

TEXTS, TEXTS!

AN OVERVIEW OF SOME RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEXTBOOKS AND OTHER RESOURCES USED IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS FROM THE 1950S TO THE 1970S.

Abstract

In the light of the renewed interest in the use of textbooks in religious education, this paper presents an overview of some of the key educational resources used in the classroom teaching of religious education from the 1950s through to the 1970s. Resources such as the *Red Catechism* and the materials used to support it, *My Way to God* and *Come Alive* are discussed. Links between the resources and the underlying approach to religious education that influenced them be it catechetical, kerygmatic or experiential are made. These resources have played an important role in the history of religious education in Catholic schools and help provide some historical insight into how religious education has been taught in the past.

The decision by the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne to introduce a series of textbooks, *To Know, Worship and Love* series, has renewed interest in the role of student texts in classroom teaching and learning in religious education. Textbooks and other educational resources have played an important role in the history of religious education in Catholic schools. In this article an overview of some of the educational resources used in classroom teaching in Catholic schools from the 1950s to the 1970s will be given. This provides a historical perspective on how these resources helped shape the way religious education was taught in Catholic schools.

1. 1950s: Teaching from the catechism

(i) A note on the catechism and catechisms.

Prior to the 1960s religious education, in the broadest sense of the term, in Australian Catholic schools was heavily influenced by the catechism. A dominant memory of teachers and students from this era was the rote learning and associated pedagogy that was part of being taught *from the catechism* (Turner, 1992). It is important, however, to clarify the meaning of the word catechism, especially in recent times when a new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has been issued.

The word catechism is derived from the Greek term *katechein*, which means to echo. Simply put, a catechism is a compendium of important teachings presented in an accessible form (Strelan, 1983). The history of the use of catechisms in religious instruction can be traced back to the Reformation, although prior to this a number of summaries of key doctrinal points, such as the one attributed to St Augustine, were available for local use (Gangel & Benson, 1983). The idea of an authoritative statement of beliefs for general use owes its modern origin to Martin Luther, and his followers, who developed a number of catechisms in order to articulate their views in a period of intense religious controversy (Edwards & Westerhoff, 1981). The first Catholic catechism dates to 1555

and was written by the Dutch Jesuit, St Peter Canisius (1521-1597) and was aimed at children (Brodrick, 1962). The Council of Trent (1545-1563) mandated that a catechism be written for the use of parish priests (Ulich, 1968). This catechism, *Catechismus Romanus*, was intended for universal use and was commonly known as the *Roman Catechism* and ran close to 400 pages of prose. It was issued in 1565 by Pope Pius V and later revised in 1583 by Pope Gregory XIII (Hsia, 1998). The *Roman Catechism* was a text of the highest authority within the Catholic tradition and served as a source document for other catechisms for over four hundred years. It is helpful here to highlight the important distinction between the *Roman Catechism* as an authoritative source document and other catechisms that were derived from it. Some of the most notable of these derivations were national catechisms such as the *Baltimore Catechism*, produced in the United States in the nineteenth century and educational catechisms issued by important figures such as St. Vincent de Paul, St. John Baptist de la Salle, and St. Robert Bellarmine. Bellarmine's catechism, *Doctrina Cristiana Breve* or *Summary of Christian Doctrine* was particularly influential as it provided a relatively brief presentation of Catholic teaching in list or point form. One of the most popular and widely used catechisms which also made extensive use of memorisation was the *Penny Catechism* – so called because it was inexpensive. First developed in the English speaking world in the late eighteenth century, by Bishop Richard Challoner, it was written in a style that was easily understood and was intended for popular use.

In Australia, the First Plenary Council of bishops in 1885 adopted for use in all dioceses a catechism based on the one approved by the National Council of Ireland in 1875 (Fogarty, 1959). This became known as the *Green Catechism* (Ryan, 1997). A number of other local catechisms were developed the last being issued following the bishops' Fourth Plenary Council meeting in 1937. This document

was popularly known as the *Red Catechism* and was produced by a number of priests working under the direction of Dr Beovich, Director of Catholic Education in Victoria and later Archbishop of Adelaide.

By the late 1950s the Australian bishops commissioned Monsignor John F. Kelly to produce a series of texts to be used in Catholic schools throughout the country. The *My Way to God* series will be discussed later but as part of this project Kelly and his team produced a senior primary text called the *Catholic Catechism Book One* and a lower secondary text – *The Catholic Catechism Book Two*. These were the last catechisms, as such, to be produced for use in Catholic schools in Australia. In 1992 the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* was issued. This is a historically significant event because it is the first catechism to be released under papal authority since the *Roman Catechism* of Pius V. From this source document other local catechisms, in the broadest sense of the word, are likely to be developed.

