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**PASTORAL ANIMATION:  
A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO  
SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION**

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**MUCH VIOLENCE?  
WHAT ABOUT GOD?**

**I WANT SOME  
RESPECT.  
WE CAN TALK TO YOU. YOU DON'T JUDGE US.**

**PEOPLE NEED YOU.**

**You teach me to get involved.**

**... WITH MY GIRLFRIEND.**



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August 1993

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DE L'ÉDUCATION

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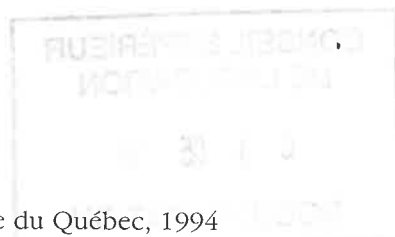
DOCUMENTATION

Secretarial services:  
Céline Dubois, Monique Bouchard

ISBN: 2-550-29173-5

Legal deposit:

Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, 1994



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	1
<b>CHAPTER I</b>	
<b>Points of view on pastoral animation at the secondary level</b>	3
1.1 The Contribution of Pastoral Animation to Secondary School Education	3
1.1.1 A "Meaningful" and "Strategic Presence"	3
1.1.2 A Window on Certain Values	4
1.2 Pastoral Animation in Relation to Today's Youth and their Needs, Concerns, Questions and Problems	4
1.2.1 Helping Young People Meet the Challenges of Everyday Life	4
1.2.2 An Insatiable Need for a Listening Ear	4
1.3 Expectations Regarding Pastoral Animation at the Secondary Level	6
1.3.1 A Dynamic Force	6
1.3.2 Relevance to Young People's Lives	6
1.3.3 Representatives of the Church	7
1.3.4 A Higher Profile	7
1.4 The Main Difficulties Faced by Pastoral Animators	7
<b>CHAPTER II</b>	
<b>The relevance and particular nature of pastoral animation at the secondary level</b>	9
2.1 Pastoral Animation — A Relevant Educational Activity	9
2.1.1 Pastoral Animation and its Role in Developing Interiority	10
2.1.2 The Role of Hope and Idealism	10
2.1.3 Reference Points, Guidelines, and Role Models: Key Factors in Shaping One's Personality and Giving Direction to One's Life	12
2.1.4 The Role of Pastoral Animation in Developing Social Conscience and Community Spirit	14
2.2 The Particular Nature of Pastoral Animation	16
2.2.1 Concrete Experiences and Learning Directly Relevant to Everyday Life	16
2.2.2 The Art of Living as Inspired by the Gospel	17

2.3	Two Examples	17
2.3.1	Pastoral Animation in Relation to the Dropout Problem and to Educational Success	17
2.3.2	Pastoral Animation and Intercultural Relations Within the School	18
<b>CHAPTER III</b>		
	<b>Steps that must be taken</b>	19
3.1	Focussing Pastoral Animation Activities on Essential Educational Objectives and Priorities	19
3.2	Sharing Responsibilities with Other Services	20
3.3	Working in Partnership	21
3.4	Giving Pastoral Animation Service a Higher Profile	21
3.5	Providing the Conditions Necessary for Pastoral Animation	22
3.5.1	Adequate Premises and an Adequate Operating Budget	22
3.5.2	Realistic Numbers of Pastoral Animators and Animator/Student Ratios	23
<b>CONCLUSION</b>		25
<b>APPENDIX:</b>		
<b>Hearings and school visits</b>		27

## INTRODUCTION

During the 1992-1993 school year, the Catholic Committee visited schools and held hearings in order to get a clearer picture of the status of pastoral animation in secondary schools.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, the Committee sought to assess the particular contribution of pastoral animation to education and to pinpoint the problems faced by pastoral animators in their work.

It became evident to the Committee that today, more than ever before, pastoral animation is having to justify both its relevance and the particular nature of its educational approach.

Although the place of pastoral animation is officially recognized in the school system, questions are sometimes raised as to its practical relevance and usefulness. This concern can be attributed mainly to the difficult economic times and budgetary constraints, and to a cultural, social, and religious context that tends to be less favourable to promoting the types of values inherent and central to pastoral animation. Furthermore, the particular nature of this Catholic education service is sometimes called into question. Some critics see it as too focussed on strictly social and humanitarian issues, while others claim that it is too concerned with spiritual and religious matters and thereby largely irrelevant to the realities faced by young people today.

The Committee therefore deems it important to express some of its convictions regarding the relevance of pastoral animation to secondary school education. It also wishes to reiterate the specific contribution of pastoral animation to school life as a whole, a contribution it believes should be acknowledged, more clearly defined and better understood.

The Committee also sees a correlation between the questions being raised about the relevance and nature of pastoral animation and some of the problems faced by pastoral animators in their work. Such questions tend to have repercussions on the actual conditions in which pastoral animators do their work in the schools.

By stating its views on the contribution made by pastoral animation and on some of the challenges this service is facing today, the Catholic Committee wishes to reaffirm the great importance it places on this Christian education activity and its complete confidence in those who work as pastoral animators.

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1. See the appendix for additional information on the hearings and school visits.





## **CHAPTER I**

### **POINTS OF VIEW ON PASTORAL ANIMATION AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL**

As a first step in its study of the status of pastoral animation in secondary schools, the Catholic Committee met with students, pastoral animators, administrators, non-teaching professionals, teachers, Christian education counsellors, parents, and representatives of the Diocesan Offices of Education.

The main questions discussed during these meetings were the following: What is the specific contribution of pastoral animation in secondary schools today? Does it effectively respond to young people's needs, questions, and concerns? What role is pastoral animation currently expected to fill at the secondary school level? What qualities is a pastoral animator expected to have? What are the problems faced by pastoral animators in secondary schools today?

This first chapter looks at the different answers given to these questions. The Committee does not detail each answer, but instead tries to summarize as accurately as possible the different points of view expressed regarding pastoral animation at the secondary level.

#### **1.1 The Contribution of Pastoral Animation to Secondary School Education**

##### **1.1.1 A "Meaningful" and "Strategic Presence"**

During its meetings with secondary school principals, the Committee first asked the following questions: In concrete terms, how do you see the role of the pastoral animator in secondary schools today? In your opinion, what is the specific contribution of pastoral animation to the school's educational mission?

A key word that came up repeatedly and spontaneously in the answers given by most school principals was the word "presence." These principals regard the "meaningful" and "strategic presence" of pastoral animation in the schools as its main and most highly valued contribution.

To say that pastoral animation has a "meaningful presence" is to say that it is rather like the "spirit of the school," that it "breathes life" into the school, that it "safeguards certain values in the school," and helps students "develop an awareness of human and Christian values." It also means that pastoral animation is perceived as providing a place where both school staff and students are welcome and where they know they will not be judged but listened to. "It is an important link in the school project."

When talking of the "strategic presence" of pastoral animation, the principals were referring mainly to the places where pastoral animation is visible: the pastoral animation room obviously, but also the classrooms, hallways, and cafeteria, in fact, wherever there are students. Using the pastoral animator in his school as an example, one principal defined strategic presence in the following terms: "It means coming out of the classroom and taking part in various school activities and committees; it means helping define the school project." Having a strategic presence also means planning and promoting activities and projects that are pertinent to young people's needs and to community expectations. It means maintaining a presence that reflects clear and specific educational objectives. As one principal put it, "Activities are simply a means to an end."

### **1.1.2 A Window on Certain Values**

Both teaching and non-teaching professionals described the specific educational role of the pastoral animator in the school as that of promoting certain values such as peace, respect, sharing, or solidarity. "I see the pastoral animator as someone who contributes in terms of values," said one teacher, "as someone who introduces values that are not exclusively Christian into school activities." "He encourages the students to reflect on values." Mention was also made of the "many functions" of pastoral animation, and of the fact that it must respond to young people's many different needs and take into account their different backgrounds. Those interviewed in English-speaking schools spoke more readily of its specific contribution to the individual's religious or spiritual growth. One teacher in an English school described the role of their pastoral animator as that of "keeping religious life alive."

Yet in a number of other schools, the people interviewed professed to have only a vague and very general idea of the pastoral animator's role. One person put it this way: "The pastoral animator works in discreet ways and is not particularly visible, yet I sense that he is there."

