

“Clear, brief and easily assimilated by all”

From *The Catholic Weekly* of May 21, 1978 Priest puts the case for a new ‘Family Catechism’

1978! Remember: this is 41 years ago!

and over a year and a half before 1980 when Cardinal Freeman gave Fr Tierney year's leave from the parish ministry to write the *Catholic Family Catechism* (CFC).

The old *Green Catechism* (OGC) as it was called) was the veritable ‘penny catechism’ for Australia from the 2nd & 3rd Plenary Councils of 1895 & 1905 resp.

This article in the 1978 *Catholic Weekly* defended the OGC reprint as a positive move against the farce of catechetics without Catholicism and without a Q&A catechism, and it announced the CFC already in the course of preparation..

THE recent debate aroused by the reprinting of the *Green Catechism* emphasizes the need for a new Catholic family catechism, according to Fr James Tierney, a Sydney priest who specializes in catechetical work.

FATHER TIERNEY, who directs the Cardinal Newman Catechetical Centre at Parramatta — an approved private enterprise of the Sydney Archdiocese — has commented on the catechism debate in a written submission to *The Catholic Weekly*.

His remarks follow some earlier comments by Sydney theologian Dr John Thornhill, S.M., reported in the *Weekly* of April 23.

Father Thornhill claimed that aspects of the teaching of the old catechism were “at variance with the spirit of Vatican II, and with elements of the teaching of Vatican II.”

In his written submission, Father Tierney argues that the most urgent need at the moment is for a new catechism (or catechisms) which will combine orthodoxy in doctrine with the “presentation of post-Vatican II developments.

While accepting some of Dr Thornhill's criticisms of the *Green Catechism's* way of presenting the Faith, he feels Dr Thornhill has overlooked the largely unsatisfactory state of catechetics at present, and especially the doctrinal shortcomings of many texts and programs being used in schools.

Those who have taken the initiative in reprinting the *Green Catechism*, Father Tierney argues — as well as those who have reacted enthusiastically to its reappearance — have been motivated by a genuine concern for clear and orthodox Catholic teaching.

It is precisely this concern, he believes, which the production of a new Australian family catechism would satisfy.

Father Tierney's verbatim submission follows: ‘Time for an initiative’

The restorers of the old *Green Catechism* and those who are enthusiastically supporting them, don't want only the *Green Catechism* and nothing else. What they are really asking for is an orthodox text

Statistics of Q&A catechisms

CATECHISMS	OGC till 1962	CFC 1981 x 2	CFCAE ¹ 1992/2009	CFCDE ² 2004/2009
Q&As total	386	404	500	50 !)
Words (approx)	8,100	7,200	10,000	1,250 ⁵
per answer	21	18	20	25
Total pages ³	60	224	136	128

1=AE=Apostles' Edition; 2=DE= Disciples' Edition;

3. The various CFC's have more support material built in.

for the instruction of Catholic children.

Any genuinely Catholic text that presents the Faith summarily and as simply as the *Green Catechism* will do them nicely.

And critics of the catechism do not, presumably, object to catechisms as such; their concern is to see the letter and spirit of Vatican II presented faithfully.

The time, then, would seem ripe for another initiative: the production of a new, post-Vatican II Australian Catholic Catechism.

Such a catechism would meet present catechetical needs by adequately covering essential Catholic doctrines, on the one hand, and on the other, by incorporating more up to date material which the *Green Catechism* lacks.

ENDORSED

The project of producing a new catechism has, in fact, been endorsed by the Australian Bishops.

Back in 1970, in their document, *The Renewal of the Education of Faith*, they made a statement which reads almost like a promise that a new catechism (or new catechisms) would soon be on the way.

This is what they said, in one of several references to the place of catechisms in religious instruction:

“In presenting an orderly synthesis of the fundamental truths of the faith and of the theological-pastoral principles drawn from the Second Vatican Council and the Magisterium of the Church, this work (the *Renewal of the Education of Faith*) has established the guidelines for the preparation of diocesan catechisms, the need for which grows every more pressing on account of the changed conditions of the modern mentality and vision of the world.”

What his means is that the Australian bishops intended to implement the advice of the *General Catechetical Directory*, which says:

“The greatest importance must be attached to catechisms published by ecclesiastical authority.”

This was the attitude of the Australian bishops on 1970, but the situation in 1978 is that nowhere Australia is there a Catholic Education Office which has one of its experts working on the production of

a new catechism.

'RESISTANCE'

There is quite evidently a good deal of resistance to the very idea of prescribing catechism for school use and directing children to memorize doctrinal formulas.

Memory learning is only one aspect of teaching with a catechism, but the one that it is currently most fashionable to despise.

Yet adults as well as children need to commit things to memory — such things as (e.g.) traffic regulations, which are even examinable, and in question and answer form!

