

THE LATEST IN CATECHISMS

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FEW intellectual groups within the Church have deserved more gratitude from their fellow-Catholics than the Catechetical Society of Munich. It came into existence towards the end of the nineteenth century; a few kindred spirits among the clergy—Stieglitz, Weber, and others—gathered themselves round a periodical, *Katechische Blätter*, still happily flourishing, and from 1898 onwards had the conscious aim of improving the prevailing ways of teaching religion to the young. They were well aware of the educational psychology of those days, Herbart and suchlike, and they soon evolved the needed applications of it to the teaching of religion. Their Munich method, as it was called, made a point of properly organized lesson-units, instead of just ploughing steadily through a book of questions and answers. They may have seemed a shade pedantic perhaps in their insistence on the regular elements of each lesson—aim, presentation, explanation, questioning, application, expression-work and so forth. But the distinctive feature of Munich was to *start* from something concrete, some narrative or at least some picture, but preferably from some *Scriptural* story, and work up *from* that to the explanation of the doctrine concerned and if necessary to the relevant catechism-answer. Other methods had used Scripture for 'examples'; Munich *started* from Scripture. As time went on, and the liturgical movement made itself felt especially in Germany, together with a deepening theology, the Munich catechists welcomed the new insights and incorporated them into their plans and material. Gradually the present generation of pioneers, in Germany and elsewhere, has come to see that catechetical renewal is not merely a matter of *methods*, of introducing a few more pictures or stories or activities, but involves reconsidering the content of the instruction itself. Fr G. Delcuve, s.J. (in his foreword to the French translation of Fr Jungmann's *Katechetik*) points out that the gains in methodology, urgently necessary as they were, had not always produced a corresponding gain in results. 'And thus, through relative set-backs, the first period of the catechetical movement, revolving round Method, was leading us into a second period,

revolving this time round the problem of Content. At the same time, it became clear that for the future we would need an altogether larger conception of the catechetical movement: as being an active pastoral education (*action pastorale*), vitalized by the liturgical and biblical movements.'

The Katechetenverein of Munich has played a leading part in this second stage, also, and it was not surprising that when the German bishops, just before the last war, decided on revising the German catechism, they entrusted the revision at first to the Deutschen Katechetenverein, and in the later stages to a 'working-party' of the Munich society which has shown such mental adaptability as well as such staying power. The work was begun well over fifteen years ago, and has not been hurried. Other countries one after the other, have produced revised catechisms usually longer and more complex than the catechisms they replaced, but the Munich catechists have still worked away quietly. Now at last, after fifteen years, their task has reached its completion. The new German catechism has passed all its experimental stages, has been finally approved by all the bishops, published by Herder of Freiburg,¹ and came into use in the schools this September.

During August, at a liturgical Congress in Munich, the new catechism was the subject of three expositions by three of the moving spirits in the Katechetenverein. Two of these—Dr Klemens Tilmann and Fr Franz Schreibmayr—are now Oratorians. They showed how the new catechism seeks to follow the liturgy itself, in attempting to make God a reality, not a mere word, to the ordinary faithful, and to keep Christ in the very centre of everything. The third paper was by Dr Josef Goldbrunner, the present editor of the society's periodical. He is not unknown to English readers, since a book of his has recently been translated into English.² His paper was on the psychological principles which the composers of the new catechism have tried to keep in view.

1 *Katholischer Katechismus der Bistümer Deutschlands*. (Verlag Herder, Freiburg im Briesgau, 3.50 marks.)

Two other books, also published by Herder, help to throw light on this monumental work.

Einführung in Der neuen Katechismus: by Dr Hubert Fischer. This gives the history of the new Catechism and explains its pedagogical principles.

Handbuch zum Katholischen Katechismus: von Franz Schreibmayr und Klemens Tilmann. This is a teachers' commentary on the new Catechism, due to appear in six half-volumes; the first of these is now announced, price 9.20 marks.

2 *Holiness and Wholeness* (Burns Oates; 5s.)

What kind of book is the new 'Catechism'? Actually it is a large cloth-bound book of 288 pages, a school text-book for children of eleven or thereabouts. Its contents are 136 chapters or lessons, followed by a few pages of prayers and Christian-life rules. After three introductory lessons on the Church as our guide to the purpose-of-life, the lessons cover four main Parts as follows.

1. On God and our Salvation: here the lessons are grouped together under the three Persons of the Trinity, and cover the Apostles' Creed.
2. On the Church and the Sacraments.
3. On living according to God's Commandments.
4. On the Last Things.

There is some overlapping, of course, in a good sense; topics like the Church or Heaven come into the Creed, as well as being more fully treated in their own place. There is no treatment of the Old Testament or of our Lord's life as such: these are evidently left to be done in other ways. There are plenty of drawings, one for each lesson at least; they are well-planned to set the reader's mind working, though not in themselves very attractive to an English eye.

The Munich tradition is followed not only in arranging each lesson under a definite idea, but also in keeping a fairly rigid structure for the lessons. Each one begins with Scripture, a text or a Gospel episode very briefly stated; then comes the main body of the lesson in several short paragraphs of doctrinal explanation. This is followed by a short list of review-questions, 'recapping' the explanation. Next comes the formal catechism question-and-answer proper (or there may be two or three of them), which again summarizes the lesson still more succinctly. To end up with there are always some short sentences by way of appendices: one 'For my own life', a personal application or resolution arising out of the lesson; another, The Word of God, quoting some fresh relevant text of Scripture; another, with the cross-heading *Aufgaben*, will suggest two or three activities or assignments for written work or so forth.

