

THE CATECHUMENATE AND MMORPGs

A Review of *Mediating Faith: Faith Formation in a Trans-Media Era* Clint Schnekloth. Fortress Press, 2014.

The first question is "What is a MMORPG?" Schnekloth answers this one quickly. It stands for "massively multiplayer online role playing game." There are numerous examples; Second Life and World of Warcraft are two of the better known MMORPG's.

The second question is "What do MMORPG's have to do with the catechumenate and the wider church? The answer to this is not so direct. Schnekloth devotes a significant amount of mediating faith to making a case that the catechumenate and MMORPGs share many traits. The most significant is "procedural rhetoric." Procedural rhetoric is the name for the phenomena that one often experiences in the gaming world, namely that "one learns the game by playing the game" (46).

Schnekloth's early encounter with the catechumenate was the process as embodied at Phinney Ridge Lutheran Church in Seattle. [See related "Faith Forming Faith" article in this newsletter.] Schnekloth's exposure to the catechume-

nate at Phinney Ridge Lutheran became fodder for his thinking about the use of online gaming media in the church today. "The catechumenate...is, in the strict sense, first of all, a medium. It is a kind of procedural medium" (53). This procedural medium, like that of entering a MMORPG, is one of initiation into a different world. "Liturgy is its own best catechesis" (55). One learns how to live in the world of Christian community by living in it, not reading about it.

Schnekloth puts a new "digitally-mediated environment" name to a phenomenon recognized by Christians down through the centuries. "Learning by living" is one of the reasons for the development of the catechumenate in the early church. It is one of the reasons for the development of the postulancy and novitiate in the process of becoming a member of a religious order (e.g. the Order of St Benedict). I suspect the author has a sense of this when he admits that he inhabits Second Life as a monastic.

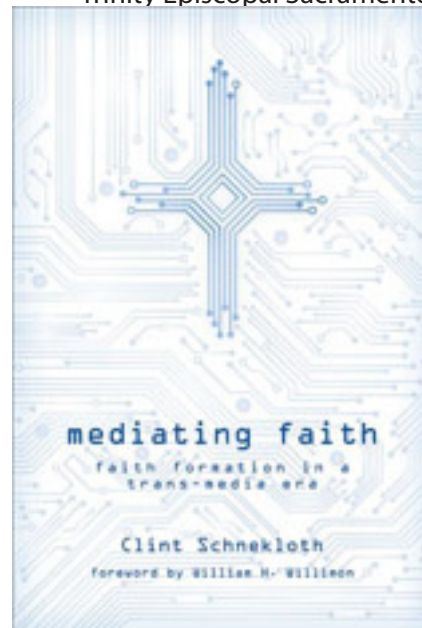
The final chapters of mediating faith contain insights on how the Church can more easily and productively move in the trans-media world in which we live. The

phenomena Schnekloth describes and comments on can be an opportunity for creating a more open, "fluid" church. "The liquid Church moves beyond the traditional boundaries of congregation and denomination through the use of communication and information technologies" (69).

mediating faith: faith formation in a trans-media era provides a great deal of material for thought in terms of ministry in our high tech world with so many new mediums for communication. And, yes, a Kindle edition is available.

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"FAITH FORMING FAITH" IMMERSION WEEKEND

First Presbyterian Church, Snohomish WA (just north of Seattle) September 26-28, 2014

As NAAC sponsors a catechumenal training event on the east coast, Paul Hoffman will be sponsoring one on the west coast through Faith.Forming.Faith. Participants will leave the Snohomish event prepared to

initiate a formational process for those preparing for baptism or its affirmation. Accordingly, the ideal registration is a congregational team that includes a pastor and/or other rostered leaders and several key lay leaders. More information is available directly from Pastor Hoffman and registrations are now open through Event-

brite. Both addresses are supplied below. The \$350/per congregation registration fee includes all training, materials, and six meals. Lodging and transportation costs are on your own. For more information/registration, go to: www.eventbrite.com/e/faith-and-font-snohomish-tickets-11674662229