

Appendix

TEACHING STRATEGIES AND LESSON PLANNING FOR CHURCH HISTORY

Teaching Strategies

1. Dramatisations

Students can act out important historical events and the making of decisions that have had an influence on the course of Church History. In doing this they can become more aware of the forces that swayed decisions and more aware of the issues that people had to deal with; this can help them understand similar situations that occur today. Dramatisations are also suitable and helpful with junior classes. Examples for dramatisation could include: the decisions of the Council of Jerusalem; the Council of Nicaea; Roman persecutions of Christians; the Edict of Milan; the schism between the Eastern and Western Churches.

2. Interviews/Oral Histories

Dramatised interviews with significant historical characters can be a way of exploring historical events and decisions as noted in 1. In addition, this work can help students improve their interviewing skills and become more aware of what underlies television interviews; this would touch areas such as: scope of data, skill in reporting, searching questions, accuracy of information, depth of analysis, conflicting interpretations, possibility of bias, use of stereotypes. Parallels with television interviews could be noted briefly and the interviewing process itself could be evaluated to some extent. All of this

work may help improve students' media sensitivity and it can relate to other media study and interpretation in English classes.

Interviews and the recording of oral history with resource persons can be useful when students look at contemporary aspects of Church History. Interviews/oral history can also be valuable for making links between past movements in Church History and the present. For example, students could interview missionaries to find out how they understand their missionary work today; or members of religious orders to see how their view of monastic life compares with what the students have studied in the unit on monasticism in the early Church.

3. Cartoons

Cartoons can be drawn by students to explain/illustrate stories or incidents, and to highlight important concepts. For example: St Paul presenting the case for Christianity to people in Greek cities; the Christians in the catacombs; the celebration of liturgies in early Roman house churches. Cartoons are suitable for junior classes and can be very useful for summaries by the less able students. The cartoons do not have to be elaborate – stick figures are sufficient.

4. Excursions

Visits to the local church or chapel can be used to show changes in liturgy and architecture, and to illustrate the history of change in the

sacraments. Also, reference to paintings and ornaments can underline the significance of symbol and ritual. Parallels can be drawn with secular rituals. Students can prepare video coverage of their excursions for viewing at a later date in class. The question of changes in structures and practices by comparison with the early Church and Medieval Church can be raised for consideration.

5. Documents

The use of original documents can be brought into the study to add a note of realism. It helps stimulate discussion; for example: samples from the letters of Paul – some of his journeyings and his preaching could be examined; the letter of Pliny to Trajan and the Emperor's reply; sample of writings by the Church Fathers. Many history books give extracts of articles and proclamations. See especially J Comby, *How to Read Church History Vol. 1*, SCM Press, London, 1985.

Looking at extracts from original sources adds colour and authenticity to the study. It helps students to identify imaginatively with the people, the times, events and decisions being studied. In some sense they are working as historians. They can exercise and extend their analytical and interpretative skills.

6. Group Discussion Exercises

Discussions can be used to help students in their analysis and interpretation of Church History. Discussions can also help show how history is used to interpret the present. While it is particularly difficult to develop historical perspective in young people, some movement in this direction can be achieved in discussions. At times, discussion exercises can be used as an imaginative exercise to lead into a topic; hopefully the issues raised in the discussion activity will be relevant to understanding the topic, e.g. if students were a group of bishops in the middle ages considering what they should do

to cope with the dramatic explosion of the population in the cities.

7. Newspapers, Journals, Magazines

Some reference can be made to the media to build links between Church History and contemporary events. It helps students develop their historical sense when they can see that forces and attitudes that influenced events in the past are still at work today. Similarly, students' interpretation of the present can help them understand the thinking that influenced past events. Also, students can write (as an individual or class effort) newspaper-like accounts of events, e.g. the early persecutions, corruption in the Medieval Church, 'crusades' to restore Christianity, saints like Francis and Dominic.

