



PIERRE BABIN

BY ANGELA ANN ZUKOWSKI

PIERRE BABIN, OMI (b.1925), a religious member of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI France), is a pioneer of group media (photo-language), an expert in psychology-pedagogy, explorer of social networking, author and researcher. He has taught at universities in Lyon, Paris (France), Strasbourg (Switzerland), as well as St. Paul's University, Ottawa (Canada) and the University of Dayton (Ohio) and St. Thomas University (Florida) in the United States. Internationally, he is renowned for his innovative vision for defining a new approach to catechesis in a media age. He founded an international research and training center in religious communications – CREC AVEX, Ecully (Lyon), France, and has been a member of SIGNIS, the International Catholic Communications Association. In 2008, the Babin Centre of Communications was opened in Bangkok, Thailand, to continue his work.

Important Dates

1925 - Pierre Babin was born in Paray-le-Monial, France, 2/25

1942 - Joined Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate

1949 - Ordained as a Roman Catholic priest

1955 - Professor at Catholic University of Lyon

1962 - Taught in Paris

1965 - Taught in Strasbourg

1971 - Founded and served as Director of CREC AVEX (Center for Research and Communication)

1976 - 1989 Served as Co-director of Audiovisual Research Department CNRS Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique), Lyon, France

1971 - 2000 Served as Director of Formation and Research at CREC AVEX

2001 - 2004 International Talks and Writing

2004 - 2008 Writing in Bangkok, Thailand

2008 - Opening of the Babin Centre of Communications, Bangkok, Thailand

2009 - Currently retired in an OMI Community House in Lyon, France

Awards:

1994- Johannes Hoffinger Award (New Orleans, Louisiana, USA)

1995 - NCCL Catechetical Leader Award

1995 - Daniel J. Kane Religious Communication Award, University of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio, USA

2002 - Honorary Research Fellow, St. John's University, Bangkok, Thailand

Pierre Babin was born in 1925 in Paray-le-Monial, France. The religious context of the small community was influenced by a devotion to the Sacred Heart, born out of the religious experiences of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (Visitation Sister) and local Jesuit spirituality. Pilgrims and missionaries flocked to Paray-le-Monial. The petite village's atmosphere was charged with a profound sense of the sacred. This spiritual context influenced the Babin family's religious imagination and set the stage for Pierre's vocation.

During the Second World War, German soldiers were stationed in the village of 8,000 people. Their presence ignited caution, fear and trepidation among the people. Pierre belonged to a group of young French resisters who, as he would say, « engaged in dangerous activity and games against the German Army by sabotaging their huts and helping prisoners to escape or pass over the borders to freedom. » His strong attraction to the poor called him to serve them when rations were low in the surrounding villages.

His adolescent years were turbulent. He found himself questioning and searching for an absolute ideal and trying to escape from an authoritarian background that seemed to hold him hostage from his real dream. He believed that his vocation was rooted in the ambivalent reaction he had to the world emerging around him. He found himself in a state of rebellion that combined a desire for perfection or a heroic idealism while at the same time combating all forms of oppression whether it came from politics, religion or education. At the age of 17, he escaped from the occupied zone of the Germans, headed toward a small town in southern France called La Blachère and entered the novitiate of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

Babin believed that the OMs offered him an opportunity to become a heroic missionary in the North Pole. He had no desire to teach. « If so, » he once said, « I would have become a Jesuit whose presence was dominant in my home village. » During his scholastic studies, he experienced a personal crisis of faith which became a turning point in his spiritual evolution. This experience later became the basis of future books: *Pour une catéchèse des jeunes d'aujourd'hui: itinéraire pastorale* and *Les jeunes et la foi*.

He discovered himself coming face to face with fundamental questions regarding the meaning and relationship of faith to life, liberty, religion and church. Under the guidance of his spiritual director, he surrendered himself to his call to bring a new perspective, or sense of life, to religion. He embarked on a new pathway that would define his contribution to a new approach toward catechesis even in a digital age.

His Oblate religious formation, theological studies (St. Foy les Lyon - Oblate College) and youth ministry experiences (Vico-Corsica) cultivated his interest in the relationship of theology, psychology and new methodologies for stimulating the religious imagination of young people.

During his scholastic studies, Babin became very sick and was sent to Corsica to rest. The pastoral landscape and people offered a healing presence for Babin. It was there (1943-1944) that he picked up a book about St. Bernard of Clairvaux. In a flash, his words struck home, « You will learn more in the woods and fields than in a book. Fields and woods will teach you many secrets that no person can ever reveal to you. » Babin often said, « This was my experience. It supported me during the transition I was theologically embracing in my life and studies. » This single insight ignited a new fire within him. He was ready to discover a new way of animating the minds and hearts of young people to discover God.

Babin perceived his Corsica days as a « paradisaical experience » in a country with extraordinary beauty and close contact with the population. He expressed his experience as « the archetype of Jesus with his disciples along the mountains and Sea of Galilee. » He said, « During those days of my scholasticate, the camp-mission experience gave me a new model of evangelization and the media. This does not mean that we had media (as such to use), but in Corsica I began to understand the basic elements of what constitutes the relationship of language and the media culture. Through sound, image, gesture, immersion in nature and reflection on village stories, I realized a new way for getting in touch with a deeper reality (mystery). »

Babin did not perceive himself as a specialist in theology, but only as a developer of a technique. Nevertheless, he was encouraged when some theologians told him that he had a deep sense of theology that went beyond any systematic approach. With this comfort, he set in motion dialogues with different theologians, even seeking them out to confirm or criticize his new way of thinking about communicating the Good News in a new media age.

Reflecting on the works of Karl Rahner, SJ, Babin said, « He was not one of my teachers, but his theology enhanced my thinking because it is deeply pastoral and rooted in experience. » Babin's studies at the University of Lyon introduced him to famous theologians and entrepreneurial thinkers, such as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who ignited Babin's investigations into the « all holy » in creation, preparing the ground for The Symbolic Way. Lyon was the center for creative theology in the 50s and 60s, and Babin delighted in immersing himself in flowing conversations.

