AFTER THE MIND OF CHRIST

By JAMES WALSH

In everything we must focus our attention upon the goal of our teaching: that is, the love that flows from a pure heart, a right mind and a genuine faith; for this love is the standard, the measure of all we say. But more than this, we are also to make it the frame of reference for the one we are instructing: it is to this love that his mind and heart must be moved and guided.

(Augustine: *De Catechizandis rudibus*, 3,6)[1]

AUGUSTINE'S letter on catechizing seems to have been the first instruction in the early Church which concentrates on method, as well as content. Further it concerns itself not with evangelization proper — the preparation of candidates during the Lenten season for baptism confirmation and Eucharist administered during the Easter Liturgy — but with what we now call pre-evangelization: whether we think of Stephen's sermon in the presence of the Sanhedrin as we have it in Acts (7,2-53), or of Paul's dissertation on the Areopagus at Athens (17,23-31); or of the methodology the latter finally made his own, and describes at length at the beginning of his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 2,1-5).

By the term *rudes*, there can be no doubt that Augustine is referring chiefly to the illiterate or semi-literate in the city of Carthage or its country districts; though the term is not confined to them. In fact, the candidates who are often brought to the deacon Deogratias — the recipient of Augustine's letter of instruction — are in some way smitten with the fear of God (5.9). Some may come because they have received a sign from heaven (6.10); others may be men of letters, already well-versed in the Scriptures and christian literature (8.12); whilst others again may come from the schools — budding lawyers or politicians, who can hardly be classed with country bumpkins (9.13). At the same time, the catechist will frequently find that his is a distasteful task: simply repeating over and again well-worn matter best suited to young children. In such

cases, we are to take on the relationship of a father or a mother, an elder sister or brother. When we allow ourselves to be linked with those whom we are teaching by the bond of compassion, then what we have to say will, even for ourselves, take on a new shape. When people come to study God himself — the richest source and goal of love — for whose sake one must learn whatever can be learned, then indeed it is well for us to be renewed in their newness. After all, one who was dead in his error is moving from death to life; and if we must go along well-trodden ways, we are to remember that we are accompanying along the paths of peace (cf Prov 2,13) those who, wearied by their aimless wandering through the world, deserve our compassion: and that we offer it at the request of the One who has given the same peace to us (12.17).

Augustine is equally concerned with the diffident candidates, who are extremely reluctant to express an opinion; or with the slow-witted, who tax the ingenuity and flexibility of approach of the most experienced catechist. With these, it will be necessary to speak to God continually for them, rather than to say much about God to them (13.18). Then there are the weaknesses and limitations in the catechist himself which affect the quality of the catechesis. We do not always get our priorities right; so that we query the importance of the work in comparison with other occupations on which we happen to be engaged (14.20). There is also the fear of failure, and the desolation which tends to come from the recollection of our own fallibility and sinfulness. God's priorities are to be preferred to ours — and Augustine has no doubt that, objectively, to undertake the work of catechesis will be to make God's order, God's will, our own (14.21). And as regards our own diffidence, our agitation or moodiness (14.22), it is not so much I who speak as Love itself: 'that love which is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us' (Rom 5,5).

Augustine's *narratio*, the content of the catechesis here proposed, is the history of salvation from the beginning of Genesis down to his own time, along with the practical application of the narrative — christian morality as synthesized in the great commandment. 'All the things which you now see taking place in God's Church and in the name of Christ throughout the world were already foretold in past ages; even as we read them or hear them read, they appear before our eyes; and thus they contribute to the building up of our faith'. The catechist, finally, is to draw strength from authentic christian community:

> You are to be at one with the good; if you are so yourself, you will easily find others like you. Then, indeed, in their company you can worship and love God freely and without favour. For he himself will be our reward, whole and entire. It is his goodness and his beauty that we shall enjoy. He is, however, to be loved not as visible things are cherished; he is to be loved as wisdom is, and truth and holiness, justice and charity, and so on (cf Eph 4,24). Not in the way these exist among men, but as they are to be found in God himself, the incorruptible and immutable fountain of wisdom. . . .
> Take the good as your model, be tolerant with the wicked, and love everyone. For the one who is wicked today — you cannot know how he will be like tomorrow. Love them so that they may come to God's righteousness. For the commandment is to love God — and our neighbour besides: the precept on which all the law and the prophets depend. Nor can anyone fulfil this law except the one who receives the gift — the Holy Spirit (27.53).

