

# Connect

A newsletter for  
high school  
religion teachers,  
campus ministers,  
and principals

---

## Primary Sources: Essential Teaching Tools

by Robert Feduccia

### Discovering the Truth

I was sixteen and the planets aligned. It was a good hair day. My skin was zit free, and my mother had just returned from the cleaners with my favorite shirt. It was the best possible day to have school pictures, and it was the best picture that had ever been taken of me—it looked nothing like me.

As friends do, I swapped that perfect picture for pictures of others. One of my pictures made its way with a friend who went to a basketball camp over the summer. One of the campers saw this once-in-a-lifetime photo of me and absolutely had to meet me. “Could,” she thought, “this boy who lives two hundred miles away from me be the ideal boyfriend?” I have no idea what was created in that poor high school girl’s mind, but she was about to be sorely disappointed.

When the basketball camp concluded, our mutual friend arranged for us to meet. We rendezvoused in a Burger King parking lot. I got out of my car, and she got out of our friend’s car. She had a large smile that slowly faded with each approaching step. The mullet hairdo that lay so perfectly in the picture looked more like what it truly was—a long, straggly mop that

“Theology and religious studies are unfathomably rich. Yet it often feels like we only scratch the surface.”

was more like a cry for help than a statement of fashion. The smooth skin from eight months earlier was replaced by the enflamed anger of pubescent hormones. As I approached the two girls, I spoke words of greeting that betrayed that I had a country, Southern accent that was, yes, Faulknerian, but far less endearing. That poor young lady spent the evening wishing she was someplace else.

Pictures are an interpretation of a person and can in no way capture the totality of that person. A parallel to this experience can be made to education across the disciplines, including theology and religious studies. Textbooks paint a picture, a still life, but do they tell a story? Textbooks often convey the results of a struggle, but do they convey the battles? Textbooks are succinct, but do they offer texture? Do they live? As

much as I love textbooks, I do not think they offer the full, moving, and breathing life that is in the Church’s theology, ethos, and history.

Primary sources are firsthand writings. They are speeches, essays, letters, sermons, novels, and stories by the people who shape the Church’s theology, ethos, and history. The two-dimensional image that the young woman saw of me in the picture was not a true representation of me. To know me she would need to interact with me. It is in interacting with me that she would discover my blemishes and flaws, my depth and my subtlety. She would discover my richness.

### The Richness of the Tradition

Theology and religious studies are unfathomably rich. Yet it often feels like we only scratch the surface. I have often heard the complaint from

(continued on page 2)

("Primary Sources: Essential Teaching Tools," continued from page 1)

students that by the time they get into high school, they have heard it all before. Many of the students have studied and passed religion tests since the early grades. They are as familiar with divine matters as they are with any other subject. Unfortunately when one becomes this familiar with a topic, the topic loses its mystery. If there is one complaint about the post-Vatican II Church that resonates with me it is the loss of mystery. As educators we yearn for young peoples' imaginations to be captured by the wonderment of God. We hope that young peoples' hearts

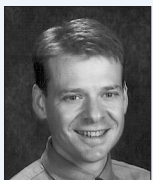
will be enthralled by the depth and richness that lies within the Catholic Tradition. Educators are now discovering that the use of primary sources can recapture the mystery.

A professor of mine in college used to say that students were reading others' writings about the mystery, but they were not reading the mystery. Read *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Read Saint Thérèse's *Story of a Soul*. Dive into the mystical; dive your students into the mystical. These tender, frightening, awesome writings can demonstrate to students that God is beyond the grade-school box they may have placed him in. Another professor of mine said that the ultimate goal of theology is to bring one to one's knees in reverence before the breathtaking power of God Almighty. If such a posture is to be taken by high school students, they will need an encounter with writings that communicate God's depth, power, and wonderment.

taught literature. Chaucer, Hopkins, and Welty were writers that took hold of me and are yet to let go. Those great writers took a relatively disinterested student and shaped me as a writer in a way that no grammar lessons could have. I was ready. Now I am finding that more students are ready. Today's students want something that is academically rigorous.

Theologically speaking, today's students seem to have questions that are more profound, more mature. The questions faced by twenty-somethings in the 1980s are now being asked by today's high school students. Is the Church necessary? Why are there so many religions? How can Christianity claim to be the true religion? What am I going to do with my life? These are ageless questions that the Church's Tradition has grappled with and has grappled with well. The wisdom of our ancestors in faith can speak to students ready to grapple.