In 1949, he was ordained and finished his theological studies. He was named chaplain at a Catholic high school in Lyon. He continued his involvement with summer camps which offered opportunities to share the idealism and hope of the young generation. While ministering to the young people, he developed a new Gospel sense of community and a deepening awareness of the power of Gospel symbols. He said, « I began to discover the symbolic way of faith, to realize that young people needed to experience the Kingdom of God. » During this time in Lyon, he began a two-year study in psychology at the University of Lyon. He studied Jung and Freud, investigating their ideas in relationship with Christianity. He became acquainted with the progressive catechetical works of Joseph Colomb, a Sulpician. His preoccupation quickly focused on a new way to teach which emphasized « being full alive. » The key was to completely rethink how to present the Good News to youth in a media age. Babin went on to teach catechesis at the Catholic University of Lyon (1955) and later at Strasbourg University (Switzerland).

As early as 1957, Pierre Babin was a pioneer in the catechetical movement. One of his lectures at the time, *Catechesis for Adolescence*, emphasized that evangelizing means transmitting a direct and personal message to the whole person, to the heart and not just to the intelligence. The catechist's language, as well as whole being, should be part of the message. This emphasis on heart, emotions and feelings (experience) was somewhat suspect by Church leaders in France, but Pierre continued lecturing and publishing books in the same vein: *Crisis of Faith* (1963) and *Faith and the Adolescent* (1964). « We must dare everything! » continued to be the mantra for his pioneering initiatives.

The National Director of Catechesis (Paris, France) was unenthusiastic about these books and Babin's way of thinking. Babin tried to rewrite them, but in Babin's own words, « It was catastrophic! » He resolutely believed that he (we) could not put our experiences, stories, symbols and poetic language, and even the testimony of Jung into theological statements. His approach simply did not fit into a theoretical approach to dogma. This experience confirmed for Babin that there were two ways of thinking: (1) a methodology of theologizing and (2) a new dynamic for communicating the faith with a Jungian approach.

In Strasbourg, Babin encountered Leon Barbey, a Swiss pedagogue, who deepened Babin's curiosity for linking human development with spirituality. Several of Babin's first publications were highly influenced by Barbey: *Book on Friendship* (1967) and *Methods* (1968). *Options* (1965) was perceived by Babin to be his systematic expression arising from the experiences of his first catechetical experiences with youth, his ministry on the Corsica catechetical campus, combined with ongoing encounters with great pedagogical and psychological masters. These books were eventually translated into a number of languages and used as texts in catechetical formation programs around the world.

Ecumenical Encounters

Taizé offered Babin a new perspective as he was contemplating a new methodology for spirituality and catechesis. Years before the Taizé Community entered the international scene, Babin connected with Brother Roger Schultz, founder of Taizé. Inspired by the Taizé ecumenical way of life and prayer, Babin integrated the Taizé experience within his personal spirituality and the CREC AVEX program. This was reflected in the arrangement of his liturgical space (small prayer chapel) and in the evening community prayer to which he invited guests from the neighborhood, visiting lecturers, students and friends. The ambience – icons, light, tone, smells, posture, music, chanting of psalms with a small community – reflected a merging of Taizé with Babin’s spirituality.

An encounter with Pastor A. Whyer, then the director of the Protestant Office for Catechetical Research in Geneva (Switzerland), offered another awakening for Babin. Whyer said, « Your books on religious education have helped us enormously. But nowadays people speak a different language, the audiovisual language. » Whyer’s observation posed the question that preoccupied Babin for the rest of his life: « What affinity does the audiovisual language have with the Gospel? » His search for an answer led him to identify three stages of discovery concerning audiovisual media: (1) audiovisual methods are a powerful aid to instruction; (2) audiovisual materials are not simply « aids » but a language in themselves and (3) the audiovisual media bring with them a new all-encompassing culture.

As the years elapsed, Babin maintained links with various Protestant groups, particularly in Geneva. He yearned to animate a new approach to catechesis that did not begin fundamentally with dogma but with experiences of the Gospel. Reflecting upon those years, Babin said, « We worked hard, prayed and exchanged our expertise in art, music and audiovisual production. We discovered a common friendship that went beyond our divisions. What I learned was that there was a unity of mosaic emerging within us. I realized that the idea of a unity of mosaic is greater than the difference of each stone. The metaphor helped me to perceive that the global image of unity needs to emerge first in our imagining efforts. »

Influence of Marshall McLuhan

Babin’s research and praxis with audiovisuals of sprinkling a few slides, video cassettes and songs into existing forms of religious education was only a palliative that might even prevent us from seeing the real changes in contemporary culture and communication. It was for this reason that he was disposed for the most significant encounter with McLuhan, who would awaken him to a more radical paradigm shift. Babin said, « Originally, I had regarded media as external instruments. Little by little, my conventional understanding of media and audiovisual methods changed. The more I

contemplated this new revelation, the more aware I became that people were audiovisually oriented, so that we could no longer speak to them as we had spoken in the past. »

There were three characteristics of modern life in the younger generation that Babin felt the Church needed to realize: (1) the resurgence of the imagination; (2) the importance of affective relationships and values and (3) the dissolution of national and cultural frontiers. McLuhan had inspired him to re-examine the function of communication, including the communication of faith. For Babin, the new awakening « was an insistence that was sometimes difficult to bear. » McLuhan managed to help him understand that technology, or more specifically the audiovisual medium of communication, is the key to understanding our contemporary culture and the evolution of a new human consciousness.

Like many of Babin's generation, his life was governed by the aphorism, « Ideas rule the world. » McLuhan opened his mind to the fact that crucial factors in changing culture and human behavior are not ideas, philosophies and religions, but the technological innovations of the era, especially in communications. McLuhan further emphasized that the message is not the words but in the effect produced by the one who is speaking. Soon, modulation was perceived by Babin as being the essence of audiovisual language, just as words and their sequence are the essence of written language. Babin often referred to the modulation of Brother Roger's (Taizé) voice in prayer as an example. These vibrations, perceived by our senses, induce emotions, images and even ideas, but first and foremost, they are based on natural analogies and habitual effects on the mind.