Augustine's psychological and pedagogical acumen — avoid confusing the candidate with over-abundant matter; explain little by little, with clarity and thoroughness; as far as is possible, give individual instruction; make the person 'comfortable'; adapt to his or her level of intelligence; sustain the interest, both your own and the candidates — all this is subservient to the pivotal theme, which is 'the love of God poured out in our hearts by the Spirit of God who is given to us'.

Gifted for teaching

'Truly I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father. . . . If you love me, you will keep my commandments (a new commandment I give you, that you love one another even as I have loved you); and I will pray the Father — for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me — and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever: the Spirit of truth. . . . You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans . . . the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things, and bring to your minds all that I have said to you' (Jn 14,12.15-17;13,34;14,18.26).

The office of compassionate love and of teaching the things of God: these are the roles most frequently appropriated to the Holy Spirit in the early Church, even as they are at the heart of the pedagogy of the eucharistic and risen Jesus. As the ancient

Pentecostal prayer has it, 'he (the Spirit) himself is the forgiveness of sins'; whilst the 'golden sequence', as the *Veni Sancte Spiritus* was popularly known in the middle ages,[2] consecrates as one of the names of the Holy Spirit, *Pater pauperum*, 'Father of the poor or of the orphaned': that is, of the apostles, who receive the Spirit of Jesus in order that they may be imbued with Christ's truth, and transmit that truth in and through the Church, his body.

'God has taught the hearts of the faithful by the light of his Holy Spirit', cries the Church, in her staple petition for the *donum Dei*. What remains is that, in virtue of the same Spirit dwelling in our hearts, God may enable us to savour, have a taste for, the things that belong to his justice (*recta sapere*), and thus rejoice continually in the Spirit's consolation (*de eius semper consolatione gaudere*).

Lex orandi lex credendi. The instinct of Christ's faithful (*sensus fidelium*) is manifested in their constant prayers of petition. There is a recognition, however vague, obscure or inarticulate, that union with the indwelling Spirit of the Father and the Son, the Word Incarnate, is the principle of that assessment or judgment of one's own choices and one's guidance of others which leads to God and his righteousness, enables us to find salvation in him, and to communicate those findings to others. It is important that we should have true spiritual understanding of this: it is to know the difference between the wisdom of this world (which is still wisdom and not to be despised) and 'the secret and hidden wisdom of God'. It is the difference between living according to the flesh (and we do live the life in the flesh — even as did Christ in his 'days of the flesh' — cf Gal 2,20; Heb 5,7) and living according to the Spirit. This is what we have learnt from Christ — to put aside the old self which tends to be corrupted by vain desires, so that our minds are renewed by spiritual change, and we can 'put on the new self which has been created after the likeness of God, in true righteousness and holiness' (Eph 4,20-24).

If it is true that current devotion to the Holy Spirit in the Church, as specified in the charismatic movement, carries with it the dangers of enthusiasm (perhaps an apt term would be fanaticism), these are, at least in theory, easy to correct. A modern protestant theologian, G. S. Hendry, antedating the bush-fires of the new pentecostalism, remarked, perhaps quite justly, that enthusiasm tends to exalt the sovereign freedom of the Spirit against the Roman Catholic tendency 'to canalize and domesticate' the Spirit in the Church: to link it too rigidly or too exclusively, one would presume, with

hierarchical structure and apostolic succession. But the more obvious danger in enthusiasm, it would appear, is its tendency to sever the connection of the mission of the Spirit and the historical Christ: which in fact happened with the Montanist heresy[3] and the apocalyptic of Joachim of Fiore,[4] where it was alleged that the dispensation of the Spirit was to supersede the historical revelation of Christ. Hendry continues:

