

mistakes, need not try to whitewash the Galileo affair, for instance, but there is equal need to speak out where insight and vision have been shown.

There are many other particular questions which I have not touched on in this paper; the general lines on which they may be tackled should be clear. All I would plead is that these issues should be freely raised and freely discussed at school, whether in the sixth form or before. There can be nothing more dangerous than to send boys out into the world ignorant that difficulties exist, unless it is sending them out armed with the snap answers of a text-book. Let them realize that the difficulties are genuine ones, and that a lifetime of thought may be insufficient to resolve them fully. Let them see that the Church does not merely admit, she insists that scientific knowledge has its proper place under the providence of God, and that a true faith not only need not fear the discoveries of modern science, but can welcome them as it always has and always will welcome knowledge that is true.



## THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

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**T**HE whole man must be the holy man, the deprivations of evil made good, the darkness of sin enlightened, the faculties and powers of mind and body integrated and controlled by the will, the whole fired by the flame of charity. This is God's will for each of us, the work which never ceases and at which we must hammer day by day. Everyone concerned with the religious education of children must have these considerations in mind. But who are they? All too often the phrase is taken in the narrow sense of the school teacher, or the priest who teaches the catechism class. 'They' will prepare him for his first Confession, his first Holy Communion, and in due time for Confirmation. The responsibility is 'theirs'. There are signs that this attitude is beginning to change, but do we as teachers realize

sufficiently the delicate balance between the contributions of home, church and school?

The primary responsibility of bringing up the child belongs to the parents, and just as in the home he will take his first steps and learn his first words, so there too will he gain his first glimpses of the supernatural. Later on the parents will delegate some of their responsibilities to specialists in various fields, but all subsequent impressions will be built on the foundations laid at home.

Let us look carefully then and see what aspect of God can best be shown here: what can be learnt at home more perfectly than anywhere else? The obvious and natural answer to that question is love. The child's very existence is an earnest of the parents' love for each other, and shadows the love of the Trinity. His early world is made secure by love, and as he accepts the love of the parents for each other and for him, so he will accept, learn of them and imitate their love of God. Doctrinal instruction can come later, the mysteries of Faith will be gradually unfolded, but at first his faith will be implicit: while he cannot love what he does not know, he will imitate the example his parents give him; as yet he may be incapable of moral actions, but his parents must 'be good for him' in all the possible interpretations of that phrase. He will learn that love of God is expressed in prayer which refers every thought and action to him; that the fire of charity on the hearth will welcome and warm neighbour and stranger alike; his father's loving protection and labour to provide for his family's material needs should move him to apprehend the idea of God's Fatherhood. And the mother? She perhaps plays the most important part in the early stages of the child's spiritual development: so many hours of every day are spent with her alone; what will the child imbibe from her? Ideally it will be the unpossessiveness of love that he will learn from her. Her love for him will not express itself in clinging tightly to him, but will content itself in providing the secure comforting background of home from which she will encourage him to make his own ventures into the outside world.

The second factor in the child's religious development is the church. How largely this figures will depend partly on the physical distance between church and home, but the sphere of influence will in general be that of the formal life of the Church. Here in the persons of his parish clergy the child will meet

ecclesiastical authority: an authority which binds his parents as well as himself. Through the formal worship of the liturgy he will learn to take part in the drama of the seasonal cycle, and imitating his parents' example, he will acquire that sense of loving reverence which makes God's house a home to the true Christian.

The third element to be taken into consideration is the school. To some it may appear the largest and the most important. Certainly in most cases the bulk of formal doctrinal instruction falls upon the teachers, but nevertheless it is vitally important to remember that the school is only one factor, the ultimate responsibility is still the parents', and for the child to receive a full and real religious education all the factors in his life must work together making one harmonious whole.

Having established that the water-tight compartment attitude is unreal, let us examine that part of the work which falls especially to the teacher. Given that the parents have provided that foundation of love of God, it is his first duty to give teaching which will enable the child to progress in the knowledge of doctrine at the same speed as he does in other subjects. All too many of the tragedies of lapsed Catholics, particularly among the more intelligent ones, are the results of a lopsided development.

