

A SHORT CATECHISM BY JOHN OF FANO

The rich experience of popular preaching on the part of John of Fano, which was already well developed before he chose the Capuchin Reform, had convinced the ardent friar from the Marches that the reform of conduct would be strengthened by a serious formation and knowledge of Christian doctrine. His attention to abandoned and begging children, of which there were many in the city at the time, was not only an expression of alert social and charitable apostolate, a requirement of and commitment to simple and practical catechesis.

As we do not possess the Lenten sermons, which he carefully prepared for printing, we have at least a small echo of his busy catechesis in the last pages of his *Devout Little Work called The Art of Union* written for "spiritual and devout seculars" as well as religious. It is a chaplet which brings together an outline of the essential elements "for being a good Christian", that is God's Commandments and the commandments of the Church, the Creed, the seven capital sins with their implications, the theological and cardinal virtues, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the sins against the Spirit, the bodily senses, penitence through works of mercy, the seven Sacraments and the Gospel Beatitudes.

It is a dry, exact, short list, to assist memory, thus only aimed at recall, since it was not necessary, following rich instruction in the ascetical and mystical life, to add further comment or explanation. Its purpose, even though not expressed, was to lead to a real review of life, an examination of conscience, flows into a personal and sacramental celebration of reconciliation, that then becomes the substance of the penitential catechesis implemented from the beginning by the Capuchin Friars in their preaching to the people, which was aimed at preparing the faithful to receive the Sacraments of reconciliation and Eucharist.

*To Be A Good Christian*¹

41 The Lord says: "If you wish to enter into life eternal, keep the commandments"² Whoever observes the commandments of the law well and those of the Church, and knows the articles of faith, will save themselves.

The Ten Commandments. - Do not adore anyone but God alone. Do not speak his name in vane. Observe the prescribed feasts. Honour your father and mother. Do not kill. Do not commit fornication. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Do not desire your neighbour's wife. Do not desire your neighbour's property.

The Commandments of the Church. - To go to Confession and Communion once a year. To hear Mass on the prescribed feasts. To fast in Lent and on other vigils prescribed by the Church. To pay tithes. Know the Our Father and the Creed. Fathers and mothers are obliged to teach these to their children,³

¹ This is the original title, which was given however only at the beginning of the work in the "Table" of chapters, f. 4r n.n.

² Matt 19:17.

³ This is a pastoral practice very evident in the Catechism by Anthony Pinerolo. Cf *I Frati Cappuccini* III/2 n 6790 ff.

and if they do not know them then the sponsors should teach them.¹ It is a custom to recite the *Hail Mary* and it engenders great devotion.

The Articles of Faith - "I believe in God the Father ", [etc]²

51 *The seven capital sins* - Pride, envy, avarice, anger, sloth, gluttony, lust.

Kinds of pride: Thinking that the good which comes to you comes from yourself; thinking that the good which comes to you from God comes because of your own merits; when you praise yourself for graces which you do not have, and particularly when you despise others.

The children of pride: Ambition, presumption, arrogance, stubbornness, curiosity, ingratitude, rash judgement, derision, tempting God and adulation.

The children of envy: Hatred, murmuring, detraction, rejoicing over the misfortune of your neighbour, being sad about his prosperity.

The children of avarice: Theft, rapine, fraud, deceit, usury, simony, unjust profits and this is the root of all evil.

The children of anger: Contentiousness, ferment of the mind, contumely, clamor, indignation, blasphemy.

The children of sloth: faint-heartedness, despair, wasting time, laziness, illicit wandering of the mind, regarding spiritual gifts as a nuisance.

The children of gluttony: Drunkenness, confusion of mind, unbecoming jollity, talking too much, scurrility, foulness.

The children of lust: Simple fornication, adultery, incest, rape, abduction, sins against nature.³

61 *The three theological virtues* - Faith, hope and charity.

The four cardinal virtues - Justice, temperance, prudence and fortitude.

The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit - Wisdom, Understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord.

The kinds of sin against the Holy Spirit. - Envy of the grace received by one's brother, obstructing the truth, despair, presumption, obstinacy and final impenitence.

The senses of the body. - Sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch.

The three parts of repentance. - Contrition, confession, satisfaction.

The three parts of sanctification. - Prayer, fasting, alms giving.

¹ That is the sponsors from Baptism.

² There follows the traditional Latin text of the Creed.

³ These lists of vices and virtues should be seen as a point of reference in the struggle of the spiritual life to achieve the purpose of human existence, which is union with God. However, they also serve as an examination of conscience in view of Confession.

71 *The spiritual works of mercy.* - Advising one in doubt. Instructing the ignorant. Correcting one in error. Forgiving injury. Consoling those in difficulties. Enduring wrongs impatiently. Praying for friends and enemies.

The corporal works of mercy. - Feeding the hungry. Giving drink to the thirsty. Clothing the naked. Visiting the sick. Visiting those in prison. Giving shelter to the homeless. Burying the dead.

The seven Sacrament of the Church. - Baptism, Confirmation, Confession, Communion, Holy Orders, Matrimony, Holy Anointing.

The eight Beatitudes. - Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed the merciful. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are those who hunger and thirsty after justice. Blessed are those who are persecuted for justice sake.¹

¹ Compare how this list is used for the examination of conscience in other Capuchin catechisms, for example, in the anonymous one published in 1552, entitled *Breve modo* etc. Cf. *I Frati Cappuccini*, III/2, nn 6904-6911.