

over the whole Church which this College possesses is exercised in solemn form in an ecumenical Council". That is surely only a hair's breadth away from meeting the patriarch of Constantinople's requirement that Rome should acknowledge that, under God, the supreme authority in the Church resides in an ecumenical Council. But if the doctrine of papal primacy as defined at Vatican I may be more open than many have feared to revision to meet Orthodox priorities (a primacy exercised by consent, an authority most solemnly engaged in an ecumenical council) it is clear that, even on this score, many difficult problems remain -- not to mention the question of papal infallibility.

(To be continued)

Faith and Experience VII:

Religion and Childhood ¹

Simon Tugwell O. P.

In his Foreword to Edward Robinson's *The Original Vision*, Sir Alister Hardy quotes a verse from Thomas Hood which expresses what is, I suppose, a fairly common feeling:

I remember, I remember
The fir trees dark and high;
I used to think their slender tops
Were close against the sky;
It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy
To know I'm farther off from Heaven
Than when I was a boy.

(OV p. 6)

At least since the time of Wordsworth it has been possible for many people simply to take it for granted that it is this sense of the loss involved in growing up which provides the key to Christ's saying, "Unless you turn and become like little children you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 18:3). Christ's

¹ Continuing the review of the publications of The Religious Experience Research Unit (Oxford), with special reference to *The Original Vision*, by Edward Robinsinon (1977), and *Living the Questions*, by Edward Robinson (1978).

conditions for entry into the kingdom seem to fall easily into the same pattern as that which we accept readily enough, for instance, in Elizabeth Goudge's delightful tale, *The Valley of Song*, in which a variety of respectable ladies and gentlemen shed their years and their cares to find new life in the enchanted Valley. No eyebrows are raised when Peter and Susan are informed that they can never return to Narnia because they are "getting too old" (*Prince Caspian*, p. 194).

Even if this is, in fact, unlikely to lead us to the correct interpretation of Matthew 18:3² we can accept that the Romantic picture of the child corresponds to a basic human symbol³ which can be found in the writings of early Christian thinkers and poets. The child, in his innocence and directness, mocks the false solemnity of adult concerns (cf Ephrem, *Hymn on the Nativity XIV*), and reminds fallen man of the integrity which he knows that he has lost (cf Irenaeus *Epideixis 14*). As Jung says, in his *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*: "A characteristic of childhood is that, thanks to its naïveté and unconsciousness, it sketches a more complete picture of the self, of the whole man in his pure individuality, than adulthood. Consequently, the sight of a child or a primitive will arouse certain longings in adult, civilised persons – longings which relate to the unfulfilled desires and needs of those parts of the personality which have been blotted out of the total picture in favour of the adopted persona" (p. 230).

Edward Robinson, in the two books under review, situates himself very clearly in this kind of tradition of seeing childhood as a symbol of wholeness. But, whereas all the texts we have noted so far are adult responses to childhood, Robinson links his speculations with actual evidence about real childhood. Admittedly this evidence all comes from adults remembering their own childhood, and it is not possible to be quite sure to what extent such reminiscences actually put us in touch with how children experience themselves while they are children. But at least some of the reports are vivid and make a clear distinction between the reported childhood occurrence and subsequent interpretation. For what it is worth, 63 per cent of the contributors claimed to be able to "distinguish more or less clearly between childhood feelings and subsequent interpretation" (OV p. 170).

It seems that the starting point for Robinson's researches was the discovery that, out of some 4,000 people who replied to the RERU invitation to submit reports of religious experience or experiences, some 15 per cent "started by going back to events and experiences of their earliest years" (OV p. 11). This evidently constituted an interesting challenge to the educational orthodoxy established by Piaget and applied to religious education by Ronald Goldman, and seemed to call for some new reflection on "how

children think and feel, how they experience the world”.

