Catechesis, Diversity, and Culture

The Importance of (Re)Definitions

*Hosffman Ospino*

The culturally diverse nature of the present Catholic experience in the United States places serious demands on catechetical leaders requiring important (re)definitions of the catechetical task. In turn this may lead to fresher (re)definitions of the U.S. Catholic experience.

At the end of my keynote presentation at a recent diocesan congress of religious education, a catechetical director approached me and asked: is it possible to speak of a Hispanic catechesis? In my off-the-top-of-my-head response I provided some general definitions of catechesis highlighting that context and relationships deeply shape the *why*, the *how*, and the *what* of catechesis. In this case, the Hispanic cultural reality was a significant factor to define the way one would catechize in contexts where Latinos/as are present. The catechetical director further asked which catechesis I thought was best, the Anglo model or the Hispanic model. Such questions led me to realize that terms such as “Hispanic catechesis” or “Euro-American catechesis” or “postmodern catechesis” or any other type of adjectivised catechesis can be problematic if we focus in exclusive terms on the qualifier: does

_Hosffman Ospino, Ph.D.,_ is assistant professor of pastoral theology and religious education at Boston College’s School of Theology and Ministry (STM). He is also the STM’s Director of Graduate Programs in Hispanic Ministry. His publications frequently address the relationship between faith and culture in Christian educational processes, often focusing on the U.S. Latino/a Catholic experience. He is the editor of Hispanic Ministry in the 21st Century: Present and Future (Convivium Press, 2010). Email: ospinoho@bc.edu.
one type of catechesis offer something that others do not? If so, how? What are the points of convergence? What about points of divergence? Do catechetical approaches translate with ease from context to context? It is difficult to speak of “x” or “y” catechesis unless we hold at least a basic understanding of the catechetical task. Likewise, we must recognize that there are aspects that are unique to the experience of sharing faith with women and men of different ages, different social locations, and different cultural backgrounds. These are the concerns at the heart of this reflection. Diversity and culture, I argue, are factors that deeply shape the way we catechize. How religious educators understand these factors determines the direction and effectiveness of catechesis and ultimately the vibrancy of the wider Catholic experience.

Religious educators today face the challenge of envisioning models of catechesis that adequately respond to the complex circumstances that shape the lives of those with whom we share faith in culturally diverse contexts. It will be naïve to think that one catechetical model is the ultimate answer to all our educational concerns amid diversity. Not to think of creative models to adequately address this reality would be rather irresponsible. My invitation in this essay is to explore how as religious educators we can (re)define the catechetical task by paying close attention to key factors such as culture and diversity. The essay is divided into three sections: first, it explores some challenges and hopes for catechesis in culturally diverse contexts; second, it defines some key concepts—catechesis, culture, diversity—whose value is constantly at stake in contemporary catechetical conversations; third, it contemplates how a contextually (re)defined catechesis, in our case one that is responsive to the culturally diverse nature of the U.S. ecclesial context, can lead to richer understandings of what it means to be Catholic. The essay concludes with a series of questions for further reflection.

*Catechesis in Culturally Diverse Contexts*

The centuries-old commission of going into the world and sharing the Good News (Mark 16:15) continues to be embraced by millions of Christian women and men around the world as participation in the church’s evangelizing mission. Every Christian evangelizes in the particularity of his/her historical location and this requires that we know our own reality in the best possible way. At the dawn of the 21st century, factors such as economic and geopolitical globalization, the pervasive influence of the mass media, the widespread access to instant forms of communication, and the ease of transnational travel, to name a few, have significantly transformed the makeup of many of our western societies as well as the way we understand what it means to be in relationship with others. Thanks to these developments, often evolving at such a fast pace that we barely have time to understand them and assimilate their impact, our societies are constantly
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redefined by complex forms of diversity. Most likely catechetical leaders reading this essay already live immersed in contexts where cultural diversity is a rather inescapable reality shaping their daily decisions. For many the question is: how can catechesis be effective in the midst of diversity?