OFFICIAL TEACHING

The official Church teaching on memory learning is that

"Formulas permit the thoughts of the mind to be expressed accurately, are appropriate for a correct exposition of the faith, and when committed to memory, help towards the firm possession of truth. Finally, these make it possible for a uniform way of speaking to be used among the faithful."

General Catechetical Directory, n. 73, and also
The Renewal of the Education of Faith, n. 177

Pope Paul VI, at the conclusion of the 1977 Synod of Bishops on Catechetics in Rome, spoke of the "necessity of some fundamental formulas which will make it possible to express more easily, in a suitable and accurate way, the truths of the faith and of Christian moral doctrine. These formulas, if learnt by heart, greatly aid the stable possession of these truths..."

In Australia, there no longer exists such a set of formulas. Most children's texts in current use do not provide any formulas to be memorized, and if they do, they are still not committed to memory. What were provided in the new Australian Catechisms of 1962 and 1963 fell out of use long ago. To see how this happened, we need some background.

The questions and answers of the old Green Catechism never stood on their own: they were a teaching aid and a pupil's text in the hands of a flesh and blood parent, priest, Religious or catechist.

The Green Catechism was filled out in Frean's *Commentary on the Catechism* and Schuster's *Bible History*. It was followed up by Sheehan's *Apologetics and Christian Doctrine*, "stimulating the mind of the adolescent". A backdrop of public and private piety was assumed.

This old Green Catechism was officially replaced in 1962 by the same authority that first directed its use, namely the Australian hierarchy.

The replacement was *Catholic Catechism Book 1*, based on the German Catechism. It was **kerygmatic**, that is, like a herald sound the Good News after the fashion of St Peter and St Paul in the Acts of the Apostles. It had a **new pedagogy**, with the summarized knowledge in questions and answer form towards the end of a lesson rather than at the start. It was accompanied by a Teacher's Book, which was later enlarged to include detailed Lesson Plans for weekly Scripture Classes in Public Schools. It was meant for Years 5 and 6 of the Primary School.

Its basic plan was the Creed in Year Five and the Sacraments and Commandments in Year Six. The

section on the Commandments contained fewer specific details than the Green Catechism, while the section on the Creed and Sacraments reflected insights to the views endorsed by Vatican II. An instance of this is the treatment of the Resurrection: in the new catechism's words, not only is the Resurrection a fact, but it is also the manifest acceptance by the Father of Christ's Sacrifice, and the new life for us all.

In 1963, Book One of this new catechism was followed by Book Two for Years Seven, Eight and Nine, and its teachers' book. In 1964 came *My Way to God* for Years One to Four of the primary school, and their teachers' books.

PRIVATE SOURCES

Then came contributions from private sources: *Visual Religion* by Brother McCracken C.F.C. and *A Program for Apostles of Christ in High Schools* by the author of this article; *Why We Believe* by Father Peter J. Elliott and *Reasoning Things Out* by John Young were for years 11 and 12. *Lift Up Your Heart: A Book of Prayers* by Father Brian Moore, S.J. contained a summary of the faith related to both the new and the old catechisms.

The command to use the CATHOLIC CATECHISM Books and MY WAY TO GOD Books one to four has not been withdrawn by the hierarchy, even though it is not extensively observed any more.

While this sequence of renewal was taking place, other influences were working to replace it with something altogether different. Thus no revision was made to improve the 1962-64 series. For instance, both books of *The Catholic Catechism* were quite inadequate on such an important subject as that of miracles, and did not treat parish life and liturgy as experienced by ordinary families. Numerous reprints did no more than update liturgical changes.

Meanwhile a plethora of texts, aids, seminars, reading lists, overseas experts, protests and disenchantments began to pile up at a bewildering rate, producing the present chaotic situation to which the Pope referred at the recent synod as "the current catechetical crisis".

Casting out the catechisms whether new or old began with attacks on the child's use of the human power of memory. The attack was extended from catechisms to any formulas, and even to prayers.

There was held to be some sort of incompatibility between memorizing formulas and understanding them. This was, and is, quite contrary to the teaching of the Church.

The attack then grew against there being any fixed text at all. Thus, the Catholic Education Office decided to issue a set of "guidelines" — something vaguer than a syllabus, and much vaguer than a program or a text. In place of texts and structured programs came the catechetical seminar and the resource person, the consultant and the co-ordinator — all admirable in themselves, but nevertheless a cover for a hidden curriculum more interested in techniques for processing people than with methods for teaching a religious content. This trend marched hand in hand with the secular school's usurpation of the family, because of the latter's alleged frequent

failings.

The motivation underlying these various twistings and turnings of catechetical policy seemed, in many ways, to be merely that of "change for change's sake".

