

Baltimore Catechism?

Dear Father Cuddy,

As always your column is like a cool breeze on a hot summer's night. But I see you have addressed two to me as Vicar for Education (Courier - Journal, 10/28, 11/4). When someone says "Hello," it is proper to respond. Also as diocesan head of the Department of Education, I feel an added compulsion to answer your query.

I thank you, too, for giving me the opportunity to express these views on a subject that is causing some confusion in the Diocese.

Not too long ago this office sent to all the priests of the diocese an article by Msgr. John J. McIlhannon titled "The Baltimore Catechism Revisited." No need to summarize it. Suffice it to say that Father Francis Connell, who revised the Baltimore Catechism in 1941, clearly stated "A Catechism is not the same as a textbook."

In the same article leading catechetical authorities were also cited and all said the same thing — "A catechism is great as a teacher's guide or sourcebook, but not as a textbook, especially for children in lower grades."

A catechism is a summary of religion, a basis for pedagogic textbooks. It is not, and should not be, the textbook. It would be equally unwise to use a dictionary as a textbook for English grammar just because a dictionary is a definition book. Should any reader desire a copy of this article, please write our office (50 Chestnut St.).

I myself always used the Baltimore Catechism in instructing converts. But even then, I revised it — for it is an inadequate tool by itself. It needs updating and revision.

For instance, the Catechism, like Gaul, is divided into three parts: the creed, the commandments, and the sacraments. Part one presents what one must believe (the creed); part two: what he must do (the commandments); and part three: the helps to do what he believes (the sacraments and prayer).

On the surface this sounds good. But such a division has a flaw — a very deep one. It dichotomizes religion, destroys its organic nature. All the things we were to believe were departmentalized into one neat package, then came the commandments with apparently no intrinsic connection to the truths of faith. "If I believe, I ought to be doing this," — such was the flimsy connection.

It was something like the didacticism of the 19th Century New England poets. Men, like Longfellow, Bryant, Whittier, et al., felt obliged to tack on to their poetry a moral to justify it to the New England Puritan mind. Thus Whittier ends "Maud Muller" with the moral: "For of all sad words of tongue or pen, / the saddest are these: 'It might have been!'" Free-thinking Emerson rebelled against this artificial linking of moral to poetry and announced in his poem "The Rhodora" that "if eyes were made for seeing, Then Beauty is its own excuse for being."

Similarly, morals, or the commandments, are not something to be appended to dogma, like

HELP THE NEEDY

Don't forget to aid the Campaign for Human Development at its collection Sunday, Nov. 22. It will finance self-help programs on diocesan and national levels.

Courier-Journal

Father Paul Cuddy, regularly seen in the adjoining pillar, wrote two recent columns in praise of the use of the Catechism for teaching religion. He addressed his thoughts to Father Albert Shamon, who is responsible for religious education in the diocese, declaring that some teachers wrongly downgrade the catechism today. Father Shamon replies in the first of two articles explaining modern catechetics. — The Editor.

a tail to a kite. Christian morality should grow out of dogma itself as the rose from the rosebud. For instance, Paul's great chapter on charity (1 Cor. 13) is the inevitable conclusion of the preceding dogmatic chapter (1 Cor. 12) on the mystical body. If we are members of the same body, then to love one another makes sense.

As a consequence, even in using the Baltimore Catechism, I always restructured its three parts into two — rebuilding it on the nature of a dialogue between two persons. For Christianity is a revealed religion, and revelation begins with God. He initiates the dialogue. He comes to man, inviting him to a communion of love.

So like any lover, God reveals Himself in two ways: He tells the beloved all about Himself (the creed) and He gives gifts (the sacraments). The beloved is invited to respond. How? "If you love me, keep my commandments."

You see, nothing is changed, and yet in a sense everything is. You might say the two approaches are as different as a marriage arranged by parents between a boy and girl who do not know each other, and one that springs from the love of the contracting parties.

The dialogic approach is personalistic; whereas the Baltimore Catechism is intellectualistic; and because it is, and because the intrinsic connection between moral and dogma is not so obvious there, the motivation behind the commandments had to be extrinsic: the law, fear. Thus the legalistic emphasis of pre-Vatican II morality.

Another point: the Baltimore Catechism is found wanting even in its definitions.

Since Vatican II there have developed deeper, more beautiful ways to understand many of the traditional words like grace, sacrament, Church, and even the workings of God Himself. We live in an extraordinary time of "grace" when new insights are offered us. We all — priests and parents — should count our blessings and strive to grasp these insights.

