INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the central insight that in 1979-82 sparked the whole approach of the National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines [NCDP] was the conviction that our “overriding problem of catechesis is that of relating the essentials of the faith to the daily life experience of the people.”¹ The challenge which the NCDP proposed was to “bridge the gap” between the faith as taught in the classroom, in parish catechesis and liturgical conferences, AND the day-by-day life experience of Filipino Catholics.

Now, in 1997, the national adult catechism, the Catechism for Filipino Catholics [CFC], as a follow-up volume to the NCDP, provides a concrete example of how NCDP’s principles and guidelines could be followed and implemented.² But in the long, drawn-out, laborious process of fashioning the CFC, to “bridge the gap” and respond to PCP II’s call for a “renewed catechesis,”³ especially as “inculturated,”⁴ a number of specific problems arose that touched on the primary

1. See Maturing in Christian Faith, The National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines [NCDP] (Pasay: St. Paul Publ., 1985) nos. 99, 165-55, 171. The basic proposal by the NCDP for closing this “gap” was integrating the natural “experiential” dimensions of the Faith (Doctrines, Morals and Worship) and the corresponding acts of the faithful: believing (Head), doing (Hands), and trusting (Heart).
goals of a national catechism.

Basically, these particular problems revolved about COMMUNICATION.⁵ The theme of communicating the Faith is so broad, with so many fundamental elements and critical questions involved – theology itself and theological method, evangelization, catechesis and catechetical methodology, Revelation, Faith, Scripture/Tradition, culture, education, among the leading elements – that many are discouraged from attempting any holistic discussion at all. Yet some serious, integrating effort is needed if there is to be any improvement in the actual practice of ‘communicating the Faith’.

The following represents an effort at using the actual, historical process of creating the recently approved adult, national Catechism for Filipino Catholics [CFC] as a focal point for a critical discussion of this particular serious effort at ‘communicating the Faith’. The obvious limitations imposed by this focus makes possible bringing together in a concrete, practical way, a number of topics and methods that usually are treated only separately, and at a theoretical level.

COMMUNICATION

To begin with the obvious, in all communication, there is a Message, a Communicator, the Means of communication, the Receiver of the Message, and whole context in which the communication takes place. Thus in communicating the Faith we have:

- **message**: the “Good News of Jesus Christ”;
- **communicators**: various agents, from the Bishops, priests, theologians, down to the simplest volunteer catechist;
- **sources and means** of communicating: Scripture, Church teaching, and the innumerable human ways in which Faith is being communicated;
- **receivers**: the People of God and all men/women of good will;
- the surrounding culture of belief or disbelief.⁶

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⁶ This fifth dimension, the surrounding culture, was the focus of a
Now in each of these five constitutive areas of communicating the Faith, one could list many serious academic theoretical approaches that have been proposed, studied and exercised in various degrees. At a more practical level, however, it is possible without too much oversimplification, to identify two common tendencies within contemporary ‘communicating the Faith’.

- One tendency consistently emphasizes the existential, experiential and personal factors in believing, the specific means used in communicating the message of Faith, and how it is received.

- The other more traditional method stresses using the content of the Faith’s message, expressed in tried-and-true formulas, and through the traditional ways of using the primary sources for its communication.

Clearly in any adequate exposition of Christian Faith, both approaches offer important and needed dimensions of communicating the Faith. Hence it is not a question of choosing one approach over the other, but rather of a correct balanced use of both.7

THE “REALITY PRINCIPLE”

In the actual process of “balancing” these two standard approaches in CFC’s method of communicating the Faith, a particular insight gradually took shape and began to function as a practical norm of choice. It can be called the “Reality Principle,” which consists of three practical ‘rules of thumb’ stating that:

1) point to, name, reveal, a REALITY;

2) resonate in concrete ways in the historical, on-going, personal and cultural life-REALITY of the faithful;

3) hence involve constant renewing and adapting in order to communicate the Faith accurately and effectively to today’s

whole recent issue of Religious Education (vol. 92, no. 2 [Spring 1997]) in which articles by recognized experts (Thomas Groome, Daniel Schipani, Mary Elizabeth Moore) discussed various aspects of communicating the Faith within the “Culture of Disbelief” of the present USA.

7. John Paul II, in his Catechesi Tradendae (1979), no. 22, implicitly acknowledges these two communication approaches in the very act of rejecting their mutual incompatibility.
'hearers of the Word'.