But this doctrine must not remain a matter of purely notional assent. Any bright schoolboy can learn the facts of faith, but so long as they remain mere intellectual propositions, that faith is dead and useless. In other words, the teacher's problem is that while he is teaching doctrine as a subject, it must at no time be regarded as such, and it is for this reason that to put it on to the same footing as mathematics or English grammar, by setting examinations or awarding prizes for it, is so strongly to be deprecated. The matter of faith must be enlivened by charity, the facts must be translated into doing, into a way of life. Above all the teacher must help his pupils to have a thoughtful and critical approach to all the circumstances of daily life.

This all sounds very fine, but how is it to be done? At the level of formal instruction it always seems that the doctrine lesson is the home of the red herring. Many teachers will agree that some of their most exciting theological discussions have started in this way. Young children are very spiritual-minded. They find it quite simple to accept abstract propositions about God. Their

questions will be diverse, but once they know that they can say anything, ask any question and have it seriously considered, we have gone a long way towards helping them to build up a Christian attitude to life. The child has no terms in which to discuss these things, his vocabulary is a long way behind the probings of his mind, and his questions will often be badly expressed, his very ideas, to our conservative minds, may be irreverent or even shocking. But he must never see this or he may well lock up his thoughts and questings within himself. With some children it is almost a test of the teacher's genuineness to try to shock or startle him by some crudely expressed idea. Nonetheless the child really wants to know, and the teacher must take his question, deal with it seriously and thoughtfully, and at the same time, by his answer, give the child the verbal terms he requires.

It might be said to be a principle that no red herring should ever be neglected. It is occasionally necessary if one crops up in the middle of some rather closely-knit piece of argument or explanation to ask for it to be held over till the end, but as a rule they should never be dismissed. The amount of incidental teaching arising from the apparently irrelevant question is enormous, and as every explanation brings a fresh batch of questions in its train, the whole body of doctrine is continually being revised, looked at from a new angle, shown to be related in fresh ways, and above all newly applied to everyday situations.

Is this then to advocate the teaching of doctrine with no syllabus, to suggest that the ground covered should entirely follow upon the whim of the children? No, the scheme should be there, but it should be essentially fluid, not rigid: we know that the children will learn and remember best what arises from their own interests; if we are teaching truth at all times, what can it matter if we are side-tracked to talk about the action of the Holy Ghost in Confirmation, when we had intended to talk about the Offertory of the Mass? The whole structure is so tightly-knit that we cannot isolate one aspect of God's truth from the whole.

But doctrine and liturgy divorced from Scripture is like a plant with no roots, and this does not mean, as it so often has in the past, the Gospels only. There is no doubt that this approach can be used with success, if references to the Old Testament be tracked down and studied, but one often finds, even among otherwise well-educated Catholics, an appalling ignorance of the Scriptures

outside the four Gospels. An instance of this occurred quite recently: a young teacher, a Catholic, though not Catholic trained, but who had taken and passed the requisite certificate for teaching religious doctrine, was asked by her headmistress to tell her class the story of St Paul's conversion. After some hesitation, she asked if there was a book which contained the story, and was quite surprised to find that it was to be found in the Bible. We cannot appreciate the fulfilling of the Old Testament in the New unless we first lay good foundations by a study of the histories and prophecies: God's teaching to his people did not begin with the Annunciation nor end with his Ascension. The prayers of the Mass and the Sacraments are so close-packed with the types taken from the Old Testament that they can provide a never-ending source of light upon these mysteries. Much of the symbolism of the Sacraments is made clear in the Old Testament references, while a study of the sacrifices of the Old Law is essential to the understanding of the sacrifice of the Mass. Therefore when planning our religious syllabus let us look first to the Scriptures.