This is not a new question for Christians. In fact, every generation of Christian religious educators must respond to it while rooted in their particular experience. Early Christian communities struggled with the challenge of addressing the multiple needs of their Hebrew and Greek members. Evangelization became even more challenging as Christians expanded their horizons beyond the Palestinian geography and welcomed members whose lives were shaped by many cultural environments (see Meeks, 32–39). The various encounters of Christian educators with different societies around the world have, therefore, been opportunities for reshaping ideas, lending and borrowing symbols, constructing new intellectual frameworks, translating concepts, and developing new practices. Perhaps the best testimonies of what I would call catechetical creativity come from missionary contexts. The stories of well-known missionaries like Matteo Ricci in China and Alexandre De Rhodes in Vietnam illustrate how cultural diversity demands fresher ways of catechizing while affirming the elements of truth and beauty in each cultural context. Both missionaries wrote catechisms, true works of art insofar as they are thorough expositions of the Christian tradition that insightfully incorporated key elements of the cultures in which they were immersed (see Phan, 211–315; Ricci 1985). The outcome of the encounter between these Christian catechists and their communities was twofold: on the one hand, a renewed understanding of Christian life in light of a new context; on the other, fresher approaches to sharing faith. Instead of advancing the idea of a radically different type of catechesis, what these missionary catechists offered was a (re)definition of the catechetical task in the particularity of their contexts, a process that eventually led to a continuous (re)definition of the Christian experience among those influenced by their work—even to this day.

The context within which religious educators respond to questions about catechesis and cultural diversity is that of the sociohistorical circumstances in which
we are inserted. For Ricci and De Rhodes it was the context of the missionary efforts of the 16th and 17th centuries in Asia. For us it is the 21st century Catholic experience in the United States. The two missionaries traveled away from their homes into practically unknown territories and met people who understood the world in significantly different ways. For most of us the mission is rather local; the distances we travel to our already established communities are short. Nevertheless, we remain aware that those same contexts are constantly changing thanks to the diversity—cultural, social, ideological, ethnic—that is part of the U.S. Catholic experience. In the midst of such cultural diversity catechesis faces distinctive challenges and expectations.

**Two Major Challenges**

Let us highlight two major challenges. First, catechesis in culturally diverse contexts must deal with multiple languages and worldviews all at once, which often coincide in the same faith community (e.g., multicultural parishes). Catechists must then develop categories and symbols that communicate the Christian message across such diversity while affirming the uniqueness of each worldview. What is at stake here is not the adoption of a spoken language for matters of faith and worship such as Latin or any other language as supporters of linguistic assimilation argue. Doing so is rather naïve and simplistic, and history is full of examples of the inadequacy of this approach. The issue is much more complex than that. It is about the need to develop creative grammars to express our Christian convictions in terms that speak to people living their faith in different cultural worlds while establishing bridges that lead to shared horizons.

Second, catechesis in culturally diverse contexts largely depends on religious educators who meet cultural diversity as an opportunity rather than as a burden. This requires an open embrace of our reality with its lights and its shadows. Dwelling on a glorified idea of the past or imagining idyllic scenarios is not healthy for any faith community. Catechists can benefit from what some theorists call “intercultural sensitivity” (Bennet 1986, 1993; Bhawuk and Brislin, 1992; Bhawuk, Sakuda, and Munusamy, 349–353), which in Christian theological terms can be defined as a charism that demands the Christian embrace of the culturally other as one would embrace Jesus Christ.

**Intercultural Competencies**

Some contemporary conversations among catechetical and pastoral leaders in the United States are exploring the concept of cultural or intercultural competency to name desired skills to work with different cultural and linguistic groups.
The idea of identifying (inter)cultural competencies is certainly a step forward in the process of acknowledging that cultural diversity requires a different way of ministering in the church. It is also understandable that literature in the social sciences seems to widely endorse this concept. My caution is that the concept may be inadequately reduced to quantifiable measures or minimalist expectations, thus impoverishing catechesis and other forms of ministry: How does one measure authentic pastoral commitment to cultural groups beyond one’s own? What is the minimum of cultural understanding that one needs to accompany a person or a community from a different cultural background? Furthermore, the idea of competencies may lead to belief that achieving a particular benchmark like speaking a language or holding a degree/certificate in multicultural ministry or traveling to another country may be “enough” to minister interculturally. This may not be what advocates of the idea of competencies have in mind and my analysis may not do justice to their intentions.

