

parishes where there are several priests, or visiting priests, who find the notices hard to decipher!

Once we can come to realize that the sermon, like the mass, is something that only the priest can do, that it is an integral part of his ministering to us the Truth and Life of Christ, then I think we will come to treat it with the seriousness that is its due. Our saying of the creed will be the natural sequence to our having listened to the word of God, our acceptance of Christ revealing himself to us now through the voice of the Church.

TEACHING THE FAITH

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THOSE of us who are called upon from time to time to teach the faith to children are often perplexed about what we should in fact teach. The Catholic faith, of course; the catechism seems the obvious choice, it is clear and easy to learn. But then what are we to do about the scriptures? It is not always very clear how we can combine the two, they follow their own rhythms.

When I was sent to teach at a Catechism Camp last summer the problem was very much in my mind—the very name ‘Catechism Camp’ seemed to indicate the method; and yet I had found, the previous year, that catechism teaching is far from satisfactory in itself. The children know the answers on the whole, and the meaning behind the answers tends to confine one to the logical steps of a remote theology. It was, therefore, a relief to find the December 1957 number of *Lumiere et Vie* very concerned with just this problem, particularly an article by R. Girault on *Four Centuries of Catechism* which shows that the catechism first appeared in an official form at the Council of Trent, and was conceived as a means of explaining the scriptures. There can be no doubt about the emphasis the conciliar fathers put on the importance of scripture as the primary source of teaching. In

order that it should be taught in a Catholic manner they arranged for the catechism to be drawn up.

In this article I will try to indicate how this approach might work. I want to underline the difficulties we must face, and analyse the weaknesses of alternative systems. I will end by demonstrating the conclusions I am arguing, in an account of how we tackled one particular subject—the mass. This might be of some use to those teachers who feel as I do. Let us start, then, from the possibility of teaching the catechism as a source, and see where it might break down. This is the normal form of teaching and yet most teachers must be aware of the very great difficulties that it entails. The catechism is usually taught by heart; this can be very useful to the child so long as it is not taken as an end: as though a class somehow knew the faith if it could give all the answers in the right language. This is a temptation to teachers: after all, knowing the multiplication tables is a clear indication that something has been taught. In our subject the danger would arise if teachers thought that this fulfilled their obligation to teach the faith. Do many children get beyond this? Obviously, but what is meant by ‘beyond’? Presumably, being able to give some sort of a meaning to the answer they have given—some sort of re-formation of their answer. But what is a ‘beyond’ meaning to the catechism? This is where the problem begins. If the catechism is thought of as a condensed form of Catholic theology—a sort of pocket *Summa Theologiae*—then the meaning ‘beyond’ will carry the child into a tentative, and necessarily incomplete, looking at systematic theology, a world where only the trained theologian feels at ease, a world bristling with abstract, carefully defined words, a specialized way of thinking. We come into this world, as it were, by the back door, for systematic theology is the result of the pondering of the Church’s tradition on scripture. It is talking about scripture, looking at it, but a specialized way of looking. Now catechism teaching tends to force the enterprising teacher into this field. Explaining the answer on the Trinity will involve some training in handling precise theological concepts, some knowledge of a philosophical tradition too. My complaint against this is that the source is hardly reached; it will be a brilliant teacher indeed, and outstanding pupils who, together, learn to handle theological concepts with such facility that they will be able to look through them into the riches of scripture. This

way of teaching the catechism tends to bombard children with a remote way of thinking. What does the enterprising teacher do? He tries to make difficult theological concepts palatable by expressing them imaginatively; he strains to the idea with homely examples—he weaves his own imagery language as a sort of second best to strict theology. And this does seem odd, for there at the source is scripture itself, revealing itself in a living imagery sanctified by the incarnation and the Church's liturgical tradition. Clover leaves are substituted for the gospel account of Christ's baptism.