## contributors



Robert Feduccia,  
development  
editor,  
Saint Mary's Press



J.D. Childs,  
director of spiritual  
life and theology  
teacher, Gibbons  
High School,  
Raleigh, NC



Steven McGlaun,  
development  
editor,  
Saint Mary's Press

### Readiness for the Richness

Students are ready to encounter such richness. I have noticed a change in students over the last several years. They are becoming more inquisitive and more serious about their studies. Looking at my experience in high school, I was completely captivated by the *Canterbury Tales*. Shakespearean references made their way into the inside jokes we shared as a group of teenage friends. Teachers often wonder if their students are ready to read primary sources. If we look at their use in other disciplines, we see that primary sources enhance learning. By the time I was in high school, I had English teachers who exclusively

### Unmediated Passion

I love to read Saint Perpetua's diary. Every time I do so, I am filled with awe at the fervor for Jesus Christ that this saint, who was never baptized with water, possessed. I love to read the speeches and homilies by Archbishop Oscar Romero. Every time I do so, my conscience is pierced on matters of justice. In Church history, I am fascinated by the letters between Pope Gregory and King Charles over lay investiture. Reading these letters reveals the passion, indeed the anger, burning in the belly of these men as they argued over the question of appointing bishops. Martyrdom,

(continued on page 3)

("Primary Sources: Essential Teaching Tools," continued from page 2)

justice, and lay investiture are topics that can be abstract or sterile. Primary sources allow students the opportunity to connect with the passions behind these issues or topics in an unmediated manner.

"Faith is caught, not taught" is a common saying. I interpret this phrase as an exchange between hearts. An effective teacher communicates the passion of deeply held beliefs in a manner that inspires students to strive for something greater. The Church's great writings contain similar power. These writings—some ancient, some new—reveal the beliefs that have shaped the Church's history, theology, and ethos. In fact, these writings are still shaping the Church's history, theology, and ethos. Being absorbed by the Catholic worldview and living in the world as a full, conscious, and active member of the Body of Christ is rarely realized simply through a cogent argument; rather, an encounter shapes a life lived in this manner. We hope for students to have an authentic encounter with the Church. Primary source writings can provide such an encounter.

Saint Thomas Aquinas's "Five Ways" is perhaps the most famous, if not the clearest example, of the clarity of scholastic theology. This is not a dry document. It is an invitation to view the world through the lenses of mystery. Looking at the world in the manner that the "Five Ways" asks is to see the world as a shouting testament to the glory of the Creator. Allowing students to read such writings and be conversant with them facilitates an

"Teachers are looking for different ways to teach, and students are looking for answers to different questions."

encounter with true learning—a learning that shapes the totality of the being.

## Credibility

When I taught theology in a high school, I was frequently angered by the view of the religion classroom. It seemed that religion classes were sometimes viewed by the other departments and the administration as a quaint little extra that gave the students a chance to share their feelings and get affirmed. This was demonstrated by the constant interruptions. College applications, academic testing prep, class-ring fittings, and a bevy of other activities were always conducted during the students' religion classes. The administration was approached about this by the religion department. The standard answer was given: "It is the only way we can be assured of reaching all the students." Our retort was to the effect that all students are also in the English classroom. This was dismissed. Very frankly, the religion department had no academic credibility. The use of primary sources can help correct that.

Pascal's wager, articles by Thomas Merton, speeches to the Pontifical Science Academy, and writings from Catholic philosophers demonstrate the seriousness of the religious studies or theology classroom. "Too touchy-feely," "not enough meat," "too much fluff": these are complaints that the religion teacher has often received from others. The academic

weight of the Church's great writings raise the dignity of both the students themselves and the subject matter. Moreover, these writings can serve as a binding force between the other disciplines. It has often been said that the Christian must live with a newspaper in one hand and a Bible in the other. The reason for this is that faith is not something that is placed in one compartment and remains unrelated to the things found in the other compartments of our lives. It is through a relationship with God in continuity with the ancestors in the faith that the Christian sees the world: arts, sciences, cultures, and languages.

The primary sources from the Church's tradition touch on all subject matters. For example, Cardinal Bernardin's speech on the consistent ethic of life shows the responsibility Catholics have in the civic world to wage peace. John Paul II's address on evolution contains a dialogue between theology, philosophy, and the natural sciences. In this view the religion classroom is not only an academic setting, it is the most essential academic setting.