Marshall McLuhan's concept of the « global village » connected with Babin's evolving unity in mosaic theme. Babin went to Canada, setting the course for numerous impressive conversations with McLuhan and bringing McLuhan's ideas into harmony with Babin's eventual

Symbolic Way Movement

In his book *The New Era in Religious Communication*, Babin explains how the encounter with Marshall McLuhan had changed both his philosophy and orientation of teaching. The edited transcript of Babin's dialogues with McLuhan over several summers have been published in *Autre Homme, Autre Chrétien* ; l'âge électronique. Babin says, « I met McLuhan several times when McLuhan was in his 'glorious prophet years' (1970-1980). McLuhan turned my former ideological structure of religious training upside down. Formerly, my life was governed by the aphorism that 'ideas rule the world.' McLuhan opened my mind to the fact that the crucial factor changing culture and human behavior were not just ideas but more fundamentally the technological innovations of the dawning of a new era. I began to see how technology had changed my town over many years. McLuhan's vision was to see the complex interaction of technology with all aspects of our social and

cultural reality. At the heart of his thinking, of course, is communication technology - the medium that is the message. »

The conversations with McLuhan escorted Babin to a new concept for communicating faith. The message is the whole complex of ministries and conditions that are required for an effect to be produced. It is the face, the gestures, tone and clothes of the religious educator. The content of the faith message is not primarily the ideas or the teaching, but rather the listeners themselves, insofar as they are affected by the medium. « In the communication of faith, the content is not first and foremost the teaching of Christ. Rather, it is those who are being taught, insofar as they are reached by Christ and his Church; again, insofar as they are affected by the medium. »

Babin knew that McLuhan changed the meaning of words, and this made it difficult to understand McLuhan's message. McLuhan saw the world from a different perspective. However, the fact that the new technologies would change the world was evident. If one wanted to understand the world, one must change one's way of looking at it and the way one perceives how it is connected. It took many years for Babin to come to terms with the meaning of the medium is the message. Babin saw it as a « Copernican Revolution. » This meant that the initial act of communicating faith was a comprehensive movement involving images, gestures, sounds, etc., that were much more important than the doctrine of faith.

Babin frequently surprised his audience with his reflections on Madonna (pop singer) and Michael Jackson (pop singer). He used « Thriller » over and over in his presentations, year after year, as a universal phenomenon of music and culture and Jackson's ability to reach people. If they (pop singers) could move huge audiences, why could we not find a way for the Gospel to do so?

Fundamental to Babin's teaching was the concept that ground is more important than figures. It is not what you say that is so important but « what you are: the tone of your voice, your gestures and behavior. » As time evolved, Babin understood that audiovisual media in general was an extension and modification of the body. He wrote, « When we say, 'Christ's Body,' we only give a Christian name to the term of 'medium.' Evangelizing in the media age is embodying Christ. Through the media, through ourselves, we make Christ a medium. »

Sharing contemplative insights in a talk entitled *The Spirituality of Media People* (unpublished) for a gathering of professional communicators, Babin examined the evolving new media age. He wrote, « Our ancestors used to plant crosses on the mountaintops. Nowadays we put huge radar (satellite) dishes up there. Is the radar (satellite) dish, a circular symbol of wholeness and instrument of communication, not related to the cross? » He goes on to say, « The communicator's first task is not to speak but to listen...to listen to the voice of 'my people.' Can the person who does not love this earth - its songs, its films, its publicity - can someone like this be a Christian media person? What Christ is witnessed to if the person is not sensitive to the voice of human hope that is expressed in today's

magazines, in film clips, in pop music? What God is communicated by the person who is not stimulated by human struggle, the person who cannot weep over mindless poverty and contemporary catastrophes? »

His concluding observation to the media professionals was « Aware as I am of the enormous pressures that exist in the life of the Christian media person...I know that we carry our treasures 'in earthen vessels.' Nevertheless, I am convinced that our profession as Christian media people is rich in the highest of human and spiritual values. If few Christians come this way, it could be that few of them are aware of its holiness. I think that electronic technology and the professional life which shape our body can be paths of the greatest holiness and of evangelization in our times. »

In 1999, addressing the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Babin said, « I believe that we must radically rethink our pastoral methods, in the same way as the revolution which occurred as a result of the discovery of print technology and culminated in the Council of Trent. We have been invited not to a superficial restructuring of methods, but rather to what has been termed a change in the priorities and paradigms of pastoral work. We must do with electronic media what Luther and Canisius did in their time with the printing press when they invented the catechism, seminaries, etc. »

Later in Babin's evolutionary thought, the Internet became the determinant media that would reshape the world into a « global village. » The concept of the « global village » enabling us to mobilize the hopes and imaginations of the people to recreate the world with the slogan, Unity in diversity, was deeply rooted within Babin.

The Symbolic Way

Babin's persistent intellectual curiosity, theological reflection and pastoral encounters with the evolving media age prepared the ground for The Symbolic Way. « If we want to express the Gospel today, » Babin would say, « then we need to use symbolic language. » Jesus used symbolic language, and it is the dominant language of the media culture. Symbolic language adds modulation to abstract words. « It is the royal way for communicating the invisible in our own age of sensory explosion. » He believed that symbolic language is « tragically misunderstood. »

Babin made a distinction between conceptual and symbolic language. Conceptual language is that form of language that provides an abstract, limited and fixed mental representation of reality. Examples are reading, writing, abstraction, precision, idea, explanation, linear sequencing, words, etc. Symbolic language leads not only the spirit, but also the heart; it moves the body. It is a language full of resonances and rhythms, stories and images, suggestions and connections which introduces us to different kinds of mental and emotional behavior.

In *The New Era in Religious Communication*, Babin wrote, « It is certainly not possible to separate neatly these two forms of language, which are so intermingled in everyday life. The two forms of language can be compared to two waves, each one carrying with it its own sand. As we have seen, printing resulted in the victory of conceptual over symbolic language in the church and liturgy, with the sacraments gradually losing their emotional force and resonances in the imagination. Instead of the baptismal font, we now have a few drops of water on the forehead, and many ceremonies have become complicated rites that cannot be explained without a great effort on the part of pastors or priests. The wave of conceptual language has carried with it commentaries, readings, the study of theology and catechetical instruction based on intellectual effort and examinations » (p. 152).