This way of teaching the catechism suffers too from its associations. It must seem, in school, like another subject to be learned—history, mathematics and catechism, another text book for the school bag. We pick up all the deficiencies of the educational system: the dropping of learning at school leaving, the inadequate feeling that you learn to get a job. Any notion of learning the faith alongside learning a trade breaks down. Of course great efforts are being made to stop these gaps, I am necessarily talking in a general way. What I am trying to suggest is that this conception of the relationship of the catechism to the faith is vulnerable, that it is very hard to see how it can become the living centre of an adult life. It tends to set the faith apart from life, as mathematics is apart from life, in no sense fundamentally explaining it. It tends to be an abstract something learned with meanings that run out and away from life, out into a system of thinking that is not nourished in the world's experience. It becomes a block of learning requiring to be applied in awkward ways. As we know, this tendency is a wrong construction of the exercise of systematic theology. Properly understood it is not remote, the remoteness is created by our inability to see its reference.

Let us take an example. Let us say we gave children in our schools a thorough grounding in Scholastic philosophy. What would happen? The children would not see its relevance. The adult who is proficient in this way of thinking, comes to see that it is, indeed, about something experienced. He feels the problems it is trying to answer. He does not feel the problems in the system, but in his living. It has a life reference for him. The more he is concerned in his living, the more he is able to grasp the philosophy. All this would be lost on the ordinary child—it would be for him a dry system that he must learn off by heart.

It would be totally remote from the life he leads. In the same way, the system the catechism is made to refer to, has this life reference; a reference to the live history of God's saving acts, but the ordinary person can only grasp this reference with the greatest difficulty.

What then are we to do? Let us see what can be made of the catechism-scripture relationship that the fathers of Trent had in mind. Instead of presenting the bare catechism to our children, we could bring the scriptures forward as a source. Instead we might use the catechism as the Church's guide to the sort of things we must see in scripture. It is important to see that the use of the catechism that we have been criticizing was a solution to a problem about using the scriptures as a source. The problem still remains with us. There is a real danger that those of us who delight in scripture should imagine that our children will automatically catch our enthusiasm. Scripture, in its own way, can be just as remote from children, especially the older child, as systematic theology. Ursula's 'Sunday experience', which D. H. Lawrence describes so delicately in *The Rainbow*, is a real challenge to the catechist who is trying to teach from scripture. Scripture does stand up over and against the modern mind, and the solution does not lie in compromising scripture, in trying to make it sound up-to-date, somehow modern, chopping it up into sophisticated anthropological, mythological, historical categories. As though we were to say, 'Look, we can be modern, too'. This is a level of scriptural study that is not essential to our teaching of the faith. This is disheartening, but we find it out sooner or later in practice. Thinking about the child's response to scripture makes us see a whole new problem evolving, a preparatory problem. We must, I think, be bold, and be prepared to do something to the modern mind, before we present it with the scriptures. Christians need to have a certain view of the world. They require a certain natural metaphysic of the world. As teachers our first concern must be with preparing the pupil for the response he can make to scripture. We must learn to leave scripture alone, and let it talk its own language. There is no place, at this stage, for a sort of synthetic biblical theology. The Christian teacher must learn to see in the scriptures the sort of view of the world that it demands. If people have become dead to the natural imagery that scripture uses, they must be resurrected. Here is the gospel, this must be

presented to our children as the sacred source of their understanding. Our job is to open their eyes: we must be opticians, not landscape gardeners.

How much preparatory work is necessary? How can we make the gospels flow, with their own meanings, into the lives of Christians? Christ spoke to his apostles in an imagery that they could understand. This 'natural' understanding depended on two things. First the hearers had a different approach to life than ours. Their imagery was simpler and more lively. The basic images of life were real to them. Words like 'water' carried with them rich associations: drinking, washing, the life of a stream, and the sea. This has been stressed often enough recently to permit me to do no more than to indicate what I mean.¹ This imaginative fertility greatly enriched the significance of divine acts which were performed with these symbols. The natural association of the image helped to extend the significance of the act. This way of looking at things, this reverence for the world has been culpably lost, or at least clouded over by modern man. I want to suggest that a vital part in our teaching will be a salvaging operation, a positive attempt to restore these images, and our reverence for them. They must be made to come alive once again in our pupils' minds, not dogmatically, but imaginatively, creatively; they are the basic primitive elements of a healthy life experience. A whole way of talking about the world is drowning and with it the natural possibility of responding to the scriptures. Our world confrontation has become smothered into various departments of scientific talk—biology, gynaecology, dietetics, physics, hygiene—so that the people we are talking to have got it into their heads that this is, somehow, the only way of talking about life. I side with Professor Ryle and claim an ordinary language once again, and I want it to be shown that it has its true primitiveness. We must rescue this way of talking about our life experience before we can effectively present the scriptures.