## The Time Is Now

The Tradition's passion and richness, the students' readiness to encounter this passion and richness, and the academic credibility that comes with using primary sources are but a few reasons to employ their use. Very simply, the time is right. Teachers are

(continued on page 7)

# from the classroom

## Teaching Church History with Primary Sources

by J.D. Childs

### Why We Made the Shift

In our theology department at Cardinal Gibbons High School in Raleigh, North Carolina, we increasingly use primary sources in our classrooms as tools to compel and excite students' imaginations. We believe that this approach feels less dogmatic, invites discussion, allows critical reflection on religious themes, and leads to spiritual practices and loving service for justice. It's easy to accept the long view of religious education as planting seeds for the future, but based on my experience with secondary school theology teachers, we want to impact students now. We want to impart a contagious sense of the faith that we believe renders happiness, integrity, and creativity in our students' lives. Moreover, it is our contention that Catholicism at its best is intellectually real, culturally engaged, expansive, and inclusive. I'll identify a strategy regarding the use of primary sources that has provided some success for members of our department in their classroom teaching, as well as having enhanced our school's theology curriculum overall.

My example involves more than the use of primary resources alone; it provides a context for their use in

order to maximize their effectiveness with our students. Several years ago our department committed itself to redesigning the approach, methods, and resources by which our Church history course was taught. Church history can be a challenging course to teach because it can easily become a brittle "timeline" with little relevance for students. The rationale for our new approach emerged from the idea that classic expressions within a particular tradition—in this case the Roman Catholic Tradition—are essentially dialogical. Classics such as music, artwork, prayers, architecture, and literature all contain an evocative capacity. When students are introduced to the formal processes of encountering Catholic classics, education of the mind stimulates conversion of the heart: love of learning becomes desire for God.

### Church History Presents the Perfect Opportunity

The organizational theme for our redesigned course uses images or metaphors of Christ borrowed from Jaroslav Pelikan's book *Jesus Through the Centuries*. Each of these images predominates in the culture of a given historical era but also contains a transcendent capacity to speak in

every age. Images like Rabbi, Turning Point of History, King of Kings, Cosmic Christ, Christ Crucified, Monk Who Ruled the World, Universal Man, and Liberator are some of the images around which we chose to organize our units. Pelikan's companion work, *The Illustrated Jesus Through the Centuries*, includes pictorial representations of the Jesus metaphors. Furthermore, we conferred with our art department and with a local seminarian who specializes in sacred art to find the best works to accomplish our aims. By first scanning these images and then using an LCD projector, we are able to project them onto a classroom wall—the face of Christ writ large! As already described, we believe that students' various sorts of aesthetic encounters with Christ are essential for committed learning to take place.

Then we used archetypal modes of Christian living taken from Lawrence Cunningham's *The Catholic Heritage* to demonstrate that certain spiritualities more adequately "match" or "fit" certain ways of conceptualizing and imaging Christ. Cunningham's book, like Pelikan's, identifies modes of Christian living that have connections with and for particular ages yet still transcend any one era. Cunningham

(continued on page 5)

also identifies specific models or expressions of the mode of Christian living being treated, using a reflection on the just-war tradition within the mode of warrior, for example, or discussing Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in the section on pilgrims, or identifying Michelangelo as a seminal example of the Christian artist.

We spent more time gathering primary sources from the Catholic Tradition that come alive, that attract kids' imaginations in order to grab their hearts—sources like Saint Francis's *Fioretti* or *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, for example. We also began gathering primary source complements for paired use with the Cunningham resource. We put together an interesting several-day lesson on various spiritualities reflected through the sculpture of Michelangelo, for example, by scanning images of his various Pietàs and using his poetry that at points in his life reflected distinct approaches to God. In this way students learned from Michelangelo himself; they came into dialogical contact with a master artist and holy man of the Renaissance in order to expand their own imaginative opportunities for encountering God.

## Timeless Questions

As we formulated our plan for the Church history class, we brainstormed about religious and philosophical questions students have today. Our contention is that questions and concerns are timeless—people in all eras have wrestled with questions of meaning, and their spiritualities reflect their yearnings. In each unit of the Church history class, then, in the context of our students' cultural

immersion and dialogue with classic expressions of art, thought, and spirituality, we help the students frame the kinds of questions people of a given era might have. We help facilitate our students' connecting of the dots from metaphors of Jesus to modes of Christian living that tap into images of Christ. We do this through visual and artistic expressions from Christians of the age to the kinds of questions about meaning that these heroes of our heritage answered in their lives and work. When students see that their own questions are the same as those of the heroes of excellence from the great Tradition, they are increasingly inclined to own the legitimacy of their own quest for meaning.