However, my comments here seek to raise awareness about the potential limitations of the concept in ministerial contexts. Accompaniment on the journey of faith through catechetical moments requires that one embraces the other person, her questions, her stories, and her experience—all of which are culturally shaped. In ministerial settings, the idea of intercultural sensitivity can be a more compelling notion; one that calls for sincere conversion on the part of the minister, openness to God’s mysterious presence in people’s lives, and the embrace of diversity as a gift to all. Conversations about intercultural sensitivity have the potential of positively grounding analyses about intercultural competencies and other related terms. This is a unique contribution that contemporary pastoral/practical theologians can make drawing from the best of our Christian tradition and addressing the context in which we live today. We need further and more sustained theological reflection about this reality.

Two Hopes

Alongside the above challenges we can also highlight two hopes. One first hope for catechesis in culturally diverse contexts is the encounter with many perspectives and experiences that enrich our own understanding of what it means to be Christian. The convergence of women and men from different parts of the world, different cultural backgrounds, and different ways of interpreting their Christian experience in one place is a unique opportunity to assess one’s convictions and to learn from others. In some sense the culturally other serves as a reference that measures the authenticity and depth of one’s allegiance to the Christian tradition. The other, Catholic or not, Christian or not, catechizes me with her/his presence and experience. The culturally other is more than a concept or idea; he/she is my neighbor.
Not only the culturally other enriches my own understanding of what it means to be a Christian, but also opens up new windows into the mystery of God. This is our second hope. In culturally diverse contexts catechesis has the potential of exploring new (or revisited) images of God that can enrich my relationship with the divine: the predominant image of the victorious Christ in North America is harmonized with that of the suffering Christ of many Latin American and Asian Christians; the biblical image of God who accompanies the stranger and the pilgrim meets the also biblical image of the God who embraces the newcomer (see Ospino 2009). A catechesis that validates the many life-giving images of God in culturally diverse contexts is a catechesis that has the potential of renewing relationships and building strong communities. Likewise, such catechesis has the power of correcting inadequate images of the divine and to restore our trust in the God of Revelation who meets every human person through Jesus Christ in the particularity of history.

Coming to Terms

Until this point I have indistinctively used terms such as catechesis, culture, and diversity. All catechetical leaders have an operative understanding of these terms based on the particularity of our experiences. Since the goal is to enter into a constructive conversation to envision directions for catechesis in our culturally diverse context, it is important that we reach some common understanding about these three concepts. But before we venture into some definitions, there are some important criteria that we must keep in mind: One, we need to adopt an ecclesial lens to read these terms. We must continuously affirm the potential of catechesis to build stronger faith communities here and now as part of the church’s evangelizing mission (GDC 219). Two, all human persons and social groups belong to cultural worlds within which we make meaning and establish relationships—including our relationship with God. Such awareness calls into question the rather faulty perception that only certain groups possess a culture and consequently any talk about culture is the concern only of such groups. In some sense such perception mirrors faulty attitudes toward race in our society (Hess, 118–125). Three, to properly understand cultural diversity and the multiplicity of religious experiences that coincide in our contexts, we need to retrieve the essential meaning of catholic through theological categories such catholicity (Schreiter, 127–132). Religious educators are uniquely positioned to affirm the richness of what it means to be catholic while challenging forms of negative homogenization (e.g., colonialism, deculturization, assimilation) in catechetical processes.

