

REVIEWS

A CATHOLIC CATECHISM: A Translation of the New German Catechism. (Herder; n.p.)

This book has been brought to the notice of Catholic teachers everywhere within the last twelve months, and welcomed by many of them with enthusiasm. It is indeed admirably planned to fulfil the purpose it was written for, if 'The Ten Rules for Using this Catechism', drawn up by Dr Tilmann and accompanying the volume as a leaflet, are borne in mind. As a teacher's aid-book it could hardly be bettered, for it has a plan of lessons that is definite, constructive and stimulating, 'God-centred and Christ-centred' as the German bishops required it to be; it deals carefully and thoroughly with the essentials of Catholic faith and morals, it utilizes the Scriptures on every possible occasion, and it leaves out unimportant pious practices or mere legendary matter.

There is a certain massive treatment of the whole build-up of the plan, which is very effective in giving the right emphasis. For example, the first fifteen sections of Part I (God and Our Redemption) deal with the perfections of God, while there are only six on the creation, the fall, and the promise of redemption. The rightness of this would have been hailed by St Teresa, who wished that her novices might have been taught, before their entry into Carmel, how to meditate on the attributes of God rather than to waste time on a multitude of childish devotions bordering on superstition.

This Catechism is also most valuable for its definition of grace and the emphasis laid on the grace-life throughout. This is surely the heart of the matter; what other *raison d'être* have the Church, the sacraments, the law of God? In the English Catechism we find no reference whatever to grace as a *life*, as making us 'partakers of the divine nature', except as a footnote to Q. 5 in *The Explanatory Catechism*, where an explanation of the twofold life of the soul is given. Hence the difficulty some teachers have in dealing with grace; the children are given no adequate summary definition that they can learn by heart, and produce as a description of this all-important gift of God. *What* the gift is, *how* it makes for our sanctification and salvation—what child could explain that from our present Catechism, unless aided by supplementary instruction from an enlightened teacher?

The New Catechism is admirably arranged. Relevant matter is collected together, not scattered under various headings, as in our Catechism. For example, sin is dealt with in the English Catechism under the Creed, the Sacrament of Penance, the Commandments, and in the section on Virtues and Vices; but here it is taken simply and broadly in the introduction to the Sacrament of Penance, and then

particularly under each of the Commandments. The Virtues and Vices section, a miscellany of largely unrelated numbers, has disappeared, and its contents are adequately covered elsewhere.

Sins against the sixth and ninth commandments are dealt with very straightforwardly and sensibly. An important distinction is made between modesty and chastity; and it is gratifying to find that this Catechism favours the use of the word 'chastity' which is explained as a synonym of the much more widely preferred 'purity', a word of tiresome vagueness when you are dealing with children who often have no idea that it has anything to do with sex. One eleven-year old girl, asked what she understood by 'purity', answered 'Holy and good, like our Lady', a view shared by the whole class, who knew it had something to do with religion, except for the most backward child, who associated it with 'Sunlight Soap, Finest for Purity'!

So far we have been considering the New Catholic Catechism chiefly as a teacher's aid-book. But it is also intended to be a pupil's text-book; and it is an undeniable draw-back that the book is far too big and expensive for a pupil's book. This is a great pity, for it would be an excellent reference book in many ways for the school-leaver who had studied it and learned to love it at school.

The pictures have proved controversial. Some teachers find them most helpful; many of the drawings have stimulated the blackboard artist to surpass himself. Others dislike them, and so do some pupils on whom they have been tried out. Repository art still reigns over the taste of our schools. But the question of liking is perhaps beside the point. The illustrations are strong, theologically accurate, and stimulating to thought; they *teach* in fact, which is what the merely pretty, or regarded as pretty, does not.

To sum up, the book should prove invaluable to every teacher of Religious Knowledge, whether he uses it according to the plans laid down by its sponsors, or whether he adapts it to his own exposition of the English Catechism. As a pupil's book it is too big and expensive, and indeed its very appearance of massiveness may have a slightly forbidding aspect in the eyes of English children. Perhaps it does not have this effect on their more serious German counterparts. Indeed fortunate are those German children into whose schools the *Katholischer Katechismus* has been introduced as their official text-book.

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LES INSTITUTIONS DE L'ANCIEN TESTAMENT, I. By R. de Vaux, O.P.
GÉOGRAPHIE DE LA TERRE SAINTE, I and II. By M. du Buit, O.P. (Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1958.)

In the period which extends from the publication of the encyclical *Divino Afflante* (1943), perhaps the greatest single contribution to the