## **1.2 Pastoral Animation in Relation to Today's Youth and their Needs, Concerns, Questions and Problems**

### **1.2.1 Helping Young People Meet the Challenges of Everyday Life**

Does pastoral animation respond to the needs, concerns, questions, and problems of young people today? The groups of students interviewed by the Committee gave a variety of answers. Their overall impression of pastoral animation is positive; they value it when it provides the listening ear, support, and encouragement they need and when the animator can relate to them personally as well as to their problems and specific concerns.

Generally speaking, students want a school where they feel at home, and they see pastoral animation as having an important role in this regard. Their main expectation of the pastoral animator is that he or she be willing to discuss any concrete personal problems, such as loneliness, tensions within the school, violence, racism, drugs, suicide, as well as relationships with parents and girlfriends or boyfriends. In the words of one Secondary IV student, "the pastoral animator is a mediator, someone who looks out for us." Another student described the pastoral animator as "someone who helps us resolve our problems." To a third student, "the animator is someone who lets us say what we think without judging us."

Many other students see pastoral animation as totally irrelevant when it is too focussed on religion, that is, on religious beliefs, the Bible, prayers, rites, liturgical and sacramental celebrations. One student expressed the view that the "pastoral animator shouldn't go overboard on religion." Another student had similar thoughts—"He shouldn't always talk about Jesus"—while a third student commented that "he should get more involved in the social dynamics," meaning humanitarian issues that come up within the school. Despite their comments, these young people do not appear to be adverse to religion per se. Rather, they appear to be seeking a meaningful, stimulating experience relevant to their everyday concerns, or a sort of "space" where they are free to explore the values and motivations that are important to them. They do react negatively, however, to nebulous abstractions, mechanical rituals, moral censure, or the rigidity of institutionalized religion.

### **1.2.2 An Insatiable Need for a Listening Ear**

The pastoral animators, with whom the Catholic Committee met, said much the same thing as the students, but from their own perspective.

Regarding young people's need to be listened to, one animator described it as "insatiable." Their need to talk, to have someone who will listen to them, someone to confide in, is indicative of other equally important needs: the need for recognition, acceptance, affection, encouragement, and appreciation. Another pastoral animator put it this way: "They need to feel that they are important in someone's eyes."

Many pastoral animators also expressed the belief that they are responding to young people's needs, and that their efforts to make the school atmosphere more personal or "real," are both useful and consistent with their intended role in the school. Others signalled young people's need to be active, to be involved in projects, and to feel that they are working together for certain causes. Animators seek to respond to these needs by offering students the opportunity to take part in groups or group projects which allow them to learn something about themselves, use their talents, feel a sense of responsibility and usefulness, and put Gospel values into practice.

With regard to young people's spiritual and religious needs and their overall attitude toward religion, several pastoral animators reiterated the students' point of view as described earlier in this document. "Young people have spiritual needs, but these can only be reached on a more human, down-to-earth level," said one animator. "Young people may have fantastic experiences, but they are unable to name religious values... They relate to concrete experience." "In today's schools, there are few people other than the pastoral animator who encourage students to reflect on their lives. Today's children are no different from the children we were: we are all human beings in search of meaning."

Pastoral animators regard young people's need to look inward and to explore their values, desires, hopes, feelings, and identity as a spiritual and religious need. They see today's young people as struggling to find their purpose in life or sometimes simply to find meaning in life, as striving to find the strength to cope with life's apparent meaninglessness and to alleviate despair. They cite young people's need to define their own sets of values, to find out what is important to them and what is not, to form their own comprehensive and cohesive views of the world and life. They make specific mention of the need some young people have for an absolute frame of reference they can use in their own way to freely evaluate the direction their life is already taking. They also speak of young people's need to live, nurture, and celebrate their faith.

Pastoral animators, school principals and teachers of Catholic Religious and Moral Instruction with whom the Committee met stressed young people's need to "hear talk of hope", to hear messages that are free of the usual pessimism and fatalism, to have positive experiences and to meet people who believe that certain commitments are worth making because they can make a real difference. They also cited young people's need to be exposed to adults who are active in their community, whose lives are meaningful, who are dedicated individuals and who live by their convictions. The example set by these adults should, in a calming, reassuring way, give young people a sense that life is worth living. The Committee concluded from these remarks that pastoral animators are often seen as providing this model in the schools, and that one of the main concerns of pastoral animators is to give young people the opportunity to meet dedicated individuals whose way of life incorporates the very values that pastoral animation seeks to promote in the schools.

### **1.3 Expectations Regarding Pastoral Animation at the Secondary Level**

#### **1.3.1 A Dynamic Force**

The school principals with whom the Committee met stressed that pastoral animation should be an integral part of all facets of school life. It should focus on the school's main priorities and be open to dealing with issues such as intercultural relations, other religions, the problems associated with violence, and the school dropout problem. For the most part, the principals generally expect pastoral animators to inject dynamism into the school through their different projects and activities. They rely on the animator's personal credibility and ability to rally people and on his or her availability and openness. They made it clear that, above all, they do not want to see pastoral animation reduced to liturgy, prayer, and the sacraments, or kept behind the closed doors of the animator's office or the pastoral animation room.

The school principals also underscored the need for pastoral animators to have sound group leadership and guidance training and to be involved in ongoing professional development so that they may be better equipped to adapt pastoral activities to current realities and to the school's and to society's needs.

#### **1.3.2 Relevance to Young People's Lives**

Christian education counsellors have several expectations of pastoral animation. These came as a result of their answers to questions such as the following: "What priorities should secondary school pastoral animation have in the years ahead?" "What, in your view, makes a person a good pastoral animator?" "What are your criteria for deciding whether or not the pastoral animation being offered is of high quality?"

Four main ideas emerged from their responses and are summarized here.

Firstly, pastoral animation must be relevant to young people, to their experiences, and to the specific problems and concerns they are facing. Being relevant to young people means speaking a language they can relate to and taking part in efforts to make the school environment more "human," to create a school atmosphere that will foster young students' overall development.

Secondly, pastoral animation must nonetheless be true to itself. In other words, as it seeks to reach out to young people and humanize the environment, it must not lose sight of the Gospel message. Pastoral animation should provide students with opportunities to learn about and experience life and Christian values. It is a workshop in putting one's faith into practice and learning about the Gospel through practical application, that is, through projects and commitments. Similarly, some counsellors stressed the need for young people to learn, through group experiences, about the importance of communities in which Gospel values can be developed and put into practice.

Thirdly, a number of counsellors raised the point that pastoral animation must reach out, establish a network of resource people, encourage greater staff and parental involvement in its projects, and share responsibilities with all members of the school community.

Lastly, like most of the other people consulted, Christian education counsellors expressed their belief that the conduct of pastoral animators should reflect the values they stand for and are there to teach.

### **1.3.3 Representatives of the Church**

Pastoral animators have a mandate from their bishop to carry out their function in the schools. Therefore the Catholic Committee made it a point to find out the views held by the directors of the Diocesan Offices of Education, for they are the spokespersons for the local religious authorities.

The diocesan authorities hold expectations similar to those of educators in the schools, primarily Christian education counsellors, but also have a number of other more specific expectations.

One of these is that they would like to see closer links established between pastoral animators in secondary schools and the corresponding parishes, for their mutual benefit. Because of their pastoral mandate and also because students and school staff tend to perceive them in this way, pastoral animators are representatives of the Church, hence the need for closer and more visible ties with the diocese.

### **1.3.4 A Higher Profile**

Apart from hearings and school visits, for a number of years now, the Catholic Committee has benefited from another very valuable source of information on the state of pastoral animation in the Catholic schools. Every five years, all schools recognized as Catholic must submit reports evaluating the schools' confessional character. These reports keep the Committee informed of the opinions of many parents.

It would appear that parents generally know very little about pastoral animation activities in secondary schools, even though they express a genuine interest in being kept informed. Yet despite this information gap, most of them have a positive view of pastoral animation. They believe that pastoral animators convey important values to today's youth and that they contribute significantly to the school's confessional character, thereby making school more attractive to young people.

However, some parents feel that pastoral animation should have a higher profile in the schools. They believe that it is too concerned with human, moral, and social values and not enough with religion and the Christian faith. Some consider this a serious shortcoming.

