

**religion in
today's school**

II

**religious instruction:
rationale,
objectives, policies**

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religion in today's school

II religious instruction: rationale, objectives, policies

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foreword

The booklet RELIGION IN TODAY'S SCHOOL dealt with the need for a "new outlook" on religious education in the schools. This study continues surveying the present situation of religious instruction and examining from a new point of view the reasons why religious instruction should continue to have a place in the curriculum, particularly in Catholic schools. The objectives of religious instruction are described, as well as the principal policies proposed by the Catholic Committee concerning it.

The Department of Education, Church authorities, school administrators, teachers and parents interested in Christian education will find in these pages a statement of the directions that the Catholic Committee favours for religious instruction — directions which have been made operational in the Regulation governing schools recognized as Catholic.

The French and English sectors of the Catholic school system are in somewhat different situations with regard to religious instruction, even though the programs and many of the teaching materials are often the same, particularly at the elementary level. But since the basic problems are identical, the Catholic Committee has considered it worthwhile to make this study available to the English-speaking school milieu, though in a shortened version. Passages more specifically concerned with the Francophone milieu have been abridged or eliminated.

At the present time there is much talk of planning and evaluation in all phases of education. Special efforts are being made to assess the results of the past ten years' renewal in religious instruction. It is hoped, therefore, that this study may prove a positive contribution to such evaluation and may encourage the creative efforts that are needed in the new world of education.

Paul Tremblay, Chairman
Catholic Committee of the Superior Council of Education

introduction

**review and
forecast**

1. A tremendous change has taken place in the field of religious education during the past ten years.

2. Now the time has come to take our bearings, to note what has been accomplished and to plan for the future. We must look back to evaluate our progress, noting the strengths and the weaknesses; we must verify our orientations and set our compass for the way ahead. Despite real advances in the past few years, religious education still has to contend with many important problems. These are not limited to content and procedures or such matters as the exemption regulation, programs, methods, options, pastoral animation. Nowadays even the objectives of religious instruction are being questioned and its very purpose is subject to discussion. Just why do the schools offer religious instruction? What are its objectives? Do these form an integral part of the general objectives of the school system? Is the school, on the other hand, undertaking tasks that normally should be the responsibility of families and parish communities? These questions require more than an examination of suggestions about improving or reorganizing religious education — there is a need to explore the underlying reasons of this instruction.

part one

**religious instruction in
the school... why?**

1. the traditional arguments

3. Let us review the various arguments used in the past and still being used to justify the presence of religious instruction in the academic program of elementary and secondary schools. We shall look at six reasons which still retain some of their original cogency, though we shall see that none of them provides a fully satisfactory justification for religious instruction in the school setting. Each of the reasons has more or less weight for particular groups, but none has won consensus. While each has a definite value, it also has limitations and inadequacies. We consider, therefore, that none of these reasons can be deemed conclusive and decisive. It is important to note that the arguments will be presented in a somewhat contrasting form in order to show the main thrust of each. In actual fact they rarely are expressed in such an emphatic way. Generally they are less clearly stated, often being implicit and inarticulate convictions, latent proposals. Nevertheless, they often exert a determining influence on even minor decisions concerning religious instruction. To draw them forth into the full light of consciousness should provide an enlightening form of catharsis.

First Argument: The Denominational School System

4. Because we have denominational schools, it is quite normal that the curriculum should include a course of religious instruction.

Second Argument: The Duty of Evangelization

5. This is a pastoral argument, drawn from the principle that baptized children have a right to Christian education and that parents and the Church, therefore, have a duty to offer them the Christian message. Parents and the Church seek help in performing this duty by asking the school to accept partial responsibility for the development of faith. The basis of this argument is the duty of evangelization and the pastoral prerequisites of baptism.

Third Argument: Tradition

6. It has been a tradition for the schools of Québec to assign a place of major importance to religious instruction. Therefore, certain persons consider it unthinkable or unimaginable to do otherwise.

Fourth Argument: Christian Culture

7. This argument emphasizes the predominant role of Christianity in the Western world, especially in North America and to a remarkable degree in Québec. It is maintained that young people here should not be ignorant of the main tenets of the Christian religion — dogma, ethics, ritual, social impact. Otherwise, they would be cut off from their own culture; they would be like exiles in their own land!

Fifth Argument: The Wishes of Parents

8. According to this argument, the ultimate justification of religious instruction is found in democratic respect for the desires of parents, who have a right to choose for their children the type of education that conforms to their religious convictions.

Sixth Argument: The Need for Good Principles

9. Adults often demand religious instruction in the school so that “good principles” may be inculcated into their children. This argument expresses some of the misgivings of parents concerning their children’s moral standards. Parents want the school to give their children a certain “basic morality.”

Value and Limitations of these Arguments

10. The six arguments we have just summarized do not lack cogency and value, but they have certain limitations and inadequacies. None of the arguments seems to us sufficiently convincing or conclusive to justify the presence of religious instruction in the school’s academic program.

2. the educational argument

11. Since we are dealing with religious instruction as provided in the schools, it should be justified on the basis of its educational value. Its inclusion in the school program should be for reasons of a specifically educational nature rather than because of pastoral, cultural, historical, or juridical factors. We shall now try to show that religious instruction can make a worthwhile contribution to the school's educational aims. The main elements of the "new outlook" already described in Part I of **Religion in Today's school** will be taken up again and further developed in three points: man's need for meaning, the nature of religion, and the concept of what a school actually is.

The Quest for Meaning

12. Human dynamics causes young children, adolescents, and indeed all human beings, to wonder about the origin and meaning of life. By nature, man is a meaning-seeking animal, a being who questions the riddle of self and the universe. He has never ceased to wonder about the mystery of his existence, his final purpose, his finite nature, his sufferings, his future. Physical science investigates the world and provides many explanations of the phenomena of our cosmic environment. Far from decreasing the number of questions, however, it increases them. The human sciences, on the other hand, have revealed the existence of two new worlds hitherto unexplored, over which humanity has not yet obtained mastery — the universe of the personality's unfathomable depths and the complex universe of relationships among social groups and nations. People constantly ask questions about these spheres of life that seem as fascinating and threatening today as was the world of cosmic energies to men of previous ages. The religious quest is just as strong today as in the past. Religious questioning has not disappeared because of secularization — it has simply assumed a new form. Even stronger than the rumour of the death of God is the "rumour of angels" — a rumour that persists in the human conscience through signs of transcendence,⁷ which indicate that there really is a spiritual dimension in humanity. That is what incites human beings to ask questions about their ultimate purpose. The world of education cannot fail to acknowledge this quest for meaning.

The Nature of Religion

13. In response to this quest rising from the core of being, religion offers a frame of reference, a system of interpreting life and the world. Religion, like other modes of knowledge such as experience, science, art, philosophy, constitutes a particular approach to the understanding of self and the universe. Millions of men and women throughout history and at the present time have chosen religion as a privileged way of attaining a coherent view of life. Properly understood, religion is not an escape from reality, but claims to be a way of access to what is really real, that is, the core of the most mysterious and most baffling experiences of life, death, love, time,

happiness. Therefore, since religion is a particularly meaningful sector of knowledge and experience, it is normal that the school should provide young people with opportunities to explore this universe.

The School's Objectives

14. The points just considered lead us to the conclusion that for purely **educational** reasons, it is important to take into account the spiritual dimension of young people's lives and to initiate them into the world of religion. However, a question remains to be answered: is the school the proper place for this aspect of education? Should not families and the Church normally be responsible for such education? If the school participates in religious education, is it not simply assuming a substitutive role? The answer given to these questions by different persons depends upon their concept of the school. Ultimately this sends us back to various educational theories and to the whole subject of the school's goals. The idea of religious instruction in the school is based ultimately upon the concept of education that is adopted. We must, then, try to clarify this matter.

15. Of course there are many theories of education, corresponding to different pedagogical concepts and producing different types of schools. The range of concepts in education stretches from rigid behaviourism advocating structured knowledge and behaviour (Skinner) to the theory of Rogers that emphasizes each individual's free development. These theories give rise to two main types of pedagogy (the pedagogy of assimilation and the pedagogy of creativity) and to various types of schools, depending upon the interplay of the threefold goals: knowledge, performance and being. Research undertaken recently at the Université du Québec has proposed a set of criteria by which we can distinguish four types of schools:

- the school that stresses preparation for life and seeks to transmit the knowledge and skills required for a trade or profession;
- the technocratic school that focusses on expertise and aims to produce specialists;
- the participatory school that takes into account the needs and expectations of young people in defining its objectives and then invites students to participate in their educational process;
- the personalized school which emphasizes primarily the inner resources of the students, their own personal progress and their own rhythm.

16. Our point of reference on this question is the concept of education set forth in the Superior Council of Education's report entitled **Educational Activity**.⁹ This text reduces the various educational concepts to two: those derived from a mechanistic view of development and learning; and those derived from an organic view. We shall summarize the main features of these two concepts.

The Mechanistic Concept

17. According to the mechanistic concept, education is basically a process of transmitting knowledge and skill. Thus it is a phenomenon of receptivity and assimilation. This model is called **mechanistic** because it compares education to a radio communication from a transmitter to a receiver. It is like a decantation process.

"This style of formation could be likened to pouring knowledge from one container into another, that is, from the teacher's mind into that of the student. . . The educator produces knowledge in the mind of the student who then receives it and incorporates it into his system. . .

