

The Life and Work of Mary Perkins Ryan

The Interplay of Liturgy and Adult Catechesis in Whole Community Education

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Purpose and Aims

Just as the new theology of Church under the Second Vatican Council marked the advent of the modern ecclesial era “prepared for by decades of theological and pastoral renewal in Europe,” the pastoral developments it inspired were framed by the forerunners of the liturgical and catechetical movements who were actively writing, consulting and organizing for several decades prior to the opening session of the Council (O’Meara 2004). Among the more recognizable figures in the early American liturgical movement include Virgil Michel, Godfrey Diekman, Martin Hellriegel and Gerald Ellard. It was a full quarter century before the influence of the European kerygmatic renewal, inspired by Josef Jungmann and Johannes Hofinger, also materialized as a national movement in modern catechetics. By the 1950’s, these two parallel movements in the American Church shared the conviction that the renewal of the Church in the modern world requires “that the liturgy and strictly speaking the Eucharist, becomes the vitalizing and directing principle of the Christian life” (Hughes 1990).

It is within the circle of the early voices of liturgical reform that we find Mary Perkins Ryan. Ryan published her first liturgical work at the age of twenty-five entitled, *At Your Ease in the Catholic Church* (1937). It was followed in 1940 with her release of *Your Catholic Language*. As an educated Roman Catholic layperson pursuing a literary career in the 1930’s, Ryan’s skills as a writer and editor combined with her fluency in languages enabled her to translate into English several of the classic works of the European liturgical reform era ; among them, Jean Danielou’s *The Bible and the Liturgy* (1956) and Louis Bouyer’s *The Meaning of Sacred Scripture* (1958). But it was on an editorial assignment for Catholic publisher Sheed and Ward, when interviewing Rev. Michael Ducey as organizer of the first Benedictine Liturgical Conference in 1941, that Ryan’s skill for praying the breviary in English led to the formal invitation for Ryan to lead this prayer at the Benedictine Conference. The experience inspired Ryan to write her third work in the field of liturgical catechesis, *Learning How To Pray* (1948). More significantly, when the first National Liturgical Week convened in Chicago in 1944, Ryan’s participation catapulted her into mainstream of the pre-Conciliar liturgical movement in the United States.

Ryan’s early connection to the movement was far greater than her skills as a writer and translator, it was the opportunity to think theologically about what she held as a personal faith conviction in the meaning of *living the liturgy* as the key to unlocking the fullness of the Christian life. Ryan shared the core belief of the early reformers, later expressed in Vatican II’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, that “liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed and at the same time is the fountain from which all her power flows.” In time, the source of her ever-widening educational vision, which began in the exploration of full participation in the liturgy, developed beyond formalized ritual and prayer in search of the broader implications of participation in the sacramental life of the Church. For Ryan, liturgical participation was inclusive of a public and intelligible Mass among the people of God grounded on a Christ-centered theology and a notion of salvation history as the progressive unfolding action of God’s sacramental Word in the world. It was this more comprehensive

theology of liturgical life and its pedagogical implications that eventually framed the contours of Ryan's vision for Catholic catechetics.

The purpose of this paper is to provide an intellectual biography of the work and career of Mary Perkins Ryan including, among its highlights, twenty-four authored and co-authored books and translations, leadership in the National Liturgical Conference and the annual Liturgical Weeks, her supporting role in establishment of the Liturgy Program at Notre Dame University and twenty-three years of editorial stewardship at the *Living Light* (1964-1972) and *PACE* (1973-1988).

The foundational premise of the paper is that Ryan, in the absence of a full scholarly treatment of her life's work, has been a neglected figure in the history of Catholic education in the United States. Moreover, that an interpretive historical treatment of Ryan's contribution to educating in the faith from the period prior to Vatican II through the post-Conciliar years, offers a deepened understanding of the currents of the American liturgical reform and modern catechetics for their influence in shaping twentieth century Catholic catechetics.

The document begins with a review of the catechetical renewal formalized under the Second Vatican Council and the exploration, through Ryan's work and career, of the influence of the liturgical reform movements in Europe and the United States on this development. It is through Ryan's writings and her editorial leadership at the *Living Light* and *PACE*, that we discover the broadening of Ryan's vision from liturgical catechesis to a more fully developed position on the role of Catholic religious education for *living the liturgy* as it intersects with the principles of modern theories of learning and development and the centrality of adult catechesis within the context of whole community education. Ryan's voice helped to shape and build the catechetical movement in the years following Vatican II, including the volatile subject of the role of Catholic schools within the broader context of the modern Church's aims for adult education and the social mission of the Church in the world. Ryan's work and career will be the lens through which the development of the liturgical and catechetical renewals are traced, her unique contributions supported and her insights to present religious educational theory and practice are conserved. It should be noted that this paper is a preliminary study of Ryan's life and work and the basis for a full doctoral dissertation on the topic currently in development by the writer.

Catechetical Renewal in Context

The spirit of renewal inaugurated by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and its articulation of the various levels of catechetical activity in which the Church's mission is to be found marks "the evangelical turn in the ecclesial vision of Popes Paul VI and John Paul II," in the assertion that "evangelization constitutes the Church's deepest identity"(Duggan 2001). With the subsequent publication of the *General Catechetical Directory* in 1971, (revised in 1998 as the *General Directory For Catechesis*), a new paradigm that situates catechesis within the larger framework of the ministry of the Word was formulated. The basic structure of this model sets forth three separate but interrelated activities for which catechesis is one mode or expression on the continuum of the evangelizing work of the Church; *mission ad gentes* directed to initial conversion to the faith, *catechesis* directed to those who have come into initial faith but require fuller conversion and *cura animarum* directed at ongoing formation in the faith towards a mature faith nurtured by a lifetime of continuing conversion. Within the framework of evangelization as the context in which catechesis is situated, the GDC also asserts that the restored

catechumenate (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*) “should be the model and inspiration for all catechetical activity”(Duggan 2001).

Among the practical insights that inform the new catechetical paradigm include the recognition of the intimate link between liturgy and catechesis, the power of small faith sharing groups, the formative power of symbols in the ritual experience of the liturgy and para-liturgies, the sacramental centrality of Baptism in establishing the vocational call of the Church and its members both within the community and the world, and the idea of a gradual development of the faith of the Christian person who is formed and informed by a full complement of parish ministries in the apprenticeship of the true Christian life. It is a constellation of educational ministries that is never static or fixed; one grounded by the incarnational gravity of Christ whose movements are determined by particular place and time in the ongoing meaning-making and transformation of the individual Christian.

The profound shift in the pastoral vision of Vatican II as the *aggiornamento* or the *todaying* of the Church in the modern world did not develop in a vacuum. Rather, it reflects the historical turning point in the Church’s self-understanding of her mission in the world first announced by Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical (*Rerum Novarum*) as the stance for the Church’s own enculturation in the modern world “to permeate its cultural setting rather than remaining apart as an exterior trapping”(Duggan 2001).

