

Paulist Removes Catechism Following Vatican Objection

By NC News Service

Paulist Press has halted circulation of its popular adult catechism, "Christ Among Us," at the request of the Vatican's doctrinal congregation, the publishing company announced April 16.

The action was taken, Paulist said, because the Vatican congregation had found the book "not suitable as a catechetical text."

A Paulist Press statement said the book would not be revised and reissued because the doctrinal congregation had determined that even with "substantial corrections" it would still not be suitable.

The book, first published in 1967 and revised three times since, most recently in 1981, has been used widely in classes for people inquiring about Catholic faith and practices.

Some 1.6 million copies have been sold, including 166,000 in 1983, Paulist Press said.

The book was written by Anthony T. Wilhelm, a Paulist who left the priesthood in 1975.

In its statement Paulist said Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, had asked in a Feb. 28 letter that the book be withdrawn from circulation. The letter went to Archbishop Peter L. Gerety of Newark, N.J., whose imprimatur appears in the book's most recent edition. Paulist Press is headquartered in Ramsey, N.J., in the Newark Archdiocese.

The imprimatur is an official declaration that a book is free of doctrinal or moral error, but does not imply that the person giving the imprimatur agrees with the contents, opinions or statements in the book.

Archbishop Gerety said in a brief statement he was immediately removing his imprimatur from "Christ Among Us" and had informed Paulist Press of his action.

In its statement Paulist Press said it had informed Cardinal Ratzinger of the withdrawal of the book from circulation "and is requesting clarifications of the congregation's decision."

The Paulist statement said Cardinal Ratzinger told Archbishop Gerety to "ask the Paulist Press not to consider any reprint of the work in the future."

Archbishop Gerety forwarded a copy of Cardinal Ratzinger's letter to Paulist Press' publisher, Paulist Father Kevin A. Lynch. The full text of the letter was not made public.

A source at the doctrinal congregation told NC News in Rome that the removal of the imprimatur from "Christ Among Us" was not an accusation of heresy against the book but a statement of the book's unsuitability in the critical and sensitive area of catechetics.

The source noted that current church legislation requires an imprimatur only for books that are used for catechetics and religious education programs and that such texts must conform to a high standard of excellence in presenting Catholic doctrine clearly.

Father Lynch in a telephone interview told NC News that the doctrinal congregation "had criticisms" of the book in the past and that two years ago, "changes were made at the request of the Holy Office." The Holy Office is the former name of the doctrinal congregation.

Several corrections were made in the 1981 revised edition of

the book, Father Lynch said. The corrections dealt with sections of the book on "conscience, sexual ethics and original sin," he said.

According to the Paulist Press statement, the book was revised each time "to bring its contents up to date with new post-Vatican II official church statements and the writings of respected theologians."

"The revisions also reflected new questions which teachers and inquirers were asking about Scripture, theology, church discipline and practices," Paulist said.

Father Lynch said that over the 17-year lifespan of the book Paulist Press had received few criticisms from people in the United States.

But he also noted that Catholics United for the Faith, a group of doctrinally conservative Catholics, has been vocal in its criticism of the book. He said a supplement against the book written by CUF was published in autumn of 1982 in The Wanderer, a national lay-edited newspaper published in St. Paul, Minn.

The source at the Vatican's doctrinal congregation said the length of time which the congregation took to rule on the book after it first was published in 1967 was an indication of the congregation's thoroughness. The source also said complaints about the book had come from a broad spectrum of people over a number of years.

James Likoudis, vice president of CUF, said April 16 that the Vatican congregation's decision was a "marvelous vindication of the sense of the faith the laity has had."

He said that CUF, as a lay organization, led the protest against the book and had informed the Vatican of its concerns. The book is "the leading, number one, neo-modernist catechetical text in the United States," he said.

CUF specifically objected to sections of the book dealing with contraception, conscience, Mary, angels, original sin and Christology, Likoudis said. The book "is simply filled with distortions on Catholic doctrine."

Before the book was withdrawn Father John Dietzen, a columnist and author of "The New Question Box," had recommended it to his readers.

"Christ Among Us," Father Dietzen said in a column which was later republished in his book, "treats all the major areas of Catholic liturgy, belief and practice concisely yet with enough explanation and background to satisfy any adult Catholic wanting to review the fundamentals of his faith."

Father Dietzen, a pastor in Bloomington, Ill., also said in the column, "We use it in our parish as a basis for inquiry classes, and find it continues to be a real treasure for new Catholics long after they have entered the church."

Sales of 1.6 million copies of "Christ Among Us" has made it one of the best-selling catechetical works for adults since Vatican II.

"A New Catechism: Catholic Faith for Adults," more commonly called the Dutch Catechism, sold "just over a million" copies in its English version since it was published in 1967, said Eugene Gologly, spokesman for Crossroad Publishing Co., which now owns the original publisher, Herder and Herder.