(ii) Working with the catechism.

The *Red Catechism* approved for use in 1937 was a slim volume – running to 64 A5 pages. It began with prayers and then moved on to a series of questions and answers, 236 in total, divided into seventeen chapters starting with *God, The Creation, Man's Destiny* and concluding with *Judgement, Hell, Heaven*. The catechism concludes with responses for boys serving Mass. It is the questions and answers, however, that have left a deep mark on the psyche of older Catholics. Question One, for example, *Who made the world?* – and its answer *God made the world* still elicits strong reactions from those generations who can recall having used this text.

When the catechism is described as the basis of religious education in Catholic schools in the preconciliar period it is important to note that other educational resources were used to support it. These shared the strong didactic style of the catechism yet attempted to expand and augment on what was a relatively small corpus of knowledge. This support material varied in kind and in quality but often provided the raw material for classroom teaching and learning. The range of material that was available depended on the local factors and the resources of the school. Three examples of catechetical support material will be discussed here.

(ii a) Material from church agencies

Many church agencies around the country provided catechetical support materials. At junior primary level the *Primer Catechism* was used. This catered for young children and consisted of key questions and answers suitably modified. It was especially important prior to First Communion. Another

influential resource used at secondary school level was the *Companion to the Catechism* which was issued with episcopal authority having been prepared by Dr Beovich and his team. The *Companion*, as its name implies, closely followed the chapters of the *Red Catechism*. It gave a more detailed explanation as well as activities at the end of each section. Church agencies also supplied a range of material designed to supplement the catechism. The Catholic Education Office (CEO) in Melbourne, for example, provided, amongst other things, *Church History Readers* for the use of senior students in primary schools. This is a significant series because it was authored by Monsignor J. F. Kelly a figure of unmatched influence in the field of catechetics in this period. The *Church History Readers* gave students an overview of the story of the church in a way that sort to engage and interest them without relying too heavily on rote learning. In the preface to the Grade IV reader, for example, teachers are reminded that students are not expected to remember the names of secondary personages – “it is enough for them to know the main events and the main figures and the important things they did” (Kelly, 1957). The readers were in a textbook style and were written sequentially. Each reader was divided into chapters (called parts) with activities and things to do at the end of each chapter.

The Melbourne Catholic Education Office also produced regular periodicals such as the *Children's World*. This was a magazine format with short articles on a range of topics. The edition in February 1958, for example, aimed at Grades VII and VIII, had a picture of Cardinal Villeneuve greeting George VI and his Queen on the cover. Inside were articles on The Visit of the Queen Mother, Coloumbus Dying (with the note in brackets that this was suitable for dictation) and Careers which served as a preamble for a series of vignettes on the nobility of the nursing profession.

(ii b) Order specific material

In the preconciliar period teaching in Catholic schools, both primary and secondary was still largely the province of professed religious (Mithen, 1972). Teaching orders produced a large array of educational material for use in schools. This material was often produced to meet local conditions and was written by religious working as classroom teachers. This gave the material great relevance and currency and also made it up-to-date (Newton, 2001). One of the most influential of the Order produced series was the *Catechism Workbooks*, published by the De La Salle Brothers, and widely, but certainly not exclusively, used in their schools (Smith, 1981). They were produced for Grades 3 to 9 in the interval 1955-1963 under the editorship of Br Aloysius Carmody fsc.

A feature of the *Workbooks* was their practical utility. They include a variety of activities such as:

- fill in the word:
by the command of Christ, the still continues to do what was done by Christ in the before his death.
(Unit 3, 4th edition, 1962)
- matching questions and answers:
the body of Jesus was placed in the tomb
(i) by soldiers at the request of the synagogue (ii) for all the just Jews and Gentiles (iii) late Friday afternoon ... ,
(Unit 2, 1st edition, 1959)
- crosswords and true and false quizzes with questions such as:
the Mass repeats Christ's passion
(Unit 3, 4th edition, 1962)
- a variety of other material such as short answer questions:
briefly describe the ceremony of the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament
(Unit 5, 4th edition, 1962).