The above criteria provide a good framework to define the central terms at the center of this reflection. The following definitions are rather keys for conversation.
Catechesis

Catechesis is succinctly defined in the Catechism of the Catholic Church as “an education in the faith of children, young people and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life” (CCC 5; see also CT 18; NDC 6). The strength of the definition is its emphasis on the necessary relationship among education, doctrine, and Christian initiation. A constant risk is the potential reduction of such task to mere indoctrination or sacramentalization, practices that fall short from building authentic and vibrant communities of faith. To avoid such reductions, we can affirm one of the earliest senses of the Greek term *katechein* from which the word *catechesis* derives: “to echo,” “to sound from above” (Bryce, 98). Catechesis demands an appropriation of what one receives so one can properly hand it on. If catechesis is ultimately about leading women and men of all ages and cultures into communion with Jesus Christ (GDC 80), how one person echoes the depth of that communion through words, actions, and convictions shall be seriously considered as an essential indicator of effectiveness in catechesis. Contemporary religious education theory has made excellent contributions to the reflection on the social, political, epistemological, and hermeneutical dimensions of the Christian educational task. Such reflection is very necessary and has led to methodological approaches that continue to have immense value in our communities. However, if believers lack a foundational understanding of their own faith tradition, any talk about hermeneutics or socialization may simply fall on deaf ears. This perhaps is the main issue in the so-called catechetical crisis affecting many of our communities. Ours is a time for a catechetical renewal that must build on the best of insights of Christian education, past and present.

Culture

Among the myriad definitions of culture, one that I find helpful and quite comprehensive appears in the Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*. I take the liberty of quoting at length:

The word “culture” in its general sense refers to all those things which go to the refining and developing of humanity’s mental and physical endowments. We strive to subdue the earth by our knowledge and labor. We humanize social life both in the family and in the whole civic community through the improvement of customs and institutions; we express through our works the great spiritual experiences and aspirations of humanity through the ages; we communicate them and preserve them to be an inspiration for the progress of many people, even of all humanity. Hence it follows that culture necessarily has historical and social overtones, and the word “culture” often carries with it sociological and ethnological connotations; in this sense one can speak about a plurality of cultures. For
different styles of living and different scales of values originate in different ways of using things, of working and self-expression, of practicing religion and of behavior, of establishing laws and juridical institutions, of developing science and the arts and of cultivating beauty. Thus the heritage of its institutions forms the patrimony proper to each human community; thus, too, is created a well defined, historical milieu which envelops the people of every nation and age, and from which they draw the values needed to foster humanity and civilization.

(GS 53)

In this definition we find that “culture” refers both to the product of our effort as well as to the context in which we become human. Both dimensions must go hand-in-hand. As human persons we are *shaped* by the cultural matrices in which we live and simultaneously are *shapers* of such matrices as we appropriate them throughout life. Notice the sequence: first shaped, then shapers. When we enter the catechetical experience, which is a moment of a larger evangelizing journey (EN 22; CT 18), we are already heirs of a language, images, and practices that make us who we are. It is through such cultural tradition that we interpret our relationship with God and others. During the last four decades Catholics have privileged the use of the concept *inculturation* to characterize the encounter between the Gospel and cultures. The term is helpful because it highlights the possibility of Christians entering into dialogue with the many cultures through which human experience is expressed. It also builds on the theological concept of divine incarnation (Dhavamony, 26–36). But religious educators in culturally diverse contexts like ours must ask whether inculturation is the most appropriate category to name the relationship between catechesis and culture. On the one hand, inculturation often seems to presume a modernistic understanding of cultures as self-contained, internally consistent wholes. But a closer look around us leads us to realize that cultures are rather porous realities that are constantly in flux (Tanner, 42–58). In culturally diverse contexts the Gospel enters in dialogue with several cultural perspectives at once. On the other hand, inculturation may be interpreted as a one-directional movement in which “the Gospel transforms culture.” But one may rightly ask: how is the “Gospel” affected? Here I am not referring to the validity or integrity of the Gospel message but to how the Good News is communicated. Any assumption that the language, symbols, and concepts that embody the content of Christian evangelization are “a-cultural,” that is to say without culture, is unwarranted. When the message of the Good News is articulated in words and concepts within a particular culture, the medium through which the message is communicated can always undergo some transformation. Consequently, Christian concepts, structures, and practices across societies may vary because of their cultural location. The situation is more complex in culturally diverse settings when the Good News encounters several cultural worldviews at once. Without dismissing the contributions of inculturation, in these diverse contexts the concept of *interculturality*
seems to hold more promise (Espín 2007, 639–640). Interculturality affirms the
dialogical character of inculturation but facilitates more fluidly the necessary
interaction among multiple cultural voices, Christian and non-Christian. In cultur-
ally diverse contexts we must creatively explore intercultural catechetical models
and pedagogies.