The first rule prescribes that formulas must be constantly related directly to the REALITIES they express, otherwise they soon become abstract generalizations and take on a life of their own, separated from their real reference. E.g., the doctrine of the Trinity is NOT a word game, but the human way we have of getting to the REALITY of the One Living God revealed by Jesus Christ.

The second, about the 'resonance' of the terms, is exemplified in the common [mis]use of the term 'Mystery'. To teach that the Trinity is a "Mystery" because it is "something we cannot understand" usually undermines and destroys all saving value and impact which the Trinity could and should have on the actual REAL believing of the faithful.

The third rule draws the conclusion that traditional terms and formulas must be constantly tested and renewed in order to accurately and effectively 'communicate the Faith'.

GENERAL PURPOSE AND DIVISION OF EXPOSITION

The following pages apply this "Reality Principle" to "balancing" the two common approaches to communicating the Good News. But this "application" is done in a unique way. For instead of simply developing the theme theoretically, a method of working from concrete examples was chosen. These examples give concrete problems of communication that the CFC encountered and the basic options taken by the CFC as an adult national catechism.

The purpose of this essay, then, is to help illumine, in a very modest way, the common problem of communicating the 'Good News' today, whether on the theological or the more basic catechetical levels. Since the means chosen in this essay is to focus on the specific problems encountered in creating the CFC, a secondary aim is to help toward a deeper insight into the CFC, especially in how to interpret and use the CFC in communicating the Faith today. The "Reality Principle" should be brought into the everyday use of the CFC as a constant criterion and norm in evaluating the CFC's potential for renewing Philippine catechesis.

The exposition begins with relating the "Reality Principle" to (I) CFC's general structure, exemplifying the need for concrete communication. This is followed by taking in order CFC's major divisions:
(II) Foundations, including Revelation and Faith; (III) Catholic Doctrine, citing certain sample dogmas of the faith; (IV) Catholic Morality, focusing on conscience and moral norms; and (V) Catholic Worship, including the role of Christ, the Church, and the seven ritual Sacraments.

I. CFC’S STRUCTURE AND THE “REALITY PRINCIPLE”

We can begin analyzing ‘communicating the Faith’ by studying the overall structure of the CFC, which already exemplifies the "Reality Principle." As we know, the Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC] chose to follow the Council of Trent catechism’s structural order (doctrine, worship, morals). As a national catechism, the CFC intentionally chose to insert its exposition of Catholic Morality between Doctrine and Worship. It thus exemplified the guidelines of the NCDP which explained the specific need in Philippine catechesis of integrating morality more closely with both doctrine and worship. This meant departing from the more common approach of tacking morality at the end, almost like an after-thought, or “something flowing from faith as a second moment but not intrinsic to authentic belief in itself” (NCDP 251).

Thus in stressing the NCDP principle of integration, the CFC opted for a structure that linked together in an intrinsic way the “four [traditional] pillars” of communicating the faith: Creed, Commandments, Sacraments, and the Lord’s Prayer. Commandments (morality) are proposed as fundamentally “the following of our Lord Jesus Christ,” the second article of the Creed. Sacraments (worship) are explained in terms of the Holy Spirit and the Church, the Creed’s third article. Therefore, in place of CCC’s four relatively separate sections following one after another (Creed, Sacraments, Commandments, Prayer), in CFC the Creed forms the structure of the whole book. 8

The “Reality Principle” entered here in balancing the more traditional order with the existential need for stressing moral living as

8. A major advantage of CFC’s order over the CCC which separates Sacraments from Prayer by the section on Commandments, is precisely the integrating of Prayer with the Sacraments, and both as flowing from the Holy Spirit.
essential to 'communicating the Faith'. This flows particularly from the second norm of the 'Reality Principle', namely, the need to recognize and resonate with the concrete personal and cultural life-Reality of the faithful. One consequence of this was the CFC’s effort to overcome the common tendency to consider holiness uniquely in terms of prayer and sacraments (cult), thus stressing the role of religious and priests, while minimizing 'doing the truth in loving service' (morality).  

II. THE "REALITY PRINCIPLE" IN CFC’S FOUNDATIONS

Introductory Chapter. Directly following the NCDP’s example and guideline, CFC’s first chapter, “Who is the Filipino Catholic?” is obviously chosen to stress the absolutely essential role of contextualization and INCULTURATION in communicating the Christian Faith to Filipinos today. This choice may seem obvious and taken-for-granted, yet in actual fact it had to overcome strong and persistent objections, which insisted on “pure doctrine,” absolutely free from any contextual influence.