Now, for 2,000 years of the Catholic tradition any change had to be an organic change: that is, any proposed change to a long-established way of thinking or acting had to be (and be seen by the faithful to be) a genuine growth out of what had formerly been the case, and not a rupture with the ways of the past. Cardinal Newman's dictum, "To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often", is often quoted out of context by those who would welcome such a rupture. What Newman had in mind, in fact, was precisely the organic development of doctrines that neither mutate nor "saltate". As Chesterton said, "Tradition does not mean the living are dead but that the dead are living."

'DISASTROUS'

It is not only in the matter of teaching methods and other practical issues that the "change for change's sake" obsession has been operative. It has had disastrous effects also in the much more central and crucial field of doctrinal content.

A good number of the catechetical texts and programs which have enjoyed widespread use in recent years have been inadequate, and at times seriously defective, in their presentation of Catholic doctrine.

St Paul was insistent in his warning against false doctrine to St Timothy and St Titus; and the supporters of the old Green Catechism are likewise reacting against the inadequate teaching which is to be found in very many texts and programs. Moreover, they rightly reject the simplistic assertions that all was shackled in pitiful immaturity in the bad old days, and that in the brave new world all is mature and liberated.

In arguing that the teaching of the Green Catechism is "At variance with Vatican II documents", Father Thornhill (CW April 23) is perhaps overlooking the psychological principle — so ancient and so new — that whatever is received is received according to the capacity of the recipient. For instance, in its statement that true Christians are to be found only in the true Church, the Green Catechism's phrase "true Christian" might just mean the same as the "full Christian" of Vatican II — and in the latter that adds up to a Catholic Christian.

Similarly with the emphasis on Law in the Green Catechism: if this is repellant legalism, what about concepts like redemption and adoption? Why shouldn't the catechism be given the benefit of the thinking of St Thomas Aquinas: "The most important thing in the law of the New Testament, the thing from which all its force comes, is the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is given by faith in Christ. Therefore the new law is first of all that same grace of the Holy Spirit given to all who believe in Christ. It must therefore be said that the new law is above all an interior gift." (S.T. 1a, 2ae, q106, a 1).

Father Thornhill is certainly correct in declaring that the Green Catechism needs some supplementation to bring out the full meaning of Our Lord's Resurrection.

The answer was there in tradition. St Bonaventure

said: "Justification was merited by the Passion alone, and not the Resurrection — but in the Resurrection alone, and not in the Passion, do we find its purpose and goal."

Alas for keeping one's balance in the modern Church: There are those today who deny the bodily Resurrection of Christ, **attaching a significance to an idea about an event they say never happened!**

Another matter which should be occupying our attention at the moment is the sort of educational outlook which is being inculcated into our future teachers at the Catholic training colleges.

In Australia, the influences of Rousseau, Dewey, Piaget, Goldman and Kohlberg are much stronger in our Catholic Teachers' Colleges than of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, St Augustine, St Thomas Aquinas, St Thomas More, Bishop Fenelon, Cardinal Newman, Maritain, C.S. Lewis, Sheed or even Pope Paul VI. A prize example is the commending of a book based on the former list of influences by Max Odorff (a synthetic name for a group) called *Teaching Your Child About God*, where Jesus is not to be mentioned to little children, where Christmas is merely Santa, and Easter the rabbit with eggs. It has to be seen to be believed. By contrast, Pascal said: "This (Christian) religion has taught its (little) children what (grown) men had managed to know only at their most enlightened"

A TEACHER NEEDS...

What a teacher needs is an education. The subject called **Education** is not something the teacher will actually **teach**, nor does it mean that having studied it that the teacher is thereby **educated**.

It is puzzling how an atheist like American psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg can provide a completely adequate psychological foundation for Christian morality. At least Aristotle believed in God and in natural law. Kohlberg claims there are six stages of cognitive moral development. A Kohlberg "stage sixer" following his Kantian categorical imperative of radical moral autonomy cannot have any rational defence against another "stage sixer" like Sir MacFarlane Burnett, who so respectably and recently proposed the selective murder of infants, the aged and genetic misfits, all to be done painlessly of course, and then to abort with quite a deal of pain the developing children whose birth might **inconvenience** others. **False ideas can be lethal, even with sincerity.**

Inadequacies are not the peculiar prerogative of the old Green Catechism. Even the Sydney Catholic Education Office's 1975 Guidelines omit traditional words like grace, soul and incarnation.

Their letter to parents at the start of 1978 continues to ascribe *Towards a Responsible Renewal* and *We Preach Jesus Christ As Lord* to the Australian Bishops' Conference, although our bishops declined to make these their own.

'RECOMMENDED'

The Dove Publication *Background to the Gospels* has a chapter that explains miracles right away. Its *Move Out Teacher's Book* says that the teacher "ought never to let himself get into the situation where he is expected to provide an **official** answer to questions

like... Why does the Church forbid pre-marital sex?" These books are in widespread use and are even recommended!

