

Baltimore Catechism?

The diocesan Vicar for Education offers his second reply to Father Paul Cuddy's charge (Courier-Journal, 10/28, 11/4) that the catechism-method of religious instruction has been downgraded unfairly.

BY FR. ALBERT J. SHAMON

In my last response to Father Cuddy, I averred that the Baltimore Catechism should not be used as a textbook in religious education classes, but only as a teacher's guide, as a source-book. I professed two reasons.

The first was that the Baltimore Catechism by its three-fold division into creed, commandments and sacraments destroys the organic unity of the Christian Religion. Faith is a life to be lived, not just a body of truths to be memorized.

Secondly, though definitions are desirable, the definitions of the Baltimore Catechism leave much to be desired especially in regard to such fundamental concepts as grace, redemption, the Church, sacraments, etc.

I wish to conclude my remarks on this subject with a final observation on definition.

Definition, as you know, is always the last step in the educative process. Only when one knows something well, can he define it. Yet the reverse is

not necessarily true. It need not follow that to be able to define is to know what is defined. I used to tell my students not to let their study interfere with their education. They could, you know.

Students can memorize answers and not know the answers. I remember a student who once used a "trot" in Latin. He would memorize the English translation of the Latin passage assigned each night for homework. He couldn't read the Latin, but the next day in class, if called on, he would translate the passage beautifully.

Not too long ago Dr. Sidney B. Simon, co-author of Values and Teaching, lectured our diocesan teachers on the subject of values. What he said concerning secular teaching is equally valid in teaching religion.

The values of our Faith cannot become values to students through courses aimed at indoctrination or the mere imparting of information. Values become values to a student only after going through an educative process.

Dr. Simon enumerated the seven steps necessary in this process: (1) thinking a thing out, (2) choosing it freely, (3) from alternatives, (4) acting on it, (5) not once but repeat-

edly, (6) prizing it, and (7) being willing to stand up for it publicly. Omit any one of these seven steps and the value does not really emerge as a value to the learner.

You can see, I am sure, what was behind the sometimes too much permissiveness of some of our religion teachers regarding attendance at Sunday Mass. They got boxed in by steps two and three: choosing freely and from alternatives.

It is to forestall a valueless kind of religious education that we frown upon using the Baltimore Catechism as a textbook.

Let us go back to the first teachers of the Faith — to the time of Christ and the apostles. Christ first proclaimed the good news of salvation. This proclamation evoked from a few the response of faith. A community formed and grew which pondered the message of Christ, lived it, celebrated it.

And then in the last half of the first century, God inspired men to write down Christ's words and deeds as seen through the eyes of faith of the first Christian community.

In other words the primeval catechetical process was—first, the historical event (the Incarnation and the Redemption); secondly, the response of faith (the Christian community); and lastly, the formulation of that faith (the New Testament and the creeds). Note well that formulation, or definition, was the last step!

What was the first step? Conversion (metanoia). When Christ preached, when the Apostles preached, they wanted to change the hearts of men. The aim of the proclamation (kerygma) was conversion. Once the basic commitment was made, then came instruction (didache). Then after the instruction came entrance into the community by baptism and Eucharist (koinonia).

