

THE PROCESSES OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

CORD outlines fifteen processes that, taken together, form a whole Religious Education programme. Here, in short, are descriptions of each of them.

EDUCATION BY ENVIRONMENT

The whole way in which a school runs has the power to teach without words. The values projected by the school have to be experienced before they can be assimilated. The environment in which growth takes place is a nurturing and caring community. This first section of the curriculum is concerned with the growth and pastoral care of all the people making up this community. This process takes place chiefly among the staff and spills over into the whole school community.

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Theology? What's that? Do children also do it? Theology is a fundamental activity which we engage in from our earliest years. It simply means seeking to understand the things we believe about God, about ourselves, and about creation, so that we can discover what they have to do with our lives. It means forming an overall picture of life that makes sense in the light of our faith and of our own experience.

How do we teach theology? That will depend on our aim. In Theological Education we want to help learners achieve theological literacy, or, in other words, gain some command over the concepts the community uses to describe its faith. What do we mean when we speak of Trinity, saying that God is one, yet three? When we affirm that each human person is affected by original sin, how do we understand this? When we call God Creator of heaven and earth, how does this affect the way we treat others and the Earth on which we live? Or again, how do we understand the words of Jesus recalled in the Eucharist: "This is my body; this is my blood."? How do we answer the spaceman who, having gone to 'heaven', announces on his return that he now knows there is no God?

While there is one faith, there are many ways of understanding it and many different depths at which it is revealed. Mysteries of faith are like diamonds which reveal new beauty the more we work with them. In different times and places, theologians - ourselves among them - receive new light on the ancient mysteries of our faith. We might say that theology is the activity of polishing these mysteries in order to keep them sparkling, and able to reflect the light of truth.

SPIRITUAL EDUCATION

Spirituality is much talked about today. All over the world, where a materialist outlook has brought people to experience a profound sense of emptiness and longing, a new surge of interest in the interior dimension of life is evident. This is so, even where people have lost a sense of religious identity and belonging.

Spiritual Education can be compared closely to Physical Education, in that it helps learners to experience, through exercise, their inner life. They learn to identify their spiritual gifts or faculties and to prize spiritual disciplines which help in their interior growth. A central element of this growth is awareness. Spiritual Education cultivates in the learner an openness to the presence of God, and an appreciation of the wonders of God's creation in all its bounty and variety. It invites learners to develop a personal relationship with God, so that through God's Spirit living in them, they will grow to the fullness of the humanity they are called to

express.

PRAYER EDUCATION

Prayer is intimately linked to the foregoing. It is the very powerhouse of spirituality, and it may be likened to the act of breathing which makes energy available to the body. Prayer in its deepest sense opens us to be breathed by the Spirit of God, to be energised by God's deep presence. It is an expression and acknowledgement of our total dependence on God.

Prayer Education aims to help learners realise the importance of prayer for spiritual life, and to teach them how to pray. Through this process they will become familiar with many traditional prayers, but it will also guide them in the articulation of their own personal prayer. They will also learn, through exercises in meditation, the value of silence. After all, prayer is a two-way experience, and being silent in the presence of God means that we are listening too!

WORSHIP EDUCATION

Worship Education focuses on developing the understanding of learners with regard to the liturgical and sacramental action of the faith community. It also aims to develop sound attitudes and practices in public worship, and to provide meaningful and uplifting communal prayer experiences.

Liturgy means literally 'the work of the people'. It is, in the Christian context, the action of the Body of Christ - what the people called Church do when they come together to worship God and celebrate the mystery of Christ and their story of salvation.

The sacraments of the Church are a part of the liturgy. They celebrate in the here-and-now in a tangible and visible way what Christ is always doing. In the sacraments, Christ breaks through to us in time, with God's eternity, making us into himself, transforming us into himself and the world into the kingdom of God.

EDUCATION BY ART

Art finds a natural place within the Religious Education curriculum, since artistic activity belongs to the same level of consciousness as religious awareness. It is significant to consider that in all the world's major cultures, art forms have arisen at the dawn of their history as a response to religious experience.

There are two sides to Education by Art: responding to art to develop the keen appreciative capacity and value- sensitivity that are needed for full receptivity to Revelation, and creating art as an expression and as a therapy.

EDUCATION BY STORY

Following the lead of Jesus the storyteller, this process weaves the experience of story into the curriculum. Story has a wonderful power to educate, and religion is a world of story. Indeed, God may be described as a character we have to learn to recognise in our personal and communal stories.

