

people could get there; but more than this; it is because modern technology is practically universal, that Japanese earthquake experts and French architects and manufacturers of prefabricated houses from goodness knows where *can* meet in a Yugoslav city without making it into another Tower of Babel. Can we hope too that the spirit in which work of this kind is done is just as much a sign of the times as is the technology which makes it possible? If so, there is ground for hope here that no political cynicism should be allowed to extinguish.

Perhaps the human family is really struggling through the smoke and dust of two world wars and the cold war to a new degree of self-awareness. Christians at least must work as hard as they can for this end, without ceasing to pray:

'Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven'.

## Religious Instruction: An Experiment

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The purpose of this article is to describe a course of religious instruction I have been trying out with boys from seven to twelve years old who attend non-catholic schools, and who visit me once a week. It seemed worth while to make it more widely known in this way, in case others might like to make use of it in some way, or at least to suggest ways of improving it.

One cannot teach many things in a mere thirty three-quarter-hour classes; what is taught one week is often forgotten the next. So the purpose of this course is to try to give some idea of what it means to be a Christian. To make it as vivid and concrete as possible I dramatise it, placing it in a setting in which the Christian faith appears as something new and wonderful. The setting is as imaginary one, but contains elements of the early Church in the Roman persecutions, the contemporary Church in some pagan parts of the world, with reference to the

actual position in England. I tell stories of martyrs ancient and contemporary, and we have some fun evoking the underground existence of the Christians.<sup>1</sup> The boys actually start off as persecutors, like Saul, but filled with admiration for the courage of the martyrs, and being in astonishment at the beauty of their teaching, they begin to feel the stirring of something strange inside. (One or two classes)

At some point they decide to make enquiries about the Christian faith, and seek out one who is preaching boldly and fearlessly in the market-place. They talk with him for some time, and learn more about the teachings and miracles of the founder. When the Christians are sure of the good motives of the enquirers, they take them to their meetings in the upper rooms of large houses. We now spend some time evoking the scene (with the occasional use of pictures, though I prefer to do without).<sup>2</sup> One night the persecutors are taken to the amphitheatre to see the Christians collecting the mangled remains of their relatives and friends, and follow to watch the burial in dark underground tunnels. (They are blindfolded part of the way to make sure that they cannot find the entrance by themselves). But on all occasions at a certain point in the proceedings the persecutors are asked to leave, as the mysteries which are about to be celebrated are only for those who have been initiated.<sup>3</sup> Naturally they want to be initiated, and become probationers. (One class).

The sponsors who have been appointed to look after the probationers now tell them some of the principal stories of the Old Testament, special attention being paid to those which later on will be used to explain the meaning of the baptismal ceremonies, such as the flood and the crossing of the Red Sea, or of the eucharist, such as the manna. (Fortunately my pupils already know most of these stories, but this section would necessarily be longer in other cases). The probationers also learn what Christians mean by a good life, and the sponsors are

<sup>1</sup>Stories of child martyrs are particularly appealing. I suggest the story of St Tarcisus (August 15th) and of Sts William of Norwich (March 24th) and Hugh of Lincoln (August 27th), (the latter two being shorn of the idea of Jewish ritual sacrifices). The story of St Hugh is told delightfully in Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*. And brief summaries of all three are given on the relevant dates in *Butler's Lives of the saints*.

<sup>2</sup>For a good book on the early Christian background see Michael Gough, *The Early Christians* London, 1961.

<sup>3</sup>Most children are acquainted with the idea, if not the word, of initiation since they have their own rites of initiation into gangs etc. So the idea of Christian initiation is particularly appealing to them.

supposed to see that they try to carry it out. The references in this part of the course are entirely to the child's own experience at school, at home, in the streets and playgrounds; and to the situations which he might encounter in the near future. The teacher naturally plays the part of the sponsor, as he played the part of the preacher, but after a time the children can be asked to take his place, in order to revise and test how much has been learned. (One, or at most two classes are given to this part, as the subject is constantly brought up later on).