Babin alleged that the wave of audiovisual language returns us to appreciating the meaning and impact of the symbol. He saw every good audiovisual document as being symbolic due to the emotional impact of sounds and images. He would often say that it has a « beyond » – something more than the reality proclaims. It is not so much about what it says but the « effect » it produces on us. It unites and pulls together. The mystery of all that is caught is in the imagination. « It is a call to become closely associated with the mysteries that inhabit and orientate the universe. That is why symbolic language and symbols cannot be dominated like a reality defined in a book. It has to be followed » (p. 152).

A prophet not only in his own time but in ours, Babin appreciated the inevitable rapidly evolving media (digital) era and its impression on young people. He was intuitively reading the signs of the times and prophetically preparing us for what we are encountering in the 21st century. His message was clear and simple: What many young people are looking for in faith is not so much knowledge as healing and spiritual fulfillment. The special characteristic of the symbol, the image and sound is that it produces effects that are not so much normative and cerebral as emotional and even physical; therefore, they tend to spread from one body to another and from one person's feelings to those of another.

His international cultural experiences reflected what Babin attempted to communicate. For example, he observed the effect of what African percussion instruments, diverse Asian and Oceanic religious rituals and Latin American rhythm produced in the observer. He saw that rhythm is contagious and it spreads through the group « like a shock wave! » It not only arouses emotion, but also creates understanding and a sense of « being at one » (sharing). Symbolic language has impact!

The Symbolic Way experience, according to Babin, is fundamentally a complex and ambiguous whole of sounds, images, words and gestures, relationships, rhythms, scents and many other factors that brings about a physical condition and psychic emotion, both of which help the awakening of the religious archetypes deep within the person. There are eight Steps (or movements) and Key Words for The Symbolic Way Experience: (1) Leave – Choose a symbolic time and place. Face your fundamental problem or your essential deficiency; (2) Feel – Don't think, don't talk, no media – simply be present to the moment; (3) Follow the Symbol – Identify an object or emotion that speaks to you.

Bring it back as a sign -souvenir - or write down your reflection; (4) Return to the group - community - to share your experience; (5) Alone - Return to a quiet place to enter more deeply into your experience - write poems, Haiku, drawings, etc.; (6) Return to the large group and identify key words that capture your symbolic experience; (7) Celebrate - Identify a setting to celebrate the Eucharist, bringing the experiences into harmony; (8) Remember - Create an audiovisual (digital) experience of key images, basic sounds and key words emerging from the emotions stirred within one during the journey. (See writings for specific detail of The Symbolic Way Experience.)

It was not Babin's desire to merely create another methodology for catechesis. He sought to « stir into flame, » « to move the spirit, » or, as Babin often said, « to awaken the soul. » The shift from intellectual ascent (of the text - the catechism) to a living, experiential reality that « shook - like an earthquake » the entire being, influencing not only the individual but the community (through symbols, sacramental reality and animated sense of community) was the hopeful reality Babin perceived.

Entrance Onto the International Scene

In the late 50s, Babin was invited to give courses in Canada and Latin America. These were his first opportunities to discover what was happening outside of France. These experiences led to another conversion for him as he attentively observed and listened to these cultures. As time passed, he became critical of the French because, in his words, « They were not capable of feeling the Good News. » Latin America especially brought this new sense of being to him. He said, « I learned that one must become like a child to enter a new culture. At the beginning, this was an unconscious experience, for truly listening to another culture is not a question of mind but of being. As a result, you are not the same. » His French colleagues began asking, « Pierre, you are French? » Soon he found himself saying, « I am French but not French...I am more. » When he read Pope John XXIII's words, « The entire world is my family, » Babin said, « Yes, this is my idea! »

Babin traveled the world, giving lectures and training sessions, working with and dialoguing with individuals such as French theologian Marcel Legault, Cardinal Martini and many others. He was a sponge, eager to absorb the wisdom and experience of those he encountered in order to be challenged and enlightened.

Babin's research and methodology, known as Group International pour la Foi et la Technologie or Group International for Faith and Technology (GIFT), has been studied extensively among Christian media professionals. His publications continued to create new portals and adventures to share and broaden his ever-expanding thinking which led to his keystone or international renown: The Symbolic Way. He travelled to Latin America (Columbia, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Peru); Africa

(Cameroon, Senegal, Egypt); Australia (Sydney and Melbourne) and Asia. In Asia, he was connected with the International Jesuit Center for Communications where he began producing audiovisual montages and videos with students. Later he became engaged with Kuangchi TV Production Center run by the Jesuits in Taipei, Taiwan, working closely with Fr. Raymond Parent, SJ.

For many years, he was connected with Sophia University (Japan) and worked closely with Sister Shoko Shirai, DSP, who directed a Media Training Center in Tokyo. Deeply moved by Shirai's unexpected illness, Babin visited her days before she died. She was an avid disciple and carried The Symbolic Way experience and methodology into the Japanese context. He was invited to the Graduate School of Mass Communications, Sogang University in Seoul, Korea, where he worked with Dr. Clotilde Lee in a program associated with the Catechetical Institute of the Diocese of Seoul.

As the years unfolded, Babin gave regular courses or workshops at St. Paul's University, Ottawa (Canada) and The University of Dayton (Ohio, USA). He was consistently invited to international conferences around the world as a keynote speaker, lecturer or workshop animator.

Creation of CREC AVEX: Center for Evangelization and Communication

CREC AVEX was established in 1971. It was born out of the ongoing critical reflections, dialogues, publications and best practices Babin observed around the world. Furthermore, it was a response to the request of the Second Vatican Council. Babin had a desire to open a center that would cultivate international religious communication leaders mixing faith with the audiovisual language and emerging new media culture. CREC (Centre recherche et communication) means Center for Research and Communication which designates the place, the house of studies. AVEX (Audio Visuel Expression de la Foi) means Audio Visual Expression of Faith. CREC AVEX offered a six-month ecumenical formation and training program for those assigned to communication ministry within their church. The comprehensive program involved theological, spiritual and technological formation.