The *Workbooks*, in the initial editions, also contained expositions of key doctrinal teachings. The change in emphasis evident in the *Workbooks* over time is noteworthy. This reflects the closeness of the authors to the situation in schools and their exposure to the debates surrounding religious education that were current at the time. As further editions were produced the *Workbooks* emphasised even more the importance of participatory learning on the part of students. This in some ways anticipated the more life-centred approaches to religious education that would come to the fore in the 1970s. In 1962, in the introduction to the fourth series, the editor, Br. Aloysius, who was also the Head of the De La Salle Training College at Castle Hill in Sydney, commented:

... this Catechism Workbook has been almost completely rewritten following suggestions asked for and received from many teachers of Christian Doctrine. Further exercises have replaced the expositions so that pupils will be able to reinforce the teaching in the classroom even more.

(ii c) Apologetics

A third type of catechetical support material was apologetic (from the Greek for a defence) literature. This was designed to provide Catholic students with, amongst other things, arguments to counter the challenges of other Christian groups and also attacks made on the church by secular forces. Apologetic material was aimed largely at students

at the senior end of secondary school and was seen as an important part of the schools mandate to form well-educated Catholics who could defend the church position in the wider world. It was especially prominent in those schools which enrolled proportionally high numbers of students intended for university and the professions. The best apologetic literature aimed to demonstrate the reasonableness of faith and Christian revelation and made intellectual demands on students. At the other end of the spectrum some apologetics materials was little more than a restatement of the brief catechetical question and answer format. An important apologetic text was *Apologetics and Catholic Doctrine* written by Archbishop Sheehan, the coadjutor bishop of Sydney from 1922-1937. This text was aimed at senior secondary students and was also used with Catholics at university. The original version was published in the 1920s and then successively republished. The 1955 fourth edition was divided into two parts. The first, *Apologetics*, contained three sections; *Natural Apologetics*, *Christian Apologetics* and *Catholic Apologetics*. The second part, *Apologetics and Catholic Doctrine* was subtitled as, *A Course of Religious Instruction for Schools and Colleges*. This contained eighteen chapters, each with a summary at the beginning, which captured the tone and content of the chapter. Chapter IV for example, *The origin of life and the origin of living species (Plants and Lower Animals)* listed the following summary points:

- The origin of life: The teaching of the Church – What the scientists say. The origin of living species (plants and lower animals):

The teaching of the Church: A Catholic may hold either Permanentism or Theistic Evolution.

- The evidence for evolution. Remarks and conclusion:
Evolutionary theories discussed:
Evolution not proved scientifically but useful as a working hypothesis if evolution has occurred, God is the author.

2. Into the 1960s: The kerygmatic renewal and *My Way to God*

By the early 1960s, partly, in response to the dissatisfaction with current approaches in religious education the Australian Bishops commissioned Monsignor John F. Kelly to produce a new catechetical series to be used in Catholic schools throughout the country. The series comprised four books to be used at primary level as well as a book for lower primary. The series, known as *My Way to God*, was published in 1964. It was preceded, in

1962, by two *Catholic Catechisms* – Book One bound in green and aimed at senior primary and Book Two bound in red and aimed at junior secondary. *My Way to God* reflected the influences of the kerygmatic movement in religious education (Hofinger, 1962). The kerygmatic approach placed great emphasis on the *kerygma* – or the proclamation of the word of God – often best found in scripture (Hofinger & Reedy, 1962). Implicit here was an emphasis on developing the personal relationship of the child with Christ. The plan of salvation was not something abstract but involved the individual on a personal level. It was meant to be their story and not just the monologue of a venerable institution. This approach to religious education was not entirely new and was reflected in some educational resources such as an American series of books, *On Our Way*, which was available in Australian Catholic schools in the 1950s. This series, written principally by Maria de la Cruz, was explicitly based on the kerygmatic approach to Christian doctrine (De La Cruz, 1957). It is *My Way to God*, however, that gave widespread expression to the kerygmatic approach to religious education in this country.

The *My Way to God* series had a characteristic style which Ryan (2001) has characterised as *bright and cheerful*. The tone of the writing in the books was reflective of the kerygmatic movement with its implicit call to faith. The extract below, from Book 4, illustrates this:

We are on a journey. We are the New People of God, called by our Heavenly Father to make the journey to heaven. Yes, we are all on the Great march to the real Promised Land. How are we to get there? Are there any signposts? Is there a guidebook to tell us about the place we are going to and what to expect on the way? Is there someone who can lead the way?