> In modern forms of enthusiasm, this is concealed beneath an appearance of devotion to the Christ of the NT, but it is not really changed; for the historical revelation of Christ is treated as the stimulus to a subjective spiritual experience in the individual, not as itself the content of that experience. The spiritualist individual experiences his own conversion and the resultant spiritual glow, rather than Jesus Christ and him crucified.[5]

Jesus, then, remains the teacher, the pedagogue *par excellence*. St Thomas, alluding to the text, 'It is to your advantage that I go' (Jn 16,7), says:

> It was expedient for us that Christ should ascend into heaven, so that, knowing him now no longer according to the flesh, we should become spiritually at one with him, and in this way be disposed to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit (*In 2 Sent., dist. 22*).

It is also worth remarking that the simplest, most personal, most biblical explanation of the title 'Paraclete', 'Counsellor' (cf Jn 14,16) is 'that it means one who is appealed to for help on the grounds of kinship. For the Jews, the first appeal for help is always to the nearest kinsman'.[6]

The Parables of the Teacher[7]

Thinkers of all creeds and nationalities seem to agree that the world of thought and feeling is suffering a radical transition. The classical culture, which encompassed our catholic philosophy and theology, is now seen to be arbitrary in its distinction of the literal and figurative meaning of words and phrases. (This may be an over-simplification, as is the tendency of all historical generalizations.) The literal was prior and substantial, the figurative a dress or ornament whose purpose was simply to make the literal more vivid and effective. However, thus to reduce the figurative to the categories of classical rhetoric — even though this is a necessary stage in the

development of the human mind, seems to constrict man's spontaneity, to limit his freedom, to obscure his nature. We are in process of setting aside the classical definition of man as a rational animal, in favour of such descriptions as 'symbolic animal' or 'incarnate spirit'.[8]

It is figurative or symbolic discourse which Jesus uses in his teaching. His easily recognizable parables represent his method of instruction, his pedagogy. There is, of course, no agreement on the part of modern exegetes on what a parable is precisely: 'metaphor, simile, allegory, fable' — all these terms are used. It seems to be agreed, however, that what is of importance is the attitude of the listener. Without belief, the parable is unintelligible. Joachim Jeremias lists the following amongst the major themes which occur in the parable: the mercy of God for sinners, the present arrival of the new age, the necessity of immediate response, the conditions of discipleship, the passion and the consummation.[9]

Three such parables (using the word in its broad sense) each of which include these themes, and which also distinguish out in a peculiarly vivid manner the pedagogical principles in Jesus's teaching, as well as the role of the Holy Spirit, are: the Washing of the Feet, with which the fourth evangelist opens his 'Gospel of Glory';[10] the episode of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24,13-34); and the Parable of the Prodigal (Lk 15,11-32). All three stories are permanent and enduring in christian history, and they present the Lord in himself, the Word Incarnate, as the 'radiance of his Father's splendour and the fullest expression of the Father's Being' (Heb 1,2-3). They testify in particular to the ever-surprising, ever-abiding presence of the Spirit. And they are highly intelligible — ever old and ever new — to the believing Christian.

Each episode is highly figurative; each belongs to a different literary genre and is wrought with skill and consummate care. Complete in itself and yet open-ended, each beckons and invites into the Trinitarian economy of salvation. The context of each is a celebration with Jesus, sacramental, eucharistic and therefore oriented to community, drawing us into the presence of the Father, with the Son as companion and brother, in the Spirit.