Ultimately we hope that through the course students might gain a sense that the questions of each age are answered in a culturally specific way and yet that in every age the answers to life's most vexing questions are discovered in Christ—he who has many faces but is always the one Lord of all. In this way we've placed academic content, particularly through the use of primary sources, at the service of evangelization for our students.

**J.D. Childs** is the director of spiritual life and a theology teacher at Cardinal Gibbons High School in Raleigh, North Carolina. J.D. has extensive experience as a teacher, a speaker, and an author. He received his MA in theological studies from the University of Notre Dame, where he also completed his undergraduate work. J.D. recently received his MEd from the Catholic Leadership Program at Marymount University. He resides in Durham, North Carolina, with his wife, Kate, and their two daughters.

### About Connect

*Connect* is a complimentary newsletter from Saint Mary's Press for high school religion teachers, campus ministers, and principals. It is published each October, January, and April.

Copyright © 2005 by Saint Mary's Press. All rights reserved.

To become a free subscriber, send your name, the name of your school, and your school address to *Connect*, Saint Mary's Press, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1318; phone 800-533-8095; fax 800-344-9225; or visit our Web site, [www.smp.org](http://www.smp.org). Direct all correspondence and phone calls about ideas for newsletter articles to *Connect* Editor, at the above address or phone number.

### Acknowledgements

Scripture quotations are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible: Catholic Edition*. Copyright © 1989, 1993 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

The quote by Saint John Baptist de La Salle on page 7 is from *Meditations*, by John Baptist de La Salle, translated by Richard Arandez and Augustine Loes (Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1994), page 331. Copyright © 1994 by the Christian Brothers Conference.

## resource . reviews Primary Source Resources

### Primary Source Readings in Catholic Church History

*Edited by Robert Feduccia*

*Primary Source Readings in Catholic Church History* is designed to accompany the Saint Mary's Press Catholic Church history textbook, *The Catholic Church*, but may be used with any course. It is a collection of significant primary sources through the Church's history. Thirty chapters include select documents, along with commentary on who wrote them and why, how each document is significant to its time, and why it has endured as an important writing in Church history. You will find writings from such people as Saint Augustine, Saint Catherine of Siena, Martin Luther, Dorothy Day, and Saint Teresa of Avila. The accompanying leader's guide is described in "From the Press" in this issue of *Connect*. Available at [www.smp.org](http://www.smp.org).

### God's Breath and Other Stories

*By James A. Connor*

*God's Breath and Other Stories* is a collection of short stories that convey a sense of sacramentality and the "real world" presence of the sacred. Through these stories James Connor shows that in the ordinary process of living there are surprises that reveal God's presence to us. This resource is an excellent supplementary book for a range of theology classes from the Old Testament to the sacraments to death and dying. In particular the story "God's Breath" is rich with baptismal imagery and is engaging to adolescents. Published in 1988, this book is out of print but is available through various used book distributors including [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

### Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations

*Edited by Austin Flannery*

The documents issued by the Second Vatican Council are integral to the development of the Catholic Church in which your students are being formed. Through the

reading of these documents your students will not only better understand the contemporary Church but also will receive insight into the journey that has brought us to this point. The *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)* and *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* are both accessible and relevant to students in their experiences in the Church and in the larger community. The Vatican II documents are available at numerous Internet sites or can be ordered through [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

### Beyond the Written Word

*By Dr. Eileen Daily*

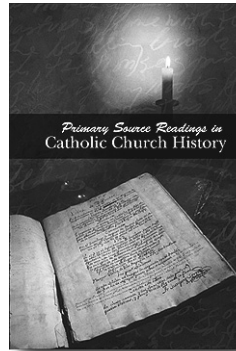
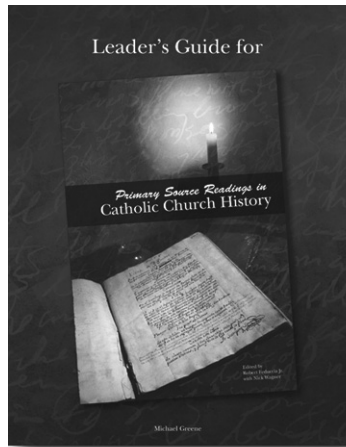
Only in the past few hundred years has reading been the primary way of teaching religion. For centuries religious education relied on hearing and seeing. *Beyond the Written Word: Exploring Faith Through Christian Art* and its teaching guide enable you to make one of the old ways of teaching religion—seeing—available to twenty-first-century students. The teaching guide offers a brief history of Christian art, an explanation of the value of art in religious education today, a survey of the student textbook, and some hints for starting out. This is an excellent resource to use in conjunction with *Primary Source Readings*. Available at [www.smp.org](http://www.smp.org).