CREC AVEX focused on six key areas in its educational and media endeavors: faith, audiovisuals (multimedia), mission, pastoral communications planning, ecumenism and intercultural appreciation. Bishops, priests and lay leaders from over 110 countries have been trained at the center. International communication experts and practitioners from around the world were engaged in the six-month program. Some of these experts were Father Henk Hoekstra (Netherlands), Father

Raymond Parent, SJ (Taiwan), Ana Maria Oliver (Lyon), Sean Patrick Lovett (Vatican Radio), Father Pierre Belanger, SJ (Canada), Sister Angela Ann Zukowski, MSHS (USA), Guy Marchessault (Canada), Victor Sunderaj (India), Roberto Molhant (Belgium), Clotilde Lee (Korea). These international experts interacted in formal and informal gatherings to strengthen the communication skills of the students. Students were required to attend workshops and seminars, participate in The Symbolic Way and complete a comprehensive project reflecting the CREC experience. Over 1,300 students from 120 countries have been trained in CREC AVEX. Most of these have become church leaders, media center directors and outstanding catechetical leaders around the world.

CREC AVEX was reoriented in 2005 upon the retirement of Babin. A group of laymen picked up on CREC and re-envisioned it by gathering communication experts offering communication technical formation for seminary formation programs primarily focused in Africa.

Additional International Involvements

Babin was active in OCIC, the International Catholic Organization for Cinema and Audiovisual. In 2001, OCIC merged with UNDA (International Catholic Association for Radio and Television) and became known as SIGNIS. From 2001 to 2005, Babin participated in the SIGNIS World Congresses.

In September 2008, the Babin Centre of Communications was inaugurated at St. John's University, Bangkok, Thailand. Its main mission is to offer a research and training program based on Fr. Babin's intellectual legacy for the mission of the universal Church.

Babin and His Vision Today

Father Pierre Babin's spiritual life was a priority for him. He drew from the deep well of a personal communion with God that energized a prophetic discourse in his life. There were many challenges of misunderstanding, ambiguity and conflicts from opposing or differing church perspectives, but he remained faithful to « We must dare everything! » in the spirit of OMI's founder and his own vocation.

Babin's small residence chapel was the location where anyone who visited or stayed with Babin could find him in either the early morning or evening hours. He invited guests to celebrate the daily Eucharist and join in the Liturgy of the Hours. There was a special aura and ambience of spiritual energy that embraced all who joined in the spiritual exercises. Babin believed that all who gathered in CREC were about God's work; thus, prayer was essential for one's communication ministry. Babin

modeled being grounded in a profound communion with God. He called all his students and colleagues to communion with God.

Fundamentally, there was a spiritual grounding that spurred Babin to the call for a « spiritual awakening » in the media age. In speaking to the Canadian bishops, he said,

I am also convinced we should no longer prioritize catechetical teaching. Rather, spiritual awakening should be our priority from now on. In all the turmoil of information and emotion, only faith built on the awakening of the inner self (the spiritual) will remain strong. A faith based solely on catechetical teaching will waver.

The church is no longer the central building of the village. Office towers and large hotels have long ago taken its place. We must ask ourselves why children would come to church to follow the teachings of Christ. How would it be possible for faith after childhood to remain unaffected by so many influences and so much agitation? One cannot be solid in the faith unless it corresponds to a personal interior awakening. The key to religious communication is relating the language of the Gospel to the progressive awakening of one's inner self.

That is why there is need for pastoral initiatives that focus on a spiritual awakening in keeping with each generation as well as on the spiritual life and Christian experiences. Taizé is a good example of this way of teaching where music, prayer, liturgical splendor, community life and witness have replaced formal teaching (at least for the time being).

In *The Gospel in Cyberspace: Nurturing Faith in the Internet Age*, Babin commenced a new journey to explore the assessment of the Internet and social networking for evangelization and catechesis. He became more conscious that a new way of being human was swiftly emerging. It appeared more revolutionary than anything he perceived from the past. He felt it was propelling civilization into a « new way of both being human and Christian. » It was more universal, oriented toward dialogue, sparking new opportunities and experiences for awakening a Gospel experience in the 21st century.

Upon Babin's retirement, he journeyed to Bangkok, Thailand, for contemplative time to compose his reflections on Aging and the Spiritual Life. In 2008, he returned to Lyon, France, to live with his Oblate Community where he passed away on 9 May 2012.

Conclusion

Father Pierre Babin is a profound witness that age is never a barrier to being avant-garde and a contemporary prophet.

As a man of faith, he was driven by a concern to communicate the message - the whole message of the Good News - to adolescents who are far more impressed by sights and sounds than by words. He embraced an adaptive stance to the changing media times with prophetic vision. He knew we have to break out of circles that confine our vision. It is impossible to enter into the digital world without breaking out of the print-oriented universe. One of Babin's mantras has been « It is impossible to have a real intercultural communication in the electronic age without leaving 'your country and your kindred and your father's house' » (Gen 12:1). Becoming a full person in the electronic age is not playing with the emerging new digital tools but being born to new depths of humanity for which our previous education has not prepared us. By 1975, he was one of the most acknowledged authorities in the Church on audiovisual catechetics. Still, early in the 21st century and in his early 80s, he continued to query, explore and imagine the influence of social networking for communicating faith in a digital age.

How did Babin perceive his particular contribution to the field of catechesis? In an interview, he responded, « Once a mentor of mine said, 'Okay, Pierre, so you have projects in life, but you must follow the inner voice within yourself.' So I tried to listen to this inner voice always and not be too preoccupied with many projects or my future. It is important always to be ready to follow a mystery. By listening to God day by day, in accordance with the grace of each period of history and each culture, one can catch something of God's voice and reflect something of His presence. I want to trust my experience of mystery, to be open to its revelation and to reflect it back into the lives of the people I encounter each day. » Babin continued to be faithful to this vision throughout his life.

