

Editorial

Are our children being taught religion? The fact that a high proportion of them cease to practice on leaving school would indicate that they are not. The article we print below, on the vocation of teaching, supplies a reason for this: 'Religion which becomes a set of facts "rammed down one's throat" . . . has neither meaning nor appeal'. The problem is essentially a spiritual one. For religion is a way of life, entered into through the liturgy, and determining the background of home and school, before it is expressed in doctrinal statements. What hope then for a child denied active liturgical life, coming from a home where practice is merely nominal, and learning religion as a collection of formulae unrelated to experience? The child will not question that 'this is what the Church teaches'; it is only a matter of time before common-sense makes him add 'and means nothing at all to me'. Religion then follows the other childish things being shed.

Is this picture a caricature? Probably many people would say so; otherwise it is not easy to account for their doing so little about it. Improvement could in fact take place overnight if the catechetical methods now in use abroad were to be introduced here. But before this can happen the reality of this situation needs to be demonstrated objectively. Experimental psychologists have devised reliable techniques for measuring such apparent imponderables as values and attitudes: only up to now they do not seem to have considered religion worth their attention, while on the other hand Christians have failed to recognize that training in the psychology of behaviour might put a powerful weapon in their hands. When one suspects a wide gap between what people imagine they are teaching and what pupils actually learn, the first step to closing it must be to convince those concerned of its existence. The techniques of demographic survey have revealed dangerous symptoms; adaptation of the techniques of our university psychology departments might help us to a cure.