But, in the course of this reflection, Robinson's interest began to change. The obvious difficulty confronting him, as we have seen, is that adult reminiscences can at best provide only indirect evidence of how children think and feel. But this very difficulty suggested a different line of thought. The fact that childhood experiences are treasured in the adult memory suggests that they are somehow still valuable to the adult, and this raises the question of the role of childhood experience in the life and religion of the adult. “It is one thing to question this (sc. one of the RERU contributions) as an objective and detached record of a particular event and the feelings attached to it at the time. But by concentrating our critical attention on this problem (to which I see no solution) we may be missing something more important. What has been the nature of this process that was set going by that early event, or of the faculty that has enabled it to continue? To answer ‘childhood’ to each of these questions is perhaps merely to overload a simple concept by confusing particular circumstances with longer-term consequences. But, unless we think purely in chronological terms, childhood can never be a simple concept. In existentialist terms it is a mystery not a problem, and mere dissection will do nothing to illuminate it” (OV pp. 13-14).

I must confess that I am enough of a bore and a pedant to be reluctant to feed more words than I have to to the ogre, Existentialism, and I am not dissatisfied with thinking of childhood in “chronological terms”; I should prefer to speak of ‘childhood’ having a literal sense and a metaphorical sense, rather than lumping them together to make an existentialist mystery. But that is, perhaps, more a stylistic than a substantial problem.

To return to Robinson. Starting with the reports submitted by contributors of childhood religious experiences, he is concerned to establish that children are capable of a genuine intuition of wholeness and reality, which is of abiding value, and that this is the root of all religious awareness. By the end of OV he can say that “childhood in the wider, timeless sense is in some mysterious way connected, or even to be identified with, that kind of awareness that is truly to be called religious” (OV p. 148).

His second book, *Living the Questions*, starts from this presupposition. “I have given this book the subtitle ‘Studies in the childhood of religious experience’. This might indicate that my chief concern is with the more elementary forms of religious experience: which is true. I meant also to emphasize the connection between that ‘life in the infinite nature of the Whole’ and the very nature of childhood: childhood, that is, as a (potentially) integral and continuing element in each individual. I say ‘connection’, but ‘identity’ would not be too strong a word. Age ... has little to do

with it.... What I have in mind is the recovery of a kind of wholeness of vision that is the natural characteristic of every child, and one that, along with the growth of other faculties, need never be lost" (LQ p. 24). In this second book his particular concern is, as he says, with "growth" (LQ p. 3), with the long term effects of childhood experience. The procedure adopted was to solicit further evidence from some of the original contributors, by correspondence or by interview. The bulk of the book consists of extracts from twelve such interviews or letters.

At the risk of trying to dissect an existentialist mystery, I must point out that there appears to be a genuine methodological problem here. If all we are to be concerned with is tracing the subsequent religious development of people who claim to have had some kind of religious experience in childhood, the procedure adopted is fair enough. But before any conclusions can be drawn about religious experience in general, it is surely necessary to consider evidence from people who claim to have had religious experiences at some time in their lives, but not in childhood. At the very least, the evidence of the other 85 per cent of the original RERU contributors should have been investigated further. And this has not been done.

This means that it is very unclear whether Robinson is really claiming that childhood as such (in the ordinary chronological sense) is in some way decisive for all genuine religion, or whether he is simply indicating that there is sufficient similarity between childhood experience and religious experience to justify using the term "childhood" of all religious experience whenever it occurs. If it is the former, we can only say that the claim has not even begun to be substantiated by the evidence provided. If it is the latter, maybe we could concede that a first blow had been struck in its defence, but even so we should need to have a lot more evidence about childhood experience in general, not just childhood religious experience. Otherwise we are just being mystified by an arbitrary decision to treat "childhood" and "religion" as convertible terms.

To be fair to Robinson, he does try to undercut all such objections, by declaring: "What I have to say should be taken rather as a personal statement, not as a hypothesis to be supported by evidence in the form of selected cases. I am not out to *prove* anything" (LQ p. 5). But surely even a personal statement must be intended to be saying something. And if it is saying something, then it is surely not unreasonable to ask whether that something makes sense or not. If the dozen cases reported in LQ are really not being offered as "evidence" but only as "interesting and illuminating in their own right", we can still ask what it is that they are supposed to be illuminating and why Robinson considers it appropriate to preface them with his "personal statement".

