

"Clear, brief and easily assimilated by all"

Catechism background to *Bush Boys* books

The seven books in the *Bush Boys* series (now in six volumes) grew out of the Australian Bush Catechism of Camping written to defend the Catholic Family Catechism

THE SEVEN BOOKS

- *Bush Boys*, an outdoor adventure & ABC of Camping
- *Cuthbert Joins the Bush Boys*
(Books 1 & 2-are now published in one volume, *Bush Boys and Cuthbert*)
- *Bush Boys and Bush Ranger2*
- *Bush Boys on the Move*
- *New Boys in the Bush*, the Lawsons of Guntawang
- *New Boys Go Bush Again*
- *New Boys' Bush Rescue*

1. The *Bush Boy* adventure books are first and foremost recreation reading.

They are for enjoyment, and not killed off with schoolwork questions on each chapter. But spontaneous informal discussion is desirable – see school principal's letter on p.2 col.2.

2. However, the author's original plan was simply to write a bush catechism to show how useful Q&As (Questions & Answers) are to teach the truth about really important things such as (a) living with a religious purpose, and to go to Heaven and not to Hell; and, as a parallel theme, (b) to survive happily in the bush without death from one of the Seven Deadly Dangers that lead to death in the bush.

3. The **Catholic Family Catechism** (CFC) was written in 1980 and two editions published in 1981. Even before 1980, and especially from 1981 onwards, it was relentlessly opposed by diocesan Catholic Education Offices and Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, especially in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra & Goulburn, Brisbane and Rockhampton. A motion was moved to ban it at the Australian Bishop's Conference (see HO "True Doctrine, *Vera Doctrina*").

Such catechisms of **doctrine** with Q&As designed for **memorization** were a threat to the official "life-situational catechesis" and "values clarification" without doctrine or memorization.

4. **BUT THE CHURCH SAYS**, in *Ritual for Baptism*: "Parents should be provided with catechisms written for families;" and in *Familiaris Consortio* n. 39. "a suitable **catechism for families... clear, brief and easily assimilated by all.**"

And *Catechesi Tradendæ* n. 55: "The blossoms of faith and piety do not grow in the desert places of a memory-less catechesis."

The Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy wrote to me in 1982: "We do hope that your catechism will be widely used in all the English-speaking countries."

The Episcopal Region for Malaysia, Singapore Brunei printed several English editions from 1983.

The Dioceses of Berhampur in 1992 and Balasore in 1993 in India translated it into Oriya; also Trobriand Island PNG into their language in 2000.

Copies of the Australian edition were given to Honiara (Solomon Islands) as a gift in 2008, with the rest of benefactors' \$20,000 donated in catechisms to Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta, The Philippines and Kenya, and to Salesians in India.

In 2005 free permission to reprint was given to Orlu, Nigeria.

5. The Australian Bush Catechism, that eventually led to the *Bush Boys* books, was prompted by the continuing rejection of the CFC by Australian dioceses.

It came about like this. The author, in 1989, began writing a Catholic survival manual along the lines of *Stay Alive, a handbook on survival* 1978/1991 for bush disasters, by Maurice Dunlevy, (now out of print). From that providential prompting, the author began drafting some ideas for "handing on the Faith" in an environment hostile to doctrinal Q&As.

Thus came the idea of **writing a bush catechism** in Q&As on “staying alive” in the bush by avoiding its Seven Deadly Dangers leading to death. At first, there were 30 Q&As, soon increased to 50. With later amendments, this became *The ABC of Camping* (ABCC, Australian Bush Catechism of Camping). It is now HO n. 2, and a vital support for the usefulness of Q&A.

6. Soon after, its author began *A Catechism About Catechisms* (ACAC). It was a manual defending a Q&A format, **“a how-to” manual** on how, what and why to write catechisms **for any topic**, itself written in 50 Q&As, practising what it preached in clarity, brevity and digestibility, and is now HO n. 1.

ACAC was useful for lecturing on the CFC by applying its principles, with examples from the non-religious context of the ABCC – thus spiced with interest and humour in its serious treatment of things as diverse as hats and handkerchiefs, cleanliness and cooking, fires and First Aid.

7. Now came **a final inspiration:** an adventure story implementing the ABCC as a “send up” of the religious “life-situational catechesis” which should have complemented Christian doctrine but did not.

So *Bush Boys* was a “life-and-death situational” story based on “bush doctrine” as a rebuke to the official “life-situational” catechesis without doctrine. Of course, effective teaching must include life-situations to illustrate the doctrine, but is ineffective waffle without it. Thus was born the first Bush Boys book. It turned out to need six sequels.

In summary, life-situations in real life need Christian **doctrine**.

Life-&-death situations in the bush need bush **“doctrine”** and a bush adventure story shows just how true this is.

Thus the Bush Boy books are at once

- (1) adventures to be enjoyed; and
- (2) to teach the Safety First prevention of accidents, so readers can safely enjoy God’s creation, on day walks, or camping out in one spot, or “on the move” with a new camp-site each night; and
- (3) they uphold family virtues and the complementarity of male & female as bread-winners and homemakers; and boys & girls as psychologically different as well as physically different; and
- (4) Christianity is presented as a normal part of an integrated life. not an unmentionable ‘private extra’. These boys honour God by praying together, keeping the Ten Commandments, yet convincingly normal as boys with mischief & naughtiness, and the possibility of consequences if and when they are caught at it.

Father James Tierney

author of *Catholic Family Catechism* and *Bush Boys* books.

Read it Aloud! **BUSH BOYS**

THE BACK COVER of *Bush Boys* boasts of short chapters ideal for reading in bed or curled up on a comfy chair, also for reading aloud at home or at school.

The undated letter that follows was, with the permission of its author, first printed 21 years ago in the old *Newsletter Cardinal Newman Catechist Centre* n. 117, in March 1993, and with bold emphasis added:-

Dear Father Tierney,

I received a copy of *Bush Boys* from your sister whilst I was Headteacher of Scarsdale Primary School, and I promised that I would write a few words to you to tell of my experience with the story.

It had been a long established practice of mine to read a story, in serial form, to the children, on a daily basis. I was quite selective in the choice of book for I have firm views as to the value of example in literature.

Let me preface my remarks by saying that **under normal circumstances I would not have chosen your book, for the style appeared to me to be too contrived.**

However, I have been an avid fan of your father's writings for many years, and that, together with your sister's good nature, prevailed.

The children took a very keen interest in the story. They discussed the plot and characters at length and with enthusiasm. They approved of the development of the story, and ensured that I found time each day to continue the reading. Their enjoyment in the story was obvious.

When I was about half way through the story I went on leave, and left the book on my table. My replacement was given no choice. I did not return to teaching but retired instead. At a farewell function the children returned the book to me, again indicating the pleasure the story had given them.

I have given a great deal of thought as to why my appreciation of the story was so different to that of the children. Some factors which contribute to the children liking the story probably do not relate to the story at all – for example, the mere fact that the reading provided them with a quiet time each day, and, without false modesty, the standard of the reading. **On the other hand, the children were able to identify closely with the characters, they were impressed with the obvious practicality of the advice and information in the story, and the style closely approximated their own.**

Enthusiasm is contagious, fortunately, and so is enjoyment. That the Scarsdale children enjoyed your story is beyond doubt. Any discussion is academic, for after all, the story was passed by the greatest critics – its projected audience.

The foregoing is too formal: the story satisfied and pleased the children and that, surely, is praise indeed. Congratulations, and best wishes for the future.

[Signed:] *Ted Lyons*