## **1.4 The Main Difficulties Faced by Pastoral Animators**

The pastoral animators consulted by the Catholic Committee were asked to summarize the difficulties they face in their work. The main problems are cited here and coincide with the concerns expressed by other groups.

One of the first problems mentioned was the current social and religious context, the overall climate of spiritual and religious indifference that pervades the schools and society today. This context gives some animators the feeling that they are working essentially on their own and that they alone carry the weight of certain concerns and convictions such as the confessional character of the school. Others pointed out the importance of having the school principal's support if they are to carry out their role confidently and effectively. Still others mentioned their discomfort and difficulty when dealing with more delicate or controversial issues such as those that may arise in counselling students and staff in the school. As for questions related to religion, the animators also mentioned having to cope with the diverse, at times conflicting, expectations of parents, students, principals, and the diocese.

The pastoral animators who were consulted acknowledged having less success with certain courses of action such as those pertaining to Christian symbolism and the integration of

faith and culture.<sup>2</sup> Some mentioned how difficult it is, given the current social context and atmosphere in the schools, to involve young people in projects and activities, to guide them, or to get them to follow through on their commitments. Like other educators, pastoral animators must continually strive to be creative, up-to-date, and well-informed—something that is sometimes easier said than done.

Animators carrying heavy workloads due to large classes or to having to work in two or three different schools expressed frustration at their inability to fulfil their function. Some of the most frequently cited difficulties, though not necessarily the first ones to be identified, had to do with the practicalities of carrying out their pastoral duties: an excessive workload due to staff cutbacks, lack of a pastoral animation room, or insufficient budget. These concrete realities hamper the day-to-day work of pastoral animators and make some of them feel that their work is either poorly understood or little appreciated.

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2. A survey conducted by the Direction de l'enseignement catholique reaches similar conclusions. See *Situation de l'animation pastorale au secondaire* (Québec: ministère de l'Éducation, 1991), p. 26.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **THE RELEVANCE AND PARTICULAR NATURE OF PASTORAL ANIMATION AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL**

The points of view and experiences described in the first chapter of this document reflect certain doubts about the relevance of pastoral animation. Why even offer such a service in secondary school when today's society appears to place little importance on spiritual and religious values and has more or less relegated the practice of religion to the private life of the individual? Is there any point in continuing to offer pastoral animation when there are so many ostensibly more pressing needs in the schools, when young people themselves do not always seem to see the usefulness of religion or its relevance to their lives, or yet again, when they show little interest in hearing about it?

Questions are also raised about the specific nature of this service in the schools. Is it always as "Catholic" as it should be? Aren't pastoral animators called upon in many instances to work as social workers or school life activity advisors? Do some animators tend to overemphasize strictly secular values, thereby sidestepping Christian values?

These and other questions are being explicitly voiced in the schools. For this reason the Catholic Committee deems it important to speak out in support of the contribution of pastoral animation to education by highlighting the relevance of this service in the schools, and reaffirming the principles underlying its distinct character and perspective.

#### **2.1 Pastoral Animation—A Relevant Educational Activity**

It became clear to the Committee during the hearings and school visits that there is a relatively strong consensus that pastoral animation meets important needs and satisfies the expectations and concerns of secondary school students. The opinions expressed were clear and appear to be based on fact. But is this sufficient evidence to justify keeping the service in our schools? To fully grasp the issues related to the educational contribution of pastoral animation, it is important to gain a better understanding of its role in helping young people develop interiority. This is not to mention their need for a certain spirituality that will help them define a cohesive framework for living, make important decisions, and find the necessary strength to cope with life's challenges. We must also bear in mind that hope and ideals plays a vital role in developing interiority, as do reference points, guidelines, role models, and values. As well, it is essential to clarify the high priority that pastoral animation places, and must continue to place, on encouraging openness toward others, and developing a social conscience and community spirit in today's adolescents.

In its 1980 document entitled *Religion in Today's School 5: Pastoral Animation*, the Catholic Committee sought to show that pastoral animation was not irrelevant to education by defining its role as a workshop for putting the Gospel into practice and by drawing attention to its distinct instructional approach and learning activities. The Committee now feels it important to go even further and to add that pastoral animation makes a meaningful contribution with respect to some of the educational needs of young people in the current social and cultural context. This contribution is all the more important given that the contemporary context does not always encourage young people to develop interiority and a sense of community, two dimensions of human development which are given high and equal priority in pastoral animation.

### 2.1.1 Pastoral Animation and its Role in Developing Interiority

Developing interiority is above all a matter of developing self-awareness and self-knowledge. It means developing the capacity to reflect on one's life and to understand its significance—in other words, to find meaning in life and to determine a direction for oneself—ultimately, to take charge of one's life.

The spiritual dimension of the person, which is the domain of pastoral animation, must be understood here in relation to this introspective capacity of the human mind. Apart from the formal definitions given by different doctrines and schools of thought, spirituality can be seen as an attempt to unify and orient our lives over the course of time. It is a long process by which we integrate our beliefs, values, and convictions, our wish to lead a good life, our desire to transcend ourselves, and actions whereby we can assess our strength in the face of certain challenges and learn to act for the best.

Jacques Grand'Maison speaks along these lines when he talks about the spiritual dimension in the research findings he published in *Le Drame spirituel des adolescents* in 1992. He had the following to say about the spiritual needs of adolescents:

Young people must take charge of all aspects of their lives. They cannot split themselves in different directions, turning from one adult to another. They must be able to find guidance, activities, and places where, either individually or as part of a group, they can come to grips with their lives and themselves as individuals. This is what young people today are most lacking, and they tell us so in no uncertain terms.<sup>3</sup>

He also adds "that the spiritual dimension is the most obscure, the one that those working with adolescents touch upon the least."<sup>4</sup>

Pastoral animation is directly concerned with young people's efforts to unify and orient their lives, given that its main function is that of "animating" the schools. The literal meaning of "animate" is, of course, to "give spirit" or dynamism to something. It also means kindling or conveying a sort of passion or enthusiasm that can only be aroused by good news or an important cause which calls on one's intelligence but also on one's emotions and energy. In more concrete terms, animating means letting people say what they have to say, and at the same time encouraging them to reflect on their life, needs, desires, and aspirations.

Animating also means helping others to take charge of their lives and find solutions to their problems, as well as providing concrete opportunities which allow them to become involved, along with others, in projects or goals that bring about personal growth.

### 2.1.2 The Role of Hope and Idealism

Life is often difficult, and society today is faced with many persistent problems such as economic and political uncertainty, recession, unemployment, and poverty. When the future is shrouded in an air of uncertainty for relatively long periods of time, it casts a shadow on the present, and certain destructive behaviours may surface. These include seeking refuge in the here and now and in a false spontaneity which gives free rein to raw impulses, a preoccupation with the immediate satisfaction of all desires, rampant violence, disillusionment, a desire to escape into the world of the imaginary and the ephemeral, the refusal to think, and a fascination with the morbid and dangerous, to name but a few.

3. Under the supervision of Jacques Grand'Maison, *Le Drame spirituel des adolescents*, Collection Cahiers d'études pastorales, no. 10 (Montréal: Fides, 1992), p. 205. (Free translation)

4. *Ibid.* (Free translation)



Such problems affect the spiritual dimension as defined above and they plague young people today. Jacques Grand'Maison writes the following with regard to the social, economic, and cultural difficulties adolescents face:

Problems rarely occur in isolation. For example, dropping out of school is usually indicative of other problems. Such problems must first be identified if they are to be understood. To begin with, we know that young people today have difficulty believing in others, in the future, in love, in society, and even in God.<sup>5</sup>

To help young people cope in a world which often runs short of hope, it is more urgent than ever that we help them develop their vital psychological resources, such as secondary school pastoral animation seeks to do, namely, hope, will, purpose, a feeling of competence, and fidelity.<sup>6</sup> In a world such as ours, reasons to live are often lacking, and it is these very reasons which energize people, help them define a life's plan, and open doors for them.

We cannot live without hope. No society can, hence the vital need to nurture that which gives hope and enables people to cope with and believe in life. It is particularly important to reinforce young people's idealism as it is essential in helping them plan and direct their actions and thoughts. We must also reinforce their belief in the possibility of their building a better future, provided they assume their personal and social responsibilities.