The mechanistic form of educational activity does not generally reach the student's profound being, that is, his attitudes; it does not develop his taste for study or research which becomes rooted in the deep personality and vital dynamism of the individual. It gives rise to a restraining education which puts pressure on the mind. . . and on the will."⁴

18. Such a concept of education reveals a mechanistic view of man. The student is not seen as truly endowed with dynamic power to grow. Instead, the driving force of education is external and conditions the students by exerting pressure. This concept engineers a stereotype pedagogy, rigid discipline and fragmentation of subject matter.

19. In the setting of a mechanistic school, religious instruction is sure to be didactic and intellectual. Some persons would see its primary aim as the transmission of the dogmas of faith. They would emphasize the need to enable students to assimilate doctrine — that is not amenable to research, but is given from without, doctrine that should produce pre-established modes of behaviour. Others take a more flexible attitude to doctrine, but remain just as demanding in their didactic approach. They want religious instruction to follow the same pattern as other subjects by having clearly defined programs, content segmented into small units, rigid methods, strictly objective evaluation procedures.

20. The Superior Council of Education rejects this mechanistic concept as a basis of educational activity. We likewise reject it with regards to religious instruction. But because this concept is still prevalent in the school milieu and in Christian communities, it follows that any religious teaching that ventures to depart from it runs the risk of being severely judged and being branded as difficult, incoherent, inconsistent, unsuitable, if not outright heretical. In some instances, these criticisms may be justified, but before accepting them at face value, we must first see what notion of the school and what theory of education they reflect as well as what view of man they imply.⁵

The Organic Concept

21. The second model of education is based on a concept that views the training of youth as an active experience in which the student is no longer a mere recipient, but the principal agent of his or her personal development.

"The student possesses, within himself, the principal resources necessary to his growth, development, orientation and choices. He is capable of initiative, autonomy, personal decision and active participation in his learning processes. He develops effectively proportionately with the extent to which he participates in them."⁶

The driving force of educational activity is the learner himself. Learning is successful to the extent that the learner, the Educand, takes an active role and uses his personal capacities to the utmost.

22. Educational activity, therefore, should be mainly directed towards the inner resources that must be liberated, stimulated, activated.

"This second concept of educational activity . . . is resolutely centered on the dynamism and inner resources of the student: it has confidence that he possesses adjustive reactions for his growth and development; it embraces not only the objectives of intellectual formation, but also the objectives of affective and social maturation in its scope; it seeks to encourage the development of inner autonomy and a sense of responsibilities. . . According to this concept, the inner progress of the student, and the undetermined momentum of his inner growth are educative objectives which are infinitely more important than the sum total of knowledge acquired, the vastness of the program studied, the number of diplomas a person has accumulated or the number of years of education he has to his credit."⁷

23. Once this organic concept of education is adopted, it is quite natural to include religious instruction as part of the school's program.

"The complete training of a person requires, not only study, in the classical sense of the term, of the traditional subject matters (mother tongue, second language, mathematics, biology, physics, philosophy, and so forth), but also reflection on the less "classical" human problems (economy, politics, sexuality, religion, and so on) as well as actual learning through the acquisition of interpersonal relationships."⁸

24. Thus religious instruction can make a valuable contribution on the level of interior growth, the discovery of personal values, the reinforcement of personality.

"Education always consists of stimulating personality growth, which can only come from within the individual, the evolving of inventive and rational thought, emotional and social maturity, the development of personal autonomy, the discovery that each person makes by himself and for himself of values, the capability of communicating and exchanging ideas with others, no matter what their age, language, religion or culture may be. And one must understand that these objectives are not abstract. At the present time, young people understand them and seek them out and they want to discover them in school communities, in their administrators and professors."⁹

Where an organic concept of educational activity prevails, religious instruction is in no way marginal or out of place. On the contrary, such a concept practically demands the presence of religious education.

25. We can sum up as follows the educational argument in favour of granting full rights to religious instruction in the school: **every school has a duty to help the student in his search for meaning, to lead him to the field of knowledge and experience that religion constitutes, and finally, to encourage the organic development of his personality.** This argument has the great advantage of justifying religious instruction on educational grounds and in educational terms.

26. On the basis of this argument and in the light of our reflections on educational activity, we shall examine religious instruction as it now stands at the elementary and secondary levels and determine its future course. But first we will deal with three major consequences of the argumentation just presented.

Consequences Concerning the Approach to Religious Instruction

27. The organic concept of education does not contradict the pastoral approach, when the latter is truly educational. But it does oppose any pastoral approach that is overbearing, unmindful of students' personal development, or based on a mechanistic concept. It must be stressed that there is no opposition between genuine education (which transcends the mechanistic transmission of ideas) and genuine pastoral activity, which is totally different from propaganda or indoctrination. As an effort to educate in the faith, pastoral activity cannot neglect the means that are essential to all educational processes. We can even say that the pastoral approach will be all the more credible insofar as it is supported by a true concept of education and refrains from trying to circumvent basic principles of pedagogy. Therefore, there cannot be any conflict between an authentic educational approach and a pastoral effort that respects pedagogy. On the contrary, pastoral action and pedagogy should be mutually enriching.

28. It can also be stated that the organic approach to religious education does not contradict the objective approach, provided that the latter be truly educational. But it does oppose an objective approach concentrating

exclusively on **knowledge**, tending to confine itself to bare facts, or advocating absolute objectivity. We need only recall basic educational principles to realize how false such an orientation is. All religious instruction aims to be educational and should combine **an objective study of religion and a personal quest for meaning. It must be a dialogue between the students' personal experience and the data of religion.** To separate fact and experience, the objective and the subjective quest is to take the wrong road, as educational activity demands that both aspects be constantly joined together. It would be counter-educational to try to teach religion from a purely scientific and objective viewpoint, as if in a sterilized laboratory. The student protest movement has taught us that education does not thrive on the technocratic style that aims to train experts but all too often neglects the human side — the social, political, and emotional aspects of problems and of individuals. True objectivity frankly accepts these various aspects as integral parts of total reality.

Consequences Concerning Program Content

29. What should be the content of religious instruction in the light of the proposed educational approach? Should young people receive an initiation into **one** religion or an introduction to **all** religions, allowing each individual the option of personal decision?

We believe it would be anti-educational to try to turn the course of religious instruction into a "religious supermarket, displaying all religions as products and inviting students to choose what pleases them. The shopping-centre concept can never be a valid general model for schools. With regard to religious instruction in particular, it would be unreasonable to try to set up a free market in values. Religious instruction in our milieu should give priority to Christianity because it conforms to the North American context and to the experience of youth living in Québec.

Consequences Concerning Teachers' Attitudes

30. We wish to stress, finally, another consequence of the proposed educational concept: it involves a change in the notion of what the teacher's role should be in religious education. The organic concept of education requires that the teacher no longer be simply a transmitter of information and knowledge. He must become a guide whose role is to "participate directly and indirectly in the learning process, choices, and commitments that depend essentially upon the students' own aptitudes."¹⁶ If we accept this approach, then we see that the primary task of the teacher of religion is to guide young people in their search for and discovery of the content of faith, to lead them to the threshold of a personal choice. Thus the teacher no longer stands as the expert or the mandated authority. Religious development calls for a community context where each individual alternately teaches and is taught, where no one claims a monopoly of knowledge and no one is totally destitute of knowledge, where the creativity of the least gifted student can contribute to the education of the whole group. Such a situation questions rigid distinctions between teacher and learner, master and pupils, evangelizer and evangelized.

Some of the students are engaged in a search for meaning, a search for the real object of religious faith. Each is invited to speak out; each receives and each gives. Among them, the teacher is a companion and guide in a journey of exploration. As guide and educator, he is called to support the moral and religious progress of the students. This is an integral element of a multi-dimensional program of education.

part two

**religious instruction
in the elementary
school**

1. the catechetical program

31. Recently the catechetical program in the elementary school has been encountering various difficulties — difficulties of a pedagogical, doctrinal, and institutional nature. As a result, the question inevitably arises as to whether the present program should be continued, whether it meets the requirements of high quality religious education, whether it contains genuine educational value.

32. Let us examine more closely the exact context of the question. Some persons consider the catechetical program and the teaching materials to be of high calibre, but not satisfactory for the school as it has now become. Consequently, there remains only a choice between being resigned to a diluted and washed-down catechesis or making militant demands for a radical transformation of the school itself. Otherwise, it might be advisable to consider transferring all of catechesis to a setting other than the school. Other persons maintain that the actual definition of the word "catechesis" implies that its presence in the school is a compromise. Adherents of this theory claim that catechesis is a pastoral activity and therefore pursues apostolic and missionary objectives which can never fit into the framework of the school's pedagogical objectives. It is thought that catechesis will always be an alien reality in the school setting, difficult to assimilate, irrelevant to the school's own objectives. It would be better to acknowledge this quite frankly and to conclude that catechesis should be the responsibility of the Church alone, not the school. This would not necessarily exclude the possibility of a catechesis being available in the school, but it should be based on voluntary choice and closely linked to pastoral activity. Both these viewpoints bring into question whether catechetical instruction rightly belongs in the school.

33. Our answer to this question is clear: the program of religious instruction is legitimate in the school and should be maintained. This answer is supported by the following arguments:

- Program requirements are designed to obtain religious instruction of high quality. Its theological and psycho-pedagogical data are derived from first-rate sources. The teaching materials can be favourably compared to those used for other subjects and they are constantly subject to revision. Moreover, the program has stimulated considerable effort to retrain teachers already in service. It has the backing of a good number of research scholars, centres devoted to reflection and training, organizations and persons involved in its implementation. All these conditions are a guarantee of worthwhile catechetical activity.