From about eight years old children can listen intelligently to the actual text of the Bible. Many teachers find that for classroom reading the Knox translation is the ideal one. It can be read almost unexpurgated, with occasional additions and parenthetical explanations, and a two- or three-year course will familiarize children with the persons and events of most of the historical books. Particularly in the junior years they thoroughly enjoy the vivid uncompromising stories of the patriarchs. The style of story-telling, with the Hebrews' love of repetition, finds an echo in their own experience. With many classes it becomes a favourite lesson, and one child always greeted the appearance of the large red Knox version with, 'Hurray, Holy Bible!' At the latter end of such a course they will have a sufficient grasp of the historical framework to be ready to accept selections from some of the prophets. These, especially the more specifically Messianic ones, will also serve to make a clear link with the New Testament.

Of course this is not to imply that the New Testament will be entirely disregarded during these years. The Church has provided for continual instruction in our Lord's life, death and resurrection through the liturgical cycle of seasons and feasts. If we follow the sequence of the Church's year there will be no serious gaps in the

pattern of our instruction, while as the seasons come round again and again we can draw on the children's deepening knowledge of Scripture and show in ever more detail the relationship between the various sections of the Bible.

If the school is fortunate enough to be able to join together in a weekly community Mass, the connection between what goes on in church and what is learnt in school can be shown very clearly. For very young children this can start with a study of the church itself. With the permission of the priest the children can examine the altar stone and the furnishings of the altar. They love to learn about the things used for Mass: the cloths on the altar itself, the cruets, the ciborium and chalice, while a study of the vestments and the liturgical colours is of great assistance in learning about the seasons and feasts.

The Mass is the great act around which all our instruction inevitably centres, and in which all our various threads of Scripture, doctrine and devotion are intermingled. We should be always on the look-out to find new methods of approach to help the children to participate as fully as they can. At first it will be enough to encourage them to watch out for the three important praying points, the Offertory, the Consecration and the Communion. If they can be helped to recognize these climaxes, and to grasp their significance, they will have made an important step towards understanding the Mass. From eight or nine years of age there is little doubt but that the ideal method of assisting at Mass is to make it a dialogue between priest and congregation. It should be remembered from the outset that as human beings, body and soul, we should use our whole selves in worship, so that our dialogue Mass should not be merely a matter of words but also of actions. When the priest turns round and says to us 'Dominus vobiscum', instead of ignoring him as does the ordinary congregation, we should stand up joyfully to say 'Et cum spiritu tuo'; we should remain standing during the collects, until we sit down to hear the reading of the Epistle.

Where there has been no tradition of dialogue Mass the responses can be learnt gradually: 'Amen' and 'Et cum spiritu tuo' will soon be acquired, nor will it take long to add the responses before the Preface, the 'Domine non sum dignus' and the 'Agnus Dei'. Longer prayers like the Confiteor and the Misereatur may take longer to reach perfection, but they will

come in time, while the Gloria and the Credo might well be sung whenever they occur. A simple setting of the Gloria such as the Ambrosian is easy to learn, and can be sung well by most children.

Once they have learnt the framework of the Mass by dialoguing they will find it comparatively simple to begin to use a missal. There are now a number of good junior and children's missals published quite inexpensively, and with a little guiding children can usually be encouraged to prefer these to the less useful and practical mother-of-pearl-backed book which too often appears as a present.

The sacraments, too, will provide material for lively study. A close consideration of the text of the prayers for their administration will awaken great interest. Here the Church explains by words and shows by signs the especial meaning of each one: the Scriptural images throw new light on to each sacrament, and the prayers will open our eyes to the multitude of special graces conferred in each instance.

A fitting climax to the study of each sacrament is to act it, using the prescribed prayers in English translation (and in the longer ceremonies cutting them down to the essentials) with the teacher taking the place of the priest and giving an occasional word of explanation or reminder. If the preparatory work has been thoroughly done there will be no lack of interest, and all can take part, some as the principal actors, and where these are not many the rest of the class can be the congregation and join in the responses.