In a book entitled *Non à la société dépressive*, the French psychoanalyst Tony Anatrella describes what he calls the *Idéal du Moi* as a "psychic structure on the basis of which the individual shapes the person that he or she will become, integrates social, cultural, and spiritual ideals, develops plans and a sense of meaning and assesses his or her conduct and actions."<sup>7</sup> According to Anatrella, "the ideal is a plan which forms the foundation for the child's growth: there is a distance separating what he or she is now from what he or she will yet become, and it is in this interval that the child will engage in a subjective dialogue with the outer world that will serve as a catalyst for the building of his or her own inner constructs."<sup>8</sup>

It is, Anatrella tells us, the notion of the "ideal" that energizes people, gives them a life's plan, and paves the way to the future. "When there is no idealism on the personal level or in society, individuals become increasingly vulnerable, and all the more so when these individuals are children who leave home and other support networks behind. They then grow up increasingly vulnerable and unable to grapple with reality effectively and consistently..."<sup>9</sup>

While it is clearly not the task of pastoral animation alone to help young people develop idealism and their inner psychological resources, it does make a meaningful and unique contribution in this regard. For example, in its concern for young people's spiritual development, it reminds them that human beings "are neither totally victims nor masters of the universe, and that freedom is achieved by recognizing and respecting a higher level of existence which calls them to transcend themselves."<sup>10</sup> It also makes a meaningful contribution when it encourages young people to follow through on their plans and

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5. *Ibid.* (Free translation)

6. Cf. Erick H. Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1962). A summary of the psychological resources of the adolescent can be found in the Office de catéchèse du Québec, *Des rues et des hommes*, Educator's document (Montréal: Fides, 1972), p. 16-22. See also *Planning Guide for Group Pastoral Activities at the Secondary Level* (Québec: ministère de l'Éducation, 1986), p. 26-32.

7. T. Anatrella, *Non à la société dépressive* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993), p. 18. (Free translation)

8. *Ibid.*, p. 52. (Free translation)

9. *Ibid.* (Free translation)

10. Comité catholique, *Éthique, spiritualité et religion au cégep* (Québec: Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 1992), p. 53. (Free translation)

commitments, to understand the constraints and possibilities of reality, and to accept, by helping others, that there is more to life than just themselves. These are important lessons to learn, and pastoral animation has both a useful and relevant role in teaching them.

### **2.1.3 Reference Points, Guidelines, and Role Models: Key Factors in Shaping One's Personality and Giving Direction to One's Life**

In his study on adolescents, Jacques Grand'Maison speaks of a "lack of reference points"<sup>11</sup> as one of the problems faced by young people today, and of their "need for role models."<sup>12</sup> He also speaks of the need "to ensure that they come into contact with true adults"<sup>13</sup> and "to expose them to coherent thinking and firm convictions."<sup>14</sup> According to Grand'Maison, there is probably a correlation between young people's lack of faith and the lack of adult reference points and role models in their lives.<sup>15</sup>

In the same vein, with regard to the essential role of education in the shaping and development of the personality, Tony Anatrella directs harsh criticism at some of the current teaching approaches which are based on spontaneity. He sees them as neglecting to convey fundamentally important attitudes, reference points, knowledge, and values. His reproaches are aimed mainly at adults, who far too often today refuse to give young people role models to identify with, or to act as role models themselves.<sup>16</sup>

Yet young people cannot possibly acquire and develop the spirituality they need to face the challenges of modern life if they have no reference points, role models, or guidelines, for all these elements encourage them to reflect on the meaning of their life and to define their own place in the world at large and in their relations with others.

Regarding these all-essential reference points and guidelines, we cannot overlook the importance of ethics, faith, and religion as symbols of existence. Ethics is the art of making informed choices, enlightened by external reference points which transcend the individual. Religion is the expression of faith. With its models, rites, practices, and symbols, it provides concrete guidelines that help give meaning to life. Some of these guidelines may have to be translated into concrete action or reinterpreted, but they are nonetheless important, even if today's young people live in a secular society that partially shapes their religious or areligious conscience and colours their views regarding the Christian heritage.

In its 1989-1990 annual report on moral education, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation stressed the urgency of helping young people today develop true ethical competence:

...behind many personal and social events lies the most radical of ethical questions which can, in the end, be formulated in two or three ways, depending on where one wishes to put the stress: "What must I choose?" "What has value?" Or "What must I do?" "What is worthy of action?" Or "What should I aim for? What is it to be a human being?" In whatever form, it is the basic ethical question.<sup>17</sup>

11. Grand-Maison, *Le Drame spirituel des adolescents*, p. 94.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 95. (Free translation)

13. *Ibid.*, p. 94. (Free translation)

14. *Ibid.*, p. 98. (Free translation)

15. *Ibid.*, p. 144. (Free translation)

16. Anatrella, *Non à la société dépressive*, p. 45-51. "To bring their capacities to the fore and develop their character," writes Anatrella, "individuals need to find in the world around them a cultural heritage that define the history and society to which they belong, a network of relationships on the basis of which they can elect to conduct themselves in certain ways in response to existential problems." (Free translation)

17. Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, *1989-1990 Annual Report on the State and Needs of Education—Developing Ethical Competence for Today's World: An Essential Educational Task* (Québec: Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 1990), p. 35.

An extensive survey conducted recently on this topic by the ministère de l'Éducation du Québec led to the following conclusions:

Young people in secondary school are not without moral guidelines. They have adopted many of the values that the moral education and religious education provided in the schools and elsewhere seeks to instill in them. Despite this, young people expect still more from the instruction they receive and, no doubt aware of an urgent need to be equipped with the skills that will help them deal with life's complexities, they would like to receive more *now*.<sup>18</sup>

Regarding spiritual and religious education, young people must be given the opportunity to form a cohesive vision of the world and of life, to articulate their faith, to use their reason and critical thinking skills to evaluate beliefs, not only to prevent them from randomly adopting just any beliefs but also to prevent them from being seduced by the wide assortment of destructive religious or parareligious ideas and movements that are proliferating today. Above all, existentially, adolescents must be able to reexamine their faith and childhood beliefs from a new perspective. In keeping with their psychological development, especially with their capacities for higher level thinking, they need to found their attitudes toward religion on both more personal and more rational bases. It is equally important that they be able to reassess their faith in light of secular realities by learning to see how the Gospel applies to them. Such an understanding casts life in an entirely different light, as it provides a source of inspiration and energy, and gives it a new dimension.

Generally speaking, pastoral animation pays great attention to these diverse aspects of young people's spiritual, religious, and moral development. It is by guiding them through the challenges of everyday life, offering them support in some of life's more difficult situations, encouraging them to adopt or change certain attitudes, organizing support or discussion groups, bringing in speakers, and organizing debates and lectures that pastoral animation helps young people define their personalities and give direction to their life on the basis of reference points, role models, and guidelines.

To help young people move from a secular view of life to an understanding of religious symbolism which will help them reassess their life and integrate the different aspects of their personality, Jacques Grand'Maison suggests role playing and initiation rites that incorporate play and experiences with strong sensory and emotional content.<sup>19</sup> In the Committee's opinion, this approach is totally congruent with pastoral animation's objective of conveying a true understanding of Christian symbolism, an objective some animators find difficult to achieve. This approach enables young people to, in a sense, reassess and relearn the Gospel from the adolescent perspective.

In a movement such as *La Relève*, for example, which advocates self-knowledge, knowledge of others, and an experience of God, adolescents in this age group (15-16 years) have been profoundly marked by the experience of initiation rites, for it puts them in touch with themselves at an important point in their reawakening.<sup>20</sup>

18. Ministère de l'Éducation, Direction de la recherche, Direction de l'enseignement catholique, *Beyond Outward Appearances: Survey on the Moral and Spiritual Experience of Young People in Secondary School* (Québec: ministère de l'Éducation, 1992), p. 127. In this survey, over 50 percent of the students claimed to know: few or no moral principles (60.7 percent); what their religion says about life (50.9 percent); what it says about life after death (56 percent); and the principal rites (55.9 percent).

19. Grand'Maison, p. 189-201. (Free translation)

20. *Ibid.*, p.50. (Free translation)

#### **2.1.4 The Role of Pastoral Animation in Developing Social Conscience and Community Spirit**

By enshrining individual rights and placing great importance on personal, professional, and economic success, today's society has perhaps too hastily sacrificed certain social and family values, such as selflessness, sharing, and community. For example, there is a tendency to believe today that everyone can and should be self-sufficient, that we can each define our own values and laws, as if no universal truths existed. How then can we live together and communicate effectively?