Let me illustrate. In the Baltimore Catechism grace is defined as "a gift of God bestowed on us through the merits of Jesus Christ for our salvation." So? What does gift mean ordinarily? Something given, doesn't it? A thing, mind you! Yet the great grace God gives us is Himself, a Person. Even the catechism definition of sanctifying grace as a "share in the life of God" sheds no further light.

How many, I wonder, have ever understood from the Baltimore Catechism definition of grace the doctrine of the Divine Indwelling? And yet the doctrine of the Divine Indwelling is the key to the entire doctrine of grace.

I was brought up on the Baltimore Catechism and never heard of the doctrine of the Divine Indwelling till I reached the seminary. Yet sanctifying grace makes positively no sense without the Divine Indwelling, for man is reborn (sanctifying grace) precisely so that he can come to know and love the God within himself and hereafter the same God, face to face. Sanctifying grace is but a means to an end.

Compare the Baltimore Catechism approach with the new approach. The new approach is biblical, that is, it begins with the word of God, not with the words of theologians.

Thus on the matter of grace, it asks what does Scripture tell us of God and His relations to man? Scripture reveals that God approached man first: He created the world. He created Adam. He called Abraham. He called Moses.

So the first thing Scripture tells us about grace is — God always takes the initiative in regard to man. Then what happened? Some muffed the call, like Adam. Some responded, like Abraham. Because Abraham did respond, he got greater graces. God chose the 12 sons of his grandson Jacob (or Israel).

And again what happened? God changed them. They became a holy nation, a royal priesthood. God changed them — but, for what reason? So that they could become a light to the nations and fit to receive His Son. A remnant did, especially the daughter of Israel, who was conveyed immaculate — our Lady.

And the process goes on. The Son of God came, established a community to make it holy to bear God in itself and in the hearts of each of its members, so as to make the world holy in turn.

So we end up with a new definition of grace — but nonetheless a definition, and one that conveys a far more adequate notion of the teaching on grace. (How false and unfair is the assumption that our catechetical textbooks, like "Come to the Father," are devoid of content and definition)

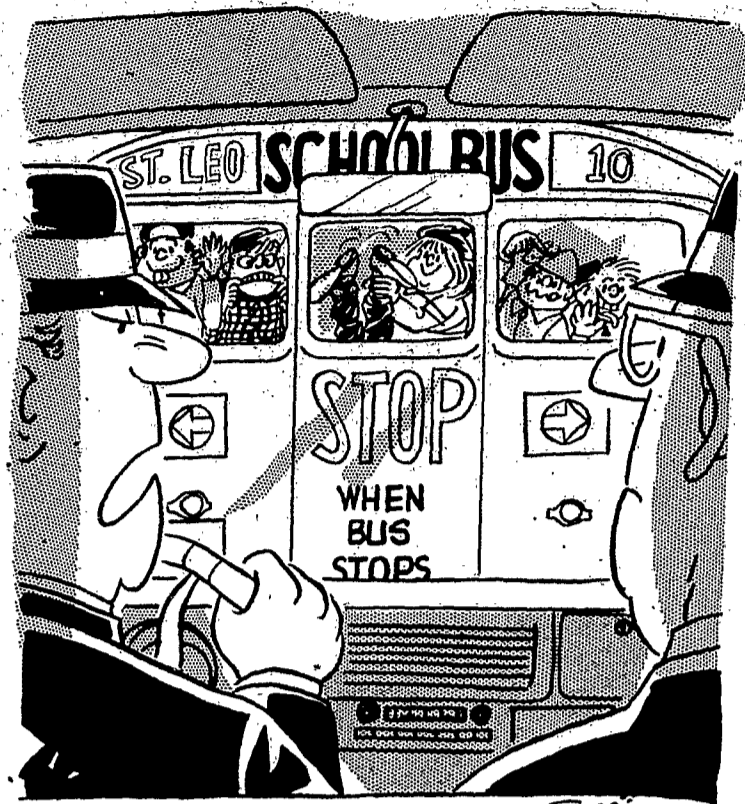
Here is the definition: "GRACE IS GOD COMING TO MAN IN LOVE (the Divine Indwelling) AND THE TRANSFORMATION EFFECTED IN MAN (Sanctifying Grace) AS A RESULT OF THAT COMING." That transformation first affects the core of a man's being divinizing him, making man God's son (sanctifying grace); and then, like the ripples caused by casting a stone into a pool, grace reaches out to transform man in his activities, in what he thinks, says, and does (actual grace) until eventually he becomes what he is made at baptism, until he can say with Paul, "I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me."

