

## Some Particular Catechetical Skills

### ASKING QUESTIONS ARTLESSLY

**B**Y ASKING QUESTIONS, mind meets mind. It keeps the pupils awake, attentive, thinking and makes a lively dialogue between teacher and pupils.

#### SOME BASIC RULES

1. **Direct your question to the entire class**, not to an individual, lest the others cease to pay attention.
2. **Wait till over half have their hands up.**
3. **Name the pupil** who is to answer.

#### SOME "DON'T"s

1. Don't ask questions with a Yes or No answer. If a pupil gives such an answer, ask "Why?"
2. Don't accept an answer unless you have nominated that pupil — modern 'indiscipline' works against this.
3. Don't ask the same ones all the time, e.g. pupils at the front or the brighter ones. Provoke the others...
4. Don't let the class chant the answer uninvited, or supply the missing word at the end of a sentence.
5. Don't take an answer if only a few hands go up: the question may be too hard, or need re-phrasing, or breaking up into a sequence of questions.
6. Don't ask questions all the time as if there is nothing new to learn — unless you teach by Socratic dialogue.

### TEACHING USING QUESTIONS

You must know why you are asking questions:

1. Revision of facts, especially at the start of the class, or for a revision break in the middle.
2. Understanding of facts and their application.
3. Revealing attitudes & discussing Christian conduct.
4. Helping them learn: keep their minds on the move: "It is an effort, painful for the young, to remember isolated fragments of information which they cannot relate to their own lives or fit into a larger scheme." Therefore uncover difficulties, and lead them on like Socrates, by:

- (a) strengthening their understanding,
- (b) alerting them to the implications,
- (c) exposing problems.

The chief difficulty about arguing out a problem in the class-room is to control and guide the argument — to make sure that it reaches some kind of conclusion, or at least that the issues become clearer, and to keep the minds of the pupils from hopping, like sparrows, in a dozen different directions at once." (Quotes from *The Art of Teaching*, by Gilbert Highert).

### THE WRONG ANSWER

Be "accepting" of persons, not of errors. Give credit for effort, then 'bury' error with truth from next pupil.

Sometimes the wrong answer will be a half-truth, so ask the same pupil a further question, or state a contrary instance, to give him another chance.

### PUPILS ASKING QUESTIONS

Sometimes pupils will ask questions. It can be a mark of successful teaching, but beware of red herrings.

Also, it is best to repeat the pupil's question so as to direct it at the rest of the class, to get them involved and thinking... "Don't give answers, ask them questions", but not all the time.

### WRITTEN WORK

**NO IMPRESSION WITHOUT EXPRESSION** says the old teaching adage. This hints at the ultimate 'expression' of Christian doctrine in holy living (hence classroom good manners). In the classroom, however, written work, and drawing pictures or diagrams 'express' thoughts and so impress them on the mind.

This is not to exclude the simpler engagement of mind with mind when the teacher (or pupil!) asks questions, nor more sophisticated expressions in quizzes, debates, mimes and drama. However, **ears listen** to you and **eyes see** what is on blackboard or white-board (or in a text) *if* the pupil's hand, driven by his mind, has to **write or draw something** on the blank page of a book. N.B. a proper book, not scrap paper.

The simple but neglected art of **copying accurately** from blackboard or text book is a **reinforcement of the message by giving expression to it**. Expression increases impression... To make an accurate copy is a lowly intellectual virtue... and it is refreshing to remember that there are such things as intellectual virtues, and that pupils of average intelligence can attain them, even though one might well suspect that many educationalizers have not had an intellectual virtue in captivity for a long, long while.

**Dictation** is appropriate, too, because "faith comes by hearing" (Romans 10:17). With dictation, the mind works at making sense of what is heard. It "relates the doctrines one to another and with the ultimate end of man", (Vatican Council I, DS 3016).

**Insist on tidy work.** Older pupils should be given freer scope in writing and diagram-summaries, while younger pupils should follow more strictly what the teacher dictates or writes on the blackboard.

**Read all written work**, every word, and carefully correct it. Balance criticism with encouragement; perhaps award a mark; initial and date it. The young like to be, and are entitled to be, taken seriously.

Treat a written exam in the same way. Moreover, by giving a written exam, (1) the teacher is testing the pupils in order to test his teaching and remedy defects, whether his or theirs; and (2) he is impressing on them that religious knowledge is a serious matter, with consequences now and in the future and for all eternity.

Start a test thus: "Today, I want *you* to examine *me* to see if I have taught you successfully." Pause! "So I'll have to give you a written test which will show up *my* failings." This novelty will cajole them into co-operation. Maybe give a prize or two. When handing the work back, lead a constructive discussion, traversing the subject matter from a new direction.

The urges of original sin and character defects prompt some pupils to "attention-seeking devices" and/or "adolescent aggression". If they "knock" your message, "turn it round" by engaging their intellects with your mental strength — be calm, kind and firm. Of course, the class will side with the knocker, but some will benefit even if the knocker is unconvinced.