Another work, "The Teaching of Christ," published by Our Sunday Visitor, has sold 234,000 copies in its two editions since 1975, an OSV official said.

Critic, Author Disagree over Catechism, Faith

By Cindy Wooden
NC News Service

A leading critic of the adult catechism "Christ Among Us" and the book's author disagreed April 16 over whether the book adequately represented the Catholic faith.

The catechism, published by Paulist Press but withdrawn from circulation at the request of the Vatican, "distorts Catholic teaching," said James Likoudis, vice president of Catholics United for the Faith, a group of doctrinally conservative Catholics who had taken their criticisms of the book to Rome.

Anthony T. Wilhelm, a former Paulist priest who wrote the original version of the book in 1967 and its three revisions, said he still sees "no doctrinal problems" with the catechism.

Paulist Press announced April 16 that the book was withdrawn at the request of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and that the book's imprimatur had been removed.

The congregation's action is "hard to understand," Wilhelm said in a telephone interview from Berkeley, Calif., where he is a marriage counselor, author and lecturer. "I'm a little numb yet."

Wilhelm said he had difficulty understanding the Vatican decision on the book, in part because "a couple of years ago some things came up and we made changes" on sections dealing with conscience, sexual ethics and original sin. The changes brought the sections into line with the congregation's requests, he said.

The book quotes from documents of the Second Vatican Council, post-conciliar documents and noted theologians, he said. "If anything, it's not far out."

But Likoudis, in a separate telephone interview from Buffalo, N.Y., said the book "was very defective" concerning the church's teaching on contraception, conscience, Mary, original sin, and sexual ethics.

The book, Likoudis said, "casts into doubt the reality of the Blessed Virgin being really a virgin, casts into doubt the existence of angels, distorts Catholic teaching on original sin."

"Christ Among Us" said that the existence of angels and devils does not "seem to be a part of the strictly dogmatic teaching of the church. The numbers and varieties which are mentioned may well be mythological exaggerations."

Concerning the story of Adam and Eve, the book said, "The biblical story of human origins has been interpreted until relatively recently as meaning one original couple (monogenism). Many current biblical scholars take a broader view and point out that monogenism is not necessarily part of God's revelation."

The virginity of Mary, the book said, "should be seen as more than mere physical inviolability. For many today whether Mary is or is not physically a virgin is of small consequence; they see her virginity as symbolizing something far greater, her profound attitude of total openness to God alone..."

Likoudis also criticized Wilhelm for "abandoning the priesthood" in August 1975.

"What can I say?" said Wilhelm, who now is married. "That (the decision to leave the priesthood) was the most difficult decision I ever made in my life."

Msgr. Colin MacDonald, director of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' secretariat for priestly life and ministry, said while church guidelines restrict the public ministry of former priests, including teaching in a Catholic university or preaching in a Catholic church, the guidelines do not place limits on their writing.

Wilhelm said that his marriage and reflections on the priesthood, including the value of celibacy, led him to include in the book's third revised edition, published in 1981, the statement that "most who advocate optional celibacy in the priesthood do not wish to abolish celibacy, but to make it what they feel is a freer choice."

The book also said on priestly celibacy, "In giving up the fundamental and deepest human love relationship, marriage, the priest expresses his total attachment to the divine. He is staking all on the reality of God among us."

Wilhelm said he could see the problems some people had with chapter 21, "Christ Joins a Man and Woman in Marriage."

Likoudis said the chapter is "very defective" and that it "sanctions contraception," advocating "the supremacy of conscience over and above the teaching of the church."

The author said he researched natural family planning with the help of a doctor and could have included more about it in the chapter. Also, he said, "I should have pointed out the dangers of the pill."

However, Wilhelm does not apologize for the "pastoral approach" he took in regard to artificial birth control.

Likoudis said the book was being used in high school religion classes and he was concerned about "girls getting pregnant and having abortions -- a far worse evil."

The book "sanctions dissent from the church on the infallible teaching on contraception," Likoudis said.

Wilhelm wrote in the book that "contraceptive birth control as a means of preventing the generation of children has been considered wrong in the church's teaching." He also wrote that "in practice there are circumstances in which couples feel that they cannot now comply with the pope's teaching."

The book also commented that "the intentions of some couples seem to be purely selfish, while others are trying their best to live a truly Christian marriage."

"However, this does not mean that each couple can decide the morality of this solely by themselves, however well-intentioned they may be; while their conscience is always their ultimate guide, they must also consider the objective standards of morality given them by the church," the book says.



St. Andrew's Plans Reunion

The 1949 graduating class of St. Andrew's School is planning their 35th anniversary reunion for June 1.

All members of that class should call 381-4647 by May 10 to make reservations for the festivities.