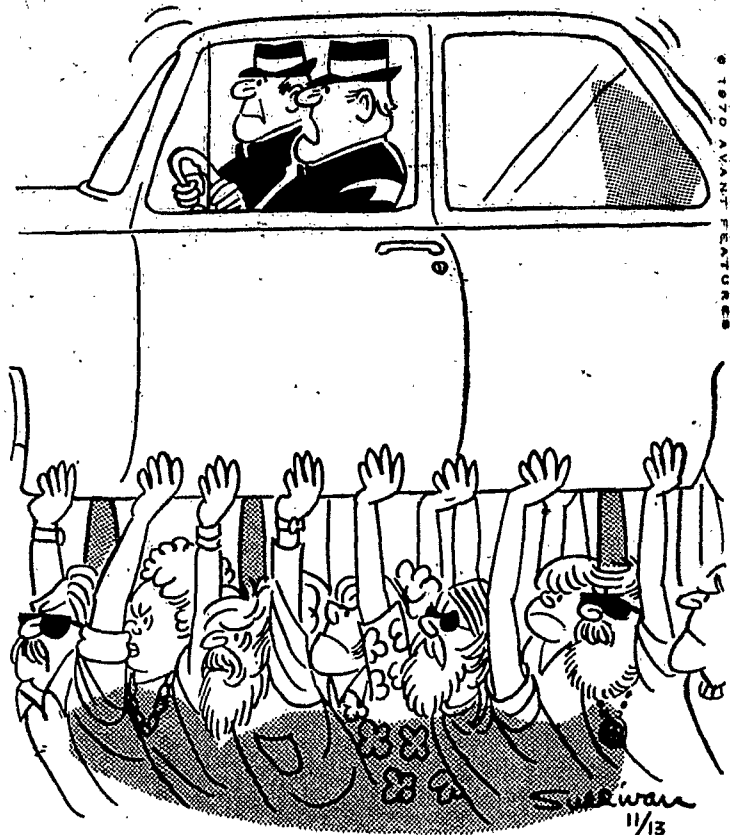
The great tragedy today is that the process is reversed for children. They are first baptized, then instructed, and then hopefully (?) converted!

No wonder so many adolescents and adults "fall away" later on. Conversion must always be at the heart of catechetics. The trouble with the world today is not head trouble, but heart trouble! Definitions, yes. Only definitions?—no! O cursed be the intellectualism that does not end in love. (See, Coudreau, Basic Catechetical Perspectives).

In conclusion, I do want first of all to commend one parish in our diocese for using the catechism properly. This parish (Good Shepherd of Rochester) has purchased catechisms for all its parents and teachers — not the Baltimore Catechism, but A New Catechism by Herder and Herder; and it has given this Catechism to them to be used, not as a textbook, but as a source book. To that we say, "Amen, Amen."

Secondly, in the opening address to the Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII chartering a course for the Council Fathers declared: "What is needed is that this certain and immutable doctrine, to which we owe obedience, be studied afresh and reformulated in contemporary terms. For this deposit of faith . . . is one thing; the manner in which these truths are set forth . . . is something else" (Abbot, Documents of Vatican II, p. 715).

The Holy Father himself called for a change, not in doctrine, but in "the manner in which these truths are set forth." The "new" catechetics is in the last analysis simply the Church's response to its Pope, who has condemned a rear-view mirror society.



"I CAN REMEMBER THE DAYS WHEN KIDS REALLY LISTENED TO THEIR CAMPUS CHAPLAINS!"

On The Right Side

Treasures In Heaven

By Father Paul J. Cuddy



Many good people worry over what to do about unsolicited appeals. They come from altruistic, health and religious organizations. Some are fakes. Recently a woman said anxiously: "Father, I don't know what to do. I keep getting letters from Mission societies and other organizations. They all want a donation, and I always try to send a little. At this time of year I get several boxes of Christmas cards with a request to send back a couple dollars or more. I want to help; but I can't support everything."

The dilemma is: should I give a little to all or a lot to a few? Over 30 years ago Father Lester Morgan was asked by a generous but scrupulous woman what she should do about all the appeals. He replied: "Choose four or five that you have a special interest in. Forget the rest." It is hard for scrupulous people to ignore any appeal. But scruples are emotional, not rational.

What to do? I went to the Hornell Post Office recently and said to the Post Master: "Tim, many people are troubled by the flood of appeals and Christmas boxes sent to them unsolicited. How do they get off the rolls of these organizations?" He replied: "The simplest way is this. Do not open the letter or the box. Just mark: REFUSED. Then drop it into the post box." "What happens then?" "The letter or box is returned to the organization. They have to pay the return postage. Consequently they aren't likely to continue such a person on the mailing list." "What if you don't return boxes of cards and merchandise?" "If they are sent unsolicited you can throw them into the wastebasket, or leave on the shelf. You have no obligation to return them."

With a twinkle I said: "I received a nice brown and white striped neck-tie from some outfit requesting a dollar in return." Tim stood his ground. "As long as you didn't send for it you have no obligation to return it." He avoided the morality of the case, whether I could wear it or give it away.