## Books by non-Catholics

**M**UST all our Catholic children's textbooks be written by Catholics? May we study great works of literature by Protestants and pagans? May we quote sayings or sing hymns composed or translated by non-Catholics?

**It all depends!** Are the things true or false? "For he that is not against us is for us," Mark 9:40. "**Every truth, no matter who said it, is of the Holy Spirit,**" (St Thomas Aquinas, quoting St Augustine).

St Paul quotes pagan poets: "And He made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after Him and find Him. Yet He is not far from each one of us, for 'In Him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your poets have said, 'For we are indeed His offspring,'" Acts 17:26-28.

Likewise the *Catholic Family Catechism* quotes pagan Cicero on **True Law and Right Reason**, a most convincing testimony to 'natural moral law' written on human hearts, (Romans 2:15). And various writings of Tertullian (A.D. 160-220) rank a place in the Breviary, though he later fell from faith and became a Montanist heretic; or King Solomon whose inspired writings are in the Bible though he himself lapsed into paganism.

Back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century no good Catholic ever read a book on religious matters unless the Church indicated her permission with a *Nihil Obstat* and *Imprimatur* — excepting only one, by a Protestant, William Cobbett, whose *A History of the Protestant Reformation in England and Ireland*, written A.D. 1824-1827, was so Catholic in its content that there was no problem.

**Aagin, the Bible itself recounts immoralities and crudities — but nothing to encourage the reader to commit them.** On the contrary! It is that criterion which decides our yea or nay to books which mention immoralities, crudities and disbelief.

Again, a very useful maths book, *Mathematics for Millions*, by Lancelot Hogben, 1936/1967, has scattered criticisms, even mockery, of Christian writers, and it praises Mohammedans against Christians. The anti-Christian passages are obviously prejudice, if not bigotry, and clearly irrelevant to its mathematics. Since it is a model of mathematical clarity and brevity, no mathematics student need hesitate to use it.

Regarding hymns, Father Matthew Britt, O.S.B., in *The Hymns of the Breviary and the Missal*, (with *Imprimatur*, 1924) said, "Many thoughtful men have long felt that something should be done to make our liturgical hymns better known and better understood. The *Dies Irae*, the *Vexilla Regis*, the *Stabat Mater*, the *Lauda Sion*, and the *Pange lingua* are incomparably greater value to the Christian than the greatest of pagan odes.

**However, the study of the ancient classics and of Christian hymns may and should go hand in hand.** Each has its own purpose; there is no quarrel between them. The one serves to cultivate a delicate and refined taste, the other

enkindles in the soul the loftiest sentiments of religion. The study of the former prepares one for a fuller and more generous enjoyment of the latter."

He also said, "In the selection of these translations many hymn-collections and many of the finest hymn-books have been laid under tribute. Catholic and Anglican scholars, especially since the days of the Oxford Movement, have vied with each one another in rendering our Latin hymns into English verse."

Here is a High Church Anglican hymn of V.S.S. Coles (1845-1929), full of good doctrine and devotion. Its tune is that of *Daily, Daily sing to Mary in Brightest and Best* n. 58.

**Y**e who own the faith of Jesus  
Sing the wonders that were done,  
When the love of God the Father  
O'er our sins the victory won,  
When He made the Virgin Mary  
Mother of His only Son.  
Hail, Mary, full of grace.

2. Blessèd were the chosen people  
Out of whom the Lord did come,  
Blessèd was the land of promise  
Fashioned for His earthly home;  
But more blessèd far the Mother  
She who bare Him in her womb.  
Hail, Mary, full of grace.

3. Wherefore let all faithful people  
Tell the honour of her name,  
Let the Church is her foreshadowed  
Part in her thanksgiving claim;  
What Christ's Mother sang in gladness  
Let Christ's people sing the same.  
Hail, Mary, full of grace.

4. Let us weave our supplications,  
She with us and we with her,  
For the advancement of the faithful,  
For each faithful worshipper,  
For the doubting, for the sinful,  
For each heedless wanderer.  
Hail, Mary, full of grace.

5. May the Mother's intercessions  
On our homes a blessing win,  
That the children all be prospered,  
Strong and fair and pure within,  
Following our Lord's own footsteps,  
Firm in faith and free from sin.  
Hail, Mary, full of grace.

6. For the sick and for the agèd,  
For our dear ones far away,  
For the hearts that mourn in secret,  
All who need our prayers today,  
For the faithful gone before us,  
May the holy Virgin pray.  
Hail, Mary, full of grace.

7. Praise, O Mary, praise the Father,  
Praise thy Saviour and thy Son,  
Praise the everlasting Spirit,  
Who hath made thee ark and throne  
O'er all creatures high exalted,  
Lowly praise the Three in One.  
Hail, Mary, full of grace.