- A large majority of the teachers of religion have expressed the opinion that their catechetical work is worthwhile. This opinion is confirmed by almost a dozen surveys that have taken place between 1968 and 1972 among elementary school teachers.¹⁰ Also, a majority of teachers believe that the school does indeed have a responsibility for Christian education and that the elementary school curriculum should include catechesis.¹¹

- Despite the difficulties already stressed, current catechetical instruction meets quite adequately the expectations of parents and pastors concerning religious education in the elementary school. In any case, it is clear that the majority do not believe that such instruction should be anything other than an initiation in the Christian faith.

- As to the specifically doctrinal orientations of the catechesis, these cannot be seriously questioned. The choice of a progressive and experiential form of catechesis is considered by many theologians to be both acceptable and in accordance with a widely recognized trend of current theological thought. It is considered the most opportune approach for the present time. Like any alternatives it has its advantages and its drawbacks. Therefore, it certainly can be improved. But on the whole, the harsh criticism of certain extremists is uncalled for: the program is indeed characterized by "theological and spiritual depth."¹²

- We add one other remark: very few ask to revert catechetical instruction to the home or to the parish. In 1972 the Dumont Report noted that "catechetical instruction in the elementary schools is considered right and proper by the large majority. In only a few instances was there any wish to see it revert to the home or the parish."¹³

For these reasons, we believe that the catechetical program is still a valuable part of the elementary curriculum, although this does not mean that it does not require certain modifications. We propose the following:

First Modification

34. This modification is imperative: **the objectives of the program should be re-defined so as to correspond more closely to the objectives of the elementary school.**

35. Here is a summary of the general objectives set forth in the religious instruction program now in force:

- to enable the children to enter into a personal relationship with each of the three divine Persons;

- to help them acquire the great Christian attitudes of faith, trust, love, detachment, thanksgiving;

- to give greater meaning, through the Christian mystery, to their experience as children, students, parishioners;

- to encourage the children's participation in the Christian life of the ecclesial community to which they belong.¹⁴

36. We believe that this program should be revised so that the objectives may be defined, specified and expressed as functions of the pedagogical objectives of the elementary school. This task now seems possible and necessary, in view of the serious effort of reflection and evaluation undertaken during the past few years in order to define the role of the school, to identify the objectives it pursues or should pursue, to determine what specific features it should have as a life environment. A working paper issued by the Department of Education in 1972 states the general purpose of the elementary school as follows:

"While lifetime educational activity has the purpose of promoting maximum personal development, this activity in the elementary school must concentrate on children's general development by helping them to **live** their childhood, that stage of life being a world in itself. **To live one's childhood** means to grow in every aspect of life, so as to attain sufficient mastery of the greatest possible number of means of expression and communication required for adaptation on every level — physical, intellectual, emotional, religious, moral, social." to sum up, the objective, on all these different levels of being, is: **"to help children master the means of expression and communication and to become adaptable to a society in a state of transformation."**¹⁵

37. Thus the religious dimension was explicitly recognized as one of the "levels of being" and an awakening of consciousness to spiritual and religious reality was recognized as an element of the educational program. In terms of this general objective, the text suggested the following particular goals for religious education (comprising both instruction and pastoral animation):

- to help children become aware of and concerned about the religious aspect of life in its various forms — the interior life, sense of the sacred, wonder, a questioning attitude to the universe, the quest for love and communion;
- to enable children to discover and to learn the religious beliefs and traditions of their families, their milieu, their church;
- to help children develop personal attitudes of respect and responsibility with regard to religion.¹⁶

38. These specific objectives assigned to religious education do not necessarily represent the last word on the subject, but they indicate an orientation better suited to the objectives of the school. Also, they are expressed in a style better adapted to the usual terminology of education. But behind the words and the style, of course, a gradual change of mentality is being suggested and proposed. We believe that the program of religious instruction should be re-formulated from this view-point. This will mean shifting from a pastoral and kerygmatic focus to a predominantly

educational focus. In many ways, this will require a transformation, a "conversion" of mentality and approach when it comes to the designing and implementation of a revised program.

Second Modification

39. The first proposed change implies the second, namely, a specification of the roles of the family and the community in the task of children's religious education. The institutional difficulties encountered in the school's catechetical program offer proof that the school does not hold a monopoly on Christian education. If the family and the community evade their own responsibility in this field, they will probably be disappointed in the school's efforts. The so-called crisis of catechetical instruction conveys a helpful warning: the school program cannot fulfill all the children's needs in the field of religious education. Parents and pastors should be aware of this. "Grasp all, lose all" says the proverb. Were the school, consciously or unconsciously, to attempt too much by claiming for itself all aspects of Christian life (faith, liturgy, ethics, experience), it would not be able to attain all its goals and would give rise to discontent and frustration. To ensure the quality and integrity of the school program, there is an urgent need for its limitations to be better identified and perceived.

2. the interrelationship of school-family-community

40. Our examination of the situation has revealed that the inter-relationship of school, family, and Christian community is at the very core of the difficulties encountered nowadays in catechetical instruction. Each of these three institutions is undergoing profound changes and therefore each is inclined to let the other two be responsible and to expect from them the essential tasks of Christian education. And so the ball bounces back and forth, from the school to the home, from the home to the parish, from the parish to the school. The result is frustration in all three milieus. Efforts to initiate dialogue become bogged down in mutual recrimination and irreconcilable proposals.

41. The School Should Take the Initiative

We believe that the school should take the initiative by defining what should be its specific contribution to the religious education of youth. Of the three institutions involved, it is in the best position to take the first steps in considering the matter. In the first place, because it is now engaged in an overall process of defining its own pedagogical objectives, it can easily seize the opportunity to define also its role in Christian education — what it can do, how much it can do, what are its possibilities and limitations. And secondly, the school's task of defining its specific contribution to the religious maturity of youth can be greatly facilitated because various parameters of evaluation are already available — theory of learning, function of the school, principles of taxonomy. Finally, the school milieu can count on qualified and competent personnel, well able to reflect on such questions and to offer solutions. Neither the religious instruction program nor the school as such can continue to claim unqualified responsibility for "education in the faith." Such a claim would only perpetuate an outdated feeling of global dominance, which would not only be detrimental to the school's own interest, but would provoke the dissatisfaction of the families and communities while encouraging them to abdicate their share of responsibility.

The Need for an Open-ended Attitude in Education

42. The school's specific role in Christian education should be sought in an open-ended attitude towards education. An example can illustrate how the organic concept of education can lead to a new outlook and a change in positions too readily adopted. Educators are often prone to gauge the content and orientation of religious instruction in relation to the prevailing mood of the milieu. They may say, for instance: "We're living in a pluralistic milieu; parents have lost interest; so there's no use providing religious instruction." But they do not apply this logic to other subjects of the curriculum. They are eager to see the school forging ahead and assuming leadership in the milieu with regard to language, personal and social development, knowledge of science. As educators, it would never occur to them to drop the English or French course just because the language used in neighbourhood kitchens

and garages all too often contradicts the classroom instruction. As educators, shouldn't they react similarly in the case of religious education? The fact that parents show little interest in religious instruction is not a reason to abandon it. Indeed, even if the parents had an overwhelming interest in it, that would not necessarily make this subject more desirable for the school curriculum. If religious instruction is found in the school, it is primarily because of its educational value and its rightful place in total education, not because of the approval or disapproval of the public. School boards in low-income neighbourhoods are often willing to increase their investment of money, personnel, and educational resources of all kinds. In an area where religion is neglected, then it would be mistaken to reduce this subject to the lowest common denominator. A true sense of education would lead to the contrary solution of devoting additional attention to spiritual and religious education.

Initiation to the Sacraments

43. Both families and parishes should be invited to accept a **larger share of the catechetical training** of children preparing for the first sacraments (the eucharist, confirmation, penance). Until recently the expression "immediate pastoral preparation" has had a rather limited meaning, referring to the fact that parents and pastors should decide whether the children are ready to approach the sacraments and then should choose the date and the style of celebration. It would be well to broaden this concept of "pastoral preparation" to include the **catechetical initiation** immediately preceding the sacrament. By this we mean that the essential catechetical elements of direct preparation for the celebration of the sacraments should be assumed by the community, that is to say, the parents, pastors, and adult Christians of the milieu. These persons should meet with the children either at a parish function, in their homes, or at the school. The catechesis could be entrusted to the "Parish Committee of Christian education" where it exists or to the parish Pastoral Committee. There is no objection to the school teachers also participating in this catechesis — on the contrary — provided they felt able to do so and particularly if they themselves belong to the local community.

44. The arrangement we are proposing is based on the following factors:

- The acceptance of children to participate in the sacramental life of the community is primarily a function of the community itself.
- Many teachers, especially in city schools, are not sufficiently identified with the local parish community to prepare children properly for their integration into it.
- A considerable proportion of teachers feel ill at ease when it comes to initiating the children to the sacraments. There may be many reasons for this, including doubts that sometimes arise concerning the parents' religious observances.

- It is very important for parish communities, large or small, to assume their part in the initiation to the sacraments. They should then be able to re-create in a new way the role of initiation that was theirs in the past.