This is the first stage: a restoration of a child's reaction to the wonder of the world. But there is something more to be done. The gospels were written for people steeped in the Jewish tradition: that is, they were preached to a people whose life experience, whose images, had already received a theological flavour. The old testament images appear in the gospels with

¹ For example, Gerald Vann, O.P., in *The Paradise Tree*.

powerful theological overtones. But they are basically primitive too, and we must unearth them where they arose, in their old testament context. I am thinking, for instance, of ideas like the Davidic kingship, the Temple worship, the Law, and the Exodus sagas. They must be seen to be a life experience, and then shown to be a theological experience.

These are the two elements the gospel requires; together they make up a natural approach to the gospels. I am suggesting that they must be creatively established in the minds of our pupils as a point of contact for presenting the faith. None of this can be demythologized, it is the essential baggage that a Christian must carry.

I think I have said enough to indicate how the balance between catechism and scripture, envisaged by the Council of Trent, might be regained. There is the catechism: if I have criticized its use as a source, I must stress its importance as a directive. We look into scripture as Catholics. Any other sort of viewpoint would, we hold, be not only un-Christian, but a blindness. We are guided into scripture by the catechism. It serves as a sort of topic head, describing the areas, and controlling the movement of our pondering. I hope that what I am advocating will become clearer when I describe its work in a particular instance. But before that one other powerful reason must be advanced in favour of this method.

We have all along permitted a certain ambiguity in this word 'faith'. Believing, obviously, does not simply mean knowing the answers to the catechism, or even being able to give some sort of meaning to its propositions. One important element in our believing is surely our ability to think creatively about the faith. As we have seen, one of the difficulties in using the catechism as a source is that it makes thinking, for the ordinary child, very difficult.² The whole area it leads him into is technical, filled with the possibility of heresy. People become genuinely frightened to exercise their faith in this way. 'This is the theologian's ground, we might make a mistake.' And so it is a matter of accepting, not thinking. How can this be overcome? People should feel the urge

² This is not to say that the catechism we use in this country is beyond discussion. The trouble with the present form is that it is rather remote from a teachable scripture. The revised catechisms which have come into circulation in the last few years, show that the Church is aware of this deficiency. This whole subject is developed most interestingly in the last chapter of Joseph Jungmann's *Handing on the Faith* (Herder).

constantly to relate their deepest life experiences with their faith. Children who have been taught to respond to scripture will know that it is precisely because they had become aware of the depth of living that they were able to respond to the gospel. The two movements have become one. Teaching the faith has become a kindling of the sacramental faith of the pupil. The child who is taught to see that St John is talking about the birth he experiences, the life he feels in his body, is able to move ahead of the teacher in discovering the extent of his Christian birth. His faith is stimulated into growth, it develops in his growing awareness of the world. It becomes vitally relevant to his life.