Here the “Reality Principle” simply directed attention to the undeniable fact that all Catholics learn their faith within a concrete cultural context, through specific individuals who understand the Faith in their particular culture and pass it on through their cultural means. Thus the “Reality Principle” insists that there is no such thing as “pure doctrine,” communicated outside of any context, through sources and means untouched by any culture.

9. Certain prescribed changes in the original CFC text (1400, 1472) manifested this tendency, on the one hand by avoiding the claim of charity’s primacy, and on the other by focusing on the special call of priests and religious in the very paragraph insisting on the laity’s call to holiness. In another paragraph (1425), the original Lay ‘Ministry’ was changed to Lay ‘Apostolate’, while retaining “lay ministries” within the paragraph. But an enigmatic ending was added: “It is clear, then, that the laity’s apostolate cannot be exclusively described in terms of ministry.” What that means is anyone’s guess! What does ‘come through’ in the prescribed changes is a very cautious attitude toward the participation of the laity in the Church’s mission.

10. The clear teaching on the 3-stage formation of the four canonical Gospels, especially the oral tradition stage, stresses the contextualization even of Scripture. Cf. note 16 on DV 8 in Abbott’s edition of Vatican II, and Neuner-Dupuis, eds., The Christian Faith, nos. 241-44, giving the Biblical Commission’s Instruction on the Gospels.
Therefore, CFC’s choice here is more than just insisting on one way of beginning the catechism rather than other possible ways. It is more than just an individual preference for one “model” over others. Rather the rejection of the allegedly “pure” doctrine in favor of contextualized doctrine in communicating the faith manifests a basic TRUTH of the real, living Faith of Christians. Any attempt to ignore this truth leads inevitably to serious error.

God’s Call: Revelation. Since Vatican II’s influential “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation” (DV), there has been much erudite theological discussion on the nature and channels of God’s Revelation. Some perennial questions have to be faced. For example, how is revelation at once:

- complete, perfect in Jesus Christ who is the fullness of God’s revelation (DV 4). and yet
- continues, since “God continues to converse with the spouse of his beloved Son [the Church]. And through the Holy Spirit the living voice of the Gospel rings out” (DV 8).

An objection, possibly inspired by theological over-caution, was raised against CFC’s affirmation that “Filipino Catholics experience God’s Self-Revelation today” through the Bible, the Church’s liturgy, etc. Again, the “Reality Principle,” bypassing all technical definitions and erudite theories, simply focused on the undeniable fact: to be a Christian one must have received God’s Revelation in Jesus Christ. Where there is no Christian Revelation received, no Christian Faith is possible.

It may come as a surprise to some, but such “realistic” arguments are often NOT well received by the experts and authorities involved. There is a certain ivory-towerish temptation, seemingly unavoidable among experts, that hinders them at times from seeing the obvious.

11. This point aims at correcting an all-too-frequent reductism, reducing communicating the Faith to social science pedagogy and the latest trend in educational theory. There is a question of TRUTH here which the “Reality Principle” insists to be the focus of both the traditional and the current experiential methods of ‘communicating the Faith’.

12. This problem had already been faced and explained briefly in the NCDP, nos. 126-27. But serious objections were raised insistently against CFC, rejecting the validity of interpreting DV 8 in terms of continuing revelation.
This unfortunate defect has to be brought to light and corrected. The saving factor in catechetical work is that, in actual practice, such unrealistic theories almost never reach those actually teaching/catechizing.

**Our Response: Faith.** CFC’s Chapter 3 on Faith offers two exceptional examples of the “Reality Principle” helping to balance the two communication approaches. The first example concerns the relation between our “human faith” (our close relations with family members, best friends, etc.), and our “divine faith” (our graced faith in God):

- the traditional content approach focused uniquely on our faith relation to God, as made possible only through God’s free Self-Revelation in Scripture, Tradition, and His grace of interior enlightenment by the Holy Spirit.
- the experiential approach uses human friendship as the best analogy (comparison) we have of both “Revelation” and “faith in God.”

The “Reality Principle” here advises a careful, balanced adoption of both approaches. Surely our Faith in God is not the same as our faith in one another. A social science analysis is not adequate to handle God’s Self-Revelation nor our Graced response in Faith. Yet the same structure of free self-revelation, free acceptance of the other’s self-revelation, and a gradual deepening process, holds for both our human and divine faiths. If no human analogy is recognized and explained, there is great danger of falling into the trap of abstract formulas, separated from reality.