The Role of the Family

45. In trying to specify the various role in religious education, the family must remember how early childhood underlies all religious growth. To accomplish this, groups of families and pastoral agents have a pastoral responsibility to young children which should extend beyond the period of preparation for baptism. If parents were more knowledgeable about the ways and forms of the spiritual awakening of children from birth to the age of six, they would be in a better position afterwards to perceive how religion continues to be "sensed" throughout childhood and adolescence. In any case, one point must be firmly kept in mind: parents need not take their lead from the catechesis given in the school. Naturally, it is desirable that they should have a similar approach and spirit, but above all they should realize that they have a contribution of their own as a family and as parents. They should trust their intuition and spontaneity as parents and educators without worrying too much about whether they are conforming to set catechetical principles. After all, children spend only one ninth of their time in school, while a large portion of the remaining time is spent at home. The family is still of capital importance in religious education. Parents should rid themselves of any reluctance to speak of religion, for their testimony is of tremendous importance.

The Role of the Christian Community

46. No catechesis is possible apart from a community. Catechesis takes place in the believing community. Faith is acquired and communicated and spread within a community of "faithful". This conviction was asserted from the very beginning of the modern catechetical movement and it is emphasized even more clearly today. Catechesis springs from and is supported by a living, dynamic, receptive community. The discouragement and resentment of certain teachers in charge of school catechesis often originate in a feeling that their efforts are neither appreciated nor supported. These reactions, negative in themselves, show the necessity of a catechesis that is deeply rooted in a community of believers. This point cannot be overemphasized.

47. But just because true communities are rarely found, should the school abandon catechesis entirely? Here we must specify what type of community we mean. What is in the mind of educators who say: "Give us communities and we will be able to provide catechesis." Are they addressing "the Church" in general? The parishes? The parents? The priests? Perhaps they are thinking of all these, the whole environment to the exclusion of the school and the teachers. It must be stated, however, that there is no such thing as one permanent, absolute community for each Christian. Everyone belongs to many groups of very different nature, many of but short duration. Any of these groups could blossom into a Christian community. The groups referred to are not necessarily those outside the

school. On the contrary, groups within the school may constitute communities whose members may experience a feeling of communion and living faith. Both catechesis and pastoral animation introduce elements that foster the growth of communities — children can speak out, share experiences, search for meaningful ritual, etc. We believe, therefore, that even where other communities fail to give the testimony that could rightfully be expected of them, catechetical instruction is still possible within school groups, even though it is necessarily less fruitful. Again we are faced with the oft-reiterated question: should religious education be provided because it is desired or because it answers an educational purpose?

48. We conclude with a summary of our main ideas and proposals concerning religious instruction in the elementary school:

1. The present religious instruction program should be retained, but with some revision.
2. The program should re-define its objectives in relation to the specific objectives of elementary education; it should also state its own aims, both cognitive and affective.
3. There is a need to re-define the respective roles of school, family, and Christian communities with respect to the religious education of children.
4. By reason of the resources at its disposal, the school could well take the initiative in this definition of roles by proceeding to determine its own specific contribution in the light of an educational viewpoint that includes the religious dimension.
5. In this process of defining roles, families and communities should be asked to take a more active part in the catechetical preparation of children for the reception of the sacraments.
6. Christian communities should be responsible for the task of gradually introducing children to the meaning and rhythm of the weekly eucharistic celebration.
7. To respond more satisfactorily to the needs of different groups and milieus, there should be greater variety than is found in the present catechetical program and its related teaching materials.
8. It is imperative that parents be better informed of the fact that the Catholic Committee's Regulation recognizes their right to request exemption from religious instruction for their children.

9. The school has a duty to provide acceptable alternative instruction for students exempted from religious education. To this end, there is a need to produce a practical guide designed to give children an awareness of moral and spiritual values.

part three

**religious instruction
in the secondary school**

1. the catechetical program

I. OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION

Objectives

49. Catholic religious instruction has two focal points: the Word of God and young people. "The Word of God must be presented in its most challenging, relevant and communal features. Focusing on young people means to listen to them, observe them, be aware of what they are seeking, refrain from imposing on them either an adult's faith or a child's faith, make use of all branches of human science to attain a deeper understanding of their world."¹⁷ The basic purpose of the program is to foster the quest for meaning — a quest in which two processes alternate: on the one hand, the Word enlightens the experiences of life, and, on the other hand, experiences of life help to understand the Word.

50. It is vitally important to keep this objective in mind so as to avoid misunderstandings about the program. It does not rest on a pre-arranged doctrinal foundation, but rather grows out of the existential situation of youth. It is called a "search" because it is intended for adolescents of Québec where the entire socio-cultural environment is in a state of change. "This socio-cultural situation would not be properly respected unless religious instruction takes the form of an opportunity for each individual to improve, to evolve, and to live in the context of an encounter with the Word of God.

. . . A socio-cultural milieu where both adolescents and adults are trying to find God calls for a pedagogy of the faith that respects all individuals, their own particular experience and the values they live by."¹⁸ It is this objective that characterizes the catechetical instruction in the secondary school. At the elementary level, religious instruction is primarily an exploration of the Christian mystery and a proclamation of the Word of God. At the secondary level, however, it is defined mainly as a quest, a search for meaning and understanding. Unfortunately, these differences of orientation tend to become blurred, largely because the same word "catechesis" is used in both elementary and secondary schools.

Content

51. We must not forget that in former times, religious instruction in secondary schools followed a highly structured plan based on history or doctrine. Thus for many persons, the introduction of the new program in 1969 represented a radical change of viewpoint and this reaction still persists. The program soon met with scathing criticism. It was denounced for its "doctrinal vacuum" and described as a catechesis crippled by vain efforts to follow the ups and downs and vague yearnings of adolescents.

Such reactions were hardly surprising. People have been accustomed to thinking of religious education in secondary schools as a highly structured program, a course in simplified theology for the laity. Therefore, the new catechetical plan caused surprise and even some fear. Even now, it meets with considerable lack of understanding in both the school and the church.

52. It may sometimes seem that this new catechetical approach has no place for subject matter and content. But a careful examination of the five-year program suffices to dispel this impression. "God, the object of the quest, has revealed himself clearly and this revelation, set in the matrix of the Bible, tradition, history, and the Church, refers to an exact content, elements of which can be selected for their connection with themes that are appropriate for particular groups of young people."¹⁹ The framework of the program is based on the salient features of adolescent experience: discovery of self, physical and sexual growth, loneliness and belonging, choice of values, social commitment. But from this background of personal experience, there emerge doctrinal discoveries and insights of supreme value concerning the mystery of God, the Trinity, creation, salvation through Christ, the Church, life in the spirit of the Gospel. Because it fits into the pattern of organic education, this program does not isolate the content from the response, does not draw up lists of "subjects to be covered," but aims, above all, to foster the religious maturing of youth according to each individual's rhythm and capacity. This gives the students an opportunity to absorb the essential reality of Christianity. As proof, we need only draw attention to some of the objectives proposed for various stages of the secondary school:

- to develop a Christian attitude to current events (Secondary I);
- to impart awareness of the historical aspect of Christian salvation (Secondary I);
- to present the Paschal mystery of Jesus as the focus of the Christian view of life (Secondary II);
- to show that God brings forth salvation from the very depths of personal experience (Secondary III and IV);
- to discover the meaning of commitment to society and to the Church; to see meaning in suffering and death; to be aware of God (Secondary V).

Methodology

53. The most characteristic feature of this program is its anthropological approach. It may not be superfluous to clarify this expression, as it often seems difficult and ambiguous. The source of ambiguity can doubtlessly be attributed to the word "anthropology", which etymologically simply designates the study of man, but more usually refers to the study of the anatomical and biological characteristics of man as a member of the animal kingdom. At times the word is also applied to

ethnology which investigates human groups and cultures. Needless to say, this latter sense of the word is not intended when we refer to "anthropological catechesis." Actually, the approach adopted is that of the philosophical question; "What is man?" The answer to this question is sought in a systematic study of human nature and conditions, based on the data of all human sciences.

In this sense, "anthropological catechesis" is religious instruction that calls on all branches of learning to enable man to acquire self-knowledge and to find his bearing in human and Christian existence. Such a catechesis chooses the human condition as the point of departure for religious exploration. Such universal experiences as optimism and hope, play and humour, compassion and awe give glimpses of transcendence and become milestones on the quest for meaning. The seekers make use of knowledge obtained from many sciences — sociology, psychology, history, anthropology, philosophy. They also turn to theology and biblical exegesis to receive enlightenment from the Word of God. It is important not to confuse this anthropological approach with an anthro-centric form of theology and spirituality.

Catechetical Approach

54. In evaluating the quality of religious instruction, it is imperative from the start to distinguish between, on the one hand, catechetical practices that strive to conform to the method and spirit proposed in the program and, on the other hand, a kind of substitute for the program which we could call "humanistic instruction." By this we refer to the type of religious instruction that refrains from any direct mention of God or religion, that confines itself entirely to topics of human and social relevance. Those following this procedure maintain that it is preferable that the religious content remain implicit, that, in any case, most groups of students are incapable of grasping the inner meaning of the Gospel message. They see religious instruction as primarily an opportunity for dialogue and humanistic communication. Here the designation "religious instruction" is a disguise that should be cast off, as all too often what is given this name actually has no religious content, but is simply humanism, an ersatz religious education. It would seem that this humanistic approach is chosen mainly by teachers insufficiently prepared to handle the subject, by teachers whose own personal religious option is negative, or by those who have been unwillingly recruited for this assignment. This approach, which is often clandestine, has thrown great discredit on catechetical instruction. It is accused of being a carryall subject, a tangle of irrelevancies, a kind of sponge-program that tackles every imaginable topic with a particular propensity to discuss drugs, love, and sex. In a survey conducted by the Catholic Instruction Service, 13.4% of the teachers admitted that they offered "a type of humanism almost devoid of Christian ideas."²⁰

Limitations of the Program

55. The catechetical program of 1969 was welcomed as the answer to a pressing need and adopted everywhere. Despite efforts to acquaint teachers with the new spirit of flexibility, this one program could hardly prove equally satisfactory to all milieus. After implementation, the program began to reveal both its strong points and certain weaknesses. This proves that any method has inherent limitations and also that there are some needs which the catechetical program cannot quite meet:

- **As to content:** the emphasis on experience (a strong point) may at times override the intellectual dimension (a limitation) — hence the proposal that there be a program with emphasis on doctrine.