Where the Munich tradition seems to be rather departed from is at the beginning of each lesson. Here the old Munich method definitely prescribed a *narrative*, from Scripture or elsewhere. In this book the narrative at best becomes a brief skeleton, or even a rudimentary vestige; and often disappears altogether to be replaced

by a saying of our Lord or of St Paul. Perhaps the authors would reply that the narrative is needed only for young children, and this book is for the eleven-year-olds. Or perhaps full narratives would make the book too large, and perhaps the teacher is expected to supply them.

The formal Catechism-questions, it will be observed, are only one element in the book, and (though printed in conspicuous type) not the most prominent; they are in fact reduced to their proper place as the final brief resumé of a lesson. Incidentally, there are only 248 of them, as compared with five, six or seven hundred in some of the new national catechisms. Nor is it the intention of the authors or the bishops to have this 'catechism proper' printed in any separate little book where it could be misused by the more lazy or unintelligent kind of teacher. As far as the present writer can make out, these catechism-answers are couched in simple untechnical kind of language, But of course the German language has a certain advantage in this respect over English, since it usually manages to avoid Latin-derived words. For sanctifying grace the German says 'holy-making grace'; for Blessed Trinity, the 'All-holy Three-foldness'; for Resurrection, the 'upstanding from the dead'.

Perhaps the best way of describing the new German catechism will be to give a specimen lesson in full. On the Holy Ghost, in the Creed, there are five lessons, dealing respectively with Pentecost; the Holy Ghost as Third Person; his work in the Church; as our Light and Strength; and as our Sanctifier. (This compares favourably with our own miserable eighth Article). There are also two lessons later on under Confirmation. We translate here the fifth of the above: "Through the Holy Ghost we are sanctified". In the text is inserted a sketch of a heart with a Dove in it; the Dove has a halo, by the way.

THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT WE ARE MADE HOLY

St Paul writes in his letter to the Galatians: 'When the appointed time came, God sent out His Son, to make us sons by adoption. You are sons; God has sent the spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying out in us: Abba, Father. No longer then, art thou a slave, thou art a son; and because thou art a son, then an heir also.' Gal. 4, 4-7.

Through the Holy Spirit we receive a share in the life of the infinite holy God. Thus we become *children of God, brothers and sisters of Christ, and heirs of the everlasting Life*. This is the wonderful gift we call the *Grace-life*. The *Grace-life* goes far above and beyond all natural life: and so it is also called the *supernatural Life*.

In the heart of the child of God dwells the Holy Spirit. He is the very Breath itself of the divine Life; He is the living Pledge that we shall one day live for ever with the Father.

With the Holy Spirit, there are living in us too the Father and the Son. Christ says: We will come and make our abode with him. So St Paul reminds us with the words: Know you not that you are a Temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

Through the *Grace-life* we are most intimately united with the holy God, the Source of all grace, and thereby sanctified ourselves. Therefore we call the *Grace-life* also 'sanctifying grace'.

'If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit' (Gal. 5, 25). If we are children of God, we shall also live as His children should; we shall love Him, praise Him, receive the sacraments, and do His holy will. Then we gain more grace and bear rich fruit for everlasting life.

Review questions: 1. What life does the Holy Spirit give to us? 2. Why do we call the *Grace-life* also *supernatural life*? 3. Who lives in the heart of God's children? 4. Why do we call the *Grace-life* also *sanctifying grace*? 5. What shall we do, as a result of being God's children?

6. *What does the Grace-life bring about?—The Grace-life makes us into children of God, Brothers of Christ, and heirs of eternal life.*

For my living: The most precious thing I have on earth is the *Grace-life*. Only one thing matters—to live as God's child. Only one thing is dreadful—to separate oneself from God, to die without His grace and to be lost for ever.

The Word of God: 'See what love the Father has shown us: we are called God's children, we are God's children'. (1 John 3, 1).

O Christian, recognize what a dignity is yours!
(Leo the Great).

There, then, is this short lesson on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and everyone will agree that in itself this rather lofty and mystical doctrine could hardly be better stated. The doubt might still arise as to whether so direct and uncoloured a statement, so bald almost, is likely to make entrance into the mind of the eleven-year-old, or touch his imagination at all. Would it not have been better perhaps to begin with John 14, 23, and present it more as a *story*, or mental picture, of our Lord conversing with the Apostles? Are we mistaken in thinking that one glimmer of imagination in the mind of the pupil is better than half an hour of reiterating by the catechist?

Undoubtedly some serious educationists will be inclined to criticize the new German catechism for putting (as they will consider) a book between the catechist and the learners, Where does the catechist come in? The book does everything, even asks the questions and sets the home-work; and yet (they will say) no text-book can really pass on the Faith to another soul: religion is caught rather than taught. Here we plunge into a never-ending educational argument, between (you might say) realists and idealists; between the pessimists who think that most teachers are 'duds' and the optimist who thinks that any kind of sincere teacher is better than a printed class-book. This article is no place for such an argument. What seems certain is that if catechisms of the formal question-and-answer sort are desirable—and the present writer, like most other Catholics, thinks they are—then the questions and answers in this German catechism set a new high standard of practical common-sense and Scripture-soaked theology, which is bound to have an effect wherever the Church's duty of proclaiming the Good News is seriously and willingly accepted by clergy and people.