paruch, *The Pedagogy of God*. Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing.

² White, J.D. (2014). *The Way God Teaches: Catechesis and the Divine Pedagogy*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor.

³ Matthew 19:26 (NABRE)

Dr. Joseph White has a Ph.D. in clinical psychology, and has served as a parish director of faith formation and director of family counseling and family life for the Diocese of Austin. He now works as a National Catechetical Consultant for Our Sunday Visitor Publishing and Curriculum and is in part-time practice as a clinical child psychologist. Dr. White has written ten books and numerous articles about catechesis, Catholic education, and ministry. His website is: <http://www.sharingcatholicfaith.com>.