Concurrent with the movement for ecclesial renewal (advanced by Leo XIII and Pius XII), a parallel lay movement for renewal in the United States Catholic Church sought to liberate itself from its historical domestic and sectarian theology and narrow the gap between faith and life. Its aim was to revitalize the lay vocation in the temporal affairs of the world as pivotal to the Church’s own mission. In the language of the early liturgical reformers, it was to view all members of the Church as taking share in the Mystical Body of Christ and the ministering to the human family. The vision of the layperson as one with a distinct though complementary vocation to the ordained and vowed religious, and as possessing a proper work in the world in the fulfillment of Church mission, was a protest against what theologian Yves Conger once described as the taking the laity simply “as an accident, an appendage of the Church” (Foote, Hill et al. 1966). This new theology of the laity spawned such developments as the Christian Family Movement, the Retreat movement, the Newman Clubs, lay missions, and the institutes associated with the peace and justice works of Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton. It also galvanized the early liturgical reform movement in America, from its origins in first decades of the twentieth century among discrete centers of liturgical apostolacy and scholarship, to a fully coordinated national popular movement by mid-century.

Vatican II formally called into existence the *age of the laity* rooted in a fresh understanding of revelation as reflected in the Council’s Constitution on Divine Revelation. The pre-Conciliar doctrine of revelation built around a neoscholastic view of the ‘deposit of faith’, guarded and authoritatively handed on by the Church, was replaced by “a notion of revelation more indebted to personalist and biblical categories, a shift in understanding with profound consequences for educating in the faith”(Boys 1989). The principles of what it meant for Scripture and Tradition to be interpreted within the community of the faithful as God’s progressive revelation, “a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God” were largely shaped by the insights of Jesuit theologian, Josef Jungmann and the European kerygmatic movement he inspired (Boys 1989). Jungmann’s concept of salvation history, as the progressive unfolding of God’s revelation centered in Christ from which flowed the life of the Church, not only undergirded the Council’s statement on liturgy as the summit towards which all activity of the Church is directed (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), it restored a living proclamatory character to liturgical life

and all forms of educating in the faith.

In response to what Jungmann saw as the lifelessness of the modern Church, kerygmatic theology urged a return to the sources and the spirit of the early church as “the unchanging background and fixed framework for the multifarious searchings and struggles that pass across the stages of life”(Boys 1989). The result was a reform in traditional catechetical theory that proposed the renewal of the Church in the modern world must integrally link both preaching and teaching to “manifest much more sharply the ‘good news’ of salvation in Christ and that the unity of God’s plan needed to be made evident”(Boys 1989). In the wake of the kerygmatic renewal of the liturgy – with its emphasis on the moorings of Scripture proclaimed and interpreted within the present historical community of faith – the inadequacies of a *catechism curriculum* and its formulaic approach to propositionally transmitting Christian truth, was eclipsed by a new educational movement in *Catholic catechetics*. With its origins rooted in liturgical renewal, modern catechetics was grounded in a theology and praxis that embraced the liturgy not only as the source of sacramental rites but also the wellspring of the sacramental life. “From the earliest days of the renewal, there was a recognition that liturgy was, in the tradition of John Dewey, “learning by doing” (Boys 1989). The pedagogical principles of modern catechetics recognized the full expanse of the human experience in the ongoing conversion to the Christian life. Education of the whole person in the faith necessarily means the intellect and the will, but also teaching by experience, activity and the nourishment of the senses through sign and symbol. With the liturgy and the proclamation of the Word as its matrix, catechetics also recognized all forms of parish life as potentially educative “since every pastoral ministry has its catechetical dimension”(Boys 1989).

Mary Perkins Ryan: Forerunner in the Liturgical and Catechetics Movements

When Ryan graduated from Manhattanville College of the Sacred Heart in 1932, she was a twenty year old Roman Catholic with her sights set on literary career. But it was the era of the Great Depression and following her return home to Boston, Massachusetts, Ryan worked at making herself more employable by attending secretarial school. One year later, this led to her first position as a secretary with the newly opened United States branch of the Catholic publisher, Sheed and Ward of New York. It was the first of two job assignments at the publishing house and clearly the less exceptional experience as Ryan would later describe herself as the company’s “first and worst employee”(Bryce 1975). Although she was employed in a secretarial capacity for only one year, Ryan “found herself in contact with lay people who could and did think theologically [and] a whole new world opened up to her”(Bryce 1975).

It was Ryan’s subsequent employment as an editor for Sheed and Ward when she encountered the full force of the liturgical movement already underway in the early 1940’s. Her commitment to the reform movement was already evident in her publishing of two works, *At Your Ease in the Catholic Church* (1937) and *Your Catholic Language* (1940). But it was an editorial assignment at St. Mary’s Abbey in Newark, New Jersey that led to her participation in the Benedictine Liturgical Conference held in Chicago in 1940. Ryan’s talk at this conference, at the invitation of Rev. Michael Ducey as organizer of the conference, was entitled, *Lay Persons Using The Breviary*. She later published her experience at the 1940 conference in a book entitled *Speaking of How to Pray* (1948). The significance of the Benedictine Liturgical Conference was felt nationally when its sponsors were asked to broaden the

movement and convene the first National Liturgical Conference in 1944. For Ryan personally and professionally, the experience catapulted her into the liturgical reform movement in the United States on a national level.

Her role in the first annual Liturgical Week consolidated her conviction that the liturgy was of central significance to the Church's life. Responding to a talk on Liturgy and the Cultural Problem given by Dietrich von Hildebrand at the 1941 Liturgical Week, Ryan's comments on education for participation in the liturgy were to become an organizing principle in her vision for religious education, "But since the liturgy is for the whole Church, how can we dare say that any member of the Church is incapable of learning to take part in it, and to appreciate its riches fully?...There are indeed ways of bringing everyone...into the life of the liturgy (Hildebrand 1941). Ryan's active involvement with the National Liturgical Conference and the annual Liturgical Weeks was instrumental in establishing her among the early voices of liturgical reform in the United States. Moreover, this activity along with a growing expanse of her published work, positioned her involvement in the emerging catechetical movement as collaboration between the two reform efforts was formalized by the 1950's through such ventures as the Liturgical Conference and the Liturgy Program at Notre Dame University.

