

Theology and Kerugmatic Teaching

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When we now consider what were the symptoms preceding the dechristianization of the masses, we lament their frightful ignorance in matters of religion. This lament gives some cause for surprise, at least in respect of those countries in which religious teaching is obligatory in schools. For in these countries each pupil receives for a period of eight years or more a wide religious instruction which gives more theology than the average priest received in the Middle Ages. Moreover, it is upon religious instruction that modern catechesis has concentrated its effort.

However, this frequent and general lament is not unfounded. Either our catechetical methods have not been adapted to the children's capacities or our reproaches do not mean what they say. Probably there is some truth in both suppositions.²

It is not really ignorance of the basic points of Christian doctrine that we regret. Most people know all the sacraments; they know about the person of Christ, as well as about Our Lady, Peter and Paul, Adam and Eve, and a good many others. They know enough about the commandments of God and of the Church.

But what is lacking among the faithful, is a sense of unity, seeing it all as a whole, an understanding of the wonderful message of divine grace. All they retain of Christian doctrine is a string of dogmas and moral precepts, threats and promises, customs and rites, tasks and duties imposed on unfortunate Catholics, whilst

the non-Catholic gets off free of them. They are averse to believing in and acting up to their beliefs, a reluctance which, in an atmosphere of unbelief and materialism, soon leads to disaster for the individual Catholic.

That is how most of us look at the present state of religious ignorance and that is what we have to face up to.

Both our teaching and our catechisms are too much in the nature of theological treatises.

The function of science is to dissect, examine and describe the component elements. It is the same with theology. The first heresies forced theologians to be scientific, when a point of doctrine was wrongly interpreted or a mystery brought down to the level of a natural truth, quite accessible to human intelligence. Therefore that point of doctrine or that mystery (e. g. the relationship between the Father and the Son, the two natures in Christ, grace and liberty), was subjected to examination, defined, defended against false interpretations by new definitions and saved from misunderstanding by fresh distinctions being made. As a result new concepts arose, useful for a more complete understanding of the truth.

Later the Scholastics exploited the patristic inheritance; they systematically explored the frontiers of Science and Faith in order to reestablish the harmony between the two. The contribution of the Scholastics is indispensable in our days when human reason, self-satisfied and critical, is asserting itself. Thus, Catholic theology presents a complete, logically built structure, a clear system which, even when it does not convert an opponent, reveals its inestimable value by giving to the priest, the messenger of the faith, such a psychological certainty that he fears no objection that might be raised nor any philosophy invented by man.

This scientific work implies an outward activity, a defence of the frontiers; it casts its light, not so much on the essentials of Christian doctrine, on the fundamental points of Redemption, but rather on the obscure and difficult questions, e. g. reconciling the unity and the trinity in God, the action of the Divine will upon human will, the powers of the Church, the mode of operation of the sacraments, casuistry. Our redemption in Christ, our possession by Him in virtue of baptism, and consequently, the obligation upon us to imitate Him, all these things are no doubt dealt with, but only cursorily, as thought evident, rapidly, as immaterial to and lost in a mass of more difficult questions.

Of course, there has always been a difference between a catechism and a theological textbook.

¹ This review had an article by Fr. JUNGMANN in its first issue (1946, Jan.-March). We then gave the principal books which he had written. Since then, he has published an important work: *Missivum Solennia*, 2 vol., Wien, 1948 (2nd ed., 1949). — Address: Sillgasse, 8, Innsbruck, AUSTRIA (Editor's note).

² We must add that religious instruction limited to childhood, only achieves incomplete results. See article by G. DEROUVE, in *Lumen Vitae*, IV (1949), p. 217. The same problem arises for high schools.

The catechism is more simple, the questions are set out in a traditional order, and the answers are given without proof. But the form and arrangement smack of the dogma course. The catechism begins with a definition of faith, then the sources of Revelation; it creates the impression that Christianity is a set of theses pertaining to an advanced science, to which one must assent by faith; there is no suggestion that it is a renewal of humanity which affects us profoundly. The Church is represented as a visible society and is defended against any attempt at 'spiritualizing' it by proofs which were elaborated at the time of the Reformation. Its fundamental structure, the community of those who are sanctified in Christ is not brought out. The doctrine of grace begins with a crystal-clear definition and the distinction between actual and sanctifying grace, and it is presented as an enigmatic condition of God's favour, a wonderful character that must be in our actions if they are to be pleasing to God. We do not take into account that this isolation of the concept of grace is justified in a scientific treatise, but not in a course of religious instruction. There is, then, some reason for the reproach that we are still speaking the language of the XIIIth century, or that of the centuries of controversy to which we owe our theological treatises.

Because of heresies a clear line of demarcation was imperative, even in popular instruction. That explains why, since the middle of the XVIIth century, our text-books have followed the analytic method. Today, when the Christian has to face not heresy but indifference, he needs to be aware of what he possesses, to rejoice in his riches, to see the whole plan of salvation and begin to shape his life accordingly. Doubtless, in the science of theology, Christian doctrine is seen as one whole; but it is a logical whole, a kind of well guarded fortress. For preaching purposes we should rather present the vision of a vast panorama. The Catholic should not get the impression of being obliged to adhere to a multitude of individual points of doctrine (between which the theologian alone knows the logical connection). He should immediately perceive the grandiose plan of God Who, in Christ, wishes to draw all men to Him. This plan should make all the rest intelligible — intelligible not in the way of a logical argument, but as a theological whole (having, of course, its own logical cohesion).