A great deal of the confusion arises, I suspect, from the shift which Robinson mentions in his own interest and purpose. At the present stage of the RERU investigation it is obviously difficult to formulate any very precise hypotheses about religious experience in general, and the presentation of the evidence with a minimum of commentary is clearly an appropriate style for them to adopt. And I expect that most readers will find the twelve cases in LQ interesting, even if it is not clear that they illuminate very much. But OV still carries enough traces of Robinson's earlier interest to warrant our saying that he does propound a reasonably definite hypothesis there about children, a hypothesis which must be of considerable interest to those concerned with educational theory and child psychology.

Robinson has himself been concerned with educational theory. Before joining RERU he was engaged in teacher training. And he is, while appreciative, also highly critical of the work of Piaget and the educationalist orthodoxy derived from it. "The starting point of all Piaget's thought about childhood is the incapacity of children to see the world as adults see it. He seems always to assume that reality is the way adults see it, and that if children do not 'ances'. Where in fact there is a difference of opinion, adults are right and children wrong. Of course, under proper adult influence, children get better all the time.... Piaget is continually setting children an exam in a subject that adults are good at and children bad. Predictably, the children fail ..." (OV pp. 9-10). What this method cannot allow for is "that there are positive qualities in childhood that remain undetected by such methods, slipping like water through the finest net" (OV p. 10).

Robinson is convinced that there are positive values in childhood. He considers it a mistake simply to see children as "inefficient adults" and to regard education as the way in which they are turned into efficient adults. He is uneasy, in fact, about the whole *Weltanschauung*, the whole culture, which makes it natural to regard education in this light and which, accordingly, welcomes such theories as those of Piaget which seem to offer it a scientific articulation of its own needs and purposes (cf OV p. 77). Robinson wishes, if anything, to turn the tables. "The child's view of the world is often more realistic and a good deal less sentimental than that of many adults.... Only if you equate realism with materialism does the adult have a clear advantage" (OV pp. 26-7).

Obviously there are large issues involved here, which I am not competent to discuss and which Robinson does not in fact discuss. The evidence on which Robinson is working, a small portion of which is made available to us in OV and LQ, is far too specialised to allow of any generalisations about the relative merits of child-

hood and adult views of life.

What is, certainly, suggested is that adults are unwise to be too self-confident about the incompetence of children. A delightful example is cited in OV pp. 126-7: "I must have been five at the time when my mother felt she should enlighten me about death. She was at her most embarrassing when enlightening us about anything. She was sitting on a garden seat and I running about picking daisies and didn't want to come when she called. Even at that age one could always feel when she was going to be embarrassing. 'I want to talk to you darling about Mr —', she said. After some time I suddenly tumbled to what she was trying to get over and said, relieved, 'Oh you mean he's dead'. Shocked, mother said, 'Oh darling, you do know about death?'. 'Of course' (scornfully), 'everything dies some time' or words to that effect. How in a clergyman's family she can have imagined that we wouldn't know about death, I can't think. She had probably been reading a book on 'what to tell and when'".

In particular, Robinson gives us some evidence that children may at least feel themselves to be wiser than their elders and betters about such matters as God. "I remember sitting in my mother's lap at the age of five, while she affectionately explained that the idea of a God was a very nice and poetic way of explaining things, but just like a fairy tale. I felt embarrassed at what seemed abysmal blindness and ignorance and felt sorry for her" (OV p. 69). "My mother did her best to give me an idea of God, and who will blame her for not succeeding? I never spoke about my own ideas to her, out of a sense of shame, feeling that I knew who and how God was and that she did not yet have that understanding" (OV p. 70). "Sunday School I found distracting, confusing and upsetting generally. An over-earnest young Oxford undergraduate used to talk endlessly about someone called Jesus without whom nobody could get to God. Feeling as I did then that I knew God very well indeed, I could not see where anyone called Jesus fitted in, or that we needed him. I loathed the rollicking choruses 'Build on the rock....' 'You in your small corner....' What had these to do with God? I did not think of them as vulgar, as I do now, but I did think they were in some way unsuitable, unworthy" (OV p. 100).

I am sure that there is a cautionary tale here which ought to be heeded by religious educators. If children do sometimes have intimations of immortality, one can see that "the language of the Sunday School may seem a little inadequate" (OV p. 110).