Yes, our loving Father has given all these helps. The most wonderful of all is the Guide He has given us – His own Divine Son, Jesus Christ. If we follow Him we cannot get lost. We cannot see Him, but He speaks to us through the Church (pp. 4-5)

Each book in the series was divided into a large number of small chapters. Each chapter began with a statement of Christian belief. A prayer, a reading from scripture or a song could follow this. Each of these was related in some way to the introductory statement. Some of the activities included were:

- things for me to think about:
How can I show that I love God's written word? (Book Three, p. 11)

- things to do:
Draw a picture of how you think Zacchaeus made up for his sins. (Book Two, p. 113)
- a prayer to say:
With all God's children I will often say Mary's own prayer, the Hail Mary. (Book One, p. 36)

Located throughout the books were things for the students to learn or know. These were often in question and answer format – an echo of earlier approaches. In Book Two (p. 77), for example, under the heading *Can You Learn This?* appeared questions and corresponding answers such as:

Q. *What do we mean by the Blessed Trinity?*

A. *We mean that the three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are one God.*

In Book 4 sections such as *The Church Teaches Me* presented doctrinal content.

The *Catholic Catechism Books One and Two* also had a strong kerygmatic tone. The *Letter from Your Bishop*, which serves as an introduction to Book One states:

... this book comes to you from the Church; it will give you Christ's truth so that you may know your Father more fully. It will show you how to live as Christians and grow in love of Him (p. v).

Both books were divided into a large number of chapters, each beginning with a statement of Catholic belief with many references to scripture – a characteristic feature of the kerygmatic movement. Questions (with answers), activities, prayers, revision and a section called *For My Life* then usually followed. This was a short statement related to the theme of the chapter which can be seen as a call to praxis or action on the part of the student. In chapter 108, of Book Two; *the Lord's Day*, the statement, *For My Life*, reads – "Nothing in the whole week is more important than my Sunday Mass."

3. Into the 1970s: Experiential education resources.

The *Catholic Catechisms* and *My Way to God* represented a significant move away from the catechetical material that was available in the 1950s. They arose out of a particular approach to religious education but this was quickly superseded. By the mid 1960s a new perspective, the experiential approach, had become established and this inspired a different type of educational

resource. Experiential catechesis, as envisaged by writers such as Van Caster, placed far more emphasis on the world of the learner as a departure point for teaching and learning in religious education (Van Caster, 1965; Le Du & Van Caster, 1969). This approach was often termed life-centred, that is, it used the natural context of students' lives to lead them into a deeper understanding of God and how God interacts with people. What is especially important is coming to terms with one's own beliefs – discovering, articulating and then reflecting on them. The beliefs of others, be they individuals or institutions are of secondary significance. Experiential approaches to religious education also placed great emphasis on discussion, reflecting on experience and group activity. Some of the rationale for the experiential perspective is succinctly expressed in the *Letter of Introduction to the Teachers Manual* that accompanied the 1970 secondary series, *Come Alive*

... our [student] text is not a statement of what we believe. It is a means of presenting young adult life in the 1970s in order that Christian believers might together reflect not on the book, but on life We have deliberately understated our notes for the teachers in the hope that each teacher will use our instrument according to the needs and possibilities of his or her group. Reflection on life will obviously be a group experience and the authors of the text have deep convictions about the value of group interaction in the maturing faith process of young adults (p. 3).

A notable feature of this era was the intense controversy that publication of life-centred religious education materials attracted (Bourke, 1969). This is partly explained by the impact of change in the church after the Second Vatican Council. The link between the catechetical materials available in the 1950s and *My Way to God* was relatively easy to see. The connection, however, between experiential educational resources and earlier material was more problematic although there was an argument for continuity in the material (Rummery, 1977). The experiential perspective was a different approach to religious education and many found this change difficult to comprehend (Malone, 1982). One of the most controversial texts was *Come Alive*. This was influenced by earlier publications such as *Move Out*, which was first published in 1967 in Ballarat by Garry Eastman.

Come Alive was a senior secondary school resource that was published in magazine form. It was produced under the direction of Fr Maurice Duffy

and prepared at the request of the Australian Bishops' Committee of Education. *Come Alive* displayed high production standards and made heavy use of photographs and other images to try and give it a contemporary feel. In *Come Alive 1*, published in 1970, for example, pages 4 and 5 are devoted to a picture of two hands joining against the background of a sunset. The only text on the pages is the following short poem.

Hands That Touch
Gently Hopefully
Mind That
Prods Explores
Searching Risking
To Be Who I Am
Yet Not Knowing
Quite
What it is

Each edition had a general theme and a series of articles or sayings that were related to this in some way. A characteristic feature of the series was its presentation of contemporary issues be they political, social or moral. *Come Alive 5*, for example, was titled *Wide Angle* and begins with a two page colour photograph of a lamp with an accompanying quote from Bonhoeffer. Also included in this edition, amongst other things, were; a survey on *What do you want in life?*; an article based on the scriptural story of Jesus feeding five thousand people and a story about a father and his drug addicted son. *Come Alive* typically used stories in an attempt to get readers to profoundly question themselves, their own beliefs and values and those of the wider society. In *Come Alive 6*, for example, *Ten Years Later*, is a story about a former SS soldier who, after a period of time, confronts his own active role in the Holocaust. One of the questions following the story is; "How true is the statement – Sinful action is a sign of deeper sinfulness?"

