

special duty to present it worthily to our people.

Indeed, all Christians can help one another to come to know and love more intimately the holy word of God, and to impart to one another the joy thereof, once they have found the treasure hidden in a field.



THE USE OF MIME IN SCRIPTURE TEACHING

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THIS is the account of an experiment. While the need for the teaching of the Old Testament in Catholic schools is gradually becoming more widely recognized, our children do not, in general, have that familiarity with the language of the Old Testament which is so often found among Christians brought up in other surroundings. While this is neither the time nor the place to discuss the pros and cons of a vernacular liturgy, it is obvious that a child who hears some portion of the Scriptures read at the daily Assembly will acquire a familiarity with the language and images employed therein. To attempt to teach the New Testament without a good grounding in the Old, is to deprive it of considerable significance, and it is in the Junior School that such a foundation can be laid.

While there are many collections of Bible stories (and nowadays even strip-cartoons) for children, the real value of all these attractive aids should be to lead the child to a desire for the real thing: the inspired word of God. It is not always realized how soon children can cope with the Scriptural text, and in this connection, tribute must be paid to the Knox version, which can be read aloud, almost uncut, to boys and girls from the age of eight onwards, and they love it. Children are said to relive the history of man's development, and the Hebrew method of storytelling, tough, earthy, and repetitive, seems to catch the imagination of Junior children.

The object of the experiment was to show the Old Testament as foreshadowing the New, and the New as fulfilling the promise of the Old; to familiarize the children with the chief characters and incidents in the Old Testament, not as isolated happenings

but as part of a pattern—God's pattern of the Redemption—and to give the children some knowledge and love of the language of Scripture.

In medieval times, the Church taught a largely illiterate people through dramatisations which grew directly from the liturgy. The earliest recorded of these is the 'Quem quaeritis' which took place at the Easter sepulchre, but others followed, direct representations of the great feasts, carried out during or in close connection with the actual liturgy, and using the Scriptural text.

These seemed to provide a model, and now, as in medieval times, the liturgy was to provide inspiration. The Scripture play cannot be divorced from worship, if it is to be true; it must be, to some extent, the child's own liturgy, and like that liturgy its participants must be impersonal and unmoved, its actions significant and formalised. Just as the Greek actor, hidden by a mask and using stylised gestures, could convey to his audience the whole range of emotion, so the young and inexperienced child, speaking the inspired word, can show forth some of the wonders of God's plan.

It seemed better to separate the word and the action. A mimed episode and Scriptural comment following one another can impose a highly stylised form, in itself impressive and unemotional, yet capable of calling forth a profound response from those who watch. Further, from the standpoint of the onlooker, this separation doubles the impact: sight and hearing emphasize each other, while from the point of view of those taking part, if it is to cater for all, and not a select highly-gifted few, it is more practicable if the task be divided: the burden need be too heavy for no one.

This type of presentation provided an opportunity to show the close relationship between the Old and New Testament. To take a theme, say, that of the Messianic promise, and to select, and show the affinity between half-a-dozen of the clearest instances where this covenant was renewed between God and men, can be a valuable method of teaching both players and audience. If each incident be accompanied by quotations taken from the Biblical narrative, or from appropriate psalms and prophecies, spoken by a well-trained choir, the words of Scripture will enter into the very bones of those concerned. A word here about the versions used: in practice it was found that the best method was to select a text, and compare the wording in the various approved

versions (Douay, Knox, Westminster), and to choose the most euphonious and suitable for the purpose of the moment.

With the group in question, the children followed a fairly exhaustive course of Old Testament study, taking first the history of the Chosen People, from the Creation, and later reading the prophets, before beginning any detailed New Testament work. Hand in hand with this each year, they produced a Scriptural mime, the implications of which would be talked about in class, so that when actual practical work was begun, they were ready to draw the fullest benefit from it.

As with all experimental work, the beginnings were small: a Christmas mime, worked out to accord with the words of St John I, 1-14. If the Knox version be used for this, the words will be found to be very apt. Two choruses of 'good' and 'evil' accepted and rejected respectively the teaching of St John the Baptist, and the advent of our Lord. A few verses of some simple carols were sung, together with the 'Rorate coeli' and the 'Lumen ad revelationem gentium', and the result was a meditative and unusual Nativity Play, and nearly every child knew the beautiful opening words of St John's gospel.