On the other hand, we must not be bemused by attractive anecdotes. The evidence we can produce to support the contention that there are positive values in childhood cannot help being highly ambiguous, because we can never in fact do more than show that there are facets of childhood which we, as adults,

approve of. After all, the evidence presented by Robinson is evidence that has been processed twice by adults, once by the people submitting the reports to RERU and once by Robinson himself. And it is necessary to balance this kind of evidence with facets of childhood of which we, as adults, do not approve. Even if Piaget exaggerated the inadequacies of childhood, it will not help much if we simply exaggerate its adequacy. Simply at the level of empirical observation, how are we to differentiate between the insights of childhood which we can regard as important and valuable, and those which we dismiss as being merely childish? I can remember giving my mother a most earnest lecture, when I was seven, about the origins of thunder and lightning, and I am sure I was every bit as confident of the truth of what I was saying as was the child who felt that she knew more about God than her mother did. I also remember, though I cannot say how old I was – I was still at prep school, though, so cannot have been more than 12 – being very snooty at my mother's ignorance of a point of orthography about which, in cold sober fact, she was right and I was wrong.

There is no harm in saying that the immediacy and simplicity of a child's vision can sometimes provide a useful challenge and corrective to the more complex and perhaps more censored vision of adults; but we have to remember that it is adults who pick out from the whole range of children's ideas and experiences what they are going to count as permanently useful. And the criteria by which they do this cannot be drawn simply from the study of childhood.

This is, of course, a reason for abandoning the study of childhood in itself, and moving on, with Robinson, to considering the role of childhood experience in the life of the adult. But, at the same time, it is a weighty argument against making the proposed identification between childhood experience and religious experience.

But for the moment our concern is with childhood as such. Robinson wishes to maintain that there is sufficient cohesion in the way children experience life to justify talking in general terms about "the original vision" of childhood; and he believes that this vision is a genuine form of knowledge, that it is related to mystical experience, that it is self-authenticating, both in the sense that it needs no outside validation and in the sense that it makes a person aware of his "true *self* as an individual", that it can only be understood in purposive terms, as showing a person his authentic "destiny", and that "this vision and the experiences which are associated with it are essentially *religious*, and that no understanding, let alone definition, of that word is possible without a sympathetic insight into all that is here included in the concept of childhood". And finally this vision can only be studied properly over a period

of time, because it has its own innate dynamic of growth (OV p. 16).

If this is true, the consequences for educational theory must be enormous. But is it true?

It can, of course, be made unassailable, like Freudianism, if we include in the concept of childhood everything that we approve of, and take the period of time in which it has to be studied as including a person's whole life time. If we do that, then there will be nothing that could possibly count against the proposition. Anything that we do not wish to approve of in childhood can be regarded as undeveloped, and anything we do not wish to approve of in later years can be regarded as a loss or thwarting of childhood. If we concede that "it may be that it is only among the dead leaves of a lifetime's experience, that time-rich humus in which we may see nothing but decomposition and decay, that childhood can grow to maturity – its own maturity" (OV p. 145), then so far as I can see we shall have to conclude that there is nothing at all that can usefully be said about childhood.

But, at least in OV, Robinson still seems to want to say something about the kind of religious experience which children (in the ordinary chronological sense) can have. And so it seems proper to ask whether he succeeds in establishing that they do have such a complete grasp of everything as he alleges.

First of all, I must say that I am not convinced that he even demonstrates that the experiences he cites add up to anything that could be called "*the* original vision". He gives a considerable amount of evidence that some children have peculiarly moving and convincing experiences, but he does not provide evidence that all the cases referred to have all the qualities he lists. Each quality receives some documentation, but that is all. And even if we concede that there is some vague family likeness linking all the evidence quoted, it will still not prove very much, because, after all, we are dealing with evidence volunteered by people who consider their experience to be religious. The contributors have selected themselves, in the first place, and then they have made a selection from their own experience.