Another educational resource that illustrates an experiential perspective is *Let's Go Together*. This was produced by the Melbourne Catholic Education Office and was, initially, intended for government schools although it quickly became a key resource for Catholic primary schools. The first edition appeared in 1968 and each year thirty issues were published in magazine form (Anson, 2002). Teaching notes were supplied in an accompanying publication called, *Catechist*. Each edition of *Let's Go Together* comprised four A4 pages. The front page was usually a large photograph along with a title caption, the facing second and third pages consisted of boxes containing pictures, activities and a range of illustrations. The back page could contain further activities such as crossword puzzles, a song, a prayer or even a message for parents.

Let's Go Together: Middle Primary, 3(2) published on 16 March, 1970 is an example of the publication style of the series. This edition is printed with a strong blue colour throughout. The title on the front is: *Where are you? Are you here?* The photograph on the cover highlights a girl sitting in a classroom. The inside of the magazine features three further photographs; two are of children at school and the third a family group. The main text on page two is the *Story of Joe* and this illustrates well the emphasis in *Let's Go Together* on placing the students' experiences and his or her story at the centre of the educative process.

My name is Joe O'Donnell. I am in Grade 4. When I was in Grade 2 I went for a holiday to England. I made new friends there. I stayed in England for one year. Finally I went home. It was a long trip home and we were tired. When I got back to school I felt a bit strange. Now I am in grade 4 and I don't feel strange anymore, because I am with the friends I am used to and belong with.

The back page asks the question: "What makes a happy home?" And also contains a prayer – "Thanking God for a family – as well as a song with a similar theme.

Conclusion: A comment on the present

By the late 1970s many Australian dioceses were well into the intensive process of writing and developing *Guidelines for religious education* (Ryan, 1997). These were intended to be frameworks for curriculum development within schools and not as material to be put in front of students. Educational resources such as textbooks or regular magazine type publications became less prominent in this period. Well into the 1990s diocesan educational authorities continued to concentrate resources on developing curriculum frameworks and related implementation as well as inservicing courses for teachers. Now that the place of the various *Guidelines* in curriculum planning and development has been established, interest has been renewed in developing educational resources that can be used in classroom teaching and learning. Engebretson (2000) has noted the need to produce good quality Australian educational resources. These resources will assist teachers to translate what can be found in curriculum documents into quality teaching. It is likely that more textbooks and related material will be produced in the future to meet this need.

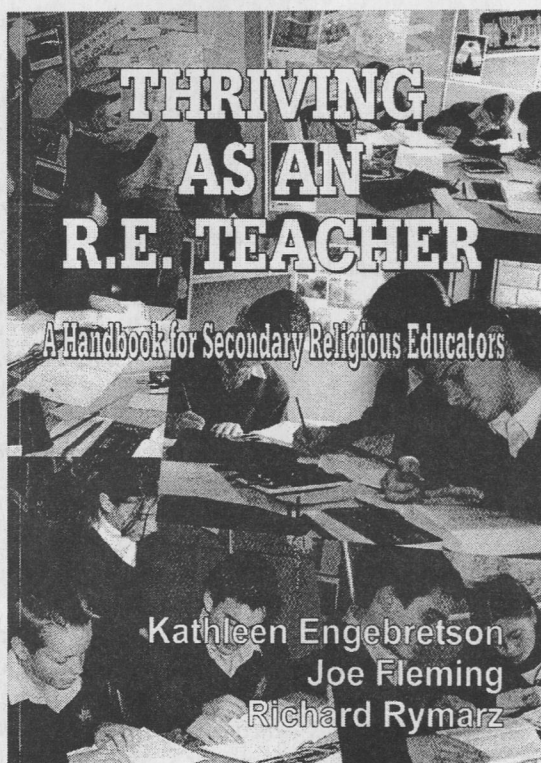
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This book focuses on issues that relate to beginning a career as a teacher of religion. It covers practical issues such as preparing lessons and gathering quality resources as well as more theoretical topics such as integrating recent research on curriculum development into teaching practice.

The book will be of interest and assistance to those who are new to religious education in schools, to more experienced teachers who may need to update their knowledge about religious education theory and curriculum practices. The book will also be useful for professional development of religious education teachers, whether at school or regional level.

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