The object of theological study is, to use the current formula, *Deus sub ratione Deiatis*. But pastoral theology does not attempt to cover every point of doctrine within the limits of human knowledge. It points to a goal and the way to that goal; it preaches

Christian doctrine as the aim of our aspirations and efforts; it shows where lies the treasure for which a man should sell all in order to possess it, the wonderful way of salvation, the invitation of God to His great banquet. We should group the Christian truths round a central fact from which they receive their light. As some one has well said, they should be presented not as links in a chain, but like the spokes of a wheel: seen from the centre, they are like rays issuing from a source of light.

This centre can only be Christ, our Lord. The best way to come to a knowledge of Him is to follow the unfolding of the story of our salvation. The method advised and outlined by St. Augustine to the deacon Deogratias, in his *De catechizandis rudibus* consists in gathering from the Old Testament the divine preparations for the coming of the Saviour, in explaining his appearance in the New Testament and His work until the founding of the Church. The *Katholische Religionsbücherlein* of the Viennese, Wilhelm Pichler, deserves mention as a guide in this method. It has been in use in Austria for thirty years in the teaching of small children and has been translated into more than a score of languages.

The basic plan, as described above, should predominate even in the detailed statement, explanation. All the parts must be joined together to make one single whole. Beginning with some bits of fundamental theology, and then going on to a philosophical explanation of God and His attributes is not as valuable as taking the Christian life as your starting point. This latter method was adopted by many authors in the XVIIth century, e. g. Contarini, who begins with: "What is a Christian?" The French Catechism of 1647 has adopted it; it has the title to the first lesson, *The Catholic*. We have to deal with baptized children who are already in the Kingdom of God and through us are to be made conscious of what they are and what they must remain. From this point of view our religious teaching of children is comparable to the religious initiations given to the newly baptized in the earliest days of Christianity.

The teaching about God will thus contain the elements of a rational proof of His existence, as answer to the question: "How can we come to the knowledge of God?" and this will be developed and underlined by extracts from the Old and New Testaments, especially Our Lord's words concerning His Heavenly Father.

Christology should not be merely a recital of facts: the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection. We should insist on their redemptive significance, thus bringing in the doctrine of grace. Christ, the

second Adam, has come into the world to raise up a new man; by His sufferings and death He has opened up to us the way to resurrection and eternal life.

It is important that the *Church* should appear as the fruit and continuation of His work. Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches through the Church; that explains its infallibility. As High-priest, he works sacerdotally through his human instruments; that explains the power and efficacy of their word. When the Church promulgates commandments and precepts, it is the crook of the Good Shepherd, guiding the faithful.

Grace and the *sacraments* must be taken out of their isolation and thus avoid the mistake of being taken for 'things.' They should not be put immediately after the moral section, because that makes them appear simply as helps for the keeping of the commandments; they should follow immediately the lessons on Christ and the Church, as indicated in the Creed. For, here again, as children of God we are made like to Christ, the Son of God made man; by grace we share gratuitously in His privileges, we have entered by Him and through Him into the house of the Father. More precise definitions may find their place in the context, but the front of the picture must be taken up with this presentation of the whole plan, which the child must never forget.

The teaching of Christian doctrine will then have once more the accent of Good News, the invitation to the kingdom of God. The response will be a joyful echo in the hearts of the children and above all in youth, less tractable to a series of propositions to which one must adhere under penalty of damnation, less disposed to practise a religion and morality which appears to them to be nothing but a set of promises, devotions and duties which one is bound to accept willy nilly.

These foundations once laid will allow of *moral* teaching in a new spirit. Morality will be seen as our behaviour, in response to a call from God.³

The foregoing considerations show that kerugmatic teaching requires more than a very clear exposition of doctrinal truths and more than their application to life rather in the manner of a technical school where they give lots of practical exercises. The doctrine itself must be transformed by its incorporation into the whole of the Good News, and adapted to its nature.

We do not, however, intend to set up a new theology against dogmatic theology. The discussion which was started some ten years in many German and a few foreign reviews on the need for a kerugmatic theology has been side-tracked and has got far away from the real question. The main point is not that of an independent theology, but that of the special rules for preaching in the light of theology.

The realization of this fundamental problem is nowadays growing without too many discussions, in larger circles and finds its place in religious and homiletic publications; already the new method inspires some religious text-books.⁴ This is a matter for rejoicing.

³ See Fr. ARNOLD, *Revival in dogmatic preaching and catechetics*, in *Lumen Vitae*, III (1948), pp. 488-518, particularly p. 503.

⁴ See J. HORINGER, *In what order should religious truths be presented?*, *Lumen Vitae*, II (1947), pp. 719-746. Also see his article in this number.