Ryan's marriage in 1942 to fellow scholar, John Julian Ryan, was followed by their relocation to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where the couple began a family that eventually consisted of five sons. Five years into their life in Cambridge, John was appointed as professor at St. Mary's College in South Bend, Indiana and Mary was employed on staff at the Liturgy Program founded in 1947 at the University of Notre Dame by Michael Mathias, OSB. It was her work and friendship with Rev. Mathias that led to Ryan's collaboration with the major theological figures in the catechetical movement of the time, including Josef Jungmann and Johannes Hofinger. It was on a summer lecture at Notre Dame that Ryan first met Rev. Hofinger which led to her collaboration as editor of his classic work, *The Art of Teaching Christian Doctrine* (1962). Recognizing the contribution of Ryan's work, Hofinger's prefatory comments in the revised edition credits Ryan "not only for polishing my poor English, but also, I am happy to say, for improving the *ideas* themselves in many sections" (Hofinger 1961). Ryan's skills in Latin and French also resulted in her work as a translator the Notre Dame Press publication of Jean Danielou's, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (1956) and the translated editions of two works by Louis Bouyer, *The Meaning of Sacred Scripture* (1958) and *Introduction to Spirituality* (1961).

While on staff at the Notre Dame Liturgy Program, Ryan was actively publishing her own works and developing a more explicit link between liturgical and educational reform in the themes of her writing, including the role of Christian education in the home (*Mind the Baby* (1949) and *Beginning at Home* (1955), the aim of liturgical catechesis for promoting a more experiential understanding of *living the liturgy* among the faithful (*The Sacramental Way* (1948), and the requirement to make the liturgy more accessible as the basis for encouraging a more active participation among the faithful (*The Psalms* (1955) and *Key to the Missal* (1960).

During this period, Ryan's exchange of ideas with the leading spokespersons for the kerygmatic (Jungmann and Hofinger) and retrieval of the Catholic tradition movements (Bouyer and Danielou) were decidedly formative as her "own intellectual and spiritual appreciation of the Church's official worship deepened" (Bryce 1975). At the same time, Ryan's interest in the plurality of environments for educating in the faith (home and parish) provides an early insight into her later expanded vision of religious education that while rooted in the liturgy was to extend to a constellation of various educational ministries

and pedagogies. A foreshadowing of this broader educational vision is evident in a 1963 article published by Ryan in *Worship* where she states, “Clearly the central work of catechetics must be to help persons receive and respond to God’s own self revelation, and self-giving, above all else in the liturgy” (Bryce 1975). In the decade that began with Vatican II and spawned the catechetical renewal of the post-Conciliar years, Ryan’s distinct matrix for linking liturgical life and catechetics was consolidated in a pedagogical principle, drawing on the modern secular educational theories of developmental and experiential learning, that Christian formation in the liturgy insists on “the bodily, symbolic, concrete, imaginative, and emotional character of religious education” (O’Hare 1994).

Ryan’s Organizing Vision: Educating to Living Liturgy

Ryan was especially suited for the lay liturgical reform of the mid twentieth century given her skills in Church Latin that would result in her commissioning to translate to English the new Latin version of the Psalms and Canticles from Pius XII’s *Novum Psalterium* (1945). Her translation of the psalms was published by Fides in 1955; a translation that was also used by the Benedictine monks of En Calcat in their English language edition of the *Book of the Hours* (1955) and *The Office of Our Lady* (1962), as well as William Storey’s publication of the breviaries for *Morning Praise and Evening Song* (1963). Various English translations of the breviaries were in circulation around this time including those of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, *A Short Breviary* based on the translation of Eberhard Olinger (1941, 1950) and Msgr. Ronald Knox’s translation, *The Little Breviary* published in England (1955). However, Ryan’s work figured dominantly in opening up the Church order of prayer to the lay faithful through translations of short breviaries permitted under the system at the time whereby diocesan Bishops could give their imprimatur to these compilations of offices, prayers, psalms and the missal.

Given the genesis of Ryan’s professional work and writings as a religious educator within the particular area of liturgical catechesis, we may examine Ryan’s published works across two stages of her development towards a more comprehensive organizing theory and practice of religious education. The first stage may be described as those works by Ryan that reflect her advocacy and theology for an *intra-ecclesial* liturgical reform. These full published works include, in addition to her English translations of the psalms used by other authorities (such as the *Benedictine Breviary*), *The Psalms* (1955), *Key to the Psalms* (1957) and *Key to the Missal* (1960). But it was Ryan’s publication of *Perspective for Renewal* (1960), just two years before the Second Vatican Council convenes, that marks a shift in her work from liturgical education, through translations and making accessible the prayer life of the Church, to one more theologically driven by the kerygmatic concepts of “revelation” and “salvation history” that would form the basis of the Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy and the appropriation of these insights to Catholic religious education.

The evolution of Ryan’s vision as a religious educator and writer was further solidified when the publication of *Perspective for Renewal* was followed four years later with her 1964 appointment to the *Living Light*, as founding co-editor with Monsignor Russell Neighbor. Originally published by the National Center of the Confraternity for Christian Doctrine (CCD), Ryan’s leadership as executive editor of the *Living Light* continued as the journal’s publication was transferred to the National Conference of

Catholic Bishops/United States Department of Education in 1966 and lasted until she stepped down in 1972 to assume editorship of *PACE (Professional Approaches for Christian Educators)*. Ryan held the position as editorial director at PACE for fifteen years, from 1973 to 1988. This period of twenty three years as editor of the two leading Christian religious education journals marks a second and more fully developed stage in Ryan's educational vision. Both her published and editorial works during this time reveal the broadening of her initial stance on liturgical catechesis to include a critical reform perspective on education throughout the life of the Church.

In addition to her frequent contributions to such periodicals as *Worship, Catholic Digest, The Commonweal* and *The Sign*, Ryan's full works during the period of the Second Vatican Council and the ensuing post-Conciliar years are characterized by this broader perspective on the reorientation of Catholic education that Ryan considered to be a requirement of Church renewal in the modern world. The first of these publications, *Are Parochial Schools The Answer?: Catholic Education In Light of The Council*, (1964) in effect placed Ryan on the map of Catholic educators seeking to translate the vision of Vatican II in its implications for the total educative mission of the Church in the world. The book's release during the closing sessions of the Council and its call for a radical *aggiornamento* of the Catholic schools system as the central normative means of Christian formation "provoked a vigorous and contentious debate"(Reidy 2004). A formal rebuttal by Catholic educator, Roy Deferrari, was published later that same year in a work entitled, *A Complete System of Catholic Education Is Necessary*. Deferrari refuted Ryan's conclusions as over critical and under informed on both the philosophy of Catholic education and the actual economics of the system.