Secondly, there would appear to be some tension between the claim that childhood experience is self-authenticating and the insistence that it must be studied over a period of time. Unless it could be established that no external factors whatsoever are involved in the development of religious (or any other) awareness out of the initial experience, it could not legitimately be claimed that the original experience was self-validating. And in fact Robinson actually cites some evidence that external factors are sometimes involved in the development of religious awareness. "I did not attribute any great significance to these experiences: they

were an expression of my ecstatic love of what Wordsworth calls 'natural objects', not utterly different from the ecstasy of sexual love. I did not think of them in terms of union with God, for instance, until later. I used to be puzzled by the way this experience would come unheralded, and in the most unlikely places – not, for instance, in rose plot, fringed pool, fern'd grot – but in a bus or by a dustbin; but I did not think a lot about it or try to give a meaning to it until I read Wordsworth, and, later still, various books on mysticism" (OV p. 37).

Thirdly, I am not sure that Robinson's use of the idea of "destiny" gets us very far. I am sure that his comment on the link between "destiny" and "authenticity" is sound; and his discussion of three reports of childhood experience of "nature mysticism" is useful: he shows that really the three experiences, though all concerned with some heightened awareness of "nature mysticism" is useful: he shows that really the three experiences, though all concerned with some heightened awareness of "nature", have almost nothing in common except that they all "helped" the experiencers "to become the person he or she had it in him or her to become" (OV p. 34). But is that really to say anything more than that these experiences, in retrospect, "made me the man I am"? And this is all very well if we are satisfied with the results; but what if we are not? I too am quite happy to say that religion is to do with people realising their potential, but I can give some content to that independently of what people actually are, because I can link it with certain points of doctrine. But without some doctrinal point of reference, talk of "destiny" seems rather devoid of content.

The point can be taken, I think, that there may be more to children's experience of life than educators in general, and religious educators in particular, are sometimes aware of – though that is surely a much less controversial claim now than it was, say, fifteen years ago. But it is far from proven that there is some fundamental kind of all-encompassing wisdom which is the normal prerogative of children, and which education simply has to sustain and cherish. If it is true, as Robinson concedes, that there are various kinds of skills which have to be taught to children, I see no reason, on the evidence given to us in OV, to deny that there are religious skills too which must be taught, and that the educator has a right and a responsibility to lead children into something other than their "original vision".

Let us now turn to Robinson's far more controversial contention ("personal statement", if he prefers) that the essential quality of genuine religion is, in some intimate way, connected with childhood.

Again, there is some difficulty about grasping quite what it is that Robinson is saying. He is explicitly not advocating any kind

of nostalgia for childhood (OV p. 41). Nor does he suppose that any childhood experience taken by itself is of much enduring significance: "My experience is what I make of it, the way I relate it to the rest of my experience, what I am now going to do about it – all these and many other factors are what make it peculiarly 'my' experience; they also make it difficult to talk, as some people think we ought, about anybody's experience analytically or to take it out of context, or to distinguish between a person's experience and his or her interpretation of it" (LQ p. 12). Nor does he seem to suppose that any experience is intrinsically "religious". He refers to experiences which "might have become religious" (OV p. 144). It is, apparently, our response which makes them religious.

So far, it would seem that Robinson is doing no more than make the obvious point that a person's experiences are part of his life, and the natural inference from that would seem to be that it is pointless to try to do an investigation of religious *experience* in isolation from religious beliefs, practice and so on.

However, Robinson seems to want to posit some basic experience which founds and underpins the whole of a person's religious development. And this must evidently contain within itself the germ of the whole subsequent development. It is true, Robinson specifically denies that the development is automatic; man's response is free. But it seems to be free only in the sense that he is free either to respond or not. His response does not strictly contribute anything new.

There seem to be two main ingredients in Robinson's contention: first, he seems to be asserting that there is an "original vision" proper to childhood, to which the adult must remain faithful if he is to be true to himself; and this original vision is the source of any true religion. Secondly, he seems to want actually to treat childhood as some kind of faculty which remains throughout life, and which enables the original vision to mature over the years.

The first claim is, perhaps, not wholly absurd. At least it makes sense to say that some people see something in their early years, which gives them some kind of criterion against which to measure the adequacy of any view of life they may themselves develop or which they may be offered by others. One contributor writes: "I think I have been simply trying, in adult life, to grow towards the vision of childhood, and to comprehend more fully the significance of the light which was so interwoven into those early years. The original impact of light was so powerful that my inner world still reverberates with it.... Very importantly: this same consciousness of light has proved to be translatable as the light of common day living. In my own extremis, I have tried to remember the light and stand by it" (OV p. 52).