- **As to the approach:** the anthropological approach handles the human situation very well (a strong point), but it is too vague, too subjective in tone, has difficulty in transcending the human level (limitations). Hence the proposal to adopt a more clearly defined, more objective approach that deals explicitly with religious data.

- **As to the overall assessment of the program:** the denominational viewpoint allows young people to obtain a better grasp of their personal and family religious background (a strong point), but its range may prove too narrow in pluralistic milieus (a limitation). Hence the proposal for a non-denominational course of study.

Suitability and Content

56. From this survey of religious instruction in the secondary school, it becomes apparent that there is a polarization of problems and objections. Some critics who note what they call the crisis or malaise in religious education think that the actual suitability of such a program for adolescents must be questioned. Others protest against the actual content of the program, in the name of theology. We shall concentrate, therefore, on these two questions: Is the program of religious instruction suitable for the secondary school? Is its content acceptable?

Should there be Catechetical Instruction at all at the Secondary School?

57. Is it reasonable to retain catechetical instruction in the secondary curriculum? Some persons express doubt; others give unequivocal "no" for answer. There are two main reasons for this uncertainty or rejection. In the first place, it is asserted that catechetical instruction, being a pastoral activity aimed at incorporating youth into the Church, should be undertaken by the Church alone, not by the school. In the second place, it is maintained that catechetical instruction with a denominational approach is no longer suited to today's secondary schools, not only because of their pluralistic

character, but especially because of the adolescent mentality with its tendency to withdraw from beliefs and habits acquired in childhood. Certain persons even hold that the denominational approach could be harmful, because it might increase the aggressive reactions of adolescents towards their religious background: it might even turn them against religion. Behind the reasons alleged, there is generally an implicit condemnation of catechetical efforts, i. e., that the program is a failure, and that it has had profound effects on only a minority of the students.

Catechetics: A Pastoral Activity or an Academic Activity?

58. The survey of the situation shows that any judgment of failure would require statistical confirmation. A careful and objective study of surveys on religious education reveals that the most widespread convictions do not necessarily prove to have the best foundation. As to the argument that catechetical instruction should be returned to the exclusive jurisdiction of the Church, let us recall that it is counter-productive to introduce a dichotomy between what is pastoral and what is academic. It is preferable to evaluate the educational value of both academic and pastoral activities. Such an evaluation might reveal that certain activities now accepted in the school setting are devoid of educational value, while others now underrated or not included in the curriculum might be very rewarding. We must strive to transcend narrow concepts of academic and pastoral activities. We must adopt a truly educational outlook in our search for solutions. A comparison may be helpful: a school assuming responsibility for some aspects of physical education or training in the arts does not proceed in advance to set up artificial divisions between its own athletic and artistic projects and those that should be provided by the municipality or the local Arts Centre. To express it in the simplest terms, we can say that the school's total educational objective is focussed on the needs of the students. The organic concept of the role of the school precludes the exclusion of any educational activity whatsoever, even under the pretext that certain functions are partially assumed by other bodies. In fact, such a situation can often encourage the school to coordinate its own efforts with those of other institutions. If the same logic is applied to the field of religious instruction in the school, then the distinction between what is pastoral and what is academic will not be taken as an absolute principle for structuring the curriculum.

The Denominational Approach: Is it Perhaps Harmful?

59. The second argument that convinces some persons that catechetical instruction should not be offered in the secondary school has greater cogency because it is directly related to the objectives of education. It casts doubt on the educational value of the denominational approach to religion during the years of adolescence. It questions the generally accepted principle that religious instruction should normally follow the parents' denominational choice. It stresses two points that are not without relevance.

- It is maintained that adolescents have a need to depart somewhat from their parents' religious tradition. This "departure" constitutes a normal stage in the conquest of personal autonomy in relation to the family, authority in general, the accepted behaviour of their milieu. If there is too much emphasis on the denominational approach, there is a risk of aggravating their negative reaction to the religious faith received in childhood.

- The second stumbling block encountered in the denominational approach is that students have the impression that only one choice is available and that it is designed to make them accept one particular viewpoint. There is a risk that the approach could either lead to blind conformity or become a kind of indoctrination.

60. There are some acceptable points in this argument, which we shall take up later in discussing whether a non-denominational approach can be justified. However, it would be erroneous to exaggerate it or to claim that it invalidates the entire denominational approach.

The Denominational Approach is still Relevant

61. Even in secondary schools characterized by pluralism, it is still possible to establish beyond doubt the relevance of the denominational approach in religious education. We offer four points in support of this assertion.

- Religion cannot be studied in the abstract: it is not just a body of concepts and ideas, but also comprises a definite experiential and affective dimension. If religious instruction could be confined to abstract concepts, then the approach could be entirely objective. But its goals must be greater. A true understanding of religion demands that it be put into the context of the students' own religious tradition.

- Pluralism does not mean the disappearance of denominational positions. On the contrary: following the brief enthusiasm for secularization as a kind of first principle of reference, there is now a stronger tendency to uphold the differences and to reprove the cultural, social, and religious levelling advocated by the technological society. It is noteworthy too that "the pluralism has engendered not only the age of ecumenicity but also the age of the rediscovery of the denominational heritage."²¹

- One concept of the teacher-student relationship even implies that each individual's religious identity be openly stated from the beginning, that both teacher and students should be willing to reveal themselves, their convictions, and their doubts. "This is a scientific and objective way to learn how to take the subjective element into account."²²

- While Catholic religious instruction openly declared its position, yet it does not seek to impose a choice on the students. The program is very clear on this point, being based on the principle that "the adolescent must be respected, which means, among other things, that neither an adult's faith nor a child's faith should be imposed upon him."²³ It states clearly also that "the mentality required for this form of religious instruction is closer to a search for God than to the transmission of doctrinal content."²⁴ In other words, the certainty of possessing the truth has been replaced by the certainty that there is a truth to be sought.

II. THE QUESTION OF CONTENT

62. The question of the "content" of religious instruction calls for some clarification. Many parents and pastors find the question baffling, even disturbing, especially those who think they detect signs of heresy. The matter has caused great concern in many countries and was the subject of an article by G. Duperray, a teacher of religion in France. He stated: "There is a hinterland, a substratum to the question of content. Were each individual asked to define his point of view, two distinct mentalities would emerge." The typology then outlined is based on the same two concepts of education that we described at the beginning of our study: the mechanistic concept and the organic concept. Many of the objections concerning the "emptiness" and "doctrinal incoherence" of religious instruction in secondary schools are derived from a mechanistic concept that reduces education to the formulation and assimilation of basic, inflexible definitions. However, the second option has been chosen for religious instruction and this choice should be maintained because it conforms to a truer educational purpose. "It respects the rights of truth and respects equally the rights of individuals. It sees "truth" as true, not merely when it has been formulated, but when it is believed."²⁶

Adjustments that are Needed

63. It must not be thought, however, that we have now dismissed all the criticisms levelled against the content of religious instruction. Following the intense ferment of ideas in the past few years, some reassessment is required. The widespread dissatisfaction calls for certain adjustments. We note six of the needs:

- to define the exact objectives of Catholic religious instruction;
- to strive for a better balance of experience and the Word;
- to reject a humanistic teaching;
- to provide an atmosphere of liberty;
- to establish a closer relationship with pastoral activity;
- to limit the use of the word "catechesis".

64. In conclusion, we sum up our main points concerning religious instruction of a catechetical nature in the secondary school:

1. The denominational approach to religion remains meaningful and valid for students at the secondary level.

2. The anthropological approach proposed in the official program of Catholic religious instruction is fundamentally in agreement with the orientation of an organic concept of education.
3. The difficulties encountered by Catholic religious instruction emphasize both its strong points and its limitations, demonstrating that there is a need for a diversity of approaches in religious instruction.
4. The objectives of the Catholic religious instruction curriculum should be redefined and more clearly specified in terms of the general objectives of the secondary school.
5. In using the anthropological approach to Catholic religious instruction, it is important to strive for a better balance between interpretation of life experience and discovery of the content of the Christian religion.
6. Religious instruction of a humanistic type, where the religious content is only implicit should be banned, as in this instance the designations "religious instruction" or "catechesis" are misnomers.
7. Catholic religious instruction has an absolute need for an atmosphere of liberty. Better information must be provided concerning the exemption clause. Also, at the Senior High School level, curriculum arrangements should be such that the program of Catholic religious instruction may be a free choice of the individual students.
8. At the secondary level, the use of the word "catechesis" should be eliminated.

2. should there be a program with focus on catholic doctrine?

65. There can be no doubt as to the validity of certain intuitive reactions that have given rise to a demand for a program with focus on Catholic doctrine. Certain students have shown interest in receiving a more solid doctrinal content. There is also an urgent need to help adolescents to verbalize more accurately their ideas about religion. Such a proposal, however, is by no means a simple matter.

From a pedagogical point of view, it would be a hazardous task to produce a doctrine-centred program with exclusively intellectual objectives. There would be a risk of reverting to the overly simplified versions of theology that prevailed in the past or of setting up lecture platforms for theologians to expound their speculations. In any case, such a program would require a great deal of adaptation and a very demanding teacher-training effort. Therefore, it does not seem advisable to introduce a course on Catholic doctrine specifically, distinct from the present "Catholic religious instruction" course.

