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How to Get the Most Out of This Book

The purpose of *Catholicism and Reason* is to present in popular language the fundamental structure and reasons underlying Catholicism and to explain the principal beliefs of Catholics. Because it reaffirms the basic convictions by which Catholics should live, *Catholicism and Reason* will appeal to a wide audience—from high school students to senior citizens. It is an excellent text for adults, whether in formal courses, informal study groups, or RCIA classes; for college and university students; and for those in Catholic high schools or parish religious education programs.

The book is a valuable tool because it offers not only a full-year study of the foundations of Catholicism, but it can also be broken down into mini-courses. Some examples:

1. A fourteen-hour Apologetics course on how to find Christ's Church in the world today (chapters 1-14).
2. An eight-hour course on the Apostles' Creed and the role of the Blessed Mother in the Church (chapters 15-22).
3. A four-hour course on Jesus Christ (chapters 5-8).
4. A four-hour course on the Church (chapters 9-12).

There are other possibilities and variations as well, depending on what beliefs need to be stressed or what religious voids need to be filled. For example, we have given a six-week course on chapters 1-12 during Lent—one night a week, two hours a night, with a coffee break between classes. Or you could give a four-hour course on our Lord in one day—covering the humanity and divinity of Jesus in the morning and his Passion and Resurrection in the afternoon—with a break for lunch and a Mass celebrated at the conclusion of the program.

But whatever material and format you choose, few books lend themselves better to an organized and systematic presentation of the Catholic Faith than *Catholicism and Reason*. The text will accomplish a goal stated by Pope John Paul II in

his apostolic exhortation *On Catechesis in Our Time*, that is, to help prepare Catholics "to make a defense to anyone who calls them to account for the hope that is in them" (n. 25).

Catholicism and Reason also lends itself easily to discussion. Specific suggestions for stimulating interest and initiating discussion can be found under the individual chapters. These suggestions, of course, are not all-encompassing, but they should provide some practical ideas for the catechist or group leader.

The chapters contain more than sufficient information for classes of forty-five to sixty minutes. How this time is divided between lecture and discussion depends on the teacher and the students. Some groups are more responsive than others and make the catechist's job easier. Whatever the situation, no catechist should have difficulty preparing an interesting and effective class.

Generally speaking, the suggestions for presenting the material will be helpful whether you are teaching high schoolers or adults, although there are certain topics, questions, and projects that will be more appropriate for one age group than another. The instructor will have to be the judge of that.

In addition to the specific tips on teaching from *Catholicism and Reason*, the following general comments, not necessarily in the order of their importance, may be helpful.

1. *Read the entire book and catechist's manual before you begin teaching.* Not only should you do this to familiarize yourself with the entire course, but you will find material in the latter section of the book that may be useful in presenting the earlier chapters. For example, chapter 16 in the book and the manual should be read in conjunction with chapter 2; and chapter 14 in conjunction with chapter 3. Familiarity with the entire book will also be helpful if you are questioned about a matter that is covered later in the course. You could then answer the question briefly, note that it will be taken up in more detail at another time, and refer the questioner to the appropriate chapter for additional information.

2. *Although the material in Catholicism and Reason can be presented effectively in lecture form, the ideal way to de-*

velop it is through discussion. Students are more likely to remember things if they have had a chance to talk about them, ask questions, and even reason to some of the answers themselves. By discussion, it should be made clear, we do not mean an aimless stream of consciousness where everybody's opinion is equally valid and where nothing is resolved. We mean rather an atmosphere where the teacher teaches and the student learns; where questions, comments, and dialogue are encouraged under the guidance and direction of the instructor; where facts are stated by the catechist if the students do not come up with them; and where the teacher summarizes the matter discussed at the end of the class, answering all questions as well as possible and trying to resolve all doubts.

3. *Instead of merely stating the points to be covered, teachers should seek to draw the information out of the students.* Catechists should be constantly asking questions, making the students think, and inviting them to participate in the class. When you first ask a question, do not direct it to a particular student lest the others in the class assume that they are safe and can stop paying attention. Ask the question first of the entire class and then, if no one volunteers an answer, direct it to a particular person. Do not allow a few students to monopolize the discussion. Try to involve everyone, especially those who seem not to be paying attention. Be careful not to embarrass the shy or reticent student, but try to bring him or her out of their shell. When students ask what you think about some matter, turn the question back to them and ask, "What do you think?" Your goal is to keep all the students involved in the class.

4. *Keep the class interesting and current through the use of stories, anecdotes, and up-to-date items related to the subject matter.* Storytelling is an effective way to make a point, as our Lord proved with his use of parables. Teachers must know the Gospels and can weave stories around the events in the life of Jesus with the assistance of a life of Christ or a biblical commentary. Have the students bring into class pertinent items from newspapers and magazines. Get them in the habit of watching for new papal statements or Church pronouncements, developments in the field of ecumenism, or ex-

amples of the effects of original sin on the world, and you will have a successful class. Remember, however, that media accounts of religious issues are often slanted, out of context, misleading, or just plain wrong. Insist that authentic documents, not some reporter's biased view of a Church teaching, be used to form the basis of any valid discussion.