A later and more elaborate attempt was 'The Promise' already referred to earlier. Man's fall, and the making of the promise of redemption, and its renewal at the sacrifice of Isaac, the calling of Moses, the anointing of David, and its fulfilment in the Annunciation and birth of our Lord, were shown as related incidents, accompanied by the speaking of two choirs, one of whom related the narrative, and the other commented from psalms and prophets.

Another subject to be illustrated in this way was the Mass. For this, two stage levels were used, and each of the main parts of the Mass was first shown in its Old Testament type, on the higher level, and then integrated into the Mass which was gradually built up at the lower level.

The theme was stated by showing formalized movement representing sin, and the need for deliverance: devils tempted the people to sloth, greed, pride, and avarice, and they fell down and worshipped the devils: 'The idols of the gentiles are silver and gold, the works of men's hands . . .'. Hope of deliverance was personified in Jacob, dreaming at Bethel, and his setting up of his monument was followed by a Bishop consecrating the altar

stone. The Israelites, led by the pillar of fire, were linked with the procession of the Paschal Candle, which brought lights to the altar, and the congregation to the Mass. A group of Jews, praying the psalms, provided the preparatory prayers, and the people confessed their sins in the *Confiteor*. St Paul wrote his epistle, and the messenger delivered it to the subdeacon on the altar steps, whence it was read to the congregation. The epistle was Hebrews, the fulfilling, in the person of our Lord, of the foreshadowing of redemption shown in the sacrifices of the Old Law. The gospel, the feeding of the five thousand, introduced the figure of our Lord teaching the multitude, while the action of the boy with the barley loaves and fishes was synchronized with that of the servers at the Offertory. Events on the historical stage then moved swiftly to the Crucifixion, which coincided with the Consecration.

The texts for this included not only Scriptures, but also considerable portions of the Ordinary of the Mass.

Perhaps the most successful of these enterprises was one which took angelic intervention on earth as its theme—so satisfactory, indeed, that it was worked out twice, once culminating in the angelic appearances at our Lord's birth, and later, during the Lent term, following a different line of thought, and reaching its climax with the angels who ministered to our Lord in his passion.

By this time, the traditions of good mime and choral speaking were well established, and both actors and choirs were used to their media, worked well in them, and were able to produce a dignified and finished piece of work. The later mimes benefited immeasurably from the fact that the music was composed specially for them, so that movement and chant gained inspiration from music which was perfect for its purpose.

The angels (the tallest boys available, their stature heightened by tall fantastic haloes, but without wings) towered in scarlet and gold over the tiny insignificance of the human creatures, who were deliberately chosen to contrast in size.

The mime opened to the glorious words of Isaias: 'In a vision I saw the Lord, sitting on a throne that towered high above me . . .' and so to his vision of the angelic host. 'Fierce war broke out in heaven, where Michael and his angels fought against the dragon', and so the Fall, first of the angels, and then of man. The angel who arrested Abraham's hand, the angel of the Passover, Gabriel

foretelling the birth of John the Baptist, these were all used to show God's providence for men, and the fallen angels were vanquished in the one instance by our Lady's 'Fiat', and in the other by the Crucifixion, and triumphant Ascension: 'The Lord has gone up with a joyful sound . . .'.

As with all work with children it is impossible, yet, to see the effect in full. Certainly all work dealing with references from the Old to the New Testament was made simpler: the patriarchs were real people, the incidents were vivid pictures. But above all, many grew to love the words of Scripture; quotations once learnt were looked upon as peculiar and personal possessions, and repeated for sheer pleasure. God's words must have become a part of themselves; can they remain unaffected by them, remembering, 'He was wounded for our iniquities; he was bruised for our sins. The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and by his bruises we are healed'?



THE PSALMS FOR SUNDAY COMPLINE

Translated from the Hebrew by

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PSALM 4

Cum invocarem

- 1 When I cáll to thee, ánsWER me,
 Gód of my jústness,
 When straitened enlárgE me,
 2 PítY me, héar thou my práyer.
- 3 Sons of mén, O how lónG:
 Why héavY of héart?
 Your lóve spent on émptiness,
 Seéking deceít?
- 4 But knóW that the Lórd hath made wóndrous
 His mércY to mé:
 The Lórd, he will héar,
 When I crý unto hím.
- 5 Be ángry and sín not,
 Commúne with your héarts