

## THE BROTHERS' PART IN THE CATECHETICAL MOVEMENT IN CHILE

In Chile, as in other parts of the world, the catechetical movement got now impetus from and took specific shape after the second Vatican Council. At that time two Brothers were engaged in catechetical work for the diocese of Santiago: Brother Miguel Dominguez, from Cuba, a specialist in youth work and group dynamics, and Brother Enrique Aguilo, from Spain, a specialist in catechetics.

### CATECHESIS FOR ADOLESCENTS

Brother Miguel Dominguez was the first Brother to be called, jokingly, "Monsignor", since he was made Vicar in charge of the arch-diocesan apostolate of youth. Needless to say, he never used the title! The post was created by the Cardinal Archbishop, Raoul Silva Henriquez. Brother Miguel's task was to form animation teams among young people in each of the eight pastoral zones into which the arch-diocese, with its three million inhabitants, was divided. In addition he collaborated in the production of catechetical text books for children and adolescents. At present he is Director of Scholastics in Medellin (Colombia) but his memory is still fresh among us. You may still meet priests, religious and lay people who consider it a privilege to have followed his courses and who have, as a result, greatly increased their possibilities for enriching their human relationships, increasing their efficacy among apostolic groups and bringing greater maturity to Christian communities.

### FAMILY CATECHESIS

Brother Enrique Aguilo, from the District of Valencia, also worked full-time in the diocesan catechetical apostolate. He contributed to the first edition of "Al Encuentro de Dios Vivos" (Meeting with the Living God) which adopted an original approach to religious education. It is for the use of parents and is aimed at helping them to prepare their children for the reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion. The Cardinal, a former student of our college of Talca, initiated this new approach and supported it in person.

The program was first intended to last for one year but was later (1971) extended to two years. The authority of the Archbishop was indispensable to getting adults, who considered that they had no need of it, to accept a long course in faith education. Until he returned to Spain in 1973, Brother Enrique worked with the diocesan team, giving courses to responsible lay people, recruited in the parishes to help parents fulfill their obligations. He also published a book entitled, "Methodology of Family Catechesis".

Since 1968, De La Salle College, Santiago, has adopted this system of family catechesis for preparing children for First Communion in preference to direct preparation in class. Gradually the system has spread to other schools and colleges. Though they did not create the system, it can be said with truth that the support of the Brothers was decisive in having it accepted by all the catholic schools of Chile. This initiative has convinced the Brothers that they should address themselves directly to the parents and not limit their work to the children.

I remember that, at first, we were not at all happy with the Chilean bishops' emphasis on the apostolate of adults. We thought that it would downgrade our centuries old tradition of work with children and adolescents. When we began to bring the parents together to teach them how to give a Christian education to their children we were rather condescending towards them.

But as soon as we decided to form small groups and when our reduced numbers no longer made possible our presence at each meeting, the movement gained a new dynamism from the laity. It was only then that we began to listen to these lay people who could sort out their family problems among themselves without continual recourse to our guidance.

In 1974 I was asked, as a member of the diocesan catechetical committee, to contribute to "Meeting with the Living God" and to form a group of animators of the Liturgy for the younger children who also share in family catechesis by taking part in the liturgy of the Word on Sundays.

## SCHOOL CATECHESIS FOR THE YOUNG

I have also been called on by the archbishop to direct the National Office for Catechesis. A group of us, lay people, priests and religious, have drawn up various programs of catechetics for schools throughout the country. We have also produced a series of teaching aids, both written and audio-visual.

In Valparaiso, Brother Rodolfo Andaur has worked for several years with the diocesan education committee in the initial and the in-service training of religion teachers for Catholic schools and non-confessional state schools. Religion courses are, in fact, provided in state schools for children whose parents do not claim exemption. Brother Miguel Angel Ortiz has replaced him in this post after having worked with the diocesan team in Santiago. For several years Brother Ramon Lara had helped him in Talca.

In Temuco, Brother Juan Fernando Garcia was given special responsibility for Confirmation with instructions to train catechists for this new form of the apostolate of youth. All these extra responsibilities in the general apostolate have not prevented the Brothers from carrying out their duties in their own schools and in their own communities.

## NATIONAL CATECHESIS

In the past ten years the most notable work carried out by the National Office for Catechesis has been:

- a) the extension of family catechesis in preparation for reception of the sacraments to all the dioceses of the country;
- b) the systematic training of lay volunteer catechists in schools and parishes;
- c) the production of a catechetical program for pre-adolescent children and a socio-religious program for adults;
- d) the preparation of means for mass evangelisation and group catechesis.

Brother German Martinez, scholastic and student of theology, has been helping our group recently by going round the country giving courses in catechetics and conducting days of reflection for the diocesan clergy who request it.

The Brothers who participate in catechesis at national level in Chile have the advantage of personal experience in the classroom and in the educative work of our own schools and colleges.

Wherever the Church has called on us, as in Temuco and Talca, we have made our schools available to the town and to the diocese for the work of catechesis. We have also taken part in the apostolate of the young and of the family at diocesan and national level. This has in no way hindered our total dedication to the Christian formation of the students in our own schools. The District Commission, responsible for education and catechesis, is, at present, planning Lasallian apostolic action in the ten centers for which the fifty Brothers of the District of Chile are responsible.

A healthy interaction is taking place between the internal apostolate of the Brothers and their wider ecclesial commitments. The experience gained in school has accustomed us to dealing with children and young people and has taught us the value of work thoroughly prepared. Our commitments at diocesan and national level bring us into contact with the realities of life and pastoral problems of which Brothers, who remain in their communities, have only the faintest idea.

I believe that these apostolic activities outside our own houses improve the quality of our work and bring us closer to our bishops and priests. In return, the bishops and clergy get to understand us better and appreciate us more. In this way possibilities for pastoral work are opened up and we are prepared to undertake them if and when we are no longer allowed to work in our own schools.

## REFLECTIONS

- What connection can you see between the charism of St. John Baptist de La Salle and the activities mentioned above?
- What does the work of the Chilean Brothers, in the field of catechetics between 1966 and 1983, suggest to you?

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