66. But two elements of this proposal should be retained: a) the need to provide a variety of approaches and b) recognition of the interest shown by some senior students of high schools in a more intensive exploration of Christian doctrine. It is, therefore, desirable to set up, within the Catholic religious instruction program, thematic files and special interest subjects that could be available to students as options. We list some possibilities, but it is by no means an exhaustive list:

- Introduction to the Bible
- Social Reality and Christian Thought
- Atheism and Faith
- Other Religions
- Charismatic Movements.

This plan would endorse the best of today's academic experiments (courses in biblical initiation, exegesis, history of the Church), while at the same time providing documentation on topics of current relevance. Among teachers of religion in the secondary schools, there is no lack of persons with the qualifications and experience required for the development of courses on special subjects to be chosen by both themselves and the students. The revised program of Catholic religious instruction does not aim for absolute uniformity. It allows for healthy diversity, within the general objectives of the curriculum.

67. Here is a summary of our opinions and conclusions concerning the Catholic religious instruction program in the secondary schools:

1. It does not seem advisable to introduce a core program of Catholic doctrine, distinct from the present Catholic religious instruction program.
2. Any revision of the present program of Catholic religious instruction should define its specific cognitive objectives and should incorporate the best elements of programs 52 and 53 which already have a definite doctrinal orientation.
3. A revised program of Catholic religious instruction should make it possible to offer, for Senior High School students, optional courses on a variety of special topics related to Catholic doctrine.

3. the study of religion from a cultural approach

I. BACKGROUND

68. A program of religious instruction from a cultural approach was introduced gradually, following an experiment initiated in 1969-70 by five regional school boards.

Characteristics

69. The predominant characteristic of this program is its scientific and objective approach, based on the model of the social sciences. "The program on the cultural aspects of religion incorporates data derived from such disciplines as ethnology, sociology, psychology; however it puts greater emphasis on the history and phenomenology of religion."²⁷ The program requires that the course be permeated with the spirit of these social sciences and that it provide training in strict scientific methods. "The scholastic level and academic standard of the course should require from the students efforts equivalent to the requirements of other subjects of the curriculum."²⁸

Content

70. The experimental program covered a three-year period and proposed that the phenomenon of religion be approached in successive stages. Here are the major divisions:

- In Secondary III the program offers a preliminary training in awareness of the existence of religious facts, behaviour, and phenomena — symbols, ritual, sacred art, religious figures, forms of social organization (hierarchy, castes, etc.). This first-year program is an overview of religious phenomena with special attention given to "primitive" religions (sorcery, Shamanism, magic, divination).

- In Secondary IV the program undertakes to study the great religions of classical and modern times: Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism. The aim is to discover the essential components of these religions, to understand them in depth by an analysis of their mystical aspect or by the testimony of spiritual leaders of these various traditions.

- The Secondary V program first examines the type of expression characteristic of religion (symbolic and mystical language) and then studies the contemporary religious situation: the concept of the sacred, secularization, the occult, religion in Québec.

When the experimental program began, it seemed to involve an enormous mass of encyclopedic and esoteric knowledge. Fortunately, pedagogical experience has led to a better dosage of the content. The later version achieved a better balance of the data of the human sciences of religion and psycho-pedagogical requirements. It is explicitly stated that "the religious culture curricula are not primarily information-gathering projects, obliging students to accumulate a vast stock of data and ideas on religion."²⁹

Objectives

71. The objectives are:

- to acquire a general knowledge of religion;
- to attain a certain understanding of the role and importance of religion in the life of individuals and collectivities;
- to know as well and profoundly as possible the cultural environment of today's youth;
- to develop awareness of the human sciences of religion.³⁰

Thus the program clearly transcends mere information-gathering. It adopts an educational approach, as shown in the following important statement: "The long-term objective can be described as: to enable students to give a religious interpretation to certain events and behaviour patterns in which mythical, symbolic, sacred, and ritual aspects can be detected."³¹

72. The approach proposed for the religious culture option was proven valid in the course of the experimental program that covered a period of several years and attracted considerable interest. A survey of the teachers and students involved should confirm the results. In any case it is now a viable program and there are special factors that guarantee its constant improvement: serious and continued pedagogical review, intelligent and realistic implementation strategy, availability of resource persons, possibilities of teacher-training in several university centres.

73. Supporting the findings of the experimental program, the following points constitute a rationale that justifies the religious culture option:

- The positive human sciences have become a new and important way of exploring the universe of religion. It is normal, therefore, that the school should give students the benefit of the particular viewpoint of these sciences, as well as a portion of the vast body of knowledge they have accumulated.

- For students, the school offers an opportunity to use scientific knowledge as a way of reviewing all aspects of life. This attitude so predominates the contemporary mentality that it sometimes seems to be the only channel of knowledge. It does not seem desirable that religion be studied only from a theological and anthropological viewpoint. It is a valuable experience for young people to be able to study religion in a scientific way.

- An important new element is introduced into the curriculum by the approach of the human sciences. Such a program can be a revelation to students who have previously considered religious instruction very repetitive and devoid of anything new to "discover."

- The educational value of the religious culture option is something more than a mere initiation into an increasingly important method of studying the field of religion. It also gives the students an opportunity to explore the entire universe of religion — to glimpse at the diverse manifestations of religious sentiment and their historical development. This is done by studying the great religions of the world and by analyzing the specific modes of expression characteristic of religious experience. The program's purpose is not merely to sharpen curiosity; it seeks to reveal the vast treasure of the religious experience of mankind.

- From a specifically Christian point of view, there is now a greater need for an integral view of the phenomenon of religion because henceforth there will be ever stronger links among all peoples of the world. This means common sharing of their experience of religion. Christians should learn to discover, recognize, evaluate and respect in all religions what they have that is good, true, of moral and cultural value. For this reason, the religious culture program in Catholic schools should inform students about the position of the Church concerning non-Christian religions.

II. METHODOLOGY OF THE PROGRAM

74. At Secondary IV and V levels, Catholic schools may offer the religious culture option, as well as the Catholic religious instruction program. It is at this stage of adolescent development that the cultural approach seems most appropriate. However, certain pedagogical adjustments are needed to make the subject worthwhile for students and adapted to their needs.

Pedagogical Value

75. The pedagogical value of the religious culture option should be recognized and fostered. For this reason, it should define its specific stand vis-à-vis the human sciences of religion as they are treated at the university level. Good pedagogy demands that a clear distinction be made between the teacher's educational activity and the scientific activity of a university research scholar. Concretely, this means that the High School religious culture option should neither limit itself to objective data nor attempt to be a "pop" version of university courses in the human sciences of religion. To be of value to the 15- to 18-year old students, the course must fit into the proper educational context, that is to say, it should conform to the organic process of the adolescent's development and to the general objectives of the secondary school.

76. The question can be re-examined in the light of the requirements of all educational situations. A teacher of any subject has a particular attitude that can be located on a continuum extending from the most authoritarian and dogmatic to the most liberal and non-directive. Both these extremes are anti-educational and should be precluded. An example may clarify this point. Education is like teaching young people how to build a house by building it with them, it being understood that they will live in that house for a whole lifetime. An authoritarian teacher will tend to hand the apprentice builders a prefabricated model, where every detail is specified in advance, where the adolescent cannot make the slightest change. On the other hand, a rigidly "neuter" or "objective" teacher will leave the young builders alone to figure it all out for themselves, under the pretext of respecting their freedom. He will provide nothing but technical data about the materials and the rules of construction. A teacher with true principles of pedagogy, however, will help the young people build their home, carefully considering the choices to be made and the conditions required for good construction. He will help them make their own plan to fit their own particular needs and the available resources. He will even urge them to provide for the possibility of alterations that may be needed in the future. This example shows that we must transcend the false and paralyzing dialectic that uselessly sets up an opposition between objective aims and religious aims. Instead we should adopt a realistic educational position.

77. We see, therefore, that the teacher of the religious culture course cannot hold aloof from the personal religious options of the students in the class. We consider it desirable that a single program booklet should contain both the Catholic religious instruction course and the religious culture option, with a foreword stressing the common objectives of all religious education in the High School. Among these joint aims are the following: to help young people in their search for meaning and to help them make their own personal response to the claims of religion. The 1972 version of the religious culture program uses terminology of that nature, speaking, for instance, of "enabling students to grasp religious meanings and to form serious attitudes and judgments."³³ But it still clings to certain timid or timorous expressions, seeming satisfied, for instance, with "enabling the students to discover the symbolic, sacred, or ritual dimension in certain events and behaviour." This is still a short-sighted pedagogical viewpoint. The religious culture course should not limit its objectives to simply helping the students identify the various plants that grow in the garden of world religions. It should help them build the home in which they will live and in which they will feel at peace with all mankind.

78. Here is a summary of our main ideas and proposals concerning the cultural option in religious education at the secondary level.

1. The study of religion from a cultural approach, based on the human sciences of religion, can be an acceptable and desirable part of the educational development of High School students.
2. The program in religious culture needs some overhauling, so that its pedagogical value may be strengthened.
3. The objective approach, based on the human sciences of religion, should be sensitive to the existential situation of adolescents, especially their insertion in the Christian heritage.
4. The objective of the program should be clearly defined within the framework of the general objectives of the Secondary school and the specific objectives of religious education. It should help students to make their own personal choices in response to the challenge of religions.
5. In defining the Catholic instruction program and the religious culture program, it is important to avoid viewing them as opposed to each other. Instead, both should adopt the same educational orientation, along with the specific characteristics of each.