In 1972, eight years into her leadership of the *Living Light* and the experience of a sustained dialogue with the scholars and practitioners of the modern catechetics enterprise presented through the journal, Ryan again addressed the issue of the Catholic schools system and its value within the renewal mission of the Church in her publication, *We're All In This Together: Issues and Options in the Education of Catholics*. Ryan's proposal was to re-evaluate the entire scope of religious education within the context of the whole parish as an *educating community*. In recasting her earlier sociological critique that parochial schools had outlived their Catholic cultural value, Ryan re-situated the schools issue in the framework of the parish school's ability to function as "a subsidiary element in the total educational effort of the parish or area or diocese, rather than its center in the sense of a sponge absorbing all the available attention and interest" (1972). In effect, Ryan acknowledged that parochial schools may be one form for educating in the faith while insisting that the parish school could no longer be considered either the exclusive or normative basis of religious education once, as the Second Council had adopted, the formation of adults was core to the Church's educative mission. In Ryan's viewpoint, the embrace of a whole community theory of Christian education requires aims and methods that respond not only to child development, but the full complement of approaches for educating adults at various life stages across multiple educative environments.

From Catechesis to Catholic Catechetics

The shift in Ryan's educational conviction, from one concerned exclusively with liturgical education to one immersed in a new model of Catholic catechetics that seeks to cement the connection between liturgy and the sacramental life of the Christian, will serve as the framework for the following

analysis of Ryan's educational theory in the post-Conciliar environment under the growing influence of modern biblical criticism and the social sciences as they intersect with educating in the faith.

It may be said of Ryan that she began in the pre-Conciliar period as a liturgical educator; an advocate of the liturgical reform movement in the United States whose skills as a writer, editor and translator enabled her a central role in the modern reform of the liturgy. Her distinct contribution to liturgical catechesis was the instruction she provided, through the English translations and exegetical notes to the Latin prayer texts, toward the aim of forming lay Catholics in a more biblical orientation to a fuller participation in the liturgy. While the publication of these translations took place in response to the directive from the pre-Conciliar hierarchy (i.e. Pope Pius XII's call to "Bring the Mass to the people, the people to the Mass"), it was Ryan's explanatory notes to these documents where the concepts of kerygmatic theology emerge as foundational to the broader catechetical orientation of her future work.

The kerygmatic movement had begun in Europe in the 1930's under the principal influence of Josef Jungmann (1889-1975). As religious educator Mary Boys observes, "His study of the early church at worship led him to question what he perceived as the lifelessness in the modern Church" that he equated to the overshadowing of the "vivid, proclamatory language of the Scripture" by the "propositional notion of orthodoxy" and "the abstractions of scholastic theology"(Boys 1989). Jungmann's assessment led to his theory that three dominant themes were essential to reclaiming the Church's inherently proclamatory theology; the return to the language of Scripture and its categories of thought, the reclaiming of the theme of salvation history that was anticipated in the Old Testament and brought to fulfillment in the New Testament Christ but eclipsed in the later scholastic concept of sacred history, and a renewal in the liturgical life of the Church through the restoration of the early Church catechumenate. .

All three of Jungmann's insights figured dominantly in Ryan's work and were to become more central to her educational vision under the influence of the documented reforms of Vatican II and the impact of modern social science theory of human development and learning on approaches to religious education. In her 1955 publication of *The Psalms*, Ryan's introductory notes quote St. Jerome in describing the reading of the psalms as "the best summary of and introduction to a Christian study of Scripture"(1958). In her brief critical analysis of the literary structure of the psalms, Ryan encourages the lay reading of the psalms for what they reveal about the Scriptural basis of a lay Christian vocation. In particular, she says, the psalms are expressive of this vocation through their encouragement of an active participation in the liturgy (as the central prayer of the Church), through their function as a gateway to a more developed understanding of Holy Scripture that reveals God's plan for salvation and our proper response to it, and because the psalmist's enlightenment of salvation history orients the Christian toward the personal carrying out of that plan in the world.

Ryan takes a more formal educational approach to the development of these themes in her 1960 publication of *Key To The Missal*, where she offers not only a lay manual to facilitate a more knowledgeable participation in the parts and responses of the Mass, but also an understanding of the various forms of the Mass throughout the liturgical year. Likewise, Ryan's introductory comments to the same work positions the call to liturgical participation within the context of a sacramental theology of the Eucharist that links the sacramental (*Real Presence*) of Christ and liturgical participation (*Communion*) with this presence as signifying a share in Christ's work of redemption. Thus, the sacramental significance of Eucharist is to effect the faithful's co-redemptive role in the building up of the Kingdom on earth. The direction of Ryan's work, even as early as the mid-nineteen fifties, had progressed from its focus on

education in the liturgy as an *intra-ecclesial* activity to one that has significance for the work of the Christian towards “a more fully human organization of society” (1960a).

It is Ryan’s publication of *Perspective For Renewal* (1960) that more fully advances the kerygmatic theology implicit in her translations of the missal and the psalms toward a more explicit philosophy of educating in the faith. A significant development in the work is Ryan’s incorporation of a contemporary sociological critique of the Church’s stance in the modern world and its failure to make a greater impact on the wider human community. In Ryan’s assessment, the dualism inherent in the Church’s cosmology has resulted in an *above culture* stance that both truncates the theology of faith and life and fosters a traditionally sectarian and adversarial relationship with the earthly city. In her proposal that the present ecclesial perspective on culture be reoriented, she embraces a more adequate theology of the Christian lay vocation as the means by which the Church can redirect lay formation efforts away from teaching *about religion* towards formation in *a religious way of life* since “the present apparent irrelevance of religion to life and life to religion is fatal to the layman’s carrying out of his Christian vocation...and this irrelevance is fatal to the full effectiveness of the work of our Church in our world” (1960b).

Ryan concedes that a leaning towards this type of cultural reorientation has previously been called for in the ecclesial documents, most vividly in Leo XIII’s encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*. However, she argues that the transformation of the Church’s stance in the world “cannot be done by fiat alone” but requires “a gradual process of leavening through the promotion of this perspective in the living context of home, school, parish and general Catholic life” (1960b). It is a leavening that entails a radical shift in the present theological perspective on the purpose and meaning of life as one directed to a supernatural order where dying in the state of grace, and the “obligations of the faith” that condition this orientation, have contributed to the attitudes of minimalism and indifference with respect to the lay vocation in the world. The same perspective has produced, says Ryan, a distinctly “American brand of clericalism” modeled on a consumer-producer relationship between priest and laity. This has fostered a Catholic view of life that has “come to run parallel, as it were, to the modern secular view ...which makes the primary purpose of any activity seem to be the gaining of some extrinsic wage, profit or benefit’ where the aim is ‘shorter hours, higher wages, on both the natural and supernatural levels”(1960b). While Ryan recognizes those Catholics who have a zeal for social justice or the works of charity, she argues that the theology that informs these works remains inadequate since along with its emphasis on doing God’s will, there is a lack of perspective for how these Christian works of mercy are related in “any sense [to] taking part in the redemptive work of Christ”(1960b).