The catechesis of forgiveness

Jesus takes upon himself the role of the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Lk 15,3-6); he assumes the likeness of sinful flesh, of the first Adam driven out of Paradise; 'for our sake God made the sinless

One into sin, so that in him we might become God's righteousness' (2 Cor 5,21). He is the scapegoat, sent by the Spirit into the wilderness (Lev 16,21-23; Lk 4,1). He is the one who, in the region of unlikeness, shows that when a man 'comes to his senses' (Lk 15,17), he enters into God, the Spirit who is the 'soul of the soul';[11] so that after being lost, he discovers that divine life which alone can restore him to his integrity, enable him to 'find himself', to unite and increase all that is good within him. So after suffering and dying to himself, he comes to life again in the Father's compassionate love In him, the great reconciliation, the Father's desire is achieved. The celebration that follows is the image of the 'joy in heaven', 'the joy before God's angels' (Lk 15,7.10). Jesus is the Son, in whom the Father is seen, in the Spirit of reconciliation and forgiveness, in the power of the Spirit whose fruits are love, joy and peace. As for the elder brother, a modern exegete has written:

> This is a very strange story, telling of the impotence of the all-powerful God. It is the impotence of love, a love which cannot stop its creatures from plunging into evil ways. That is why evil is an essential part of creation . . . the freedom of God's creatures is unthinkable without the freedom to do evil. God's fervent love can only keep hovering over his creature until it can get through and invite him home again. When that happens, it is the work of the Holy Spirit. And the parable closes, like the life of Jesus, with the persistent presence of a love that can only implore.[12]

St Bernard puts it more forcibly than this, when he expatiates on a favourite theme, 'God moves, as it were, by his desire for us'. The Holy Spirit in person, the Spirit of the Father, reveals to us that there is something of us hidden lovingly in the Father's heart, so that we are in truth the children of God. His Spirit testifies to, persuades, our spirit that we are his children.[13]

A Eucharistic Catechesis

If the feast for the return to life of the one dead mirrors at one remove the *sacrum convivium* and the consummate *agape*, the other two episodes are more directly and obviously eucharistic. The washing of the feet is the fourth Evangelist's method of having Jesus instruct the Christian, individually and corporately, concerning the relationship eucharistically established between himself and his Church, in the Supper, the Cross and the Resurrection. This movement of thanksgiving to the Father, for what the Son is enabled to do for his

friends and for those who look to him, is itself the presentation of Christ to the christian community as the Father's *agape*, in his Spirit, to each and all of us. It is the Father's gift to us, to the end that the human personality might be refashioned and assimilated to the Son; so that in the moment of the Spirit's coming, we too may offer and be offered. We, too, become *agape*, the son's love-offering to the Father, for the ransom of many.

Here Christ's awareness and identification of himself reaches a supreme point. The consciousness that his existence is 'mission-existence' is all-pervasive. He is aware, first of all, that he comes from God: the Father has bestowed upon him the power to offer, dedicate and devote himself; aware too, that the community of his disciples, the representatives and witnesses of the whole of God's people, are his by the Father's gift. The reality of communion which he has with them is manifested in the loving service which he communicates to them: as their Lord and teacher, certainly, but also as their companion. The entire incident is thus community-centred. It is action-reflection, action out of awareness, action that crystallizes awareness. It identifies Christ to himself and to his brethren. And it suggests that this sort of action will identify each one of his followers to himself and to the other. The christian teaching/learning situation, even when it is one-to-one, is always for community: for giving, for service, for learning, for teaching, for receiving.

The awareness of the teacher of the source of his communication must be proportionate to Christ's over-all awareness of his relationship to the Father. The teacher/learner must share the Spirit of Father and Son. Jesus is highly conscious that what he is doing is manifesting the love of the Father, revealing him as he is, in human terms. It is not simply, perhaps not primarily, a matter of what is communicated — the humble and loving service. It is the personal aspect of the communication: the fact that I give myself, the consciousness that I am empowered to make this gift, because I myself am gift — the *donum Dei*.

> God is my gift; himself he freely gave me,
> God's gift am I, and none but God shall have me:

the words of St Robert Southwell, Jesuit poet and martyr. Thus the teacher, in his own self-awareness, manifests the conviction that his own person demonstrates the reality of what he is giving in his doing. He knows that he can give totally, because he himself, in this

self-gift to the Father, becomes the Father's gift of himself, through the Spirit of Jesus, to those whom, in his teaching, he serves. Here, then, is the shape of the teaching/learning action, the psychological movement of the Lord's pedagogical method. It is significant that he should choose to demonstrate it to his disciples at a time when they lack intellectual alertness, and are disturbed, agitated and distracted. They will comprehend later, when the Spirit leads them into truth.