When the probationers have learned a little of God's saving plan for mankind, and have shown willingness and ability to lead the Christian life, they are taken to see the bishop and are enrolled as catechumens, their names being inscribed in a large book which is compared to the book of life. Then follow, spread over a period of about seven weeks, all the preparatory rites for the sacrament of baptism. For the sake of the dramatic form of presentation we use the pontifical rite for the baptism of adults, which closely resembles the form these ceremonies took in the eighth and ninth centuries, and indeed contains a great deal that goes back to much earlier periods. I have translated the text freely into modern and simple English, but some people might prefer to follow the analysis and translation of the simpler rite, used for babies, as given in some such book as Gerald Ellard's *Christian Life and Worship*.<sup>4</sup> For the explanations of these rites I use patristic sources, especially the catechetical lectures of St Cyril of Jerusalem and St Ambrose,<sup>5</sup> but some teachers might find it preferable to use the summary of the teachings of these fathers in *The Bible and the Liturgy* by Jean Daniélou.<sup>6</sup> The rites with their symbolic gestures, and the imagery used in the texts and explanations I find are readily understood by children of this age-group (seven to twelve). In fact, I find that they can use symbols and symbolic gestures almost as easily as language. They use them in their play quite frequently, and often without verbal explanations. They can readily be taught to mime things. It is an efficient form of psychotherapy to allow children to play out emotional difficulties, expressing in symbols what they cannot in words. For a very interesting treatment of this subject

<sup>4</sup>Ellard: *Christian Life and Worship* New York, Bruce Publishing Co. 1934. (Easily obtainable in England)

<sup>5</sup>Cyril of Jerusalem: *Catechetical lectures*, Library of Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers New series Vol. 7. Six of the twenty-three are edited separately by F. L. Cross: *St Cyril of Jerusalem's Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*. London, S.P.C.K. 1951.

<sup>6</sup>J. Daniélou; *The Bible and the Liturgy*. Originally published in America 1956, but I think it is now obtainable here.

I would refer the reader to Mrs Eve Lewis's *Children and their Religion*.<sup>7</sup>

The more intelligent boys are quick to offer an explanation of symbols and symbolic gestures. For example: having talked at length on the uses of salt as a preservative of meat, as a savour for food, and as a means of cleaning and closing wounds, I asked what was happening when the bishop put salt on the catechumens. Among the replies I received were the following:— 'He is cleaning up the wounds made by sin'; 'He is preserving us from going bad by committing sin again'; 'He is making us taste nice' (— 'to God'—as an afterthought). I do not know whether this is a sign that symbols are no longer absolutely necessary for the instruction of these boys, and whether they would just as well understand the meaning of 'becoming a Christian' in non-symbolic ways, but I am sure that a lot would be lost by doing away with them. The less intelligent, who cannot explain symbols, can, I think, understand at least some of them. The reason I say this is that their interest is obvious and continuous, and I doubt that this would be so if they did not understand.

The exorcisms and renunciations of the devil we carry out with great seriousness. The children on the whole prefer Latin as a mysterious language for the exorcisms, but are amused by my translation of *exi ab eo spiritus immunde* as 'get out of him you filthy devil'—I think that this is nearer the original than 'go out of him thou unclean spirit'. (Some people might prefer to take the line that if one wants to adapt one's teaching to the mentalities of the children one should go all the way with them in this matter, and let them pretend that the Latin words are sort of abracadabra words which are effective in casting out devils. This, however, seems to me to be dangerous, because when they cast off their semi-belief in magical words later on, they may also lose their belief in exorcisms). For the renunciation of the devil they turn to the west, the land of the setting sun, of darkness and sin, and say 'I cast you off, Satan, and all your works of darkness'. Then they turn to the east, the land of the rising sun, of light, and from which the Lord will come in glory. They kneel on one knee with outstretched arms and say: 'I greet you, Christ, with all your works of light'. Sometimes I get them to spit towards the west, a practice apparently not uncommon in some ancient rites.