4. policies

79. Using the data already gathered, we shall now specify what practical arrangements should be made for religious education in the High School. We shall examine the following points: coordination of programs; the question of whether religious instruction should be compulsory or optional for the students; the relationship between the course in religious education and the course in ethics; implementation of the exemption clause.

I. COORDINATION OF PROGRAMS

80. For a relevant teaching of religion, two types of course seem appropriate: Catholic religious instruction using the anthropological-catechetical approach and religious instruction course "of a cultural nature". It may be felt that these two courses do not offer enough variety to meet needs of different milieus. However, in order to meet the different needs of different milieus, it is not always necessary to increase the number of official programs for the whole school system. All too often it is forgotten that changes can be made on an institutional basis, that is to say, the general programs can be adapted to the needs of a particular institution or a particular region.

81. Where two official programs are offered, the general objectives of all religious education at the secondary level should be clearly stated from the beginning. Simply to list the specific objectives of each program separately would not be satisfactory — the common objectives must be clearly delineated. Though this list is not exhaustive nor definitive, some of the common objectives are:

- to meet the needs of adolescents in their search for meaning and in their quest about the purpose of life, of humanity and of the universe;
- to encourage the exploration and understanding of religion in its various forms: doctrine, history, worship, ethics, personal experience;
- to help young people determine their own response to the challenge of religions, that is to say, to enable them to define their personal attitude in an enlightened and thoughtful way;
- to give an awareness of the contribution of religion to social life and its place in the heritage of families, of Québec, of the Western world;
- to foster respect and good will towards various religious beliefs and forms of expression.

These common objectives will then have to be transposed, defined and nuanced according to the specific approach of each of the two programs (Catholic religious instruction and the religious culture option), each according to its own content and method.

82. One more point. Though we have suggested only two options, one must not conclude that we have excluded all other possibilities. An anthropological-catechetical approach is one of many forms of religious instruction. While we have discarded a doctrinal approach for the present, this approach or even others might seem more feasible or suitable in the future. We hope that "Catholic Religious Instruction" is understood in a broad sense, covering a wide range of approaches. Likewise, "Religious Culture", now limited to one model, could be developed from an historical, sociological or phenomenological perspective. Neither of these two programs should be considered as the unalterable standard of religious studies, theology or methodology.

II. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: SHOULD IT BE COMPULSORY OR OPTIONAL?

83. The present Regulation of the Catholic Committee provides that, at the elementary level and in the first two grades of the secondary level, religious instruction is included among the core subjects that are compulsory. An exemption can be obtained, of course, but that is the exception that proves the rule. For the upper secondary grades — Secondary III, IV and V — the Regulation introduces a set of optional programs. The purpose of introducing these options and the reasons that make them desirable ought to be clearly understood.

84. It might be useful to recall that, prior to the revision of the Regulation in 1974, many persons were asking for a less rigid structuring of religious instruction for adolescents. It had been widely suggested that this instruction should be optional. Two possibilities could be envisaged: the unconditional option and the partial option. In the first case, religious instruction would have become completely optional. The subject would be removed from the list of compulsory core subjects to become one of many electives offered to the free choice of students. Under the **partial option**, some form of religious instruction remains compulsory, but students can choose among alternative programs.

Rejection of the Unconditional Option

85. Making religious instruction completely optional would go counter to the educational argument presented in the first part of this study and therefore the Regulation has discarded the unconditional option. The present Regulation of the Catholic Committee calls for the partial option, that is a choice between two programs at the Secondary III level (Catholic religious

instruction or ethics) while at the Secondary IV and V levels there can be a choice among three programs (Catholic religious instruction, ethics, or religious instruction of a cultural type).

Options for Senior High School

86. Options may be offered in what is called the second cycle of secondary education or the senior High School. Why is the policy introduced at this stage rather than throughout the High School? The principal reason is that Secondary III is the point where elective procedures begin and students see the range of possibilities. Programs are uniform in Secondary I and II, except for the distinction between the general and vocational curricula. Also, students now enter High School at a relatively young age, after an elementary course now reduced to six years. Parents particularly emphasize that it is premature to give 12-, 13-, 14-year old children a choice among various forms of religious education.

Option Procedures

87. We believe that where options are concerned, a good measure of liberty should be granted to local authorities. Options require complex arrangements and involve many variables: personnel resources, the prevailing attitude to religious education in particular schools, limitations of secretarial services, priorities set by different school boards, general layout of course outline, etc.

88. The Catholic School Regulation allows a good margin of liberty:

- “a) in the third year, the institution may offer a choice between Catholic religious instruction, which must always be offered, and moral instruction.
- b) in the fourth and fifth years, the institution may offer a choice between Catholic religious instruction, which must always be offered, and religious instruction of a cultural type, and moral instruction.”

It goes without saying that these provisions should be understood to mean that the student is required (unless availing himself of the possibility of an exemption) to choose one of the courses offered.

III. RELATIONSHIP TO THE PROGRAM OF MORAL INSTRUCTION

89. In the context of our evaluation and of the orientation proposed for religious instruction, some attention should be given to the relationship between religious education and moral education. This is an important matter, all too frequently obstructed by confusion. The fact that a course in ethics may be chosen instead of Catholic religious instruction leads some persons to think that the two courses are mutually exclusive and occupy entirely separate compartments. As if morality could be chosen to replace religion or religion to replace morality! Whether we are considering arrangements for students exempted from Catholic religious instruction or the choices available to all students in Secondary III, IV, and V, such a notion seems bizarre both to those who look at the course of moral instruction as totally different from the course of religious instruction and to those who find it unthinkable to teach morality divorced from religion. As if moral education and religious education could be either totally separate or absolutely inseparable! The provisions for exemption and options should not give rise to oversimplifications about the relationship between moral education and religious education.

90. It must be admitted, on the one hand, that there is a place for moral education as distinct from religious education. It is possible to find a type of moral education that adopts a non-religious approach. One need not be a believer in order to become a good citizen, a responsible person committed to the service of others and respectful of basic human values.³⁴ It should be acknowledged, on the other hand, that religious education and moral education have converging educational goals. These two subjects, far from being in opposition or mutually exclusive, are complementary and mutually supportive in helping youth to give meaning and motivation to their lives. From the very fact that both are included in the school's overall educational effort, the subjects have evident affinities and there should be explicit acknowledgment of their points of convergence, the following in particular:

- Religious education would be incomplete if it did not include a moral aspect. In fact programs of religious instruction usually include a large segment of moral education. But this is not always clearly evident and it would be well to stress more specifically the goal of moral maturation that is suggested in the programs.
- In the course of moral education, one can hardly ignore the vast body of reflections accumulated by different religious traditions. Therefore, it is indispensable that moral instruction programs should take account of the specifically moral element found in various religions. In this respect, there is still a rather wide gap to be filled in the programs now in force.

Implementation of the Exemption Clause

91. Efforts are needed to eliminate the difficulties encountered in implementing the exemption clause. However, it will always be somewhat inconvenient for the school administration. But the regulation must stand; the Catholic Committee must continue to assert the right to exemption. The reasons for this are:

- The public school, whether recognized as Catholic or not, is common to all, that is to say, must accept any child living in the territory served. Therefore, the right to be dispensed from religious instruction is seen as a democratic guarantee essential for parents who do not share the faith of the majority.

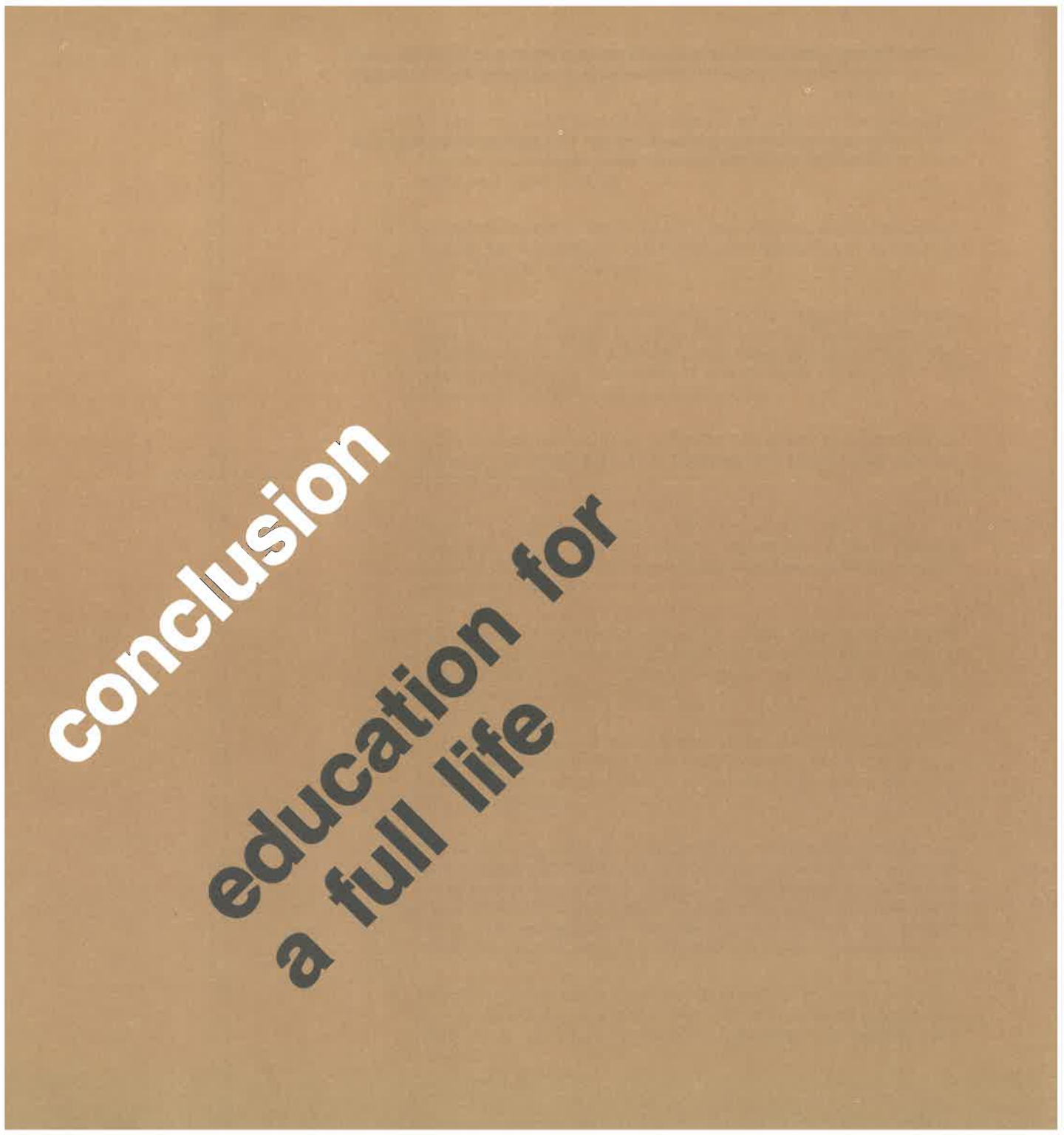
- It is likewise essential that such an arrangement should guarantee respect for the budding autonomy of adolescents and their personal choices with regard to religion.