The corrective needed, according to Ryan, is a new theological realism that can foster “a life more directly and intensely “a life of faith rather than a life of obligation” (1960b). In drawing from the principles of kerygmatic theology, Ryan calls for a reorientation in the Catholic perspective on salvation history that embraces a progressive and historical unfolding of redemption through the Scriptural understanding of “the revelation of God’s self-communication in Christ” as “a continued creative presence in the world through the Word and the Spirit”(1960b). In this way, says Ryan, there is really only *one* Christian vocation (although there are differentiated roles within the structure of the Church) and this is the daily work in cooperation with God’s plan for redemption. For it is only when the Christian “discovers that God has something to say to him personally, something that calls for a total response and total commitment” that “the all-inclusive realism of the Christian spiritual life” opens one to hearing the Word

and responding to it. The Christian lay vocation, says Ryan, is the cooperation with “the work of the Spirit in ordering himself and his activities towards carrying out God’s design in himself and in the world”(1960b).

Ryan advances the idea that disclosure of God’s self-communication as revealed through Scripture finds its deepest analogue in the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity. Here again, Ryan points past a merely metaphysical conception where God, “the Infinitely Other, the Absolute, and the All-holy is not Abstraction, is not Isolation, but is infinite personal self-giving in the inner life of the Father with the Son in the Spirit, and in the making and remaking of all things” (1960b). It is only when the human history of salvation is understood in the deepest realities of the Trinity, contends Ryan, that human meaning in life is to be found “in our being brought together in the perfected reality of what we are and of what we are to one another”(1960b). In this way, the dynamic communication of the inner life of the Trinity points us to a “mutual sharing in and of all good things” and an understanding of material creation as “a medium and a means of our communication with God and with one another, so that all may be “gathered up” in the eternal praise that the Son offers to the Father in the love of the Spirit”(1960b). From the perspective that the Christian vocation is to be understood as “a communicating with God which includes of its very nature a communicating with our fellow men,” Ryan argues that “all human life and activity are seen as potentially religious, and therefore, meaningful in the sense of being capable of being drawn into the current of God’s communicating and redeeming love”(1960b).

In contrast to the Church’s prevailing dualism that relegates the temporal order to a “proving ground” where the avoidance of sin and the reception of sanctifying grace through the Sacraments is the only security of each individual soul after death, the kerygmatic notion of salvation history insists that earthly existence possess an “end in itself” in “the transformation of the world according to God’s plan of calling all persons to perfection in Him”(1960b). The very real, human social task, according to Ryan, is to open God’s self-communicating love to all persons by removing the obstacles that inhibit a fully free response to God’s message. “The work we do, the work we pay for, the work we encourage others to do must be evaluated for its potential to either help persons ‘develop themselves as free persons’ with access to the ‘common goods’ of society *or* its potential “in so far as it dehumanizes and depersonalizes men”(1960b). It is within this context, that Ryan situates the critical role of the Christian lay vocation as uniquely suited, given their place in the temporal affairs of the world, “to use rightly human time, energy, talents and material things, and to work toward a more fully human organization of society”(1960b). Ryan’s perspective on the role of the Christian laity is decidedly realistic and deliberately responsible without erring on the side of religious triumphalism. Acknowledging that “we cannot force acceptance of Christ on another but we can and must do everything we can to relieve the suffering of others and work towards conditions in which everyone can hear God’s message, however it may reach them,” Ryan argues for the Christian vocation to help effect “sufficient freedom to respond to [God] if he will”(1960b).

It is Ryan’s theology of the Christian lay vocation that identifies how her liturgical perspective for active participation in the liturgy and above all in the Eucharist becomes the existential framework for the intersection of Christian faith and life. Just as the Christian actively receives and freely responds to the self-communicating Word and self-giving love of the Spirit in order to enter more fully into perfection and communion with Christ, the Christian lay vocation is to open out this same sacramental reality in communication with the world. As such, the liturgy poses one mode, as a here and now experience of God’s personal encounter with the believer, but continues throughout the life of the Christian in all modes

“oriented to the final carrying out of God’s design”(1960b).

It is the dynamic encounter with Christ in the liturgy and the living out of this active response to God’s plan of salvation in the world that forms what Ryan considers to be the essence of catechetical renewal. The real problem, as she articulates it, is not with “methods” or “materials” but an overall pedagogy that fails to orient Christians “toward putting them into personal contact with God’s self-revelation and self-giving” in such a way “as to arouse their personal response and self commitment”(1960b). Because God’s plan of salvation has not been presented as a living invitation to participate in it, and instead reduced to abstract formula, the emphasis of traditional catechism instruction in Christian doctrine fails to make the critical link between faith and life. “Students cover the ground without having once touched it,” is the saying attributed to Mortimer Adler that Ryan quotes to argue that “formal instruction has its place” but must be subordinated to “a biblical-liturgical formation opening out God’s design in wider and wider contexts, putting the Church into contact with the Word of God ...and awakening them to the need for a personal response to God’s love in worship and in Christian living”(1960b).

Parochial Schools - A Vatican II Reform

It is from this perspective on the foundations of catechetical renewal that Ryan launched her initial criticism of the parochial schools system to conclude that “the resources now spent in providing protective or segregating services for Catholics be used instead, on the one hand, to foster a mature and responsible Christian vitality which is our best safeguard, and on the other, to serve the needs of the whole community in the sharing of Christ” (1960b). Ryan fully developed her critique of the Catholic schools system in her 1964 publication, *Are Parochial Schools The Answer?: Catholic Education in Light of the Council*. Ryan’s central premise for the book, described in a review of the work by Gerard Sloyan as “radically ecclesial”, raises the question of how the reforms of Vatican II are ideally implemented in the educative work of the Church. In this context, she argues that the traditional historical purpose of the Catholic schools system (a sectarian institution concerned with the Catholic socialization of an immigrant community in a Catholic-hostile Protestant environment) is no longer relevant to the challenges of the Church in the second half of the twentieth century. Moreover, the resources to maintain a system that continues to serve fewer and fewer Catholic children will only increase disproportionately. It is Ryan’s contention that these funds are better appropriated toward a catechetical renewal that can both “awaken and inform the faith” and evoke “commitment to the whole Christian vocation” among all persons of the faith community (1964).

Ryan’s critical evaluation of the Catholic schools begins with the economics of the system and her conclusion that the Church can no longer afford the expenditure of money and resources on an educational system that is serving an increasingly smaller population of the people at the expense of the religious formation of all Catholics in light of the catechetical vision of the Second Vatican Council. In providing concise account of the shrinking population of Catholic primary and secondary schools in particular, Ryan contrasts these declining enrollment figures with the rising costs of investment in both clerical and vowed religious personnel in addition to the “bricks and mortar” expenses necessary to sustain the system. Recognizing that most parochial schools already operate at a deficit that is subsidized by the local parish, Ryan questions not only the fairness of the financial responsibility on families who do not participate in the

school, but more importantly, whether this investment would be more wisely made on educational efforts that could benefit the entire parish community.