Attitudes not based on reasons are enslaved to feelings, emotional states and crushes on a teacher or priest who permits a personality cult. Such attitudes are liable to be replaced by another set, through the subversion of the World, the Flesh and the Devil.

If the catechetical debate of ten years standing is ever going to be settled to any popular satisfaction, there will have to be an **ecclesiastical "Royal Commission"** into religious education, with plenty of scope for the **examination** and **cross-examination** of those called to witness before it.

If Mr Wran can have educational seminars, and Mr Bjelke-Petersen can have commissions of enquiry into education, why not the Catholic Church?

It would need to be conducted by an independent group such as the Church's Marriage Tribunal... not only must justice be done but it must appear to be done.

To return to the basic suggestion which is being made here — the suggestion that a new catechism be produced and distributed — an important point is the place of the parent in using the catechism with his or her child.

A catechism for home use was always needed. The old Green Catechism of 1939 had an introductory letter from Archbishop Kelly:

"We must acknowledge the supreme obligation of each Pastor, and of every parent, to have the catechism lessons taught to their respective children, in the family, in the Church, and in the school."

Note that order: Family, Church, School.

Will today's children accept a catechism? Maybe they are a lot more versatile than we have been led to believe. Any approach, old-fashioned or new-fangled, carried out by interested adults with the Faith, will probably work. Method is a lot less important than the teacher, as the *General Catechetical Directory* say (n. 71).

It is only when one tries to compose a new set of Questions and Answers that one appreciates the craftsmanship of the old Green Catechism. It takes five minutes to prepare an hour's sermon, but an hour to prepare a five minute sermon; possibly it will take several hours to compose one catechism answer.

In any event, the Australian bishops have said there will be new catechisms, and the Pope clearly wants one, as he indicated as recently as last November. So the supporters of the Green Catechism are guaranteed a new and orthodox text.

What will be the qualities of such a new composition? Well, in the first place, the answers must be memorable. This means the language must be simple, brief and doctrinally accurate; the answers must make sense even without the question; they must involve the repetition of the words or phrases of the question (although with new words introduced from time to time); they must have a flow of words that is memorable for its poetry, and with a **printed layout that has effulgence of form (i.e. beauty)**. "What is it?" and "What does it do?" questions

will figure prominently.

Secondly, questions should be labelled "Parent" even when they are used in school, to emphasize who is the first teacher of the Faith, and that the schoolteacher is *in loco parentis*. There can be other questions labelled "Child" (as in Sheehan's *A Child's Book of Religion*) which will be provided with an answer from the parent, to make it read like a radio play, to sound more life-like, and to provide a mechanism for imparting information that need not be memorized.

Thirdly, quotations from the Scriptures and the liturgy and the sayings of the saints should be prominently displayed and dispersed among the questions and answers. They need not be prescribed for memorization, but will tend to stick in the mind for their beauty, their poetry and their sacredness. This will balance the more abstract parts (for both are necessary) and promote piety.

Fourthly, there will have to be brief notes for parents. These will bridge any gaps if there is a contrast in words or ideas from earlier catechisms, and provide some hints on how to teach at home, and how to co-operate with God in forming the child in faith.

Finally, there will also be prayers: as Professor James Hitchcock says in his book, *The Recovery Of The Sacred*, "If a prayer is memorable, its effectiveness is greatly extended, since it can work in people's minds even outside the times of normal devotion."

The catechetical specialists at the Cardinal Newman Catechist Centre and their field consultant teams are already at work on a Catholic family catechism.

The recently formed Newman Centre Association, with its broadly-based membership, will also be helping in this project.

The first half of the catechism is already drafted for criticism, but is temporarily "stalemated" for lack of time and money.

The catechism project is linked with another, the Newman Religious Education Guidelines for all years from Kindergarten to Year 12. Both these projects are expressly intended to transcend any differences between supporters and critics of the Green Catechism.

Then we can all get on with our personal and parish renewal, with authentic Vatican II ecumenism, and some prospect of converting the neo-pagan environment. The enemies of the one Enemy must unite in faith and love; only the Devil is profiting from discords in charity, and (what is even worse) the spread of heresy, error and half-truth.

EDITORIAL COMMENT 25th July, 2019

Despite their earlier good intentions in 1970, the Australian Bishops **abandoned the reform of catechetics** and for 50 years have left the contenders to fight it out among themselves.

The *Catholic Family Catechism* in all its editions and translations from its first edition on 2nd February, 1981 has fulfilled some expectations of the 1978 *Catholic Weekly* article.

Some proposals for the Fifth Plenary Council defy the Catholic teaching in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* so this council will be a **doctrinal & catechetical battle**.

Pray, because it all depends on God, and **Act**, because it is the Will of God that we actively participate in His work.