In a recent radio interview, the American pediatrician Benjamin Spock made the following statement: "We should now teach children not only how to get ahead, but also how to serve others." The more isolated we become from one another, the greater the risk that we lose sight of why we live and die, work, love, and reproduce. We also risk losing a unique and essential means of coping with reality and shaping the future. With no sense of a shared destiny, it becomes harder for people to make choices in life and sadness and depression gradually take over.

Young people today look for places where they can act out certain values such as helping others, sharing, solidarity, social commitment, respect, and openness to others; places where they can learn about life in community, assume real responsibilities, play useful roles, and help improve the quality of the milieu in which they live and make the world more humane. Movements such as Development and Peace, World Youth Day, and Amnesty International, and activities such as distributing Christmas baskets, raising funds for international cooperation organizations, peace marches, environmental projects, visiting homes for the elderly, ill, or needy, all reflect what adolescents are seeking. Such activities and learning experiences in the context of groups or collective projects are also important in terms of young people's development.

A pastoral animator who served as president of the Conférence de pastorale scolaire du Québec for several years wrote the following:

I would stress the definite impact that belonging to a group has on a young person's development. Many young people blossom as part of a team, particularly when there is a real sense of fellowship: they feel both loved and personally appreciated..."<sup>21</sup>

On completing his study of adolescents, Jacques Grand'Maison went a step further when he said that:

The strongest, most confident, and enterprising adolescents we interviewed all had a strong sense of belonging to a group, be it the family, a group of young people, or any other formally organized group. We often hear that young people in gangs often exhibit regressive behaviour. While we often ignore the positive aspects of this social experience, we might well ask ourselves whether these gangs, with their initiation rites, are not a substitute for the social and institutional void which engulfs adolescents.<sup>22</sup>

With respect to the teaching of faith and social commitment in our daily lives, the Assembly of Bishops of Québec recently reminded us of the great importance, indeed of the fundamental and crucial nature, of the role of the community:

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21. Jacques Charron, *Passionnément...avec les jeunes* (Montréal: Fides, 1991). (Free translation)

22. Grand'Maison, p. 96. (Free translation)

...we favour small groups and communities, not to institutionalize a new form of ecclesial belonging, but to live out the true meaning of the Church. In fact, there is no community if there is no communication, if there is no recognition of people's personal realities, if there is no communion between members as they seek to understand and deepen their faith and to express this faith through commitment.''<sup>23</sup>

Clearly much remains to be done to develop the social conscience and community spirit that are so essential to being able to define one's place in life, grapple with its inherent challenges, and live in harmony with others. Much remains to be done not only among our young people, but also in our schools, if, for example, we are to take a critical look at an institutional culture that may be overly influenced by individualism and other prevailing destructive social values. Such a critical look is vital if we are to strengthen the sense of sharing and community pastoral animation seeks to promote and develop in young people.

To this end, pastoral animators must continue to collaborate in all endeavours that are likely to create a school where specific functions are less compartmentalized, where management is more participative, and where all educators work toward the goal of fostering young people's overall development. A school where everyone is less isolated from each other is more conducive to the sharing of concerns and to the recognition of each person's contribution. A school that is ultimately more attentive to people provides a more realistic and human environment for students and staff alike. Such a school is not utopic. Rather, it reflects the essence of the Gospel message.

In its report entitled *Un Québec fou de ses enfants*, the task force on youth of the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec speaks of the need to improve the school environment, particularly that of students age twelve to seventeen.

We have heard talk of every kind of problem: teachers who are demoralized, structures that depersonalize, students who are demotivated, communities that take no interest in their secondary school, the lack of any pride or sense of belonging to the school, stringent rules... A major problem is the difficulty young people have in finding adults there who are attentive to their needs, and who are willing to listen and develop emotional bonds.

We lay no blame for this state of affairs, but rather make known the strong determination shared by many of those interviewed to give all young people an environment that will allow them to experience success, feel pride, attain objectives, and come out of adolescence as mature adults... The school is so important in young people's everyday lives that the dissatisfaction we heard expressed about it during our consultations is cause for concern. There is a definite sense of urgency surrounding this issue.<sup>24</sup>

Many people nowadays regard religion as a private matter for the individual conscience. This way of thinking overlooks the key roles that religion has played in the social and cultural development of most societies. How, for example, could the history, literature, and most of the institutions of the Western world possibly be understood without acknowledging the influence of Christianity and the Gospel? In seeking to influence the very culture of the school, pastoral animation is being true to its purpose, and to the values and message it seeks to impart. Its educational contribution to both the school and students is all the more relevant given the major stakes that hinge on improving the quality of life in the schools.

23. Assembly of Bishops of Québec, *Bâtir une Église, une communauté vivante*. Message aux communautés chrétiennes, March 1993, p. 3. (Free translation)

24. Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, Direction des communications, *Un Québec fou de ses enfants*, Report of the Groupe de travail pour les jeunes (Québec: Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, 1991), p. 123. (Free translation)

## 2.2 The Particular Nature of Pastoral Animation

The first chapter of this document mentioned the somewhat agonizing position of the animators in our schools, pressured as they are by often conflicting, if not contradictory, expectations and views. On the one hand, there are critics who would like to see more Masses celebrated in school, and, on the other, there are those who would prefer to see none at all! There are those who feel that pastoral animators are too much like social workers or school life activity advisors, and those who criticize them for being too spiritual or traditional in their approach, and for overemphasizing prayer, liturgy, dogma, and morals. As a result of these opposing points of view, disagreements as to whether to humanize, teach the Gospel message, or administer the sacraments come back to the surface, although they have been condemned as sterile. However, these disagreements no longer hold "...when people know how to put their Christian faith into practice in their secular life, when they can live and see their secular life in a Christian way, particularly in a society and culture which is increasingly secular."<sup>25</sup> As Jacques Grand'Maison reminds us, Christian life is lived in other ways than through religious mediation:

The Catholic movements of yesterday's youth had a social, secular dimension to them. No one was scandalized by this; quite the contrary. It should not surprise us then, that today, spiritualist movements are considered to be authentically Christian. With a touch of humour, we assert that in order "to understand the essence of the Gospel, to savour it, some of it must be dissolved in the daily diet of life."<sup>26</sup>

For today's young people, the "daily diet" includes problems related to staying and succeeding in school; it also includes violence and poverty, emotional, sexual, and behavioural problems, personal identity crises, and intercultural conflicts, among others.

Offered at a crucial time in young people's lives when they are grappling with major personal crises, pastoral animation gives young people the opportunity to participate in experiences and learning activities that are directly relevant to their everyday lives. It allows them to get involved and to cultivate the art of living as inspired by the Gospel.

### 2.2.1 Concrete Experiences and Learning Directly Relevant to Everyday Life

*Religion in Today's School 5: Pastoral Animation* defines pastoral animation as follows:

Pastoral animation is a workshop in the sense that young people experiment with and learn about life and Gospel values. Learning through experiences at the midst of things. Pastoral animation is a workshop for doing, enacting and living. Pastoral animation is a workshop whereby faith is put into practice and through practice, faith-understanding deepens.<sup>27</sup>

Through the movements, projects, and diverse activities it organizes, pastoral animation places young people in concrete, everyday situations which allow them to get to know themselves better, to test their skills, to integrate different aspects of their lives, to open up to others, to understand their surroundings, to assume responsibilities, and to follow through on commitments.

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25. Grand'Maison, p. 36. (Free translation)

26. *Ibid.*, p.52. (Free translation)

27. Catholic Committee, *Religion in Today's School 5, Pastoral Animation* (Québec: Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 1980), s. 12, p. 17.

Pastoral animators concentrate above all on making themselves available to young people when needed, on listening to them, on assisting them through their personal or collective struggles, and on helping them find answers to their questions or solutions to their problems. By guiding young people through concrete, relevant everyday situations using a variety of techniques, pastoral animation also helps them develop their faith and sense of humanity.

### **2.2.2 The Art of Living as Inspired by the Gospel**

There is no such thing as pastoral animation without reference to the Gospel and to faith; without a close correlation between life and the expression of faith. By allowing young people to integrate different aspects of their lives and to reinterpret them in light of the Gospel, pastoral animation makes its own unique contribution to their education.