My own thoughts are these. If, e.g., Friends of the Bulgarian Gypsies send me an unsolicited neck-tie, with a request for a cash return, these points are to be considered: 1. the time spent opening the package and examining the contents and requests; 2. the trauma at a possibly oblique insinuation to abandon the priesthood; 3. the temptation to vanity, since men, although less likely than women, can become clothes crazy. Since clerical garb is forbidden by law in Mexico I may some day go to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, sporting that unsolicited tie, a recompense for the three points above.

I seriously hesitated to write this article lest anyone should take it as an invitation to be less generous to the Missions and to other charitable works. Far from it! I think most of us are too cautious rather than too generous. I have made it a practice for years to give to charity the amount equal to what I spend on vacation. If I spend \$300 on a vacation, I give \$300 to charity. But not to 300 charitable organizations.

In all candor I consider this no great thing. I have no wife or children to support. Few married people could do this. Most single people could, if they would. Let's face it. Most of us give, not from our need but from our abundance. While fallen human nature makes us reluctant to loosen our pocket books, every man feels lighter in spirits as well as in cash, once he has given to do good.

The solution on how to save on postage, time, and wear and tear on the worry system is not a suggestion to give less to charity. Rather the suggestion is to be even more generous. One of the best charities is The Propagation of the Faith, 50 Chestnut Street, Rochester, N.Y. 14604. This is Our Holy Father's special agency for the Missions. But each man must decide where he wants to invest his cash. A wise man once said: "When I die, I want a decent share of my money sent on ahead of me, rather than leaving it all behind me."

On the Line

The New American Bible

By Bob Considine



The New American Bible has been 25 years in the making, is the first Bible to make use of the treasures of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the first authorized Catholic translation to be based on the original languages in which the Good Book was written — Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek.

Some changes will be noted and perhaps cause grumblings among the traditionalists. Examples:

A clear description of Goliath, found in a 3rd Century B.C. Dead Sea Scroll, places his height at six and a half feet, before David cut him down to size. Earlier Bible translations had him stand at "six cubits and a span," about 9 feet 6. Even the recently published New English Bible swears solemnly, "he was over 9 feet in height." At 6 feet 6, Goliath couldn't have made the New York Knickerbockers.

The amused reactions of congregations to an earlier Catholic lectionary translation of the Parable of Divine Mercy (Luke, chapter 15) is duly noticed by the interdenominational board of translators responsible for the new Bible. The version that caused the unsaintly snickers went like this:

"Or what woman of you, who has ten dimes and loses one, does not light a lamp, and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls in the friends and neighbors and says: 'Rejoice with me, because I have found the dime which I lost!'"

The word "dime" had replaced the earlier Biblical word "groat," which was a coin of low denomination. The idea of a lost dime causing such a stir was more than Catholic congregations could accept in this age of inflation. The lost coin is

now called a "silver piece," Christ, the teller of the parable, will be happy to learn. As will Luke.

The Beatitudes come through well in the new Bible. The prefix "Blest" replaces an earlier and quite idiotic change from "Blessed" to "Happy." With "Happy" leading off the wondrous lecture, congregations were jolted awake by the man in the pulpit saying "Happy are the poor in spirit . . . Happy are the sorrowing . . . Happy are those persecuted for holiness . . ."

The Christmas cardmakers, window dressers of department stores, and Tin Pan Alley virtuosos will be dismayed to learn the Three Wise Men were not necessarily wise and not really kings. The New American Bible describes them as "astrologers." Father Stephen Hartdegen, coordinating editor of the vast undertaking, which was sponsored by the Bishops' Committee of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, explains:

"The original Greek word was 'magoi' from which we have our term 'magi,' meaning learned men skilled in astrology and sorcery. That they were specifically astrologers seems evident from their observance of the star rising at Jesus' birth and following it to Jerusalem."

No Bible has ever specified any particular number of astrologers. Father Hartdegen points out. The legendary "three" may have arisen from the three gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. As for their being kings, the various personages designated by the Greek "magoi" did not include kings.

It's all there — romance, adventure, tragedy, triumph, love, hate, and an ark full of lovable animals. Only now, you can't put it down.