This early experience may carry with it an inarticulate sense of

meaning; several contributors report this, and it is not necessarily unimportant. The philosophical debate about the relationship between talking and meaning should not make us forget that in some sense we can know what we mean even when we cannot say it; otherwise how would we know that we have said what we meant, or, perhaps more strikingly, how would we know that we have not succeeded in saying what we meant?

However, it would surely be foolish to accept too uncritically these pre-articulate intimations of significance. After all, we may feel that we are "on the verge of a great revelation" (OV p. 37) without in fact being on the verge of any revelation at all. It is not uncommon for us to think that we understand something very well until we try to talk about it. It is, if I may say so, a matter of experience that there is a difference between finding that we cannot articulate what we still know we mean, and finding that, after all, we do not know what we meant. Intimations of meaning have to be cashed, however inadequately and tentatively, if they are to be accepted as genuine insight.

Furthermore, there does not seem to be any particular reason to suppose that the most important intimations of meaning, the most important intuitions, will occur in childhood rather than at any other time of life. In fact, of the RERU contributors who reported religious experience in childhood, only 4 per cent of under-35s and only 13 per cent of all of them reckoned that their childhood experience was more significant than adult experience, while 70 per cent said that their adult experience was more significant (OV p. 169). So far as I can tell, none of the 12 people interviewed in LQ regard their childhood experience as particularly important in their subsequent development. One of them says "I sometimes think that the curious sense one has in adult spiritual experience, that the reality has always been there but one has not noticed it, is due to the fact that it is a return to the far more vivid awareness of one's childhood perception" (LQ p. 127), but that is not the same thing as regarding childhood experience as in any way determinative.

The important principle would seem to be that there has to be some kind of vision, some kind of intuition, in life, and our theorising must do justice to it. But that is a harmless enough proposition, and does not seem to entail any consequences at all about childhood.

The contention that "childhood", in some sense, provides us with our permanent religious faculty is even less substantiated by the evidence given in our two books.

In the first place, not all contributors see any religious significance in their own childhood experience. "As I grew older these feelings diminished, and at no time did I connect them with rel-

igion, with the Church, or with a Christian God” (OV p. 50 – it is not clear whether the contributor refers elsewhere to some experience which was connected with religion; if she does not, it is unclear why she should have written to RERU. This kind of unclarity is an unavoidable consequence of presenting the evidence in small snippets, and does much to lessen the value of the book).

Then some contributors report that it was only in retrospect that their childhood experiences were taken as religious. For instance LQ No 3 gives a fascinating account of what it is like to be a practising Jew, which it would be very hard to fit to Robinson’s principles; the contributor begins by saying: “My earliest religious experiences were perhaps not sensed as such at the time but emerge with that significance in retrospection” (LQ p. 57).

Some contributors seem to regard their more mature experience as depending on many factors other than childhood. For instance, one elderly lady of 81 says: “I believe that the child has a wholeness.... That simple wholeness is something like the wholeness of an animal, but more conscious perhaps. I would compare that simple wholeness with the more complex wholeness that you work towards slowly. I think I am much more whole today at 81 than I was at 40. And perhaps when a new wholeness has been achieved *out of the complexities of life*, one will be able to see the world invisible again” (OV p. 52; italics mine). Similarly a lady of 60 writes: “the later things came after much thought and terrible anguish, and went much further, and meant a great deal more to me” (OV p. 51). A lady interviewed in LQ says that “the childhood experiences have given me a beacon to aim for. But between me and this beacon of light there was thick fog for a long time. My way to go through the fog I’m afraid had to be my way; it couldn’t be anyone else’s. And my way was the way of logic.” Her final arrival at certainty was the result of “a combination of the scientific approach and the mystical one” (LQ p. 82).