Like Pope John XXIII, Babin opened windows; he also provided catechists the world over with a new vision, new approaches and a new theology of life and work in leading people to God.

Assessment of others of Babin's Contributions to Christian Education

Sean Patrick Lovett (Director of the English Division - Vatican Radio)

« During the meal, I teased him, pretending to interview him with a dessert spoon as a microphone.

I asked him whether getting older always meant getting wiser... He responded, saying it only made you more convinced there are no real answers... (Socrates: 'All I know is that I don't know').

I asked him if he was satisfied with his life's work... He said it would depend on whether or not it continued after he was gone...

I asked him how he would like to be remembered... 'As a man who loved Jesus » was his reply.' »

Memories of Pierre...

« We were celebrating Mass with a group of students in the 'upper room' of his apartment in Ecully. We had reached the Offertory. The congregation was invited to offer 'something symbolic and personal.' Each responded: romantically ('my heart'), passionately ('my life'), heroically ('my sufferings'...Pierre took off his shoes and sat there in his undarned stockinged feet: 'My shoes - that walk the world to bring Your (Jesus') message of Love.'

Isn't that what 'The Symbolic Way' is all about? » (SPL)

Peter Malone (Former SIGNIS President)

« While Pierre was very (very) French in his background and style of communicating - an extraordinary shrug with hands and eyebrows raised in question, he was able to affect a wide range of international audiences. And he was a pioneer.

What came to be called The Symbolic Way was the fruit of his personal response to the audiovisual changes of the 1960s, their potential for education and, specifically, religious education. His was the way of storytelling and meanings, of images and imagination, of the power of the personal response to beauty and goodness as well as (and sometimes over and above) the power of truth and reason. The First Vatican Council offered us one of the ways of deeper theological reflection, the use of 'analogies.' Pierre recognized the power in analogies of all kinds and their symbolic wisdom.

With OCIC as one of the partners in the establishing of CREC, Pierre kept contact by inviting Henk Hoekstra, the president, Jose Tavaros who had been a vice president and myself, when I succeeded Henk, to offer courses at Lyons. Speaking in French was a challenge, with students ever ready to offer the bon mot for translation. For me, this was an opening to the internationality of audiovisual and symbolic communication, especially in Asia and Africa. I appreciated how courses on film, the movies, could be part of this Symbolic Way.

Guy Marchessault (St. Paul's University - Ottawa, Canada)

« Babin organized his formation in Ecully according to a triple approach: professional formation, international encounter and The Symbolic Way. For him, a pastoral agent should be a competent person if he or she would have to express himself or herself in audiovisual. That began by an understanding of image. The intercultural milieu at the CREC AVEX was crucial for him. Each group had to use every year three languages: French, English and Spanish. One has to get out of his or her own culture, language and country to get the 'flavor' of other human experiences, he believed. It was in this spirit that he decided to receive students from other Christian communities as well. Finally, The Symbolic Way represented for him the chance offered to the students to overcome the purely intellectual formation given out in seminaries and faculties of theology - not to forget them, but in order to introduce mystogogical and experiential dimensions in the language, in order to speak to today's adolescents.

« There was a kind of halo around him: Very tall, gifted of a melodious voice, he could give a precise judgment on a student's production. Afterwards, he would give each one an opportunity to express one's point of view. He could be very concentrated in prayer and he loved meditation. A trait that surprised me a lot, years later, was the fact that he always felt incompetent in front of others, and for this one precise reason: He never received a university degree. So, he perceived himself as less capable, as having a weaker voice in front of patented academics. He always suffered a lot from this situation.

« Finally, he liked good cuisine, good wine, good company in front of his fireplace. It is why he never lived alone for a long while in his apartment. Between workshop sessions, he preferred to go away from Ecully on trips, where he was received all over the world by his former students, so glad to show him their appreciation and admiration. »

Matthew Hayes (President, Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School - Indianapolis, USA)

« What I particularly remember about Pierre was his humble graciousness as an 'international' expert when he was a resource at the May 2000 Fertile Ground: A Conversation Between Catechesis and Inculturation Symposium at UD. As the facilitator of that event, I was so impressed with and excited by his openness to serve the process as a 'senior partner in conversation' - listening carefully to insights from those attending as participants. Subsequent to the event, I came upon his words in the Epilogue of *The Gospel in Cyberspace: Nurturing Faith in the Internet Age*, which he co-authored with you [Sister Angela Ann Zukowski, MSHS], that described this so well. About such a conference he wrote, '...the communication summit is not the conference, but the dialogue. Indeed, we need lectures and sermons, but first of all let us have dialogue allowing each one to play an active role.' For him, catechesis was truly between the Living Word speaking through others. This humble listening characterized his presence later when he came to the Archdiocese of Louisville to resource our parish catechetical leaders.

Rev. Freeborn Kibombwe, OMI (Zambia)

« I was invited to participate in a short three-week seminar on *The Introduction to Media Culture and Evangelization: A New Way of Being Church* in 2001 in Lyon. Here I discovered a 'pearl of great price.' I was challenged to look at media as a new culture. I had always associated media with social and contemporary culture and not as a means for evangelization. I returned to CREC again in 2002. There were 17 of us from all over the world: sisters, priests and laypeople working in their respective diocesan or episcopal conferences in communication.

« My encounter with Father Pierre Babin was awesome and holistic. He embodied the essence of a Christian communicator. I could not help but be fascinated and marvel at the eloquent presentations of what the media could mean for Christian communications. In my final paper for CREC, I described it as a journey of discovery, 'a river which flows through many channels and opens up new streams or avenues in my life as an affective and effective media evangelizer.'

« What I understood from Father Babin is that to create a new language with technology, we have to cross beyond boundaries or barriers that categorize people into white or black, African or European, Asian or American. Babin calls us to interdependence, or interrelatedness, by thinking about the global village "becoming one world in terms of language and culture.