### New Seeds of Contemplation

*By Thomas Merton*

Thomas Merton's *New Seeds of Contemplation* is present in most school libraries and in the personal libraries of theology teachers. It is a wonderful book to help young people begin the process of learning theology from primary sources. It is both an introduction to the contemplative tradition of the Catholic Church and an opportunity to move students into deeper personal reflection. If you are not interested in covering the entire book with your students, the exploration of the true and false self in chapters 5 and 6 provide a wonderful and poignant entry point. Available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

# from the press



In addition to *Primary Source Readings in Catholic Church History*, which is highlighted in the resource recommendations in this issue of *Connect*, Saint Mary's Press is proud to offer *The Leader's Guide for Primary Source Readings in Catholic Church History*. This leader's guide offers guidance on why and how to use primary sources. For each reading in the student book, the leader's guide provides review questions, in-depth questions, take-home activities and well-developed classroom activities. A few of the authors' writings covered in the leader's guide are Saint Perpetua, Saint Augustine, Pope Saint Gregory, Saint Catherine of Siena, Martin Luther, Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Francis, Junipero Serra, Dorothy Day, and the Second Vatican Council. This resource will help your students interact personally with some of the authors and documents that have informed the Catholic faith over the centuries.

"This example [Saint Theresa] teaches us how advantageous it is to inspire children with piety and to procure for them, especially by making them read good books capable of making good impressions on their mind."

—John Baptist de La Salle

("Primary Sources: Essential Teaching Tools," continued from page 3)

looking for different ways to teach, and students are looking for answers to different questions. The situation of teaching religious studies and theology to high school students is in a new era that has yet to be fully defined. Yet despite the lack of a full definition, it seems that teaching with primary sources has a prominent role to play in this new time.

Ressourcement, the recovery of the Tradition, and aggiornamento, the updating of the Tradition, are the two sides of the coin that is the Second Vatican Council. Pope Benedict XVI has said that good ressourcement automatically leads to aggiornamento. As religion teachers allow their students to recover the Tradition, they stand in awe at the applications young people make as the great writings of the Church become ever young. It is a new time: a time to let the students have a front-row seat and a firsthand encounter.

**Robert Feduccia** founded the Youth Liturgical Leadership Program at Saint Meinrad School of Theology. Through his work as a parish youth minister, his leadership of liturgical conferences for youth, and internships for college students, he has invited young people into relationship with the Lord and the Church through liturgical prayer. Robert has also spent time as a theology teacher at Charlotte Catholic High School. Robert is a development editor with Saint Mary's Press and speaks throughout the United States and Canada on a wide range of topics relating to the Catholic Church. Robert lives in Charlotte, North Carolina, with his wife, Kathleen, and their four children.

# in touch

## what's inside

- "Primary Sources: Essential Teaching Tools" .....1-3, 7
- contributors .....2
- from the classroom  
"Teaching Church History with Primary Sources" .....4-5
- resource reviews .....6
- from the press .....7
- in touch .....8

Dear Reader,  
The Catholic Church is rich with the writings and lessons given to us by saints, theologians, papal documents, and everyday Catholics. I recall the first time I was truly introduced to a "primary" source. It was my freshman year of college, and we were all assigned Thomas Merton's *New Seeds of Contemplation*. In an extremely real way, it was a religious experience for me. That was the first time I encountered a theologian's thoughts that had not already been processed for me by a catechist or teacher. The enlightenment I found in the pages of that book informed my faith and fueled my search for other writings. From Gustavo Gutiérrez's *A Theology of Liberation*, to Henri Nouwen's *The Wounded Healer*, to the meditations of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, that first encounter with *New Seeds of Contemplation* paved the way for much more personal reading.

As teachers we have the opportunity to introduce our students to primary sources in a manner that is engaging and digestible for them. In this issue of *Connect*, the feature article provides you with reasons that primary sources can be an important addition to your curriculum. "From the Classroom" offers an example of how one school is using primary sources to teach Church history. I pray that your ministry in this new school year continues to grow, and that primary sources will enlighten your students in new and exciting ways. By the way, I still have that now-tattered copy of *New Seeds of Contemplation*.

Peace,



Steven McGlaun, development editor

Nonprofit  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Saint Mary's  
Press of MN

touching the hearts of teens<sup>®</sup>  
saint mary's press  
702 Terrace Heights  
Winona, MN  
55987-1318  
USA