5. *Define all terms, even if it seems unnecessary.* You should not assume that any religious term is understood correctly, so ask the students what it means and then spell out the definition for them. A Catholic dictionary or encyclopedia, or the glossary section of the *Catholic Almanac*, will be most helpful in providing definitions. Unless the students understand exactly what you are talking about, you will either lose them or misinform them. A good secular dictionary, even though not Catholic, can also provide accurate definitions of religious terms.

And don't be afraid to have the students memorize some of these definitions. As Pope John Paul has said, "A certain memorization of the words of Jesus, of important Bible passages, of the Ten Commandments, of the formulas of profession of the faith, of the liturgical texts, of the essential prayers, of key doctrinal ideas, etc., far from being opposed to the dignity of young Christians, or constituting an obstacle to personal dialogue with the Lord, is a real need. . . . We must be realists. The blossoms, if we may call them that, of faith and piety do not grow in the desert places of a memory-less catechesis" (*On Catechesis in Our Time*, n. 55).

6. *Use the chalkboard and other visual aids as much as possible.* The old saying that one picture is worth a thousand words is still true. The material on the Passion in chapter 7 is very powerful as a story; it can be even more powerful when supplemented by a crown of thorns, a scourge, a crosspiece similar to what Jesus carried, and some railroad spikes. Any maps, films, slides, pictures, etc., that can be used to illustrate a point will add immeasurably to your class. Simply writing things on the board will also make a difference in getting the material across to the students. Do not neglect any tool, particularly videos and games (Hangman, Jeopardy, etc.) that will make your class more informative and interesting.

pecially the Gospels. There are also reference works that the students could use for reports to the class. Have one or two students give a five-minute talk each class. This will prepare them to talk about Christ and the Church just as freely and intelligently as they talk about sports or politics. Speaking of references, there are certain books that are invaluable to teachers and should be a part of their own library. These books include a Bible, a Catholic dictionary, a one-volume Catholic encyclopedia, a Catholic almanac, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a life of Christ, a dictionary of the saints, and a good question-and-answer book, such as *Catholic Replies*.

10. *Encourage daily prayer and frequent reception of the Sacraments.* Take advantage of the numerous reminders throughout the course to mention the necessity of daily prayer, at least weekly Mass and Communion, and at least monthly Confession. Begin and end each class with a prayer, inviting the students to suggest prayers and to lead the class in saying them. A decade of the rosary is a good way to start a class period. The catechist can be an actual grace for the students by inspiring them to do good and avoid evil and always to remain close to Jesus and his Church. Teachers who demonstrate a sincere interest in the well-being of their students, who pray with them and for them, who are available to them after class for any help or advice they may need can have a positive and long-lasting influence on the young people entrusted to them.

Effective catechesis depends upon "the faith, hope, and love of catechists, responding to God's grace by growing in these virtues and ministering to others," said the U.S. Bishops in the concluding paragraph of *Sharing the Light of Faith*. "The person of the catechist is the medium in which the message of the Faith is incarnated. Whether catechists be parents, teachers, religious, priests, bishops, or any other of God's people, their witness to faith plays a pivotal role in catechesis."

11. *For high school religion teachers, acquaint the parents of your students with the course.* There are three things necessary for a successful program—good books, good teachers, and interested parents. We have provided the first requirement and contributed to the second. The third is up to

you. Contact all the parents at the beginning of the religious education year, explain the course to them (you could send them a photocopy of the "The Chain of Faith" on pages 159-161), urge them to send their children to class faithfully, and invite them to visit the classroom or to contact you if they have any questions or suggestions. Some students will tell parents that they don't want to go to class because "we're not learning anything." Parents who know what is being taught to their children will not be swayed by that argument.

12. *It is important for the teacher to realize that the work of helping others to grow and mature in the Christian life is primarily the work of the Holy Spirit.* The catechist, Pope John Paul said, "must be very much aware of acting as a living, pliant instrument of the Holy Spirit. To invoke this Spirit constantly, to be in communion with him, to endeavor to know his authentic inspirations must be the attitude of the teaching Church and of every catechist" (*On Catechesis in Our Time*, n. 72).

"The fundamental tasks of catechists," the Bishops of the United States said in *Sharing the Light of Faith*, "are to proclaim Christ's message, to participate in efforts to develop community, to lead people to worship and prayer, and to motivate them to serve others" (n. 213). In order to be effective teachers, the Bishops said, catechists "must have a solid grasp of Catholic doctrine and worship, familiarity with Scripture, communications skills, the ability to use various methodologies, understanding of how people grow and mature, and of how persons of different ages and circumstances learn" (n. 211).