The work of pastoral animation is a task of interpretation, that is, a patient exercise of understanding life enlightened by the Word of God and the Word of God enlightened by life.<sup>28</sup>

By virtue of its objectives, which focus on the gradual internalization of values and the adoption of attitudes and behaviours congruent with these values, pastoral animation allows young people to cultivate the art of living as inspired by the Gospel. It provides a channel for the Gospel to be an active force in the school, since as we already know, the Gospel is meaningful only if it is in touch with today's realities. Its presence is felt at the vital core of individual lives, of cultures, and of societies. It may be experienced in the form of good news, hope, or a release from the grip of human problems. It is conveyed through those who, inspired by the words, actions, and spirit of Jesus, are able to translate His project of liberation into concrete action.

This is essentially what pastoral animators are already doing in the schools. This is also what they are being asked to continue to emphasize in their work by demonstrating the educational relevance of pastoral animation in terms of the spirit of the Gospel, which relates to all aspects of human experience.

## **2.3 Two Examples**

The following two examples illustrate how the relevance and distinct perspective of pastoral animation is already apparent with respect to the dropout problem and to educational success and with respect to the new challenges arising from intensified intercultural relations in our schools.

### **2.3.1 Pastoral Animation in Relation to the Dropout Problem and to Educational Success**

For all educators in the school system, today's dropout and success rates are indicative of the pressing need to help young people discover, or perhaps rediscover, the joy of learning. They are indicative of the pressing need to make school a more interesting place so as to motivate students to at least complete their studies. They are also indicative of the need to use a wide range of teaching strategies and to adapt teaching to the new requirements of a society which is undergoing major social and economic changes.

Pastoral animators must be credited for the initiatives they have taken regarding the particular issues associated with the dropout problem and the goal of educational success for the largest possible number of students. For example, some animators have paired stronger students with weaker ones. Others have created emergency funds and school supply centres

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<sup>28</sup>. *Religion in Today's School*, s. 51, p. 26.

to help students with financial and material needs. Still others have organized “theme weeks” or initiated resource groups designed to foster both student motivation to participate in school life and a greater sense of belonging, which in turn improves the student retention rate.

By becoming actively involved in school life and students’ current experiences, these pastoral animators performed both an eminently useful task and one that reflects Gospel values. Staying and succeeding in school are crucial issues for both young people and society today. Learning that one finds fulfilment in life when one knows how to maintain a certain balance and how to help others and follow through on one’s commitments—this too is part of cultivating the art of living as inspired by the Gospel.

### **2.3.2 Pastoral Animation and Intercultural Relations Within the School**

Most schools, particularly in the Montréal region, are becoming increasingly pluralistic and multicultural, which brings with it its own set of problems. Getting young people who come from diverse and sometimes radically different ethnic backgrounds, religions, and cultures to live alongside one another in an atmosphere of respect, sharing, and cooperation is no easy task. Very real problems of disorientation, culture shock, communication, poverty, and integration into the host society are common among young neo-Quebecers today.

Pastoral animators take an active role with respect to these problems in our schools today. By making themselves available and trying to humanize the environment, it is often they who welcome immigrant students, Christian and otherwise, and who help them integrate into school life. They provide opportunities for personal reflection and hold ecumenical prayer sessions. They organize joint projects such as multiethnic talent shows, outings, plays, public debates, and volunteer charity events. One such animator encourages the young people in his school to participate in discussion groups, and to talk about their respective religious traditions. He gives others the chance to explore the spiritual wealth of their own religious traditions by setting aside part of the pastoral animation room for their use during periods such as Ramadan.

The involvement of these animators in the school’s daily activities clearly demonstrates that in many schools, pastoral animation is a service which is useful not only to Catholics but to all students, and that it respects the religious freedom of the individual. This type of service makes a positive contribution to an integral, humanistic type of education and helps young people learn how to live together in a pluralistic socio-religious context. From a Christian point of view, the work of these animators is a true reflection of the Gospel values and of Jesus’ teachings, which call on us to be attentive to the needs of others, to welcome the strangers in our midst, and to love unconditionally. This involvement is also indicative of the fact that pastoral animators are both able and willing to adapt to new, changing, and unprecedented situations.



## CHAPTER III

### STEPS THAT MUST BE TAKEN

Pastoral animation clearly makes both a significant and unique contribution to the education of young people today. A number of steps must therefore be taken and conditions guaranteed to ensure that this service will continue to perform its assigned educational function in the school. The following recommendations should be considered: focus pastoral animation activities on priorities and essential or fundamental educational objectives; share responsibilities with other services; work in partnership; improve general understanding of the role of the pastoral animation service; ensure that the conditions necessary for pastoral animation are in fact present in the schools.

#### 3.1 Focussing Pastoral Animation Activities on Essential Educational Objectives and Priorities

Several of the pastoral animators interviewed by the Catholic Committee admitted they were overwhelmed by the task before them. Clearly some of them have heavier workloads than others, and in certain cases, totally unmanageable ones. But isn't it precisely when the workload is heavier that it becomes more urgent than ever to set priorities which force us to make choices, to eliminate certain activities, and to modify our objectives? And how can we choose these priorities and objectives without first closely studying the school context, without analyzing, for example, concrete or specific situations that need to be rectified in the schools and the most effective ways of doing so?

Pastoral animators obviously plan and evaluate their activities, and most of them do so very effectively. Yet some of the activities they plan never get off the ground, either because they are too formal or too ambitious, or insufficiently adapted to the specific and concrete realities of the school in question. What must be remembered here is that quality animation requires careful planning of activities based on a thorough analysis of the school context. To do this, one must know how to consult others, how to objectively assess the activities carried out, and how to regularly evaluate the pertinence and educational validity of these activities. One must also know how to ask questions about the effectiveness of the methods used to attain the objectives and not repeat the same activities systematically year in and year out, even if they have proven successful—at least not without continually evaluating their relevance. In addition, this implies knowing how to say no to certain requests or projects which have not been carefully thought out. These are some of the signs of quality management in pastoral animation.

In its efforts to focus on essential or fundamental objectives, pastoral animation can seek inspiration in guidelines that were given by the Catholic Committee two years ago in its position paper on Catholic Religious and Moral Instruction at the secondary level<sup>29</sup>. Taking into account the existing socio-religious context, some of the concerns expressed by young people, and some of the new expectations of secondary school education, the Committee proposed six learning tasks it deemed essential to the moral and religious education of secondary school students. Students should learn to: relate to their inner realities; define their views regarding the main components of the Christian faith and way of life; read the Bible in terms of its original meaning and its significance for today; interpret current events and events in their own lives in the light of Christian faith and experience; find out,

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29. Catholic Committee, *L'enseignement moral et religieux catholique au secondaire—Pour un enseignement mieux adapté aux jeunes et aux contextes actuels—Avis au ministre de l'Éducation* (Québec: Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 1991). (Free translation)

intelligently and with an attitude of respect, about the great religious traditions and the various current manifestations of religious attitudes in the community; and lastly, exercise moral judgment.

Deemed essential by the Committee, these learning tasks are intended to give young people the opportunity to acquire a certain number of “useful, lasting, and pertinent skills in the current socio-religious context,”<sup>30</sup> and to guarantee, on the spiritual, religious, and moral levels, a basic “exit profile” for students completing secondary school. If pursued using the educational approach specific to pastoral animation, these learning tasks can help update or effectively implement the proposals made in *Religion in Today's School: Pastoral Animation*, 5 in 1980, based on the list of the five functions of religion.<sup>31</sup>

### 3.2 Sharing Responsibilities with Other Services

During its meetings with pastoral animators, the Catholic Committee was dismayed to learn that in many schools there are few, if any, formal or organized relations between the pastoral animation service and the instructional services department, or even the Catholic Religious and Moral Instruction department. In October 1992, similar observations were made at Carrefour 92, a conference on education in the Catholic schools on the island of Montréal.<sup>32</sup> Yet there are many concrete opportunities for cooperation on such matters as the essential learning tasks proposed by the Catholic Committee in its 1991 report.

Closer cooperation should likewise be established between pastoral animators and teachers of subjects other than Catholic Religious and Moral Instruction whenever possible. Pastoral animators could, for example, act as resource persons regarding issues related to faith, religion, or morals.