An extraordinary example of this danger is the truly ‘remarkable’ CCC statement: “We must believe in no one but God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (no. 178) – which, thank God, is contradicted explicitly in nos. 154, 180! Nevertheless, it does indicate that if ‘communicating the Faith’ regarding divine Revelation and Faith does not use any human analogy like friendship, it is very doubtful that

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13. Nevertheless, there are many indications of a real transformation in the mind-set of many experts. Michael J. Hines, *Doing the Truth in Love* (New York: Paulist, 1995) and Donald Gelpi, *The Turn to Experience in Contemporary Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1994) are indicative of many periti in both fundamental and systematic theology, as well as Scripture scholars, who are searching for greater integration of theology and spirituality, theology and the everyday life of faith, critical study of Scripture and the pastoral demands of the community, and the like.
either will be understood in any real way.\textsuperscript{14} The second example concerns the fundamental qualities of Faith, our believing in God.

- *traditionally*, faith is explained in separate sections as reasonable, certain, supernatural and free;
- a more *existential* approach integrates these basic qualities, particularly those that at first sight seem mutually contradictory.

*CFC*, in one of its more creative sections entitled "Paradoxical Characteristics of Faith" (*CFC* 141-54), pulls together seemingly contradictory qualities of Christian Faith as they actually co-exist in believing Christians. Once this is done, it becomes obvious that neither quality of any pair of seemingly opposed Faith-characteristics can possibly be accurately understood unless interrelated with the other. For example, faith in God as a "free act" must be balanced by its quality of being "morally obliged"; faith as "reasonable" must be balanced by its "beyond natural reason" quality. Unless these qualities are interrelated together, neither one can be properly understood or exercised.

That last comment is important. The real value and necessity of this balance of communicating what FAITH is surely rests on the REALITY of believing. E.g., Faith is at once and undeniably BOTH a gift of God yet something WE DO. Both need to be said, and together, at the same time – otherwise both will be grievously misunderstood.

The impact of the "Reality Principle" in these two examples is very strong. It touches directly on the reality or nature of the MESSAGE itself (what is Faith): on the actual believing of both Communicator and Receiver; and on the adequate Means for communicating the truth of faith. The unfortunately common practice of simply having the youth memorize the traditional formulas describing Faith, with no critical appreciation of its REALITY in their daily lives, may be one principal cause for PCP II's complaint about how ineffective our catechesis has been. Nothing less than this focus on the Reality of Faith as lived is acceptable for any genuinely adequate com-

municating the Faith'.

III. THE "REALITY PRINCIPLE" IN CFC'S CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

Only a few typical examples and illustrations of how the "Reality Principle" worked in these following sections can be given.

Regarding "Doctrines," two additional factors came into play in balancing the common methods of communicating the Faith. The first was the appearance of certain "fears" that apparently served as unspoken sources for some unrealistic objections. For example, the "fear" of a nationalistic church, separated from the unity of the universal Catholic Church under the Pope, the Vicar of Christ, prompted some objections against the CFC as "too Filipino." Or the "fear" of a liberation theology that is more Marxist than Christian, induced a similar objection regarding CFC’s vigorous espousal of PCP II’s renewed Social Apostolate. Or finally, "fear" of an exaggerated feminism induced a negative reaction to CFC’s very modest efforts at inclusive language.

The "Reality Principle" here, while acknowledging the necessity for sharp and continued vigilance against slipping into the dangers inherent in these topics, nevertheless reveals the intrinsic INADEQUACY and ONE-SIDEDNESS of FEAR as a determining factor in creating an effective catechesis. In all three cases, there is undeniable truth and value in the positions objected to – national culture, the social thrust of the Church, and the legitimate concerns for women’s rights. Fear of possible and even real abuse can never destroy the truth and value of correct use.

Such fear is not a chance reaction. Rather the fear of questioning dominant metaphors of God, as well as the fear of knowing ourselves more deeply and honestly, are the subjects in one way or another of numerous contemporary studies. These fears can be responded to positively by education that focuses on a 'wisdom' [sophia] that inspires and encourages persons to seek to know and respond to God

in their concrete situation.\textsuperscript{16}

The \textit{second additional factor} that became more significant in balancing the communication of "Doctrine" was the underlying \textit{epistemology}, or how we know and understand reality.\textsuperscript{17} For catechists and religion teachers in school, especially on the High School and College levels, the relation of Faith and reason is a major problem. In our present age of science and technology, not to mention materialism and consumerism, there is a basic, underlying and constant challenge of defending Christian Faith’s truth and value. Faith is a "\textit{loving knowledge}" that for human persons is superior, not inferior, to both physical and social scientific knowledge. But this runs counter to the thrust of almost all school studies. No wonder, then, that the public truth value of the Christian Faith is often ignored, doubted, or even rejected.