Taking an historical survey approach to the development of the Catholic schools system in the United States, Ryan illustrates how the early Catholic experience of the 19th century was one characterized initially by the absence of any public school system followed by a system of Protestant-dominated church schools that threatened the Catholic way of life by virtue of the anti-Catholic sentiment characteristic of the early reformation churches. Catholics were not only in the minority in the United States, Ryan argues, but the Church operated out of a “state of siege cultural mentality” in response to the developments of both the anti-Catholic stance of the Reformation and the anti-religion stance provoked by the Enlightenment. This was further complicated by the influx of Catholic immigrants, the principal source of early growth in the Church, whose inculcation to society was facilitated by the Catholic cultural identity that the Church enabled through its sectarian faith stance (including national churches) and eventually a system of parish schools that served to insure a self-enclosed process of Catholic socialization. The identity of the Church in the United States as inextricably bound to Catholic schools would be formalized in 1884 when every pastor was charged to establish a parish school. In effect, the school became the safeguarding instrument of the Church with the late nineteenth century mandate from Bishop Hughes of New York as illustrative of this fused identity, “You must proceed upon the principle that , in this age and this country, the school is before the church”(1964)

Ryan’s analysis takes account of the legitimate historical conditions of the 19th century Church that gave rise to the Catholic schools system but holds that these conditions are no longer relevant and, more importantly, have the potential to work at cross-purposes with contemporary catechetical renewal. Today’s Catholics, argues Ryan, are not only fully inculcated members and leaders of a modern pluralistic society but the reforms of Vatican II, calling for a more inclusive mission of the Church in the universal human community, are in tension with the foundational principles of the schools system that promotes an isolated formation in the faith and serves to segregate the Church from the wider culture. For Ryan, the negative effects of what she describes as the “school mentality” on the parish life of Catholics extends beyond the financial burdens of the system. As the main source of Catholic socialization, Ryan considers among the detrimental effects of the schools to be the conditioning of parents to believe that they are inadequate to task of religious instruction of their children, the fostering of the belief that only children need religious education and only the school-model can provide it, and finally, the encouragement of an “8th grade religious education” as normative for all adults. From the standpoint of the Church’s broader mission in the world, Ryan considers the Catholic schools system as serving a sectarian rather than a more inclusive, ecumenical attitude towards other Christians and faiths. Moreover, the pastoral call for Catholics to participate in the wider needs of the local and world community is undermined by a system of formation that nurtures segregation over a greater share of the life of the Church in the world.

Ryan argues that the question of what *form* educating in the faith should take must be asked within the larger context of what it means to live a religious life where, “leading religious lives is not to dissociate from the secular world,” rather “to commit ourselves and our whole lives to carrying out [the mission of the Church] in our world”(1964). Catholic formation in the religious way of life, according to Ryan, is to be rooted in the sacramental life of the Church. It is a sacramental view, suggests Ryan, that discerns the understanding of the Sacraments consistent with The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, “as encounters

with Christ where we come to know Him in the fullest possible sense and are 'formed' to His self-giving love to the Father and to all mankind" (1964). If we are to follow the Second Council's teaching on the Sacraments, says Ryan, we must recognize the Sacraments not only express our personal initiation into God's plan but signify our active communal participation in the present historical revelation of God's Word "addressed to us here and now, of God's action in our regard here and now, and of our response to that action in daily life"(1964).

Ryan points to a second lesson in the history of education in the Church presented by the experience of the ancient Catechumenate. The Catechumenate of the first centuries of the Church was, says Ryan, "the nearest model to a Christian education institution"(1964). It followed a liturgically based curriculum where sacred liturgy, Scripture, preparation for the rites of initiation and the Mystagogy that followed were integrally "focused on forming one in the Christian way of life"(1964). In this context, the Sacraments themselves were seen as formative of the entire Christian community given the public nature of the Easter Vigil initiation, the general practice of Eucharistic gifts brought from the home, and a formation of initiates in an active charity that flowed from worship into the wider community through works of mercy. It is this model, argues Ryan, that can and must inspire a new Catholic catechetics where "all instruction in Christian truth flows from this center in the liturgy" and where all formation is "to awaken Catholics to the possibilities of Christian living [and] to help them realize those possibilities in communal worship, private prayer, organized activities, and in personal, social and professional life"(1964).

With a vision for catechetical renewal focused on the education of the whole community in the *living liturgy* inspired by the Catechumenate model of the early Church, Ryan's recommendation to abolish the Catholic schools system as an antiquated and ineffective model for the contemporary aims of educating in the faith generated strong opposition from Catholic educational circles and Church hierarchy itself. Catholic University's Roy Deferrai's rebuttal, *A Complete System of Catholic Education Is Necessary* (1964), chose to defend the principals of Catholic education on the basis of a pre-Conciliar model recalling Pope Pius XI's encyclical, *The Christian Education of Youth*, and its philosophy that "the true Christian, the product of Catholic education, is the supernatural man who thinks, justifies and acts consistently in accordance with the example and teaching of Christ; in other words, to use the current term, the true and finished man of character" (Deferrai 1964). Deferrai argued that Ryan failed to grasp the philosophical significance of Catholic education in its vision of the educational product as "the integrated man" and the principle that "only by the application of the Catholic philosophy of educating systematically and completely from beginning to the very end of a person" that growth as a human being can be best achieved the true end of Catholic education (Deferrai 1964). He concludes that Ryan fails to understand the nature and importance of academic integration grounded in a Catholic epistemology and ontology. Ryan's criticism of the failure of the Church to form whole persons in the faith is, for Deferrai, the very reason why Catholic education is essential since, "the inconsistency perceived between religious faith and those who believe and their activities in the temporal sphere results - in great part - from the lack of a solid Catholic education"(Deferrai 1964).

Parochial Schools Revisited

More than a decade after Ryan's publication of *Are Parochial Schools The Answer?* (1964),

Ryan again took up the issue of parochial schools but this time in within the broader educational context of the schools, after schools programs (CCD) and adult catechesis in *We're All In This Together* (1972). The period between these two publications, the first at the onset of the Vatican II reforms and the second after several years of experimental implementation at the parish level, produced its own set of historical circumstances and lessons. The reforms to liturgical worship heralded by the Second Vatican Council – specifically the full and active participation of the laity in the celebration of the Mass – was tested with varying degrees of success, confusion and frustration at the parish and diocesan levels. The recasting of the Church mission to embrace a universal humanity and the dignity and freedom of all persons pointed toward an intentional engagement with culture, in particular among the apostolate of laity, with educational implications for the work of social justice and a growing concern for ecumenism.

