

By FRANK MORRISS

I'll be happy if I'm proved wrong, but I don't expect much of true substance to result from an evaluation of religion texts being carried on by the U.S. Catholic Conference Department of Education. I base my pessimism on the limitations imposed upon itself by the committee doing the evaluating — namely, a decision to consider the books only from the point of view of their educational effectiveness.



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The committee will study only texts bearing an imprimatur and will accept such as a kind of Good Housekeeping seal of approval for these catechisms' orthodoxy. Unfortunately, that is letting the imprimatur take the buck which should be this committee's, or some committee's.

The bishops whose names are attached to these imprimaturs would certainly be the first to insist that their seals do not, like a federal inspection stamp on a side of beef, guarantee that the texts are doctrinally wholesome, but only that they contained nothing perceivable to their delegated censors as contrary to faith or morals.

About the only thing likely to deny a book an imprimatur from somewhere would be outright and specific denial of some article of faith, or, as in the case of the Dutch catechism before its revision, a statement from the Vatican that there were in fact errors to be corrected.

SOME YEARS AGO I wrote a review of the scandalous book by Fr. Charles E. Curran that brought him the notoriety which earned him a seemingly irremovable spot at the Catholic University. I mentioned the fact of the book's imprimatur, which brought a rebuke from the bishop involved, who protested that this made it appear that he in fact approved of this book.

I had mentioned the imprimatur to be fair to Father Curran, to acknowledge that the book could not be said to be openly heretical. The bishop was actually right — he was standing on the fact that the imprimatur does not mean a book is good, that it is not harmful to the faith of its readers, that it is wholesomely orthodox.

While there may be many bishops, to their credit, who would withhold their seals from a merely questionable book, still there are enough options open to an author and publisher to allow them to get an imprimatur somewhere. It is, as I say, only rare cases in which there would be nowhere to turn in order to get the seal.

What parents are looking for is an investigation that will determine whether most of the texts being used today do in

fact teach their children the truths of the faith—whole, entire, and without adulteration.

The texts can be as educationally effective as anyone would want, but if what they are teaching is not the faith of the one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church then these texts are worse than useless — they are positively dangerous. Parents want to know if their children are being given a stone in the place of the sustaining bread of Catholic truth.

In this regard, what is omitted from the texts can be just as significant as what is included. If for example the fact of sin and eternal punishment is all but ignored — as they certainly are in some of the texts — then the child is being misled rather than taught the faith.

Just as dangerous are some of the philosophic and psychological prejudices behind these texts. Lectures, for example, promoting the *Come to the Father* series are heavily biased toward the existential understanding of learning as opposed to the conceptual. This psychology borders on denying the fact that a child is a rational animal, capable of ideas and understanding.

When teachers and parents are told by the *Come to the Father* lecturer, "Today, we are materialists to a great extent, and again this is good. The secular world is here to stay: the secular city is our way of existence. One of the Protestant theologians at the University of Chicago knew creation as

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metropolis, the secular city as God's new creation. Some of you are familiar with Harvey Cox on this."

WHEN SUCH THINGS are said with apparent approval, Catholics should immediately be on the alert. For this type of orientation, as popular as it is and as imprimated as it may be, is still extremely dangerous to faith. It is dangerous because it is biased not only against man's true nature but against some of the basic implications of Christianity.

I very much suspect that the textbook evaluation will not

adequately investigate such matters. For one reason, it is likely that at least some of the evaluators share the prejudices of the new textbooks, and therefore cannot be expected to view them objectively.

The feeling of many Catholics that something is wrong with these texts is a proper feeling in most cases. The difficulty is for the ordinary person to determine and state just what is behind that feeling.

We are all swimming in the strong tide of existentialism and like Alice swimming in her own tears, we cannot exactly identify all of the peculiar creatures that are showing up. Alice never did know until she returned to the real world.

Our trouble is that too many whose job it is to tell us and our children about reality are living in the existential nightmare. That is their real world, and only by becoming existentialists ourselves could we swim with them.

To awaken is to drown; but to remain asleep is never to escape the nightmare. Somehow we must get ourselves and our children to shore.