« I will forever remain indebted to Father Pierre Babin and the CREC AVEX team for empowering me and thousands of alumni around the globe with the new language and new ways of communicating the Gospel. »

Hazon Zaidi (Pakistan)

« I came to CREC AVEX for training in radio and film in 2004. CREC came to me at a time when I most needed it. I worked as a technician for 14 years before coming to know CREC. Although I learned my work through experience and seeing others do it, I had no formal training. As a Christian communicator, I needed to know everything I required to be a competent media person. CREC has given me confidence in ways that now I know and understand better some of the ways skills are used effectively in electronic media and their effects on people.

« I couldn't wait to meet the founder of CREC. I found Father Babin just as I visualized him to be: a fatherly figure, loving and always welcoming, a man gifted with the Spirit and knowledge of the media culture - past, present and future. His vision was clear that the church today must be equipped with a new breed of Christian communicators sensitive to the needs of the present time. The challenges that were set before me have enabled me to work out strategies by which I may be able to create audiovisual materials that will touch people's lives. »

Jing Manipol-Lanzona (Philippines)

« In 1994, I left the Philippines to participate in the CREX AVEX program. What I owe to who I am now is to The Symbolic Way - to Father Pierre Babin. CREC is not only a place of work...where East and West meet...not only a center for harnessing talents, acquiring technical knowledge and skills, but it is an instrument to deepening one's faith, love of God and all humanity, transcending one's race, color, creed and religion. It was when we were brought to a forest, instructed to be alone that was the greatest ordeal in my life. Everything began to sink in...alone on the mountain...in the midst of tall trees and maybe dangerous animals...back to nature...back to God. CREC awakened me! »

Joseph Mujule (East Africa, Tanzania)

« The influence of CREC was very positive. The ideas have not only affected me, but also those I share them with. After CREC, I am a different person. The skills, values and philosophies I gained while attending CREC are still precious to me. The education, professors, welcome families, Pierre Babin himself, and all his crew were my family anyway from my family. The time in CREC with people from around the world influenced my perceptions and made my world much bigger. »

Sheila George (North America)

« Unlike any communication formation I had received before, Pierre Babin and CREC offered a new way: an Incarnational and contemplative approach to communications. Centered on The Symbolic Way experience, I came to understand how to not just 'practice' communications, applying techniques or technology, producing so much communication 'window dressing,' but was challenged to listen with the heart and be open to seeing in a new way, to be the conduit for communication that is already there.

« Babin, of course, did not just teach this, he lived this. His charisma is the incarnation of his understanding of communications and faith expression. He challenged his students by his example. »

Norman A. Hjelm (Lutheran World Federation, Geneva, Switzerland)

« Pierre Babin is widely regarded as one of the most original and farseeing thinkers about religious communication in the world. He explored the deeper religious meaning of the revolution in global communications. He related media to new ecclesial forms (such as base Christian communities), new youth cultures and the contemporary quest for religious experience, new theological emphasis and especially new forms of religious education. »

Regis A. Duffy, OFM (University of Notre Dame, USA)

« Babin has written a stimulating, relevant and substantive treatment of catechetics, evangelization and communication theory and practice. His style in itself is an example of direct and challenging communication... Anyone involved in catechetical or pastoral work could learn something from Babin's insights. »

Barbara Cortese (PACE #23, May 1994)

« It is a great tribute to Pierre Babin that his work has withstood the test of time. When he published *Faith and the Adolescent* in 1965, the second wave of the women's movement had only just begun. Babin was writing about the spiritual development of adolescent girls one decade before a major paradigm shift in the understanding of women's psychology and two decades before the current understanding of the psychology of girls. Yet such were his powers of observation that his research fits hand in glove with that of the feminist psychologists that were to follow. »

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The attempt has been to gather as many translations, books and articles as possible concerning both the works of Babin and references to him through the collaborative work of Dr. Clotilde Lee (then acting Director of CREC AVEX). While 95% of Babin's work is in French we included other language editions and resources offering the breadth of Babin's work and influence.

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Excerpts from Publications

« In the communications age, the practice of pluralism becomes the sine qua non condition of life. If the cultural and geographical boundaries are more and more eroded under the influence of the media, how can we deepen unity without agreeing on a new basic contract favorably open to other ideological positions, religious sensitivities, even cultures and religions? The point here is not to renounce what we are, but renounce the absolute and normative character within what we are. The point above all is to gladden our hearts and to make the a priori split. As soon as I do not affectionately love the Buddhist and the Muslim, the unemployed and the tramp, pluralism cannot go forth - at least according to the Gospel » (CREX AVEX Newsletter #23, 1995).

« In my view, the Gaillot Affair sounds like a thunder clap in our Church communications. Why speak of evangelization and 'integration of the Gospel into the new culture' (Redemptoris Missio) if we do not reform our communication style? At the communications age, pluralism becomes a necessity for the Gospel, a pluralism of sympathy and forgiveness. Whatever the ambiguities of the Gaillot Affair, I rejoice in the awakening of consciences. Bishop Gaillot will soon be forgotten, as a consequence of the media! It should at least remain a certain awakening on us and the conditions of the Gospel » (CREX AVEX Newsletter #23, 1995).

« Both Peter and Paul are entrusted with spreading the Gospel but in different ways. In the era of the media, we urgently need a Paul who dares going up to the Areopagus. Besides, we should watch

with a positive look at the differences between Peter and Paul. To me, the Gospel cannot be integrated into the new culture if Paul is not recognized with the right to a difference of language and attitude. »

« All along the centuries, evangelization took various forms. Every age had its privileged forms linked with its culture: proclaiming, announcing, bearing witness, preaching and teaching. In the media's age, we could perhaps speak of 'evangelization through the body.' Let us again propose a change of predominance: shifting from a predominance of teaching, announcing or preaching, to a predominance of an active presence of Christ's Body. Evangelizing through the body is neither style figure nor « sock formula. » It is the true reality of a message in the media culture. When we say 'Christ's Body,' we only give a Christian name to the term of 'medium.' Evangelizing in the media age is embodying Christ. Through the media, through ourselves, we make Christ a medium. »

Pierre Babin, OMI, (12/3/1995) Sunrise on South America So Spoke the Founder (unpublished)

Canonization of Bishop de Mazenod, founder of the Oblates. Heads raised on St. Peter's place. You, Brothers and Sisters, who are there, Brothers from everywhere, let us listen to the voice of our youth, May the proclaimed holiness be our inner incentive!