The Spirit of recognition

The final story, lucid in its liturgical structure, may be called parabolic only in the looser sense of the term. It is, however, a paradigm of his spiritual presence to Christian Community. He presents himself to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus in a manner belonging to his risen Lordship. The person of the teacher, until the moment of recognition, seems to be of secondary importance. The first movement of this pedagogical action is to enable them to respond out of their own temporary disbelief. The sympathy which they experience encourages them to speak of their own reaction to the crucifixion-event (Lk 24,17-24). Like the prodigal, they must 'come to themselves', prompted by his Spirit, affecting them precisely because 'their eyes are held', and they are prevented from recognizing him physically. The quality of divine compassion is that of the Paraclete, even as it is the compassion of Christ the teacher, who gently upbraids them because they are *anoētoi*, out of tune with his mind (*nous*), because he is out of their physical sight (Lk 24,16.25). The response of their hearts is first to his compassion, then to the authority, the competence, the assurance, as he opens the Scriptures to them (Lk 24,27).

Thus the risen Jesus 'paces' the action. As they arrive at the village, it is clear that he has reached his conclusion. But now they are so involved with the person of the teacher that they feel the need of his continuing presence. They have arrived at an experiential knowledge of their relationship with him in friendship. Even the moment of 'sight' is hardly of his person; it is the liturgical gesture. 'He took the bread and blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. . . . They told what had happened, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread' (Lk 24,30-31.35).

Their acceptance of him as teacher, their reaction to him, the

learning of the lesson, is truly distinct from the awareness of his physical presence. They encounter him in the Spirit: 'Were not our hearts burning within us as he spoke to us on the way?' It is thus that the catechist will have 'the mind of Christ'. The Spirit of Jesus will be in us in proportion as we reflect, like Paul, on 'whatever is true, whatever is just, whatever is honourable, whatever is pure, whatever lovely, whatever grace-filled in the telling' (Phil 4,8-9). So we are to learn and hear, listen and receive, and the God of Peace will be upon us, and on those to whom he sends us.

NOTES

[1] Augustine's *De Catechizandis Rudibus* has not yet been edited in the *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*. Perhaps the handiest version for english-speaking readers — it is very competently edited and annotated, though the translation is somewhat stilted and convoluted — is *S. Aurelii Augustini 'De Catechizandis Rudibus'*, trans. with Introduction and commentary by J. P. Christopher (Washington, D.C., 1926). All translations from the Latin are my own.

[2] Cf Joseph Connelly, *Hymns of the Roman Liturgy* (London, 1957), pp 110-13.

[3] Cf *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol 9, s.v. 'Montanism', pp 1078-79.

[4] Cf Bernard McGinn, *Apocalyptic Spirituality* (New York/London, 1979), pp 97-148.

[5] *The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology* (London, 1957), pp 68ff.

[6] Cf James Quinn S.J.., 'The Divine Kinsman', in *The Way*, vol 6, 3 (July 1966), p 210.

[7] On what follows, cf William Yeomans S.J., 'The Goal of Christian Teaching', in *The Way*, vol 21, 2 (April 1981), pp 95ff.

[8] Cf Bernard Lonergan S.J., 'Dimensions of Meaning, in *Papers of Lonergan*, ed. F. Crowe S.J. (Montreal, 1967). See also Dr Mary Rousseau's observation, *infra*, p 216.

[9] Cf J. L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (London, 1966) s.v. 'Parable', pp 635-36.

[10] Cf R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John: XIII-XXI* (New York, 1966/London, 1971), pp 548ff.

[11] Cf St Bernard, *De Div.* X, 4 (PL 182,569).

[12] Eduard Schweizer, *The Holy Spirit* (London, 1980), p 121.

[13] Cf P. Dumontier, *S. Bernard et la Bible* (Paris, 1953), pp 40-43.