When it comes to reciting the creed and the Lord's Prayer, I use the old rite of the eighth century.<sup>8</sup> We have the procession of the four

<sup>7</sup>Eve Lewis: *Children and their Religion*. Sheed and Ward Stagbooks. Particularly Part one, and chapters 7 and 8.

<sup>8</sup>I. Schuster: *The Sacramentary* Vol. 2 pp. 122-134. Burns Oates 1925.

deacons carrying the four gospel books which they place on the altar. Then each of the deacons reads the first chapter of his gospel, and after each the bishop explains a little about the evangelist and his work. This is the first time the catechumen has actually been able to see the gospels, as the books were carefully treasured and guarded during the times of persecutions lest they should be desecrated. After the 'handing over' of the gospels, there follows the handing over of the creed. The bishop explains briefly each of the articles of the Apostles' Creed, the catechumen learns it by heart and 'hands it back' by reciting it the following week. (I only spend one class on the creed, as we constantly refer to it in later classes). Then the Lord's Prayer is handed over and handed back in the same way. We read the part of the gospel in which our Lord speaks about prayer and teaches the apostles the Our Father, and talk for some time about prayer. At this stage we only consider the form of prayer taught by our Lord, namely prayer to the Father, as this is the form most readily understood and used by children. They very quickly pick up the idea of the mediation of prayer by Jesus.

We now begin to prepare for the sacrament of baptism itself. Taking an idea from Austin Farrer<sup>9</sup> we discuss three types of miracle worked by our Lord. First those which are works of *cleansing*, such as leprosy, and we make reference also to the story we read earlier of the cleansing of Naaman. The cleansing from leprosy is only a sign of the cleansing from sin, and we do not consider it simply as a wonderful happening. The second type of miracle are those which are works of *restoring* dead people or limbs to life, with reference to the miracles of Elijah and Elisha, interpreted in the same way—as signs of our restoration to the life of friendship with God. And finally there are the miracles of *exorcism*. We consider also how the bishop in the preparatory rites imitates all these actions of Christ. For example, when he signs the catechumens' ears and eyes he is imitating the action of our Lord in curing blind and deaf people. We cannot see the miracle, but believing that the miracle was worked as a sign, we believe that the bishop's signs also effect what they show. (It is natural for children to look upon our Lord as a Superman and not much more. A certain effort is required to get them to consider the meaning behind the miracles).

Then we study the last days and death of Christ, with reference again to the Old Testament types and prophecies; for example the last supper is referred back to the feeding of the five thousand, and through that to the manna in the wilderness, both considered less as miracles than as

<sup>9</sup>Austin Farrer: *The Gospel of Mark*. London, 1951.

signs of the eucharist. We do all this study in the liturgical context of Holy Week. After all this, which may take four or five classes, we study the preparatory rites for the sacraments of initiation. First the consecration of the holy Oils on Maundy Thursday, which impresses with its grandeur and solemnity the tremendous event which takes place when the newly baptised are anointed with oil. The blessing of baptismal water is re-enacted in the same way.

We now imagine it is Easter night. The catechumens come in and are baptised by being plunged three times into the water, are anointed by having the beautifully smelling chrism poured over their bodies, come before the bishop dressed in white robes and holding lighted candles, to be confirmed by the laying on of hands and the pouring of chrism over their heads. Then they are led into the church for their first mass and holy communion, received under two kinds, and followed by a meal of milk and honey, a reference to entering the chosen land. The main parts of the canon of the mass are studied in the course of this section.

Finally we imagine it is the octave of Easter and the neophytes come each day in their white robes and carrying their candles to hear further explanations of the ceremonies they have taken part in.

The Holy Ghost is difficult to talk about. What we do is to start with the idea of the breath of God—the spirit of God which moved over the waters when God created the world, and when the earth was emerging from the flood—the Hebrew phrase *Ruach Elohim* meaning either ‘Spirit of God’ or ‘mighty wind’. We consider the mighty words of God being carried on his breath. We talk a lot about mighty winds and tempests. Then we refer to the creation of Adam, when God breathed the breath of life into him. During the preparatory rites we saw how the bishop (or exorcist) cast out the devil, and breathed the Spirit in, and how the Bishop breathed over the oil and water to be used for baptism and confirmation. Finally we read of the mighty wind of Pentecost. For visible signs we consider the burning bush and the parted tongues of fire, and second the dove which fluttered over the water as the earth was emerging from the flood, comparing it to the wind which fluttered over the water at the moment of creation. (The creation story of Genesis 1 seems to be a description of the earth emerging from a flood). During the course I try to arrange for the children to see a baptism, urge them to go to the Holy Week services if they can, and at the end those who have not yet been confirmed are confirmed.