In the post-Conciliar environment, the emerging vision of the interrelatedness of the human family called forth the vocation of all Christians in the transformation of conditions and institutions that deny a proper share in society's common good. In this context, sin – once understood as the personal alienation from God to be overcome by good works and the mercy of grace signified by the Sacraments – took on a radically social character. Christian freedom and responsibility in Christ required the cooperative role of the person in the present unfolding of God's plan such that the traditional "accommodating" view of social, political and economic injustice was now seen in the light of a transformative one, where Christian vocation meant a partnership with God in his plan for redemption. If the Christian encounter with Christ – as it was understood by the Second Vatican Council – was to be both personal and communal, *We're All in This Together* advances the argument that the former legalistic morality of Church teaching must yield to a new "stance of authority" as "the authority to those [in the Christian community] who have come to terms with their own experience and who are convinced that, in however imperfect a meaning, they have some important truth about the human condition"(1972).

We're All in This Together is Ryan's post-Conciliar reflection on the work of the renewed Church that has been done and is yet to be accomplished. Informed by the insights of the modern social sciences to the developmental nature of personal growth, the historical conditionedness of all language and symbol systems as taught by modern biblical criticism, and the economic and cultural complexities of achieving a "just" common good in society, Ryan exhorts that the former security of the pre-council Catholic ethics and world view need give way to new, more dynamic and creative metaphors for guiding Christian meaning and vocation in the modern world. Ryan argues that new root metaphors - such as *Exodus* and *Pilgrimage* - must be drawn from the Tradition to give meaning to the Christian historical experience of God in a way that can help to critically re-appropriate Tradition for the discernment of God's revelation in our own time and place.

Given the scope of the post-Conciliar shift in the Church's mission and world view, Ryan assesses the pre-council model for educating in the faith to be inadequate both in aims to socialize and the indoctrinate, especially children. But also because the schooling model has necessarily grafted a child-only focus onto religious education. As a consequence, Ryan finds the common and traditional assumptions about formation in the faith themselves require reform and renewal. It is a charge that was implicit in Ryan's original critique of the Catholic schools system (*Are Parochial Schools the Answer?*) when she first raised for question " [is] the Catholic educational system, as we know it, necessary or even desirable"(1964)? While her critics at the time insisted she failed to see how the cultural identity of the parish was enmeshed in the parish school, they likewise failed to hear Ryan's larger question, "Must the

school be the central normative means of Christian formation rather than the home, the Church, the public forum where Christianity is lived” (1964)?

By the date of the publication, *We’re All In This Together* (1972), Ryan was in her eighth year as executive editor of the *Living Light*, an experience that afforded her extensive exposure to the state of parish catechetical renewal in the United States. The development in Ryan’s vision of the educative mission of the Church is evident in her introductory comments to the publication when she concedes that many of her assumptions in *Are Parochial Schools the Answer?* appear to have been naive in the view that liturgy “could become by itself the chief means of Christian education of individuals and communities”(1972). Describing what amounts to the present “complete confusion” across Catholic schools, education in general and religious education, Ryan admits “we are still seeking the answer” or “worse yet trying to impose our most recently discovered answers on others”(1972).

Reflecting on the state of flux in which Catholic education now finds itself, Ryan concludes that the Church itself is not exempt from cultural influences. The pluralistic nature of modern society has also meant a diversity in Catholic world view. Likewise, the trend in secular education toward a more humanizing and liberating curriculum has direct implications for how the Church goes about its educative task while the learning from modern social sciences and biblical scholarship forces us to recognize that the gospels themselves are social-cultural products, with points of view developed toward distinct audiences, and significant implications for how the texts are to be appropriated for our own time and place.

We’re All In This Together provides a critical historical view of how the Church has

historically responded to the question of educating in the faith from the period prior to the Second Vatican Council and since in order to illustrate the social cultural influences that shaped the respective approaches to religious education. In this context, says Ryan, many of the past approaches are no longer adequate (i.e. Catholic formation as a product of socialization in the schools) as cultural developments change the “answers” because they change the “questions” that society is asking about itself at any given point in time. Ryan examines the foundational themes and issues raised in her former work, *Are Parochial Schools The Answer?*, but this time within a more culturally contextualized framework. The fundamental difference is the author’s greater willingness to examine how existing, yet problematic, models of education such as Catholic schools may be reformed to address an authentic educational need that neither the secular society nor the Church is presently meeting. In this way, suggests Ryan, Catholic schools may be re-envisioned as “a subsidiary element in the total educational effort of the parish or diocese”(1972). If the Catholic schools curriculum can be reshaped in line with the modern movement towards a truly humanizing and liberating education (eliminating many of its present non educational functions), Ryan envisions a new possibility for these schools to emerge as “real alternatives to the public schools.”

One such model, suggests Ryan, is the value-centered educational curriculum where universal human values and human relations form the underlying philosophy of the program and catechetics (while an optional offering) serves to distinguish the program from one exclusively based on secular humanism. A second alternative considers a “compensatory role” where Catholic schools are established to complement those areas where the public school system is weak. Since these tend to follow concentrations of lower social-economic groups, Ryan finds the Church fulfilling a genuine educational need consistent with its own moral principles for serving the poor and other socially oppressed groups.

Despite Ryan’s willingness to see new life for the traditional system of Catholic schools, she

continues to insist that the school-only model remains inadequate in light of the present educational mission of the Church that all Catholic people may “grow up in all things toward Christ.” In proposing a whole community model for parish religious education, Ryan redefines the aims of education (from her former narrow stance of educating through the liturgy) to one that equates the whole process of Christian community with the practices of educating in the faith. Within this paradigm, Ryan envisions differentiated but inter-related roles including education for liturgy, social justice, spiritual direction and counseling along with more classical instruction in the knowledge and Tradition of the faith, where the central aim is to form, inform and transform “the religious dimension of existence in all man’s search for meaning”(1972). Ryan’s organizing vision expresses a unity in the goal for religious education throughout the lifetime of the Christian, but not a uniformity in approach. Forms of educating in the whole community model may be intergenerational (as in the liturgy) or tailored to the developmental needs of a particular life stage (such as new parents).

What is most critical, says Ryan, is that our educational aims are directed toward the continuous transformation of the person in Christ; that they open up a Christian life biblically rooted in the dynamic history of the Incarnation and a response to that reality that signifies “all personal and social history is to be seen as oriented toward the transcendent fulfillment of human hopes in the eschatological Kingdom of God”(1972). In this context, the catechetical task is to bring the specifically Christian sources of religious education to the experience of being human – the scriptural Word of God, the theological presentation of Church doctrine, a critical history of Church mission including its present one, and an encounter with Catholic social teaching that invites reflection and action whereby social justice is no longer a position paper produced by Church hierarchy, but the witnessing life of the individual Christian in community.