But perhaps most important, the Bishops said, "the catechist must be fully committed to Jesus Christ. Faith must be shared with conviction, joy, love, enthusiasm, and hope. . . . To give witness to the gospel, the catechist must establish a living, ever-deepening relationship with the Lord. He or she must be a person of prayer, one who frequently reflects on the Scriptures and whose Christlike living testifies to deep faith. Only men and women of faith can share faith with others, preparing the setting within which people can respond in faith to God's grace" (n. 207).

Chapter 2

The Search for God

Purpose: The purpose of this chapter is to show several ways of reasoning to the existence of God.

Tips for Teachers: Begin the class by writing the word "God" on the board and asking the students for whatever words this suggests to them. As the words are called out, write them on the board in three separate columns— those related to God the Father, those related to Jesus, and those related to the Church. There will be some overlapping—words that could go under more than one heading—but generally the columns might look something like this:

<i>God</i>	<i>Jesus Christ</i>	<i>Church</i>
Creator	Savior	People of God
Father	Redeemer	Saints
Old Testament	Sacraments	Pope
Ten Commandments	Passion	Bishops
Prophets	Resurrection	Mass
Religion	New Testament	Miracles

Do not put the headings above each column until you have listed all the words. Then, as you identify each column, explain that the course will cover these three all-important realities—God, Jesus, and the Church—and that in this particular class you will discuss God and whether we can use our reason to show that he really exists.

The remainder of the class should be used to explain the three proofs for the existence of God—historical, uncaused cause, and intelligent design—either by having the catechist outline them or, preferably, by drawing them out of the students through the use of the topics and questions listed below. Teachers are encouraged to use the many examples for each proof that ap-

pear in the chapter, but you should be constantly on the lookout for more current items to support your case. The more outside material that you or your students can bring into class, the more interesting and enjoyable the class will be.

The question of evolution will usually arise or, if not, the teacher should bring it up so that it may be properly defined and the position of the Church may be stated. Do not get bogged down on this theory. Discuss briefly what it means and note that it is only a possible explanation of the origins of the universe, not a scientifically verifiable fact, despite what some textbooks say. Do not attempt to show the weaknesses of the theory unless you are well versed on the subject, but you can encourage students who wish to pursue the subject further to consult some of the books listed below.

While we call the arguments for the existence of God "proofs," they are not overwhelming and irresistible, probably because God expects a certain amount of faith from us. We cannot prove everything about our Faith. There are some things—the Trinity, for example—that remain a mystery; we accept these things on faith and we cannot force others to believe them. So, too, with the arguments for the existence of God. The catechist's task is to present these "proofs" in a reasonable and convincing way and then leave it up to the Holy Spirit to give a person the faith to accept them.

The material on Adam and Eve in chapter 16 (both in the text and in the manual) should be consulted in preparation for this class since the students usually ask about the Genesis account of creation.

Topics for Discussion:

1. What are some examples of atheism in the world today?
2. Is there a conflict between science and religion?
3. Which proof would you choose to show the existence of God to a non-believer?
4. Give some examples of design and order in the universe.

Some Questions and Answers:

1. Can a person truly be an atheist?

A. It seems unlikely. Those who most vociferously pro-

claim their atheism cast doubt on their own credibility. For why would anyone be so adamant in arguing against something they insist does not even exist? Why wouldn't a person who says there is no God be content to let others believe what they want? Perhaps those who call themselves atheists rant and rave against belief in God because, deep down, they realize how far out of step they are with the evidence of their own senses. Of far greater concern than this tiny minority of intellectual atheists are the millions of practical atheists—those who say that they believe in God but who live as if God did not exist.

2. Some scientists contend that the universe is the product of pure chance. How would you answer them?

A. To say that the universe happened by chance makes as much sense as saying that the presidential figures on Mount Rushmore were carved out by the wind and rain. Or that a computer resulted when thousands of pieces of wood and metal, plastic and rubber were thrown haphazardly into the air and came down perfectly assembled. If the universe were the result of blind chance, how is it that the astronauts can plan their space flights with such precision and accuracy? Or that astronomers can predict to the minute an eclipse due a century from now? It makes much more sense to accept a universe with an intention and with someone to guide its development, but these scientists have already made up their minds, and they refuse to acknowledge any facts that would contradict their faulty premise.

3. Is evolution a demonstrable scientific fact?

A. No, evolution is a possible theory that attempts to show that human beings evolved from lower forms of life. But no one has ever found the "missing link"—that combination of animal and human that would establish a definite link between the two species. And, as indicated in some of the books listed below, there is a growing body of material that casts further doubt on the evolutionary hypothesis. But even if the evolution of the world from pre-existing and living matter should ever be proved, there would still be the need for a prime mover or first cause who started the world in motion and planned its

development that way. While Catholics could accept an evolutionary theory that had God at the beginning, they could never accept the concept of atheistic evolution, which denies the existence of a first cause and says that everything evolved by chance from nothing.

Projects:

1. Trace your family tree back as far as you can.
2. Read either the Denton or Johnson books mentioned below and list three problems with the theory of evolution.
3. Read the Genesis account of creation and write a newspaper story describing the temptation of Adam and Eve by Satan as if you were a reporter assigned to cover the story.

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