**Cultural Diversity**

Our third term is diversity—more exactly cultural diversity. We have established
that all human persons and communities are shaped by culture and that we are
shapers of the cultural reality in which we live. For Catholics in the United States,
the context in which we are shaped and participate as shapers of culture is one
that is highly diverse. Our demographic landscape at the dawn of the second
decade of the twenty-first century is being constantly transformed by cultural
diversity and as a consequence the U.S. Catholic experience is undergoing profound
redefinitions. But keep in mind that cultural diversity is not limited only to ethnic
differences. Factors such as language, education, age, and socioeconomic status
also contribute to diversity in our context. Furthermore, intra-group diversity
must not be ignored. Current efforts to develop catechetical initiatives and re-
sources need to take cultural diversity seriously. To do this it is helpful to expose
two myths: one, that the assimilation of all U.S. Catholics into a standard language
and the adoption of homogeneous practices will bring unity. To respond to this
we must insist that the issue at stake is not unity as uniformity but unity in
diversity. The latter is what makes us *catholic* and what has made the U.S. Catholic
experience unique—more evidently, of course, at some moments in our history
than in others. Two, that all concepts, symbols, and ideas are equally translatable
across cultures. To this myth we may say that translatability is desirable when
possible and necessary. However, it does not need to happen always. Diversity
demands the respectful embrace of difference and the realization that the richness
of certain symbols, concepts, and experiences resides precisely in their mysterious
character within the particularity of a cultural framework. An unyielding drive
to translating may rob us of precious opportunities for contemplation.

**Catechesis and the (Re)Definition of the
U.S. Catholic Experience**

Diversity has been a constant mark of U.S. Catholicism defined mainly by two
major factors: (1) the various immigrant waves dating back to the 16th cen-
tury with the arrival of the first Spanish Catholics into present U.S. territory—and
still continuing today with millions of Catholic immigrants from every corner of
the world, especially Latin America. (2) The creative, yet not tension-free experi-
ment of being both American and Catholic.
Many cultural families constitute the Catholic community in the United States, each contributing in very unique ways to the richness of our common experience. Among those, U.S. Hispanic Catholics warrant particular attention because of their numeric presence and their increasing influence transforming thousands of Catholic communities throughout the country. Approximately 70 percent of all Hispanics in the United States are Catholic; more than 40 percent of all U.S. Catholics are Hispanic; by 2050 it is estimated that two thirds of all U.S. Catholics will share some Hispanic background. The present and future of catechesis in the United States are closely, yet not exclusively linked to the U.S. Hispanic experience. Turning to this group to illustrate some of the points made until now will help us to envision some directions.

To speak of the U.S. Hispanic Catholic experience is to point to a highly complex reality. It is actually more appropriate to speak of several Hispanic Catholic experiences coexisting in the shared U.S. cultural matrix. These experiences are in turn further particularized by factors such as birthplace (e.g., U.S.-born, foreign-born), migration status (e.g., exile, undocumented immigrant, temporary worker, professional), country of origin, ethnicity (e.g., white, black, indigenous, mestizo, mulato), education, sociopolitical location, language, and generational difference, to name a few. It is beyond the scope of this essay to explain each factor. However, we need to recognize that each is fundamentally constitutive to the U.S. Hispanic Catholic experience in its multiple expressions.