The "\textit{Reality Principle}" in this case must somehow get beyond the common rationalistic idea of human knowing which idolizes scientific knowledge and equivalently ignores or rejects the value of interpersonal knowing. A case in point is the notion of "\textit{mystery}" in Christian catechesis:

- as compared to the experimental knowledge of science and "scientific proofs," Christian "mysteries" are described as things "we cannot understand, but simply have to accept on faith";
- but if compared to our interpersonal knowledge of our parents, family and friends, Christian "mysteries" are not only reasonable but "certain" enough to die for.

16. See the insightful summary article of Mary Elizabeth Moore, "Wisdom, Sophia and the Fear of Knowing." \textit{Religious Education} 92 (Spring 1997) 228-43.

Here again the "Reality Principle" manifests an essential dimension of reality: human knowing is NOT limited to the measurable, experimental, scientific level. Mystery is essentially such a POSITIVE REALITY that it can never be fully defined, circumscribed completely; rather it is inexhaustible in intelligibility, always open to further understanding. Only in this sense could "Christian mysteries" possibly be "saving."

In this sense, we are mysteries to ourselves – meaning we can never define ourselves perfectly, with nothing to add. Rather we are ever open to deeper self-understanding. Christian Faith shows clearly why this is so, namely, precisely because we are directly related to God as created, redeemed, sanctified, and destined for life everlasting. As such we can never be circumscribed – there is always more to know and understand.18

Based on a more limited traditional epistemology, prescribed changes were imposed on the CFC (no.1356), relegating 'mystery' to what "can never be known" unless revealed by God, and distinguishing between divine truths proposed to our belief and "created salvific realities" which can "partly be known by our human intelligence." This, of course, destroys seeing the unifying basis for all 'mystery' in religious faith as God Himself, rejects the fruitful analogous understanding of 'divine truths', and leads toward a one-sided propositional understanding of Revelation that was superseded in Vatican II’s "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation" (no. 2).19

Also for lack of an adequate epistemology, an uncritical naive


19. This 'imposition' came after much written discussion which descended to the level of insisting on one sentence rather than another of an identical paragraph from Vatican I's "Dogmatic Constitution Dei Filius on the Catholic Faith," Chap. 4, Faith and Reason (DS 3016, Neuner-Dupuis, *The Christian Faith*, no. 132). One can only react with a wry smile at this exercise of contrariness, especially given the lost opportunity of making real improvement in the ordinary catechist's notion of mystery.
`realism' was claimed for eschatological language used in revelation and faith. Prescribed changes obscured if not rejected CFC's original exposition's nuanced view that faith statements about judgment, heaven, hell are not ordinary, factual eyewitness accounts, but rather interpretations of the ultimate dimensions of our experience now (CFC 2033, 2074).\textsuperscript{20}

SAMPLE DOCTRINAL APPLICATIONS

Both the "fear" and the overly rationalistic idea of human knowing were encountered in CFC's way of communicating some essential Catholic doctrines.

An example of the 'mind-set' that makes some formula of faith 'the reality' while ignoring the real, actual believing was exemplified in the prescribed deletion of the phrase "many beliefs" (original CFC 215) as endangering the traditional formula, the "one" Faith. The twelve articles of the Creed on creation, Incarnation, Paschal Mystery, the Holy Spirit, the Church, etc. were somehow ignored, allegedly out of fear for confusing the faithful. The "Reality Principle" here simply highlights the fact that belief in creation is not belief in the Incarnation, which in turn is not belief in the Holy Spirit, etc. Fear can, at times, obstruct recognizing the obvious – and an obvious fact that needs to be expressed.