If there is anything that emerges from the evidence in OV and LQ by way of a spiritual “faculty” in us it is not the child in us so much as the animal. Several contributors refer to their childhood experiences as having something animal about them. The contributor quoted in the previous paragraph compares the wholeness of childhood with that of an animal; another speaks of “a kind of young animal response” (LQ p. 114). Several contributors describe a feeling of being part of nature which could well be linked with this. And it would connect with Polanyi’s belief, cited with approval by Sir Alister Hardy, that “all human knowledge is now seen to be shaped and sustained by the inarticulate mental faculties which we share with the animals” (DF p. 41).

But it is surely intolerable for us to suppose that the whole development of our human capacity to abstract from immediate

impressions is no more than an unfortunate aberration. It may well be that Polanyi is right to suggest that it is some kind of intuition not unlike that of the animals which registers assent to the conclusion of some piece of argument; but would it be true to say that the final conclusion is no more than the hunch which initiates the reasoning in the first place? Surely we need here the traditional distinction between two kinds of *simplex intuitus*: one precedes and grounds ratiocination, one follows it. And it is the latter which constitutes genuine human understanding. Of course, the two are *similar*; but they are anything but identical. Ultimately there may be nothing to say; but even so, it would be stupid to throw away the ladder before climbing up it.

What Robinson seems curiously blind to, strangely unwilling to acknowledge, is that reflection, doctrine, study and all the hundred and one different activities of the mind, have their own proper contribution to make to our religious development. And there is no sense in isolating any one element and giving it priority over all the rest. Some people, no doubt, may be launched by a powerful experience in childhood, just as others are fired more by a rational curiosity, a metaphysical itch to understand. Others are fired by rituals. Others just grow placidly into the religion in which they are brought up. It is sheer prejudice to insist that some animal or childish immediacy of perception is the only acceptable foundation for religion.

In fact there are several places in OV and LQ where the material itself cries out to be investigated from the point of view of doctrine. For instance, LQ No 8 turns out to be a convert to Catholicism. There was already a relatively substantial discussion of his case in OV pp. 35-6, and Robinson apparently considers it of no religious interest whatsoever to mention his Catholicism. The interview in LQ makes quite clear that the Catholicism does not, in any obvious way, derive from the reported childhood experience. The contributor does not, in fact, see more than an ill-defined "convergence" between his Catholicism and his childhood experience. One would have thought that it would be the most obvious thing in the world to ask him why he became a Catholic. But the question remains unasked.

Then again, the first case developed in LQ concerns two young girls who had an important experience of nature at the age of 16 when they were both professing atheists. Four years later they are, apparently, reading theology at University. The reader is surely intrigued to know why they should be reading *theology*, especially as they agree with Robinson's suggestion that their experience at 16 might have convinced them that intellectual answers were not necessary to the basic existential question, the experience itself being "a big answer to an unformulated question". But apparently

it never occurs to Robinson to ask why they are then reading theology.

I fear that we have to conclude that Robinson's "personal statement" is indeed not an hypothesis that stands any chance of being confirmed by evidence; it is a statement only of a dogged prejudice against allowing the rational mind to make its own legitimate contribution to the development of religious life.

This means that OV and LQ achieve much less than we might have hoped. The evidence in LQ is presented more fully than in OV, so that we can begin to grasp the individuality of the 12 people concerned, and this is fascinating, but only serves to confirm the improbability that any significant pattern will emerge from any merely empirical inquiry into religious experience. In OV most of the evidence is too fragmentary to provide more than periodic amusement. I suppose it does emerge with sufficient cogency that some people do have peculiar experiences in very ordinary circumstances, which sometimes lead to interesting consequences in their lives. But then we probably knew that already.

2 See, for instance, the comments of Wolfgang Trilling in his commentary on St Matthew (Burns & Oates, 1969, vol. II p. 84).

3 Cf C. G. Jung and C. Kerényi, *Introduction to a Science of Mythology* (London, 1951).

On Teaching The Catholic Faith In School

Emma Shackle

Five years ago, (February 1973) I wrote an article for this journal entitled 'On Teaching Religion in School' in which I argued for a style of teaching religion in Catholic schools which had greater respect for the child's own understanding of his religious identity. The fact that the majority of children in Catholic schools enter them with a Catholic label tied, as it were, round their necks, does tend to make those professionally concerned with the future of the Catholic faith in this country forget that, while for some children this label may be a pathway to great joy, for others it may be an albatross.