At the local level some catechetical leaders have responded to Hispanic Catholic diversity with homogenizing alternatives. As mentioned above, such measures are rather simplistic, naïve, and ineffective. Others have opted for programmatic fragmentation of catechetical initiatives leading to ultimate isolation of large sectors of the faith community according to language or ethnicity. In general, these measures are also ineffective and rather divisive. It is imperative that practical concerns be informed by reflective moments rooted in the praxis of the communities to develop models that carefully affirm the relationship between catechesis and cultural diversity. Catechesis among highly diverse communities like the U.S. Catholic Church, and more particularly the various Hispanic Catholic communities, needs to envision shared horizons within which multiple experiences coincide in mutual dialogue and lead to a renewed understanding of one’s faith experience, individually and communally. These horizons begin with the multiplicity of experiences that people already possess within their particular cultural worlds and expand proportionally to the embrace of new experiences to which they are exposed. Of course there are some ways more suitable to achieve such horizons.

More than 40 percent of all U.S. Catholics are Hispanics.
than others. Forced assimilation into a dominant way of being “Catholic” and hasty translations of symbols and pedagogies from one culture into another seem to top the list of less-suitable ways. Let me briefly illustrate what I see as one possible way of proceeding positively towards the achievement of shared horizons through catechesis in contexts where U.S. Latino/a Catholics are widely present —and the effects of such horizons upon the wider U.S. Catholic experience.

**Shared Horizons Through Catechesis**

Marian devotion is a broadly recognized characteristic of Christian Catholicism. In the United States immigrant groups have enriched the Catholic spiritual landscape with the many stories and rituals surrounding particular devotions to the Virgin Mary. Hispanic Catholics are no exception and the number of Marian devotions among Latinos/as can seem overwhelming to any outside observer. From a homogenizing perspective, it is easier to dismiss such variety of devotions and pedagogically focus onto just one or two. In that case, Our Lady of Guadalupe, the most widely revered Marian devotion among Latinos/as in the United States, seems fittingly appropriate for such purpose. An even further homogenizing step would entail to strip the devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe and any other Marian devotion among Hispanics from their cultural and historical roots in order to “translate” it into a “more universal one” like Mary, the Mother of God. Let me clarify that in the Hispanic Catholic imagination these devotions coexist without excluding or contradicting one another. Each highlights a special appropriation of one of the most beloved saints in the Christian tradition: Mary. However, my observation here is that we cannot afford to ignore (or dismiss) the social, cultural, historical, and popular religion dimensions of particular Marian devotions among U.S. Latino/a Catholics. These dimensions tell unique stories, the stories that have shaped the Catholic faith and identity of millions of people (Espín 2010, 17). At the heart of Hispanic Marian devotions we discover powerful accounts of the struggles of indigenous peoples and African slaves; we are confronted with the testimonies of hope of those who are poor and suffering as they contemplate the divine love mediated by Mary; we are enriched by ordinary affirmations of how many Latinos/as perceive God's divine providence in their lives. These Marian devotions embody the Catholic faith of the people mediated through unique socio-historical-cultural experiences that are crucial to appreciate where people come from and how they understand their relationship with God.

Catechesis is a unique opportunity to retrieve these Marian symbols and devotions in the local communities by inviting Latinos/as to share them with one another and the larger community, to celebrate them, and to reflect about how they give meaning. By retrieving the religious symbol catechesis retrieves the story; by retrieving the story catechesis retrieves a particular way of being Christian.
Catechesis ought to be an ecclesial experience in which we retrieve and interpret the Christian tradition in light of our culturally diverse reality. Such retrieval can only strengthen the experience of the larger faith community. This is the shared horizon in which differences and commonalities meet. In this shared horizon catechetical leaders honor the articulation of what gives meaning to a person or a group and invite others to enter into the conversation. There is no need to embrace every aspect of the particular stories or to arrive to a final synthesis. It is about recognizing that being a Christian means to affirm the complexity of daily life in lo cotidiano (the everyday), that history and culture deeply shape how we relate with God, and that there is something good about diversity. The concept of shared horizon thus exceeds the need for homogeneity and is fulfilled in the openness to listen to one another.