Regarding original sin, the fear of moving beyond the "traditional" formula imposed two changes on CFC. The first was to insert the image of original sin as a "black mark" to be washed away in Baptism (CFC 1602). While the second was the insistence on "privation of sanctifying grace" as the essential understanding of original sin (CFC 401, 406). The first impedes recent catechetical efforts to correct the "stain" image of original sin and concentrate on the more fundamental truth of Baptism emphasized today in the RCIA and expressed in 1 Pt 3:21: "Baptism is not removal of physical stain, but the pledge to God of an irreproachable conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." The second (privation of sanctifying grace) is theologically

\textsuperscript{20} These prescribed changes seem to be caused by simply out-of-date theology. For a simple exposition of the common current theology, see Zachary Hayes, \textit{Visions of a Future: A Study of Christian Eschatology} (Wilmington: Glazier, 1988), and his brief \textit{What Are They Saying About the End of the World?} (New York: Paulist, 1983).
accurate but very weak in ‘communicating’ the reality of original sin in individual persons and the world today.

A certain refusal to ‘look reality in the face’ may be discerned in other prescribed changes. For example, the human limitations and constant need for renewal and purification of the Church was changed to “our” limitations and need (CFC 1371) – apparently under the illusion that admission of the Church’s need explicitly acknowledged in Vatican II and countless other writings since would shake the simple faith of Catholics.21

Another example of avoiding the obvious, concerned the doctrine of “resurrection of the body.” Deletion was prescribed for CFC’s modest attempt to link this dogma with current scientific knowledge about our material bodies – what “body” of ours will be raised, given the constant aging and renewal process going on throughout our lives? Instead, platitudes of Jesus as our norm were inserted (CFC 2050). Perhaps more disconcerting were two prescribed changes in treating death itself. The first changed CFC’s exposition of how death pertains to the whole human person, not just the body, by claiming for the soul, death just “seem[s] such a threat” (CFC 2052).

The second prescribed change was to delete from CFC’s original exposition of “Jesus’ Death as Norm” the aspect of death as constructive and integrating, apparently in fear of the reference to the “final option” theory of death (CFC 2056).22 The “Reality Principle”


22. The initial objections to CFC’s exposition on death were actually heretical, denying that the Person of Jesus Christ died. When it was pointed out that all the references cited in the CCC as proof of this position, affirmed the opposite – Christ really did die, death meaning separation of body and soul (CCC 1009, 650, 1006, 1016) – no more was heard on this particular point. One wonders what possible ground could be proposed for affirming the universal redemptive power of Christ’s death IF the PERSON of the Incarnate Word did not die.
here could have drawn on the long Catholic tradition in spirituality of “putting oneself on one’s death bed,” to decide things of great moment – not to mention Christ’s own encomium: “There is no greater love than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:13).

The role of Scripture in catechesis and religious education, sketched in CFC’s Chapter 9, “God Promises a Savior,” provides a further clear example of the “Reality Principle” helping to balance the communication approaches. Here it is question of how much modern “Biblical criticism” should be incorporated into an adult catechism.

- on the one hand, the Bible is for everyone – not just Biblical scholars;
- on the other, the misuse of Scriptural texts for “text-proving,” or in a fundamentalist manner, shows the need for proper formation in Scripture.

The “Reality Principle” here works as an intermediary between the extremes, and touches not only Scripture as THE means for communicating the “Good News,” but also includes the respective spiritual maturity of both Communicator and Receiver, the background and cultural context, and the actual faith understanding of Scripture itself.23

IV. THE “REALITY PRINCIPLE” IN CFC’S CATHOLIC MORALITY

The very structure chosen for CFC’s approach to Catholic morality represents in itself an exercise of the “Reality Principle” in balancing two current approaches to teaching morals. Briefly summarized, one approach stresses Biblical sources and focuses on the primary themes of virtue and character, while the other more traditional approach sticks to the Commandments. By introducing Catholic Morality in the Gospel terms of “following Christ” (Chaps. 13-14), and the Ten

Commandments relative to Christ’s own teaching and deepening of the Two Love Commandments (Chaps. 15-21), CFC was able to balance both current moral approaches.  

That this represents a real positive accomplishment is highlighted by a number of prescribed changes imposed on the CFC, manifesting a certain authoritarian attitude of mind. First, regarding the moral agent, the key operative difference between the motivating power of “loving, evaluative knowledge” and so-called “head knowledge” was wiped out with a “not only, but also” misguided attempt at balance (CFC 831). A similar misguided attempt, this time producing an erroneous balance, destroyed CFC’s original exposition of the real primacy of “vision over moral prescriptions, values over mere rules, fundamental commitment over particular acts” (CFC 1843).