Many pastoral animators are already involved in cooperative endeavours with other student services. A survey conducted by the Direction de l'enseignement catholique indicated that roughly 68 percent of them work as part of a multidisciplinary team, 44 percent are also involved in the “multi-agent” team responsible for the educational project, and 33 percent sit on their school's orientation committee. It is these types of activities and arrangements for involvement in school life that must be encouraged, for they allow pastoral animation to serve its intended educational purpose in the school.

In the current school context, it is becoming increasingly necessary for pastoral animators to be able to work as members of a team, to know how to work together to achieve their school's objectives, and to share responsibilities.

In this respect, much is expected of pastoral animators and it is not always limited to their direct work with the students. The comments made by some school principals were particularly significant here. They expect pastoral animators to take an active part in defining the school project and in helping to increase staff awareness of certain values, primarily by serving as models or advocates of these values themselves. They expect pastoral animators to be concerned with the well-being of the school as a whole and to act as agents of change.

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30. *Ibid.*, p. 7. (Free translation)

31. These learning experiences or courses of action for pastoral animation were expressed as follows in *Religion in Today's School* (p. 93-106): apprenticeship to a meaningful life; experiencing life in community, in communion; Christian symbolism; Christian action and commitment; integration of faith and culture.

32. “Pastoral animation sometimes works in isolation in the schools, having no contact with Catholic moral and religious instruction teachers, with the administration, with the parish pastoral animators, or with parents.” *Carnet de route de Carrefour 92* (Québec: ministère de l'Éducation, n.d.), p. 16. (Free translation)

33. Ministère de l'Éducation, *Situation de l'animation pastorale au secondaire—Compte rendu d'un sondage* (Québec: ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 1991), p. 20

Lastly, they expect them to be “a force in the school,” “a voice for certain values,” and a catalyst that helps “bridge the gap” between people. All of these expectations are legitimate and congruent with the true role of the pastoral animation service in the school.

### **3.3 Working in Partnership**

Several of the pastoral animators interviewed stated that they feel isolated within their schools, as if they are the only ones concerned about certain issues, especially those issues most directly related to the school’s confessional character. It is true that since the phasing out of regional school boards, secondary school pastoral animators often find themselves alone in performing this function within their school board. In such instances, it is up to the school administration to work together with the Christian education counsellors to find ways of organizing or facilitating regular meetings among pastoral animators. These meetings provide essential opportunities for discussion, information-sharing, professional development, and collaboration on joint projects.

Several animators with whom the Committee met also indicated how essential it is to have the school principal’s support. When the principal has a good understanding of the role of the pastoral animator, it simplifies the latter’s task and greatly enhances his or her chances of playing a meaningful, relevant, and effective role in the school. The principal can offer valuable support by creating conditions that are favourable to pastoral animation services and by helping supervise the planning, implementing, and evaluating of pastoral animation activities in the school on a yearly or term basis.

There are different ways of enlisting cooperation. For example, it is absolutely essential that students be given responsibilities, and that pastoral animators learn how to teach students to do things on their own rather than doing everything for them. Not only is this more valid from an educational point of view and more motivating for the students, but it is also more congruent with the true role of an animator. Cooperation can also be sought by creating participatory structures such as pastoral committees, in which school staff members, pastoral agents from the local parish or diocese, leaders of youth movements, and representatives of social or humanitarian groups in the community can take part. Every possible effort must be made to overcome isolation and to work together in a spirit of cooperation.

### **3.4 Giving Pastoral Animation Service a Higher Profile**

While pastoral animators are usually well known as individuals, there often appears to be a very real lack of information, among school staff, students, and parents, as to the nature of their work and of their particular function in the school.

The problem does not only lie in the fact that some parents cannot differentiate the role of the pastoral animator from that of the Catholic Religious and Moral Instruction teacher. But problems do arise when, within the schools themselves, there is little understanding of what pastoral animators do, of why they devote so much time to particular groups of students, of why they involve students in extracurricular activities, or of why they consider it so important to have a pastoral animation room at their disposal. If pastoral animators are seen simply as another kind of social worker or school life activity advisor, or, if there is no appreciation of the fact that in their efforts to humanize the school environment they are performing an eminently evangelical and pastoral task, then profound misunderstandings can arise and create problems.

Because of the misconceptions people sometimes have of pastoral animators and their role in the school, and because of the many expectations they often have of them, it is essential

that efforts be made to provide better information on the specific role of pastoral animation in the school, on its distinct educational approach, on the learning it allows students to achieve, on the priorities and objectives of pastoral animation and on the type of activities it involves.

As was pointed out in the first chapter of this document, parents often ask for more information on pastoral animation as part of the process of evaluating the schools' confessional character. Clearly it is important to know how to respond to this request, and to understand the specific type of information parents are seeking and are likely to find interesting. However, it is equally important to give them a broader picture of the nature and function of the service and at the same time, to give the service a higher profile. Of course, this does not mean bombarding parents with information—quality is more important than quantity. What is important is to choose the most opportune moments for passing on this information, to use language that the audience can understand, and to give the service a higher profile in the school.

### **3.5 Providing the Conditions Necessary for Pastoral Animation**

A number of conditions are indispensable for pastoral animation. Without them, the task is often difficult, if not virtually impossible to accomplish. The Catholic Committee's views on this subject are set forth in the following pages.

#### **3.5.1 Adequate Premises and an Adequate Operating Budget**

The Committee has already stressed the great importance it places on providing the minimum conditions required by pastoral animators to fulfil their function in the schools. These conditions are suitable premises specifically designated for pastoral animation activities and an adequate operating budget. Section 22 of the Committee's regulations reads as follows: "A public school recognized as Catholic shall allot funds and provide premises for conducting pastoral animation activities."<sup>34</sup>

*Religion in Today's School: Pastoral Animation*, 5, mentions the need for specific premises for pastoral animation activities and specifies a number of requirements.<sup>35</sup> In 1978, the Direction générale de l'administration of the ministère de l'Éducation also published a guide containing mainly plans for the building and layout of pastoral animation premises and informing the school boards of the surface areas to be allowed. However, in 1980, the Ministry spelled out new building standards which effectively eliminated the spaces reserved for pastoral animation to make way for multipurpose spaces that could also be used for pastoral animation activities.

The net result has been that today some pastoral animators have no premises available to them for pastoral animation activities. Others must wage a continual battle to hold onto their rooms and prevent their being used for other activities, or moved to less accessible premises in the school, away from the hub of school activity and student traffic.<sup>36</sup>

These situations sometimes create major problems for pastoral animators, and the authorities concerned should do everything in their power to see that they are resolved.

34. Catholic Committee, *Regulation Respecting the Recognition of Elementary and Secondary Schools of the Public School System as Catholic and their Confessional Character*, s. 22.

35. Cf. *Religion in Today's School* 5, s. 455-456.

36. The survey conducted in 1991 by the Direction de l'enseignement catholique and entitled *Situation de l'animation pastorale au secondaire* indicated that 11 percent of the pastoral animators interviewed do not have a pastoral animation room and that only 66 percent of them have a room which is reserved exclusively for their use.

One thing is absolutely certain with regard to the budget needed to carry out pastoral animation activities: though pastoral animation is concerned with spiritual realities, its material needs are nonetheless very concrete! It must have a sufficient budget and one that is equitable compared with that of other services and school activities.

### **3.5.2 Realistic Numbers of Pastoral Animators and Animator/Student Ratios**

Today the Catholic Committee holds much the same view as it held 13 years ago regarding the number of pastoral animators needed. Briefly, their position is as follows:<sup>37</sup> the quality of pastoral animation depends largely on the quality and competence of the animators, but also on their working conditions in the schools; the number of persons assigned to pastoral animation plays a key role; the service must have sufficient staff; the Committee has no intention of proposing a numerical norm for all Québec schools; staffing needs must be evaluated in terms of the tasks assigned, the objectives to be reached, and the confessional character of the school. Once recognition of the confessional status has been granted, it implies that the school should be given the means to fulfil its mandate. The already small number of pastoral animators cannot be cut ad infinitum without rendering the service ineffective or meaningless.