Some sacraments obviously lend themselves more easily than others to this dramatic form, and Holy Orders in particular can be most exciting if all are candidates for one or other of the minor or major orders. Penance, on the other hand, is much more difficult, but it can be treated in more symbolic style, by dramatizing the Confiteor: our Lady and the saints, who during the first part of the prayer are the accusers, finally become suppliants for the penitent. It is typical of the clear thinking of children that there is never any doubt in their minds as to the reality of the sacraments thus acted.

Besides these studies, it is often helpful to encourage the children to create as it were their own liturgy within the framework of the liturgical cycle. Thus in May or October special attention may be paid to the Rosary. The mysteries should be



studied in Scripture, and their implications in our own lives can be discussed. Some visible record may be made: each child can make a rosary book, or a large wall chart can be a piece of co-operative work.

Getting ready for Christmas might include the preparation of some of the Messianic prophecies, perhaps for a service of lessons and carols. These can be most effectively learnt and spoken by different groups of children, instead of being read by solo voices, and these words, first studied in their context and then learnt by heart, will remain for ever something real and familiar to all of them.

During Lent a profitable study of our Lord's passion can be made through the making of a mime of the Stations of the Cross. The actual doing of each station and the discussions arising from it can help the children to have a very real insight into the meaning of Passiontide. Older children will enjoy doing a dramatic reading of the passion from one of the Gospels, after the manner of the solemn singing of the passion in Holy Week. Three good readers can take the parts of narrator, Christus and other solo voices, while the rest of the class will thoroughly enjoy itself as the crowd shouting 'Barabbas!', and 'Crucify him!'

Rogation processions provided the inspiration for some interesting work by one class of children. They made their own version of the Litany of the Saints, using all their own patrons, and those of their families. This was sung in an informal 'domestic' procession round their school gardens. Arising out of enquiries about their patron saints, they then embarked upon research work upon their own names. Each child wrote and illustrated her own saint book, containing the lives of her baptismal and confirmation patrons. When they found that this work could be called hagiography it became even more popular.

No mention has so far been made of the Catechism, a subject on which there is so much division of opinion. Surely its real value is as a revision notebook, a summing up of the facts *after* they have been approached from the realistic angle. What is quite illogical is to use the Catechism answer with its unfamiliar terminology as a jumping-off point, for it is then far too easy for the whole thing to remain in the realm of ideas unassociated with everyday life. While there is no doubt that the definition learnt by heart may prove a useful guide line to prevent one wandering



off into heresy, it is by itself a meagre substitute for the glimpse we should try to give our children of that vision which 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard: neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him'. (I Cor. 2, 9).



### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

DEAR FATHER EDITOR,

I am indeed sorry if anything that I wrote on the subject of prayer for unity should have given Fr Victor White, and perhaps others, the impression that Anglicans and Free Churchmen were organizing a Week of Prayer which would 'positively exclude . . . the intentions of the Octave approved by the Holy See'. I am sure that nothing is further from the intentions and desires of those who take part in promoting the Week of Prayer in this country. Indeed, the fact that both the organizers of the Octave and the Catholic Missionary Society are represented on the Advisory Conference for the Week of Prayer would seem to guarantee this.

I think one cause of misunderstanding may have been that I did not make it sufficiently clear that the subject of my article was prayer for unity among Anglicans and Free Churchmen in this country. So that when I remarked that the Octave 'is not now widely observed', I meant of course among Anglicans; and when I wrote of 'the restrictions of outlook' which marked the original observance of the Church Unity Octave, I wrote as an Anglican about a devotion which was originally started by Anglicans. From that point of view, I am sure that Fr Victor White would agree that the first formulation of the idea was distinctly limited. It could only appeal to those Anglicans who, while remaining in the Church of England, accept the full claims of the Papacy.

Whether or not there was anything radically new in the Abbé Couturier's vision, I do not presume to judge. It seems to me that, like many great discoveries, it revealed to us something which was implicit in what had gone before, but had not yet become articulate. But one thing is certain, and that is that through him God has given us a way of praying for unity which is being faithfully followed by Christians of every denomination. The breadth of his contacts, and the lasting impression which he has made both during and since his life-time, seem to justify one