Second, this tendency towards an authoritarian and legalistic approach to morality is discernible in the prescribed deletion of all “limitations” in explaining moral norms (CFC 832), thus equivalently ‘absolutizing’ the letter of the law. Such absolutizing is exemplified in the prescribed changes in the question on the actual effectivity of the Sixth Commandment. CFC’s original response was that its effectivity had suffered from the widespread “double-standard” and rigid taboos often enforced by a moralistic, legalistic mind-set. This response was turned upside down to: “The Commandment has proven to be a great protection from . . . ,” which seems to run against the explicit apologies by John Paul II regarding recognized abuses of the past.

This legalistic mind-set is also evident when to the paragraph on “Conscience and Magisterium” (CFC 838) a quote from CCC was added, admonishing the faithful of their “duty of observing the constitutions and decrees conveyed by the legitimate authority of the Church” (CCC 2037). It is not clear what “constitutions” are in question; what is clear is the authoritarian bias.

Third, a similar attitude is discernible in the prescribed deletion of CFC’s original modest exposition of levels of conscience, later related

in a general way to models of sin (CFC 706, 770). Two whole paragraphs had to be refashioned with unimpeachable quotations from Church and Papal documents.

These examples only go to show the great difficulty, within the exposition of General Morals, of communicating a balanced view of both conscience and moral norms. The “Reality Principle” again helped in recognizing the mutual dependence between universal objective moral norms, and the proper indispensable role of conscience. The balanced exposition arrived at by the CFC neither merely reaffirmed uncritically universal objective moral laws, nor slipped into relegating all morality under the “proportionate reasoning” of the individual.

The “Reality Principle” in this case was particularly effective in unmasking the inadequacies of some current positions. For example, current works in moral philosophy and theology commonly distinguish any number of meanings and levels of conscience. The result is very often confusion. In this context, the “Reality Principle” fostered the practical approach to the essence of conscience by the question: “What does conscience do, that nothing else does, and that has to be done?” The answer: apply universal moral norms to concrete moral acts. This reply rests on the REALITY that “No law interprets itself, and that conscience does NOT act as a law unto itself.”

That such a balance is not so “common,” however, was indicated by a negative reaction to CFC’s use of the phrase “personal responsibility” to bring together the moral agent’s conscience, and the object, intention and circumstances of the moral act. Introducing a new phrase like “personal responsibility” (CFC 1805) apparently alarmed traditionalists. “Does this mean a fourth element has been added to the moral act’s three constituents of object, intention, and circumstances?” Here the “Reality Principle” asserts itself again as judicator: personal responsibility simply refers to the human person as moral agent in community. Without such personal responsibility, there is NO “object, intention, or circumstances,” NO moral act. Again, the obvious seems the hardest to get across.

25. For a recent detailed discussion of conscience by authors such as Cardinal Ratzinger, Bishop Paul Philibert, Benedict Ashley, O.P., and John Haas, see Catholic Conscience Foundation and Formation, ed. Russell Smith (Braintree: Pope John Center, 1991).
But the objection represents a startling example of totally missing the reality: persons acting morally. It seems to be a clear case where the terms and formulas themselves have become the "reality," while the personal moral agents performing moral acts which the terms are supposedly expressing, are lost from view. This deficiency is partially due to a "common sense" mind-set that reduces "personal" to private or subjectivistic.26 A more accurate view of the REALITY of the "person" as intrinsically relational and social, overcomes both the charge of subjectivism and an out-dated "objectivistic" view of the human subject in moral acting.27

V. THE "REALITY PRINCIPLE" AND CFC'S CATHOLIC WORSHIP

In the final section on Worship, the "Reality Principle" became operative in CFC's discussion of "Sacrament." The basic effort of the CFC was to emphasize the ritual Sacraments as "encounters with the Risen Christ," involving the active faith of the receiver, within the context of the Christian community, the Church, and actualized by the power of the Holy Spirit. Such a conception raised a number of interrelated difficulties from the traditionalist approach.

Traditionally, Sacraments were commonly defined as "giving grace" which in practice unfortunately seemed to picture grace as a quantifiable reality rather than in terms of a personal relationship.28 When


28. An objector actually could not understand what "increase of grace" could possibly mean IF grace was defined in terms of God's personal loving relation with us. CFC's approach to Grace, based espe-
joined to the traditional Catholic phrase “ex opere operato” describing the objective power of the sacramental action. “giving grace” also was open to the misconception that sacraments worked “automatically,” independent of any faith on the part of the receiver. Both these very common real misunderstandings about “giving grace” were rejected and bland generalities prescribed in their place (CFC 1527-28).