The course is a very elastic one and can be extended at any point,

depending on the needs of the children and the importance the teacher attaches to certain things. Someone might feel the need to spend a longer time on the apostles' creed, or on the Old Testament stories. I take a year to get through it all, but there is no reason why it should not take two years. I can think of no aspect of the child's religious education which cannot be fitted into the course at some point or other and rendered into an imaginative and dramatic form.

But of course the method has its dangers. If one is not careful, one is liable to create a little theatrical world which has no reference to real life. I tell the children the story of Antaeus whose mother was the earth, and he got his strength from her while he was in touch with her. Even when he wrestled and was thrown he bounced up again with a fresh access of energy. He was finally conquered by being held up in the air away from the earth. I liken the liturgy and the Christian to Antaeus and the earth. We gather together often to keep in touch with the Church, our mother, and return to the fight with a fresh access of strength. Even if we get thrown in the struggle with Satan, we return to the Church for more strength from confession. If we stayed away from the Church for long we should lose all our strength. Using this idea as a basis we never let a class go by without showing how what we study has some relevance to the child's present and immediate future life.

Another danger I touched upon above is concerned with the child's love of mystery, his preference for Latin. Unless one exercises considerable restraint the whole course could become a complete mumbo-jumbo. One of the distinguishing features of the Roman liturgy is the comparative fewness of places in which the meaning of any word or gesture is so esoteric that its meaning is not clear to the observer (always supposing the observer knows Latin). It would be disastrous if the children were to develop the idea that the sacraments were some sort of magical rites. So there is a certain tension between the use of the child's love of drama and mystery, and the serious purpose for which it is being used, that is, instruction. The means could easily become the end of the course if one were not careful.

I should like to end with a note about the simplification of dogma for small children. When they learn history at school, they learn that Richard was a Good King and John was a Bad King. When they grow older, and read learned articles which rehabilitate John and consign Richard to Hades, and learn to make a more balanced judgement between the two, they do not complain that they were deceived and misinformed at school, but realise that life is more complex than a child

could understand. On the other hand, this could not be said of other things that children learn about, such as fairies and Father Christmas, which they have to cast off at some time or other. Now for a Catholic any simplification for children, similar to that which is made in history classes, is regarded as temerarious, and some would say intolerable. Hence we use catechisms which may indeed be doctrinally accurate, but which children find it difficult to understand, apart from being rather unappealing. They do not absorb anything which can develop with them as they grow older. There are various suggested alternatives and supplements to the catechism which try to accommodate the Church's teaching to the child's intelligence but which fall into the category of the 'things-we-cast-off-when-we-get-older'. What is needful, I think, is the kind of simplified teaching which is patient of complexification later, of being assumed into a more subtle and complex pattern.

In this article I have described my method of coping with this problem. I try to create images, and seed-ideas which will grow as the children grow, and develop into a life of Christian faith. It is not for me to decide, and in any case it is too early to decide, whether this method fulfills these requirements. I think it does, but I should be grateful for the opinions of readers.

## Catholics and Friends

HELEN CAMPBELL

In Northern Ireland, where I have grown up and lived and worked, the barriers separating Catholics and Protestants have made any kind of constructive encounter between them almost impossible. In the late 1950's there were some signs here and there that a few Protestants and Catholics were at least prepared to look at one another over the fences of deep-seated fear and distrust, but the winds of change had not then begun to blow. In the last brief year or two the God-given inspiration of Pope John has breathed its influence on a world of Christian people ready to listen. to try to understand and to accept a new attitude of mind and spirit.