The voice said:

Going to Rome or to South America is not what matters But following up to the end, what leads ourselves inside of us. Believe, believe still more deeply, You will upset the mountains of the impossible, You will put back the borders of age and sickness. Dare, dare again!

Remember!

He did not choose his disciples to think of His doctrine, Nor to take advantage of a guaranteed pension, But to hustle Satan And accomplish miracles! Don't let yourself be hardened by an excess of right ideas, By ordered dogmas and accumulated privileges.

Be free and live fully! May our eyes shine with faith in any human being! Heal the people from their funk and routine! Perform again the wonders He commanded his disciples to do!

Remember, the miracle in the Bible offers this particular feature That it does not heal forever. In any stroke of the fate, any travel, Any tiredness, any project upset, Tremble but stand firmly. In absurdity and immense solitude, Do not speak; wait.

Be concerned with your succession but do not worry. One has ever only the children of one's faith. You are not betting your life on the obedience to laws, but on faith. Dare and believe.

You are called « charismatic, » « new age » « Founder, » « unclassable, » « lacking realism, » « made »: Does it matter if, THOROUGH YOU, hope comes back?! If the dead leave the tomb of their habits, Of their old fears and jealousy!

Go on the wings of audiovisuals, Renew the taste of paradise, Give back to everyone the dream, the pleasure of a strong wind! Hustle the old Church full of certainties, Bundled up in the formalities and fears. You will remain radically faithful to Peter, But you are Paul, a missionary, outside the walls!

Lord, see the sand flowing from my hand! Protect me from impatience and « grabbing » From the anguish of height and the desertion of my friends. Teach me the right balance between action and abandon. And, when the time has come to be ready for a new miracle, The Miracle of the Spirit, When the flesh becomes useless, May I then return, laughing, to the mother-earth, And be surfing forever on the real Internet!

(So spoke within me the voice of the founder of the Oblates!)

Recommended Readings

BABIN ,Pierre. (1969) Adolescents in search of a new church. New York: Herder and Herder.

Babin realized early in his ministry that the Church needed to communicate faith to young women and men in a more effective manner. The traditional catechism approach simply did not speak a language that would awaken a meaningful relationship with the person of Jesus in their lives. In this book Babin challenges catechists and Church leaders to create an atmosphere of freedom whereby individuals felt comfortable to struggle with the great questions of faith and emerge deeply committed to the person of Jesus Christ.

BABIN, Pierre. (1967) Options: Approaches for the religious education of adolescents. New York: Herder and Herder

Crafting a religious instruction that was meaningful to the questioning adolescents of the 50s and 60s required new methods and modes of communication and stimulation (Babin used the term 'vibration'). Babin was influenced by emerging psychological insights and saw their potential impact

for constructing a spiritual encounter to awaken the inner spirit. Here he develops seven approaches to enrich the human experience of the young and enable them to « re-invent » their own faith.

BABIN, Pierre and Iannone, Mercedes. (1991) *The new era in religious communication*. Minneapolis. Augsburg Fortress Press.

Over the years Babin's research and praxis emerged into a multimedia experience called *The Symbolic Way*. It is more than a program, event or, a simple methodology for modern times. It truly was a multisensory - media experience. *The Symbolic Way* was an experience to awaken and animate the inner spirit to be receptive to the wonder, beauty and awesomeness of God. In this book the grounding principles and precise process of *The Symbolic Way* is explained in depth. The reader comes to appreciate that the symbolic way is the royal way for communicating the invisible in our age of sensory explosion.

BABIN, Pierre and Zukowski, Angela Ann. (2002) *The Gospel in cyberspace: Nurturing faith in the Internet age*. Chicago. Loyola Press

Later in life Babin became intrigued with the emergence, meaning and impact of the Internet within cultures. His early research and studies with Marshall McLuhan paved the way for a new communication threshold that was unfolding by means of the Internet. Babin's perpetual curious mind struggled with the rapid evolution of the Internet. He knew that something radically different was transforming how people think, communicate, act and experience community in a virtual world. In this book (originally written in French), the reader experiences Babin's inquisitive mind striving to make sense of the new reality in light of his life experience with *The Symbolic Way*.

Interviews with Pierre Babin

The following DVD's are one-on-one interviews with Pierre Babin. To best capture the spirit and charism of Babin, a review of these DVD's enables the viewer to appreciate the passion of his life's journey, thinking and contribution to the field of religious communication and catechesis. These DVD's were produced later in Babin's life while he was still able to critically reflect and communicate his perception on his perceived contribution to the field of catechesis.

Zukowski, Angela Ann. *Symbolic way: An interview with Pierre Babin*, OMI. Produced by The Institute for Pastoral Initiatives. The University of Dayton 2006

Lee, Clotilde. *The symbolic way: A method of religious communications*. Avex Alliance Production. 2007

Articles Highlighting Babin's Work

Zukowski, Angela Ann, MSHS, D.Min. (1994, February). A profile of an animator: Pierre Babin, Pace, Pps. 13-14.

This short article is a simple profile introducing readers to « Who is Fr. Pierre Babin, OMI? »

Zukowski, Angela Ann, MSHS, D.Min. (1994, July/August). Inculturating catechetics: An interview with Pierre Babin. The Canadian Catholic Review. Pps. 5 -9

This article was commissioned by the Canadian Catholic Review as a personal interview with Babin highlighting his perspective on inculturating catechesis in a new media age in light of his encounters with Marshall McLuhan.

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Dr. Zukowski is a professor in the Department of Religious Studies and Director of the Institute for Pastoral Initiatives of the University of Dayton, 1979-present. She orchestrates the Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation (UD). She has served as the world president for the International Catholic Association for Radio and Television (UNDA, 1994-2001) and on the Pontifical Council for Social Communications (Vatican, 1988-2002). She lectured in CREC AVEX from 1989 to 2005, served on international committees and lectured and co-authored with Babin. A close friend and advocate, she continues to explore Babin's vision for the 21st century in light of the digital age.