To bring in faith as necessary for receiving the sacraments fruitfully apparently raised the fear that this would reject the traditional Catholic teaching on the objective power of the Sacraments. Furthermore, the distinction between the spiritual and the material was jeopardized by questioning whether “presence” of the Holy Spirit in Baptism was any less “material” than the original sin as a “stain.”

The “Reality Principle” in this case worked from two sources. First is the misunderstandings about the “automatic efficacy” of the Sacraments, and about original sin as a real physical stain. Both are common among the faithful, and this is fully recognized by those who have direct catechetical experience. Rejecting these existential, verifiable facts on the grounds that no one ever taught such notions, is simply refusing to face the actual reality of the catechetical situation. No “renewal” can take place as long as one refuses to admit the facts.

The “Reality Principle’s” second source in this matter is an adequate post-Vatican II sacramental theology based on a sound current philosophy of the human person, and of the role of symbol in culture and Faith life. “Faith” IS clearly a necessary component for fruitful reception of the Sacraments. “Presence” IS less material than “stain” – as every person knows who has experience of an interpersonal

cially on St. Paul and the Greek Fathers, has been the emphasis in systematic theology for the past fifty years.

29. The phrase ex opere operato has been interpreted in a very positive manner by some recent studies. These indicate that the Church has NOT always taught that the sacraments give grace ex opere operato (contrary to the opening statement of the prescribed changes in CFC 1527), but that this expression became common only at the Reformation. See Bruce Harbert, “A Meeting with Christ.” The Tablet (March 1, 1997) 284-85; also Michael Whalen, “Instituted by Christ: The Third Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Praxis of Christian Sacraments.” Living Light 33 (1996) 18-28.
relationship. Sacraments ARE "symbolic acts" which means they are MORE REAL, not less, than mere physical reality. The insistence on adding "visible signs" to "symbolic acts" in defining ritual sacraments is apparently prompted again by fear of anything new as antithetical and in general, counter-productive. The "Reality Principle" here simply reasserts the factual realities involved, against all inhibiting fears.

Fear of anything new was manifested also in the traditionalists' inability to understand Jesus Christ not only as the source but as "the fullest expression" of the sacraments – Jesus as the perfect Baptized, Confirmed, Reconciler, Priest, Healer, etc. The compromise published in the CFC (1526, 1604) unfortunately misses badly, confusing Christ as "Primordial Sacrament" with Christ as "the fullest expression" of the ritual sacraments. Jesus is the "Primordial Sacrament" because of his Incarnation, his very embodied being as the God-man, NOT because of instituting or being the Goal of the ritual sacraments. Rather He is "the fullest expression" of the ritual sacraments because they are ritual symbolic acts designed to "fashion us into the likeness of Christ in his Paschal Mystery." Christ "instituted" the ritual sacraments as the means for encountering Him. Thus the Sacraments are from Jesus, designed to draw us toward Jesus.30

CONCLUSION

This essay has tried to get beneath the surface of the many individual options taken by the CFC, and by means of a threefold, generalized principle, the "Reality Principle," attempted to offer a unifying rationale for the multiple positions taken or defended. While it is certainly true; that the "Reality Principle" as expressed is greatly influenced by its author, or by any individual viewing reality, nevertheless sufficient impartial objectivity can be claimed for many of the

30. The prescribed changes in the CFC's exposition of "sacrament" can be traced to the inability of the objectors to grasp the proposed simple description of "sacrament" as a (1) a symbolic material act/event, (2) making present a spiritual reality. This twofold basis for all sacraments embraces 'natural sacraments' (human body as sacrament for the person; the marriage act as sacrament of conjugal love), Christ the enfleshed Eternal Word of God making present the Father (Jn 14:9), the Church making present the Risen Christ in His Spirit, and the seven ritual sacraments, the means of encountering Christ within His Body, the Church.
examples offered above.

For after, it IS necessary to go from words to the Reality they are expressing. It IS necessary to grasp the existential meaning and impact of specific terms within the cultural life of the hearers. The GFC in a sense is just a beginning; with God’s grace it may spark much further catechetical communication, guided by the “Reality Principle.”

31. For example, that “God reveals, but we are perfectly free to accept or not accept” is logically asserting the free nature of all authentic Faith. But existentially, for a typical adolescent, it implies that responding to God involves no moral obligation whatsoever – it makes no real difference whether one accepts or rejects God. “Freedom” means radically different things to different persons at different times.