8. Videos, Films, Slide Sets

The crucial matter here is good choice of programs. They should be previewed and the teacher needs to be clear about the key ideas covered. A varied response should be planned; avoid always handing out a routine 'reaction' sheet, while periodic use of such sheets can be very effective in keeping students' attention on the presentation. Sometimes the teacher needs to give a short introduction that will focus students' attention on the subject matter. Focus questions can be used to help students draw information that is relevant to the issues they are to consider.

9. Maps, Pictures, Posters, Charts, Models

These can be displayed on the classroom walls or on display boards. Similarly, student work and projects can be displayed to advantage. Even photographs in books can be shown to the class if they cannot be enlarged and put on display.

10. Library Resources

There are many good student text books on Medieval history that include material on Church

History. Suitable texts could be used for library projects.

11. Music

(This needs to be used judiciously.) Church music from a particular era can be played to evoke something of the mood of the times. The extract should not be too long, as many students are 'turned off' classical music. The students are not asked to 'enjoy' it but to work out: what *effect* this music had; what objectives did the composers have in mind when they presented it? What does the music tell them about the style of worship and the character of the listeners?

TEACHING CHURCH HISTORY

The teacher does not merely impart historical details to students but uses relevant details to:

1. 'tell a good story',
2. help students understand an important event that is part of their heritage, and
3. bring the past to life.

The imaginative ability of most students is keen and their capacity for identification great. Most have no difficulty entering into the drama of great events, empathising with great characters and taking sides in conflicts.

Allowing this to occur means teaching at sufficient depth for students to be able to visualise the behaviour of characters and to have an idea of the main elements of the society at the time. They can then appreciate the feelings of the people concerned and have some understanding of the ideals that motivated them.

The Planning of Lessons

It is helpful to link each lesson or topic with the preceding one. A few minutes can be spent at the beginning of a lesson explaining its scope and recalling questions and elements from previous work. This can reinforce what has been done and help give a sense of direction and progression to the study.

Students should have access to a study guide presented in either verbal or written form which

sets out the scope of the topic. This need not be elaborate. It could contain some of the following elements, depending on the length and complexity of the topic.

1. A statement of the aim.
2. The central questions and problems that are to be discussed.
3. What kind of study skills will be involved - e.g. reading in class, reporting, discussions, assignments.
4. Use of library facilities, e.g. reference material guide.

The *introductory* lesson is a very important one. Raising interest in a new topic is crucial. Below are some suggested strategies:

- Posing questions that stimulate curiosity. As well as motivating the students, these questions can help them see what sort of information is needed.
- Presentation of audiovisual material that is relevant or that provides an introduction to the topic.
- Pinning up maps, pictures, cartoons and quotations. Display of objects around the room which are relevant to the topic that is going to be studied - e.g. map of the Holy Land, a Map of Paul's journeys, pictures of Catacombs and of ancient churches in Rome or other cities.
- Giving a thumb nail sketch of the social background of a period - manners, dress, way of life.

If the strategies used for a particular topic do not work effectively, the teacher should be prepared to try something different the next time and not be daunted by failures. While not expecting students to be enthusiastic all the time, the teacher should be constantly trying to find ways of engaging the students' interest and getting them involved in the study.

It is helpful for teachers giving parallel courses to work together in preparing material and aides, thus increasing the quality of teaching materials. Sometimes each class can work on a particular aspect of a topic and then have a mutual information-sharing exercise.

Finally, there needs to be variety within each lesson – a balance between listening as the text is read aloud or listening to teacher presentations, reflecting, discussing, reporting and some time

given to written work. The written work need not be detailed, but at least some record of the major points covered. This is a valuable exercise that focuses student attention; it also helps promote more relevant discussion. The organisation of work along these lines does not have to make the lessons inflexible. There is always scope for the 'unplanned'. Opportunities can be taken to comment and reflect on prominent contemporary events and pressing social problems.