92. The Regulation requires that students exempted from religious instruction be offered alternative programs of moral instruction or religious knowledge. It is important that a course in moral education be available because what is at stake is the proper respect for students' consciences, as well as the spirit and quality of the Catholic religious instruction program. Any school of a thousand and more pupils should have among the staff one or more teachers qualified to give a course in moral education.

93. Here is a summary of the main conclusions and proposal, we have presented regarding religious education policies at the secondary level:

1. To encourage real diversity in religious education at the secondary level, there should be a concentrated effort to strengthen and improve the two programs, Catholic religious instruction and the religious culture option.
2. To assure optimum conditions for the religious culture course, it should be introduced gradually and should be subject to supervision for several years.
3. To emphasize the fact that the Catholic religious instruction program and the religious culture program are complementary, it is desirable that both be outlined on the same curriculum chart and accompanied by a statement of the general objectives of all religious education at the secondary level.
4. It is not desirable to make religious education an unconditional option at the secondary level because this subject has inherent educational value.
5. However, it has been judged advantageous to allow students of Secondary III, IV, and V to choose one of two or more courses because the different approaches can help them achieve religious and moral maturity.
6. For students of Secondary IV and V, every High School should normally strive to provide a choice between two approaches in religious instruction — Catholic religious instruction or religious instruction of a cultural type.
7. A threefold option may be offered to students of Secondary IV and V: Catholic religious instruction, religious instruction of a cultural type, and moral instruction. It is up to local authorities to decide to offer the options.
8. It is vitally important to understand the relationship between the religious instruction course and the moral instruction course. While a separate course may be offered in moral education, yet the two subjects must not ignore each other or contradict each other. Both aim to help young people find meaning in their lives. Both should follow the general pattern of the school's overall objectives.
9. Despite inconvenience from the viewpoint of administration, the exemption clause in schools that are both denominational and public is a necessary democratic guarantee for students and parents.

10. The introduction of options in Secondary III, IV, and V should solve many of the problems encountered in applying the exemption clause.
11. The school timetable should assign to religious instruction the equivalent of 100 minutes per 5-day week.



conclusion

**education for
a full life**

94. Throughout this study of the situation of religious education in elementary and secondary schools, our primary interest has been the total educational process, of which religious education is but one component. Our basic viewpoint has been the conviction that educational activity should foster the full growth of the person to a state of maturity. It may seem paradoxical that we have not made much mention of religion, but we were constantly concerned about growth on every level of being and there is a close affinity between wholeness and holiness. Belief is in the line of human growth and one of the aims of religion is to enable people to grow to their greatest possible stature.

95. Because the focus of our attention in these pages has been religious instruction, there has been an almost inevitable risk of some distortion. We may have given the impression of seeing this as the most important subject of the curriculum, while assigning lesser places to other subjects. We certainly had no intention of inflating our subject to that extent! The Educational approach forbids such an exclusive and distorted attitude. It aims at multi-dimensional growth, encompassing every feature that can reasonably be considered an inherent element of individual and social development. In the past, schools were often denounced for giving religion too important a place while neglecting scientific and technical training. It was pointed out that "you don't earn your living with religion." Agreed! Yet the excesses of the past cannot excuse today's shortsightedness. A secular religion preaching nothing but economic and technological growth fails to answer the deepest needs of today's young people and adults. Humans do not live on things but on the meaning of things! It is vitally important, therefore, while in no way neglecting scientific, economic, civic, intellectual, and artistic achievements, to also open young people's minds to accomplishments of a moral and spiritual nature. True education makes for fullness of life.

notes

(1) See Peter L. Berger, **A Rumour of Angels** (Penguin Books, 1969)
Also A. Greeley, **Unsecular Man, the Persistence of Religion** (New York, Schocken Press, 1972).

(2) **Présents et futurs au choix**, tome I, Les étudiants, (Centre de recherche prospective en éducation, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Department of Education, Québec, 1971, pp. 216-218.

(3) **Educational Activity**, Report of the Superior Council of Education, 1969-1970, Québec, 1971, pp. 1-75.

(4) **ibid.** p. 33.

(5) See P. Lucier, « Par delà les conflits apparents. . . » in **Relations**, No. 385, September 1973, pp. 246-250.

(6) **Educational Activity**, p. 35

(7) **ibid.** p. 36.

(8) **ibid.** p. 23.

(9) **ibid.** p. 27.

(10) In response to the statement "Catechesis is useless," here are the proportions of teachers declaring that they "totally disagree":

Québec City: 75%; Hull: 60.9%; Sherbrooke: 48.7%; Valleyfield: 51.8%; Rimouski: 69.4%; La Pocatière: 77.3%; Saint-Léonard: 63.3%. (See Part III of **Voies et Impasses: Les maîtres et l'éducation religieuse**, Nos. 7 and 8.)

(11) In Sherbrooke in 1971, 72.3% of the teachers declared their total disagreement with the statement "catechesis belongs, not in the school, but elsewhere." (cf. **Profils religieux**, Sherbrooke Catholic School Board, p. 56). In Ville LaSalle in 1972 74% of the teachers recognized that the school has some responsibility for Christian education. The figure for Verdun was 87% (cf. Rapport préliminaire, mimeographed text).

(12) B. Grom, « Regard de l'étranger », in **Relations**, No 385, September 1973, p. 255. This entire issue of the magazine was devoted to an analysis of the doctrinal content of the text books used in the schools for religious instruction. We draw particular attention to several articles by theologians: J. Harvey, « Nos manuels de catéchèse: expérience et message »;
G. Bourgeault, « Pour une vie chrétienne. . . »;
J. Chênevert, « À quelle Église initier? »;
J. L. Aragon, « Marx ou Satan? — À propos de certaines dénonciations de la nouvelle catéchèse ».

- (13) Study commission on the Church and the laity: **L'Église du Québec: un héritage, un projet**, Montréal, Fides, 1972, p. 185
- (14) **Programme of Catholic Religious Instruction**, p. 5
- (15) **L'école élémentaire** (working document, Department of Education, Québec, January, 1972, p. 84.
- (16) **ibid.** p. 178.
- (17) Programmes of Catholic Religious Instruction 121-221-321-421-521. p. 3
- (18) Loc, cit.
- (19) Loc, cit.
- (20) **Survey of Religion Teachers in Public Secondary Schools**, Department of education, document S.E.C. 2.10, Québec, 1973, p. 48.
- (21) P. Berger, **The Sacred Canopy**, (New York, Doubleday, 1967) p. 148. See also M. de Certeau, **L'étranger ou l'union dans la différence**, (Paris, Desclée, 1969)
- (22) Quoted by P. Chauchard in the Manifesto, **Règlement No. 8, 88,888**, published by the Association québécoise des professeurs de religion, 1973, p. 7.
- (23) Catholic Religious Instruction (Secondary School Programmes) p. 3.
- (24) **ibid.** p. 10.
- (25) G. Duperray, « Le contenu de la catéchèse » in **Catéchèse**, No. 49, October, 1972, pp. 485-498.
- (26) **ibid.** p. 490.
- (27) Religious Culture Programmes 331-431-531, mimeographed text, 34 pp. Québec, 1972, p. 7.
- (28) **ibid.** p. 12
- (29) Loc. cit.
- (30) **ibid.** p. 11

(31) **ibid.** p. 13

(32) See F. Ouellet, « L'enseignement religieux au secondaire: une réelle diversification des voies est-elle possible? » in **Cahiers de pastorale scolaire**, No. 3, 1973, Université de Sherbrooke.

(33) Religious Culture Programme p. 13.

(34) See the Vatican II declaration on: **The Church in the Modern World**, No. 44, the Encyclical **Pacem in Terris** and Pope Paul VI's speech at the United Nations on October 4, 1965.



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