How does all this work out in practice? It obviously requires very careful preparation on the part of the teacher. He has to be used to seeing the sort of sympathetic approach a child might make to scripture. Here was the way we went about it at our summer Catechism Camp. Seven days with a class of some twelve ten-year-olds, girls and boys. The subject for the week was the mass. After a good deal of thought, I decided that the fundamental notion I must expand was that of 'eating': the natural mystery of 'eating'.³ So for three of the days we did nothing else than talk about the associations of 'eating'. There was nothing I knew that they did not know about it, it was only a matter of making them explore the concept. We sat round on the grass and broke a blade off and ate it, and the children started to talk about what this meant. From now on they were to do the constructive thinking; it was only my job to insist on its seriousness, and to direct the areas of their talking. A life growing up from the soil, the earth giving itself in a profusion of life, 'eating' seemed to imply the death of living things, that we reached the soil through the death of living things. Now this was a form of talking that children liked; it was peculiar and yet true. Things started to look rather different. Sometimes the process was a long one, grass eaten into animals and animals into us, and always this killing, and always the thing eaten became me, not a disintegrating chemical process. Then there were the odd customs we had of eating: the family sitting round the table sharing a common life. Parties were odd, for here something more seemed to be happening: you weren't just eating together, you came to enjoy somebody's company and share his food. The next stage was to

³ The basis of this approach was suggested by articles in *Lumière et Vie*, February 1957.

introduce them to an old testament experience. What if there should be no soil? What about the desert? And so we talked about the passover and the flight from Egypt. The children were now able to apply their earlier insight. Of course, here was God forcing them to recognize that a new soil was required, a new life springing forth from heaven. God had prepared a table in the desert. The children had already suggested the connection with the feeding of the five thousand; they never have the slightest difficulty in coping with typology, their minds work that way. The difficulty now was to restrain the children. Here, they saw, was Christ, the bread from heaven, distributing a new food, and so we were able with a wealth of imagery to hand, to sit down and discuss the mass. This was the high point of the week. Here was a sort of creative theology going on with great enthusiasm. I made a tape recording of a short discussion they had, as I wanted this discussion to form the background of a mime I was producing. Here is an example of the sort of things they said, taken down in exactly the children's own words, from the tape. The accent was Gloucestershire; the children sat round and took the microphone whenever they had something to say. There was no rehearsal and no prompting.

'God led the Jews into the desert to show them that they cannot live by earthly food alone, but by heavenly food as well. The Jews, when they were in the desert, found that there was not rich soil, but plain sand which nothing could grow in. Then they raised their hands into the air and begged God for food. God, having pity on them, sent down manna. . . . Earth and heaven are two sources of life. The blade of grass springs out of the soil and an animal comes along and eats it. We then kill the animal, and eat it, which is turned into ourselves. Christ is a blade of grass which springs from heaven, we eat him in the form of the holy eucharist and we become him. (The girl who was speaking now, gave a history of bread, beginning with the wheat, and developed her 'blade of grass' idea into a comparison between bread baking, and Christ's passion, death, and resurrection—this had a remarkable likeness to some second-century writings.) . . . The mass is like a party in which we are all invited by God to meet God and eat with him. . . . The table is the altar which we all sit round and eat the holy eucharist, it is like a family table. . . . We know God likes parties because he was always going to them

in the gospels. . . . We get to the rich teeming earth of heaven by eating the holy eucharist which is the body of Christ. . . . We come into the body of Christ by having baptism. . . . We Christians are made for heaven; mass gives us the life necessary to grow towards heaven.' Apart from the use I wanted to make of some recording, I felt that a tape recorder is a great help to this method. It was exciting, they were the more anxious to speak. It gave a permanence and significance to what they had said, and we were able to play it back and criticize. And all the time it was impressing these eucharistic images into their minds.

On the last day we had a concert and our class's contribution was a mime in three parts. Simple miming is of the greatest assistance to scriptural teaching. Nothing brings children so deeply into the spirit of scripture as a carefully produced mime—but that is another story. In the first part we had a mime about 'eating', using a commentary on the tape recorder. In the second, we emphasized the second element in the method—the old testament imagery. Here it was a mime of the passover and the flight to the desert. All this was accompanied with drum-beats. In the desert scene I used the recording I have described above, using simply the children's voices. Finally the desert scene turned into the feeding of the five thousand acted as a eucharistic feast. For this we played a Tommy Steele record. A simple little love song. This created a musical atmosphere that was congenial to the children. As they moved in the spirit of the eucharistic actions, it helped to make this strong religious emotion relevant to their everyday one. Then there was the possibility that the very words of the song might serve as a new imagery for looking at the mass.