Stories, like all art, do something to us. They should be allowed to do what the Spirit wills: they should not be *used*. We should never tie the hands of a story by abstracting, moralising, summing up, or explaining in a closed way. Doing such things with a story is like dissecting a dead animal in the biology laboratory. Jesus' usual strategy with story was just so. Only the

badgering of the disciples led him occasionally to explain a parable.

Again, there are two aspects to Education by Story: encounter with artists' stories and with inherited stories, and telling one's own story.

SCRIPTURAL EDUCATION

The centre of Christian faith is the Incarnation, the process through which the Word of God becomes present to our senses. This process came to flower in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, but it had always been active since the beginning. Jesus, we may say is the last, full word that God speaks. In Jesus, the Word of God, is everything that God wants to say to us. But in order to prepare the soil of our understanding, the same Word of God comes to us as it has through the last two thousand years in the form of human words - those words we call the Scriptures. One and the same Spirit inspires both the person of Jesus and the written Word of God.

In Scriptural Education our aim is to help the learners become familiar with the Bible story. We want them to recognise that the Scriptures are God's word written in human language under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and that the Bible is a collection of many different kinds of writing from different cultures over a period of 1000 years. We want them to cultivate a reverent attitude to the Scriptures, to learn how to read these books, and how to turn to them for nourishment, encouragement and inspiration.

EDUCATION BY MODELS

The Word of God is more easily recognised in the actions of those who have taken it to heart. And so, in this process, Education by Models, we aim to inspire learners by introducing them to the stories of real heroes, those who have learnt what life really is about, and who have lived it to the full. Jesus is, of course, the first model we point our learners to. We also draw inspiration from the lives of Mary and other Christian saints, from holy men and women of other religions, as well as from the lives of contemporaries like Nelson Mandela and other great figures.

PHILOSOPHICAL EDUCATION

How does our faith influence the way we think about life? When we get to know some of the models proposed in the previous process and how they think, we begin to realise that there are ways of seeing life that we have been formerly blind to. In Philosophical Education we want learners to appreciate the difference that faith makes to coping with life and its mysteries. This process invites learners to reflect on their experience in the light of faith.

PERSONAL MORAL EDUCATION

What does it mean to be a human being? How do I relate to myself and to others? I ought to live according to who I am if I am to experience freedom, joy and fulfilment. Personal moral education aims to provide practical answers to these fundamental questions and challenges. It aims to develop in the learners a true understanding of freedom, a sense of responsibility, and the ability to listen to conscience, that voice which sounds in silence from the depths of oneself, in order to make decisions that lead to life, not illness or death. Conscience needs to be formed and informed. An understanding of the commandments of God to the people of Israel, and the commandments of Jesus to his followers need to be deepened so that they become written, not on blackboard or stone, but on the learners' hearts.

EDUCATION IN STRUCTURAL MORALITY

While the previous process deals with justice on a personal, one-to-one level, structural morality is concerned with social justice. Society is typically structured in favour of some people, usually the rich and powerful, at the expense of others - the poor and the marginalised. Education in structural morality aims to develop an awareness of such injustice, and to encourage attitudes and action that will lead to change so that society is arranged more equitably, and power is seen as an opportunity for service.

This process, involving a conversion of the head and heart, encourages social analysis, following the SEE-JUDGE-ACT model. It challenges learners to become citizens with a social conscience, informed by the social teaching of the Church.

EDUCATION FOR PERSONAL GROWTH AND RELATIONSHIPS

The question “Who am I?” is raised in different ways in the different processes. Here it is treated, not in a theological, a philosophical or a moral sense, but on a personal and individual level, helping the learner to grow in a sense of personal identity, to realise giftedness, and to be able to relate with confidence to others.

An important understanding developed in this process is the growth towards wholeness. Wholeness is seen as the key to holiness, the becoming who one is in communion with God. Learners need to be able to integrate the various dimensions of their person - the spiritual, the emotional, the rational, the intellectual, the affective, the social - in a harmonious way.

EDUCATION FOR RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

Mirroring the *ubuntu* idea that ‘we become who we are through others’, this final classroom process helps learners to understand the importance of living out one’s faith in community. It helps them to grasp what it means to be a member of a faith community or church, and introduces them to the opportunities they have of participating in its life of service. They learn to appreciate being part of the community’s ongoing story, and are enabled to ensure its future relevance and vitality.

INTENSIVE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

This final process involves concentrated periods of time which are not part of the regular classroom RE. It takes various forms - class and group retreats, school missions, days of recollection, weekend experiences and growth camps are some examples.