Ryan’s conviction that a major task of Catholic catechetics concerns the ongoing and dynamic exploration of the human experience or ‘life themes’ – which are equally the main themes of Scripture and liturgy – was formalized in the mid-nineteen sixties as *The Christian Experience Series* published by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine with Ryan as editor. Ryan herself contributed to the series with the publication, *Through Death to Life* (1965). During the same period, she also published several titles that addressed contemporary issues of Catholic moral teaching specific to the needs of various life-stages of the Christian with discussion guidelines to encourage the practice of faith sharing in small groups. These include *Helping Adolescents Grow Up in Christ* (1967), *Has the Liturgy Changed You?* (1967), *Love and Sexuality: A Christian Approach* (1967) and *Toward Moral Maturity : Religious Education and the Formation of Conscience* (1968) .

By 1979, Ryan’s exploration into the culturally conditioned human experience of the religious way of life included her first and only work that addressed feminism in her historical survey of sexual discrimination in the United States, *Womanhood in America*. This was also Ryan’s final published work. As a purely secular study of the unjust practices of the labor market in the treatment of women, *Womanhood in America* is characteristic of Ryan’s philosophical view that religious education is ultimately concerned with the reorganization of a more humane society as the necessary freedom from which one can choose to live a religious life. In 1984, Ryan became only the second woman to receive The Mathis Award, presented annually by the Notre Dame Center for Liturgy, for her contributions to renewal of the liturgy in the United States. She continued her work from the editorial post at *PACE* until her retirement in 1988 at the age of seventy-six.

Ryan's Educational Legacy

To raise the question of what distinguishes Mary Perkins Ryan as a 20th century Catholic educator is to ask what about Ryan's perspective made her uniquely suited to respond to the religious education issues of her time with a view rooted in history but oriented toward a prophetic stance on the possibilities for educating in the faith. Four themes are proposed as characteristic of how the five decades of Ryan's vision and work shaped and vitalized the catechetical renewal movement in the United States before and after the Second Vatican Council.

Ryan entered the conversation on reform of the Church in the modern world as a liturgical educator. In the early years of her work, her approach to catechetical renewal was centered in a liturgical formation that was understood to be educative of the Christian life through informed and meaningful dialogue in the Mass and the central prayer life of the Church. Her skills as a translator, including Church Latin, enabled her to play a significant role in the educative mission of the early liturgical movement and its work to facilitate a more active participation of the faithful in the liturgy that would influence the numerous reforms in the rites of the liturgy and eventually the use of the vernacular following the Second Vatican Council

A second theme in the development and contribution of Ryan's work to Catholic catechetics in the United States is the Scriptural basis of Ryan's liturgical catechesis that evolved under the influence of the European kerygmatic movement. A kerygmatic orientation to the biblical categories of "revelation" and "salvation history" provided Ryan with the critical link between the "here and now" encounter with Christ in the liturgy and the Christian vocation to effect the freedom necessary for all persons "to respond to God's promise, if he will" In her work with Johannes Hofinger, both at the Liturgy Program at Notre Dame University and the Liturgical Conference, Ryan developed a vision for educating in the faith that was adequate to building on the foundational principles of liturgical catechesis and opening them up to all the ways that the parish community educates including schools, religious instruction, the sacraments, social justice and the liturgy. Her understanding that not only the parish school but all forms of parish life are potentially educative led to her advocacy of whole community religious education where a full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy was seen to extend to full participation in a sacramental way of life, both in the Christian community and the world..

Ryan's organizing vision for religious education, in its embrace of a whole community approach, also incorporates the contribution of the modern social sciences in the understanding of *who* is to be educated in the faith and *how*. A third theme in Ryan's legacy is found in her work to bring the learning and insights of modern secular educational theory, including human social and psychological development, into dialogue with religious education. The result of Ryan taking a broader, more social-cultural approach to educating in the faith was most forcefully presented in her work *Are Catholic Schools The Answer?* (1964) In advancing the idea that the parish school system has outlived its historical/cultural purposes, Ryan argued against the school model as normative for all religious education based on its failure to address the more comprehensive needs of the adult Christian community. Ryan's conviction that religious education must be tailored to the life experience of its participants led her to recognize both how the parish may educate through its various intact ministries and how new curriculums need be developed that address the various life stages and events that define Christian participation in the sacramental life over the lifetime of the believer.

Another theme woven throughout Ryan's educational vision is the embrace of a Catholic lay vocation as complementary to the clerical and vowed religious vocations, while maintaining the integrity of each for the fulfillment of God's plan for the world. The understanding of God's self-communication as an existential reality for all Christians led Ryan to a practical theology of the laity whose role was uniquely suited to the reform message of Vatican II for a more just social transformation of the wider human community. Ryan considered only an educated laity could help realize the Church's shift from an above-culture stance to a more assimilated and participatory one. In this context, Ryan's advocacy for the formation of the laity in the sacramental life of the Church had the potential for re-situating Catholic social teaching, from its former place as an optional ministry for a select few to normative moral imperative for all believers.

The challenges to Catholic religious education in the present century are no less urgent than those encountered by Ryan through the event of Vatican II. Certainly, Ryan's criticism of the parochial schools system has proven prescient. While the wisdom of whole community catechetics is more widely accepted, we continue to struggle at the parish level to find both the financial resources and prophetic vision that can make this educational philosophy normative rather than exceptional. The school model of Catholic education, which Ryan prophetically found so limiting, remains a pressing reality. With the critical economics of the current schools system collapsing (in some parishes) under the weight of itself, the impact of forced school closings and consolidations means that we remain in a defensive posture relative to owning a vision for if and how Catholic schools should be integrated into a larger aims of religious education.

One final theme from Ryan's work that continues to inform our contemporary educational situation is the importance of the lay Catholic vocation to the health and vitality of parish operations. Ryan did not anticipate the precipitous declines in religious vocations in the post Vatican II Church that placed additional burden on the Catholic schools system and more recently (in the wake of clerical sexual abuse scandal) has placed more emphasis on the role of the laity in all areas of parish life. Her conviction that the lay Catholic vocation was critical to the Church's mission in the modern world was based on the theology of revelation that proclaimed God's active and historically unfolding plan for the salvation *is* the baptismal call of all Christians to a humane organization of society. It was an outer directed vision that held an educated laity uniquely situated for the social justice mission of the Church. This reality has more recently been coupled with the heightened need for the laity to assume an even more expanded role in the ecclesial ministry of the Church to offset clerical shortages. It is a task that will include among its many issues, a more vibrant model of parish education as school closings and consolidations continue. While the future models of a more collaborative lay/clerical parish leadership may vary, they share the common requirement for a laity that is educated in the traditions of the faith and the discernment for how the past may be effectively re-appropriated to present life of the Church in the world.

More than forty years ago, Ryan argued the vision of the Vatican II Church could only be secured by an educated adult laity capable of enacting the reforms of the Council in the context of their personal and communal Christian life. The future vitality of the parish institution, both as we now know it and as our religious imaginations allow us to perceive it over time, takes us back to Ryan's educational vision for an educated adult laity in order that we may move forward as a Church.

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