According to the data collected in January 1993 by the Direction de l'enseignement catholique of the ministère de l'Éducation, the average ratio of pastoral animators in secondary schools went from one animator for every 923 Catholic students in 1973-1974 to one animator for every 1073 Catholic students in 1992-1993. However, the ratios for certain administrative regions vary considerably, ranging from one animator for every 821 students in some regions to one animator for every 1499 students in others.

If we examine the data available for the 1991-1992 school year, this time from the point of view of the school boards, we note that, at that time, 24 boards had a ratio of more than one animator for every 1400 students, 16 of these had ratios ranging from 1:1500 to 1:1900, and three had ratios that were higher than 1:2200!

The Committee made a point of meeting with several pastoral animators working in schools where the ratio is extremely high<sup>38</sup>. It noted that pastoral animators working in such situations generally become more selective in terms of which requests for individual guidance they handle. For example, the only animator in a school of 2800 students had the following to say: "If I wanted to, I could spend all my time doing individual guidance, given the number of requests and needs expressed by staff as well as students, but it's simply impossible!" Another experienced animator, also working alone but in a school of 1800 students, has adopted the position that individual guidance can no longer be a priority for him, even if in 1991-1992, he had many one-on-one interviews. He now sees himself instead as a sort of referral agent who directs most of the requests he receives to other people in the school or in the community, such as the psychologist, the person in charge of the school dropout project, a social worker or the nurse. "But just listening to young people," he said, "to find out who to refer them to, that alone takes a lot of time! And I do personally handle cases involving death, suicide, or abortion, or when someone has been lured into a sect..." Another such animator working in two schools with a total student population of 1350, reiterated a similar position when he said, "I simply decided that I would no longer set aside any time for individual interviews. I learned to say no. Now I only hold group animation sessions. I feel that I have cut out one of the essential functions of my pastoral role, namely, that

37. Cf. *Religion in Today's School* 5, s. 463-468.

38. The Committee met mainly with a group of eight animators working in one or more schools. The animator/student ratio ranged between 1:1350 and 1:2800 students for these animators.

of giving attention to those who have gone astray, but I have no choice...even if it's very frustrating and demotivating for me...Working in two schools means that I am also less visible to the students, and they are therefore less inclined to seek me out..."

Other examples could be cited. The often difficult situations in which some animators find themselves risk compromising the students' very right to quality pastoral animation services.<sup>39</sup> For this reason, the Catholic Committee is of the opinion that the animator/student ratio should not exceed 1:1000, particularly given the nature of the pastoral animator's task, which by definition should be based on a "pedagogy of presence and accompaniment."<sup>40</sup> A ratio in the order of one animator for every 1000 students should be weighted in the context of small schools. A pastoral animator may in fact work in three or four schools, but be unable to do any real animation work with the students or staff owing to lack of time in any one school.

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39. *Education Act*, s. 6, 226, and 227.

40. *Cf. Religion in Today's School* 5, s. 43.

## CONCLUSION

One of the few astronauts to have walked on the Moon recounted how overwhelming he had found the sight of the sky and the Earth. "For a long moment," he said, "I just stood there with my mouth gaping, my feet glued to the ground, utterly transfixed. What a breathtaking sight! Then suddenly I caught hold of myself and told myself to stop wasting time and get on with collecting rocks!"

This incident suggests that we need two types of education: one which teaches us how to live our life, and the other which teaches us how to earn our living.

In today's secondary schools, pastoral animators, who are often concerned with the first type of education, perform an educational function that is sometimes misunderstood but nevertheless of great importance. This function can be described in many ways, the most important of which are perhaps the following: openness and availability, a listening ear, caring, support, and guidance.

The many and varied activities offered as part of pastoral animation provide young people with truly essential experiences and learning opportunities. Pastoral animation also contributes significantly to improving the quality of life in secondary schools.

In this document, the Catholic Committee has sought to highlight certain aspects of the contribution of pastoral animation to secondary school education and to suggest steps that are likely to ensure its continuation. The Committee's primary goal was to show the vital importance it places on this Catholic education activity in secondary schools. In summary, the Committee:

1. *Affirms that in today's secondary schools, pastoral animation makes a unique and meaningful contribution to students' education*
2. *Draws attention to certain aspects that must eventually be given priority if we are to succeed in fostering interiority in young people such as helping them develop idealism, and reinforcing their sense of hope and their psychological resources*
3. *Stresses the crucial importance of providing reference points, guidelines, and role models to help young people shape their personalities, give direction to their life, and define their roles in their relations with others*
4. *Encourages pastoral animators to draw on role playing and initiation rites as a basis for creating activities that will enable young people to understand religious symbolism in relation to their secular life and that will help motivate them to reexamine their lives in this light and integrate the different aspects of their personality*
5. *Urges pastoral animators to continue their activities with a view to develop social conscience and community spirit in young people and to improve the quality of life and interpersonal relations in the school*
6. *Reminds us of the particular perspective or function of pastoral animation in the schools: it complements other educational services and is designed to give young people the opportunity to take part in certain types of experiences and learning that are directly relevant to real-life situations; it is a service which also promotes, in the school, values and attitudes inspired by the Gospel*

7. *Points out that pastoral animation's direct involvement in the issues, realities, and problems which are uppermost in the minds of today's young people is the clearest proof of its educational relevance and truly evangelical and pastoral nature*
8. *Maintains that it is by thoroughly analyzing their school environment and carefully selecting the priorities and objectives to be attained that pastoral animators can define the most relevant and effective role their service can play in their school and with the students they are serving*
9. *Encourages pastoral animators to focus their educational activities on essential or fundamental objectives, and to draw inspiration from the learning tasks described by the Committee in its 1991 position paper to the Minister of Education*
10. *Calls on pastoral animators to work in closer collaboration with other staff members, particularly with Catholic Religious and Moral Instruction teachers, in order to rally their energies around common goals, projects, and educational concerns*
11. *Urges school boards to find ways that will allow pastoral animators to meet regularly, beyond the limits of their territory if need be, for discussion, information-sharing, professional development and collaboration on joint projects*
12. *Recommends that pastoral animators make greater efforts to work in collaboration and partnership with others in their school*
13. *Recommends that pastoral animators and those in charge of this service take initiatives to keep students, school staff members, school board personnel, parents, and the community at large better informed of the role of the pastoral animation*
14. *Recommends that school administrators ensure that certain essential working conditions, such as adequate premises and operating budgets, be made available to pastoral animators in all secondary schools*
15. *Recommends that in assessing the number of pastoral animators to be allocated to secondary schools, school administrators bear in mind that quality pastoral animation depends on a realistic animator/student ratio, in accordance with the parameters set out by the Committee*



## **APPENDIX:**

### **HEARINGS AND SCHOOL VISITS**

#### **Groups of people met during hearings**

- A group of nine pastoral animators from Montréal
- The pastoral animators from the Gaspé diocese
- A group of nine pastoral animators working in situations where they are shortstaffed
- A group of eight Montréal school principals
- A group of six Christian education counsellors from the Montréal region
- The Christian education counsellors from the Québec City and Chaudière-Appalaches regions
- The assembly of the directors of the Diocesan Offices of Education of Québec
- Two groups of students from École polyvalente de Carleton

#### **School visits**

During the school visits, the members of the Catholic Committee had the opportunity to meet with many groups of students, teachers, administrative staff, non-teaching professionals, parents, and pastoral animators within the schools and school boards.

#### **The following schools were visited:**

- École secondaire Horizon Jeunesse (Sainte-Rose, Laval)  
Commission scolaire Des Mille-Îles
- École secondaire Paul-Gérin-Lajoie (Outremont)  
Commission scolaire Sainte-Croix
- École secondaire de la Pointe-aux-Trembles (Montréal)  
Commission scolaire Jérôme-Le Royer
- LaSalle Catholic Comprehensive High School (LaSalle)  
Commission scolaire du Sault-Saint-Louis
- École secondaire Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes (Longueuil)  
Private educational institution





It's an important link in the school's mission.

I want to have my say!

WHY SO MANY

YOU HELP US GIVE MEANING TO OUR LIVES.

HOW CAN WE LIVE THE

GOSPEL?

YOUNG

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CONSEIL SUPÉRIEUR DE L'ÉDUCATION

2050, boul. René-Lévesque Ouest  
4e étage, Sainte-Foy, G1V 2K8  
Tél.: (418) 643-3850  
(514) 873-5056

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