

What is Wesleyan Catechesis?

The larger inheritance of catechesis

Catechesis is:

the process by which the church shares its witness to new life in Jesus Christ with catechumens---those who want to hear and learn---seeking to form them in Christian faith and life so that they can "echo" the good news of God's transforming grace in Christ. Through catechesis, the church seeks to provide new converts with ways and means by which the Holy Spirit can transform their faith and life.

Aidan Kavanagh's description of catechesis as "conversion therapy!:"

1. Catechesis reorients converts so that their whole approach to life will be grounded in God's revelation in Jesus Christ.
2. Catechesis "attempts to seduce the convert's initial, subjective, and largely incommunicable experience of faith" into an approach which is shared with other Christians.
3. Catechesis provides the convert with guidance and direction "in basic discipline for living the Christian life."

[Aidan Kavanagh, "Catechesis: Formation in Stages" in *The Baptismal Mystery and the Catechumentate*, ed. by Michael W. Merriman (NY: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1990), pp. 39-40]

Catechesis seeks to

- (1) center life in Jesus Christ
- (2) within the context of the living tradition of the Church so that
- (3) we can be enabled to live faithfully in accord with God's justice/love.

Because we are called to continue to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ," there is a very real sense in which the Christian life is a life of on-going catechesis!

Richness of the catechetical methods of the Wesleys:

"my great desire is to have

Christ formed in my heart by faith"

(Davies, *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 9, 24)

Contemporary restatement of the only condition for joining a Methodist society

("a desire to flee from the wrath to come and to be saved from their sins"):

a desire to flee from lack of meaning and significance in life, with the emptiness and spiritual starvation that brings, to be saved from the power of broken and empty relationships with others and with God, and restored to wholeness of life.

The Means of Grace

Means of grace are "outward signs, words, or actions ordained by God" to be the "ordinary channels" through which prevenient, justifying, or sanctifying grace are conveyed to us. They are not the only ways in which God works, but they are the "ordinary" ways--the places where God meets us "by previous appointment," as it were.

(DWV, *By Water and the Spirit*, 1993 ed., p. 33)

For John Wesley, a society was

"united in order to pray together,
to receive the word of exhortation,
and to watch over one another in love,
that they may help each other to work out their salvation."

[*The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 9, 69)

The essential components of Methodism in place by 1735:

the willingness to submit to discipline to attain spiritual vitality;

the importance of an experiential knowledge of salvation;

the conviction that the pursuit of holiness

in its highest earthly form was indispensable;

and the knowledge that all of these together,

without the exception of any one, was the correct path.

(W. Stephen Gunter, *The Limits of 'Love Divine,'* pp. 54-55)

The Baptismal Covenant (adapted from Come to the Waters, pp. 39-40)

1. Wesleyan catechesis and the services of the baptismal covenant are grounded in dying and rising with Jesus Christ. The foundation and power for both is the faithfulness of God in Christ. They point to, and rely upon, the converting grace of God at work through the church and in the world.

2. Wesleyan catechesis is directed toward the same questions we find in the United Methodist services of the baptismal covenant:

Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness?

Do you repent of your sin?

Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior?

Do you put your whole trust in his grace?

Do you promise to serve him as your Lord?

3. Wesleyan catechesis, like the process of Christian initiation or reaffirmation, assumes and requires the participation of the community of faith, not merely as observers of the baptismal rite, but as participants in the work of

reaching out,

welcoming,

forming faith and discipleship,

and sending persons out to ministry in daily life.

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