Naturally, this is only a sketch. But is it not obvious how superior this biblical approach of our new textbooks is to the purely theological one of the Catechism?

The new approach sees grace, not as a "thing" to be stored up, a get-all-the-grace-you-can type of spirituality, but as a relationship, a dynamic love affair that needs ever to be deepened (as does the love in a good marriage) — deepened by prayer and the sacraments.

(To Be Continued)

Wednesday, November 11, 1970



"THERE'S YOUR NEW RELIGION TEXTS!"

On The Right Side Why Catholic Papers Fail



By Father Paul J. Cuddy

For many decades the two Catholic weeklies with the widest circulation in the United States have been Our Sunday Visitor, published in Huntington, Ind., and The Register, published in Denver, Colo. Three years ago each had a circulation of 600,000. Each had great influence on Catholic thought and attitudes among the people.

The Register was founded by Msgr. Smith of Denver, and was primarily a newspaper giving the news of the Catholic mission in the country and the world; and incidentally giving edifying instruction. It built up the Church to be seen and loved as Christ teaching in the world.

Our Sunday Visitor was founded by Bishop Noll some 60 years ago. At the time there was a violent anti-Catholic press, spreading calumnies against Catholics and the Church, and being believed. Consequently, the purpose of the Visitor was to defend the Church. It was incidentally a vehicle of instruction, and so developed.

When I was assistant to Father Curtin in the mid-1930s, I found in him a great apostle of the Catholic press. At that time the Catholic press could be relied upon to defend the Church against her enemies, and to propagate the Faith. Father Curtin sent 400 copies of The Register to 400 families in his parishes. And this was in the middle of the depression. Several times Father John Guy described how as a young boy he used to sell the Visitor for a penny a copy outside the Clyde church. He considered it an important apostolate.

Three or four years ago Our Sunday Visitor went leftward. Shortly afterward the Register did the same. For three or four years there was a change from traditional loyalty to the Holy See and to the hierarchy to a querulous whine which is characteristic of the leftward-oriented Catholic press.

Two years ago the Rochester Association of Catholic Laymen

sponsored a talk at St. John Fisher College, on the condition of the Catholic Church. The speaker was John Leo, a personable liberal Catholic columnist. Since I had read with sorrow Leo's weekly barbs at the Church, the Holy Father, the hierarchy, et al, I phoned Father Pat Keleher and said: "John Leo is speaking in Rochester tonight. Can you join me?" "Delighted," said he. So we went.

During a question period afterward, a questioner asked: "What do you think of the liberal Catholic press?" Leo focused a facial fusion portraying disgust and disdain. Said he: "Oh, the liberal Catholic press! With the same old stuff week after week: the pill, articles like 'Bishop Sacks Curate,' 'Nuns Defy Cardinal,' written by the same tired writers with the same faces grinning out at you week after week!" Had Frank Morris or William F. Buckley said this he would have been accused of reactionary intransigency. Coming from Leo, it was surprising.

A few months ago, Time gave a feature on the troubles in the Catholic press. It reported that the editors of the Register and Our Sunday Visitor, after three years of liberal editing, had to give up. Each had lost circulations around 100,000. Time opined that Catholics weren't ready for Vatican II renewal. The real reason was that The People were fed up on phony claims of renewal and rejected them, and their papers. The People want their papers honest and edifying, i.e. building up hope and love for the Catholic Church.

Abraham Lincoln said it: "You can fool all the people some of the time. You can even fool some of the people all the time. But you can't fool all the people all of the time."

Decades of fidelity to Catholic faith, practice and history rejected the anti-Church slant of the liberal Catholic press. One day, it might be good to discuss the strong and weak points of our own Courier-Journal.

Ke
S
Soc
turned
ago w
"so-so."
This
lost a
tough
three
ishing
Leagu
The
scored
ment
althou
Bob C
mark
This
ney's
pitch
has m
sides
banke
der an
stood
Cro
Highw
also.
Catho
in the
al.
The
ter th
riers
O'Con
of the
splint
Anoth
had s
sat of
For
Kings
Aquin
crew,
Aquin
Quare
the f
mud
BK
won
t
Snycl
All-A
ing
conso
Kear
recon
Ba
week
ta is
be I
schoc
Th
real
ber
Ba
form
Dave
King
cuso,
er f
grad
Bf
coacl
repor
great
Brot
In
com
day
impr
form
four
beca
four
letic
Bf
BK's
thou
reco
post
win
Ei
this
the
Lea
from
alwa
ers
ther
A
Gre
coac
kids
Cou