

THE RELIGIOUS APOSTOLATE OF A BROTHER IN THE THIRD AGE

For the past four years I have been in contact with a group of children from the nursery school up to, and including, the sixth year. I do not teach catechism to these children unless a teacher needs me to offer this service. I exercise my religious apostolate by further developing the catechesis on every level

I accomplish this work in the following way: at the beginning of my religious activity of 30 to 35 minutes, I review the theme that has been taught in class. Next, I go to the practical part of making these experiences come to life. It goes without saying that this requires a lot of creativity. This religious experience is a workshop of evangelical practices. These activities follow the catechism time fixed by the schedule. To involve all the pupils or almost all of them affords a capital importance to these experiential activities.

One example. During Lent, I prepared the fifth year pupils for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. These came to the place prepared for this religious service where I had taken great care in creating an atmosphere conducive to such a preparation: soft lighting, music to set the right tone, posters, usually done by myself, using Gospel texts, the Bible, paschal candle, etc.. We start off with some brief questions in order to review and this is followed by a hymn and a moment of relaxation. I can either read, or have read, a parable, where I ask the pupils to expand upon what is illustrated in front of them. I refer to the most important points of the parable: ingratitude, dissoluteness, jealousy, vengeance, mercy, shame, pardon, according to the identity of the personages. You have recognized the parable of the Prodigal Son. I succeed in making them discover the Lord's mercy in the face of the weakness revealed in the conduct of the two sons. It is an examination of conscience where one asks himself where he has been faithful and where unfaithful to the call of God or simply to His word. At other times, I would draw up a list of Gospel texts on the points most often broken. Each one has a list of passages. The pupils express themselves spontaneously about these. When it comes to the accusation, they say to the priest: "I am a sinner. I have been particularly deficient in keep such a word of God". In other words, the Word of God is used for confessing. To illustrate further, I would give each pupil a sheet of paper on which a caterpillar de-

vouring a leaf is drawn. They can freely write their lack of love. They give it to the priest on entering the confessional room. There follows a litany prayer to ask pardon. The pupils make up their own or use another. After confession, to the sound of soft music, there is a prayer of thanksgiving in the form of hymns, prayers of praise or by the recitation of Biblical passages.

There are other kinds of religious activities. There are those which deal with the liturgical celebrations in the parishes, especially the Eucharist; those which are done each week during the main times of the year: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter.

For this purpose, one hour of pastoral activities which can be devoted to each group each month is written into the schedule.

It is on the occasion of ceremonies for the Christian community that we most frequently use the biblical recitations, choreography or sacred dances. The congregation very much appreciates this kind of participation. The young could ask for nothing better. Sometimes the entire class learns the choreography. At other times, it is only the youth chorale I practice with outside of class time. Of the 240 pupils, I get about one-eighth of them to participate in it.

With regard to the recitation of Biblical texts done in the usual oral way, significant gestures add much to the Word. Most often, the Gospel and Psalms are chosen.

For example, at the profession of faith in the sixth year, the pupils, after having formulated their credo individually or by groups, recite the Profession of Peter: "Upon arriving in the region of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked his disciples...".

What are the reactions of the young to these religious activities? We can state them as being positive. I can assure you that they like these religious activities and they tell me so. Still, what is even more convincing is the testimonies of the parents and the teachers. It is a pleasure to hear the various accounts.

What are the objectives? They are very numerous. Ordinarily, they are pointed out following the catechetical theme. For the new program set up in 1986 for the primary course, here is a resume of a list of objectives in the religious apostolate in Quebec:

Table I - *New interiorization followed in the Primary.*

Reception: Consciousness - Willingness to receive - Attention directed or preferred.

Response: Assent - Willingness to respond - Satisfaction in responding.

Valorization: Acceptance of a value - Preference for a value - Commitment.

Table II - *Finality of Education.*

Child: Needs and interests of the children.

The Leader: Content of the animation apostolate.