At some moments the cultural and historical dimensions of religious symbols seem to hold more weight than the doctrinal principles that originated them and are meant to sustain them. This makes sense if we agree that for most believers the first encounter with the faith is through the practical embrace of ideas, stories, objects, and rituals that give meaning to their lives here and now (Tilley, 14). In most circumstances such practical embrace precedes formal catechetical instruction as well as formal theological reflection. Thus, catechesis understood as organic and systematic education in the faith to initiate women and men into the fullness of Christian life must enhance the understanding of the aforementioned symbols affirming their cultural and historical dimensions, correcting possible doctrinal errors, and highlighting their life-giving potential.

The case of Marian devotions among U.S. Hispanic Catholics is simply an illustration of the renewed direction in which catechesis might move in our context. Needless to say, attention to cultural diversity is not exclusive of groups for whom language or ethnicity are central markers of their identity. Neither is it limited to practices of popular Catholicism or marginal articulations of the faith. As previously indicated, every person is located within a cultural matrix that shapes identities and worldviews and is simultaneously shaped by our intentional appropriation. The process of echoing one’s faith does not happen in the abstract but is essentially related to the particularity of our existences. In the United States, such existence is deeply marked by cultural diversity.

There are many other realities in culturally diverse contexts like ours that catechetical leaders can use to make catechesis more dynamic and effective. For instance, issues of social justice like immigration, racial discrimination, and sexism...
need to be addressed by taking into consideration the variety of experiences of the different groups and subgroups that constitute the church in this country. It is very likely that each group has different perspectives based on their own socio-cultural experience. Catechesis needs to provide the spaces for those perspectives to be shared and discussed. To apply, for instance, the principles of Catholic Social Teaching to problems like immigration without engaging the actual experiences of the many voices in the church affected by this issue is to miss a precious opportunity.

Cultural diversity then emerges as an opportunity to (re)define catechesis in creative ways. Catechesis needs to be more than mere indoctrination or memorization of formulas through culturally-oblivious methodologies and resources. In the culturally diverse matrix in which we live our faith as U.S. Catholics, catechesis must serve as a proper locus in which women and men of all backgrounds share their symbols and stories with each other creating shared horizons that are welcoming and affirming. Catechesis ought to be an ecclesial experience in which we retrieve and interpret the Christian tradition in light of—not in spite of—our culturally diverse reality. Present historical conditions such as large population shifts, conversations about Catholic identity, and generational transition indicate that the U.S. Catholicism is heading in the direction of renewal. This renewal can be understood as a necessary re-definition of the U.S. Catholic experience in the spirit of what Pope John Paul II called the New Evangelization: new in its ardor, new in its methods, new in its expressions (John Paul II, 1983). No such re-definition will be effective unless catechesis is first appropriately (re)defined. Furthermore, catechesis won’t be appropriately (re)defined in our context if it does not intentionally recognize and affirm cultural diversity.

**Into the Future**

The biblical image of fresh wineskins for new wine (Matt 9:17) seems quite fitting to bring this reflection to a close. The culturally diverse nature of the present Catholic experience in the United States places serious demands on catechetical leaders requiring important (re)definitions of the catechetical task. In turn this may lead to fresher (re)definitions of the U.S. Catholic experience. Returning to the question in the beginning about what is Hispanic catechesis or any other type of catechesis, our reflections in this essay help us to realize that what is at stake is a much larger issue; it is about what catechesis must be here and now. Thus we need to consider three interrelated questions: (1) How must we (re)define catechesis in culturally diverse contexts? (2) How can the multiple voices that constitute our faith communities better contribute to a more dynamic (re)definition of catechesis? (3) What kind of Catholic experience will emerge when we engage in honest dialogue to address to the previous two questions? This certainly calls for further reflection and more sustained conversations.
References