Society: Expectations of society.

Conception of the animation apostolate.

Conception of the experience.
Educational Intentions.

Table III - The general content of the animation apostolate in the primary

Experience:	According to the axis:
1 - Of a sense of life	1-A Confidence 1-B Openess to life 1-C Autonomy
2 - Of the common life	2-A Respect 2-B Mutual help 2-C Solidarity
3 - Of contact with God	3-A Interiority 3-B Entry into tradition 3-C Celebration
4 - Of moral conduct	4-A Sharing 4-B Rectitude 4-C Conversion
5 - Of creative links	5-A With the past 5-B With the present 5-C With the future

I shall choose an example where the experience will be *contact with God* and the axis, *celebration*.

The general objectives will be:

Reception

- 1.1 The pupil ascertains the important place of celebration in prayer of the Church.
- 1.2 The pupil takes into consideration the need of celebration in the life of a Christian.
- 1.3 The pupil brings attention to the "celebration" dimension of prayer.

Response

- 2.1 The pupil responds to the invitation to celebrate in order to enter into contact with God.
- 2.2 The pupil spontaneously makes place for celebration in his prayer.
- 2.3 The pupil pursues with satisfaction celebration activities or those oriented towards celebration.

Valorization

- 3.1 The pupil finds the activity of Church celebration important.

It is upon the objectives that the evaluation of religious activities are based. It is not always easy to evaluate.

The objectives of the apostolate of religious activities, as elsewhere in catechesis, are of three kinds:

1. General objectives
2. Terminal objectives
3. Intermediate objectives, which determine the activities to be done with the pupils. Most often these general and intermediate objectives are held to.

We include here an example of what might be a religious activity.

We have spoken about our role with regard to the pupils. We must say a word on our involvement with parents.

For about the past two years, the catechesis has been divided into two parts:

a) antecedent catechesis (basic catechesis which is given in the school throughout the year);
b) initiative catechesis (preparation for the sacraments which is given outside of class time, where the teacher refuses to give it). In both cases the Religious Animator is obliged to have dealings with the parents to re-teach them about the sacrament in question (Confirmation, the Eucharist, Reconciliation). To this effect, he forms an initiating committee with some parents. This committee, having received the requisite instruction, will inform the other parents concerned. Let me assure you that this is much more complicated than if I did the teaching myself. Still, we know that the objective of this method merits its continuance. It goes without saying that the meetings multiply: 4 meetings for the committee and 3 to 6 meetings for the parents. Multiply these numbers by the number of sacraments.

In addition to the committees formed for each sacrament, the school has a school religious activity committee. This committee concerns itself with the proper running of religious activities within the school. It intervenes particularly at the time when school reopens — important times of year — with difficulties to be overcome — pastoral relations and the school committee made up of parents. It can, with the consent of the principal (in order to have the necessary funds) carry out extrascholastic activities with the pupils. For example, a Saturday pilgrimage by bus.

Each year in-service training is offered for the different committees. All the expenses are defrayed by the Ministry of Education.

I should like to call your attention to a point concerning the sacraments. It is not that of receiving a sacrament, a follow-up must be assured.

This is how I proceed. After the reception of a sacrament, I call the pupils back to talk to them. I give examples of follow-up.

A little later, I invite them to show this follow-up before the Christian community, which is responsible for the actions of children in the Christian point of view. This is poignant and moving, but profitable for all.

In conclusion, I should like to say a word about the chorale of children whose activities are carried on outside of class time. This chorale is very valuable when a liturgical celebration comes up in the school of parish community. I also see to the active participation of the parents. With the parents or sometimes without them, the chorale takes care of the entire liturgical service: announcements, hymns, processions, movements, readings, the psalms, always sung, etc..

All the celebrations or nearly all take place in the parish church.

Brother Leandre FRECHETTE
3775, Place de La Salle
Trois-Rivières, Quebec
G8Y 1Z6 - CANADA