

Church column

We've forgotten how to enjoy

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Recently, after the assaults of the 11 p.m. news, I lay down with a light novel. It took my mind off world problems and recalled memories of several years ago, of a rugged harsh island off the west coast of Scotland. On this Isle of rock and sheep, of storms yet peace, the proud people

would gather regularly for a "ceilidh". This means a "visiting" or "sojourning". As a traveller, you arrive at a croft home after a hike over some bleak landscape, not without its own appeal. You are received with honor, settled into a room with the sweet smell of a peat fire and the warmth of lamplight. On an island where neighbors are separated by both distance and storms, every human life is precious.

You are given the gift of the house with its warm reception. In return, you are expected to offer your own gift — sharing of news, singing or playing, dancing, telling stories. Sadness is left outside the door. After an evening of joy and laughter, a simple yet sufficient "strupach" (meal) is served. Then by the light of the moon, crofters return home renewed, refreshed, feeling in communion with their world.

As my memories were awakened of similar experiences eight years ago, I reflected upon the very different world of Canada — of ominous newscasts and forecasts. We've forgotten how to really enjoy ourselves, how to celebrate life consciously and soberly. It's all so simple. But we've forgotten. I wonder why. Perhaps there's too much to remember — myriad details from work or home, taxes, pressures, and every

salesman on the earth squawking and flashing messages at us. All are offering to "save" us — dollars, worries, sickness, and every other need we could have or avoid. Many people find themselves sick, simply sick of the world and all its demands. What do we prescribe? At the risk of seeming simplistic, I would suggest 'love', love to take some of the weight off, the love of people giving themselves to others. Someone has to love you enough to let you love yourself a little. Two people face a crisis — one survives and lives, the other doesn't. In one, the urge to live, the love of living is strong; in the other, it is weak. In one there is a rootedness, an essential security of being named and loved; in the other, there is the insecurity of unknowing and uncertainty. We need certainties, the certainties, which come to us in the experiences of living, the certainties of our Christian faith, the love and hope which we have in God's Spirit, and the peace of communion with God, with ourselves, with His world. These words, so easily written and read, to become real require commitment, an identification with Christian community, a participation in the Body and the life of Christ. Such a commitment of people caring for people, in the spirit of the self-giving Christ, will give us not just a moment to celebrate, but a life of eternal living.

Survey indicates pupils well taught in religion class

A survey given to 360 Grades 4 and 8 Separate School students based on what they've learned in religion class shows that the board and teachers are achieving good results in the most important religious attitudes, especially among the younger children. Though the questionnaire wasn't compiled and evaluated by professional statisticians, it was the first try by religious education coordinator Noel Cooper, to get an idea how well courses are being learned, applied and accepted. Both age groups answered 80 true and false and fill-in-the-blank questions and the older students were asked an extra section on opinions and attitudes and the part religion plays in their lives. In his analysis, Mr. Cooper explains the test

wasn't marked in terms of who got what right but rather in percentages of children who gave preferred answers. He hoped to relate these percentages to the effectiveness of what is being done in the classroom. "I feel that any item which is answered correctly by 80 per cent of the students is being well-taught in our religious education program," states Mr. Cooper. "Items falling below that level could be marked for added emphasis." In the junior group, about 29 per cent of the questions were answered below the 80 level. Grade 8 pupils were slightly more rusty, replying to 35 per cent well below the preferred level. One justification given was that many of the concepts taught in lower grades had either been forgotten or that personal

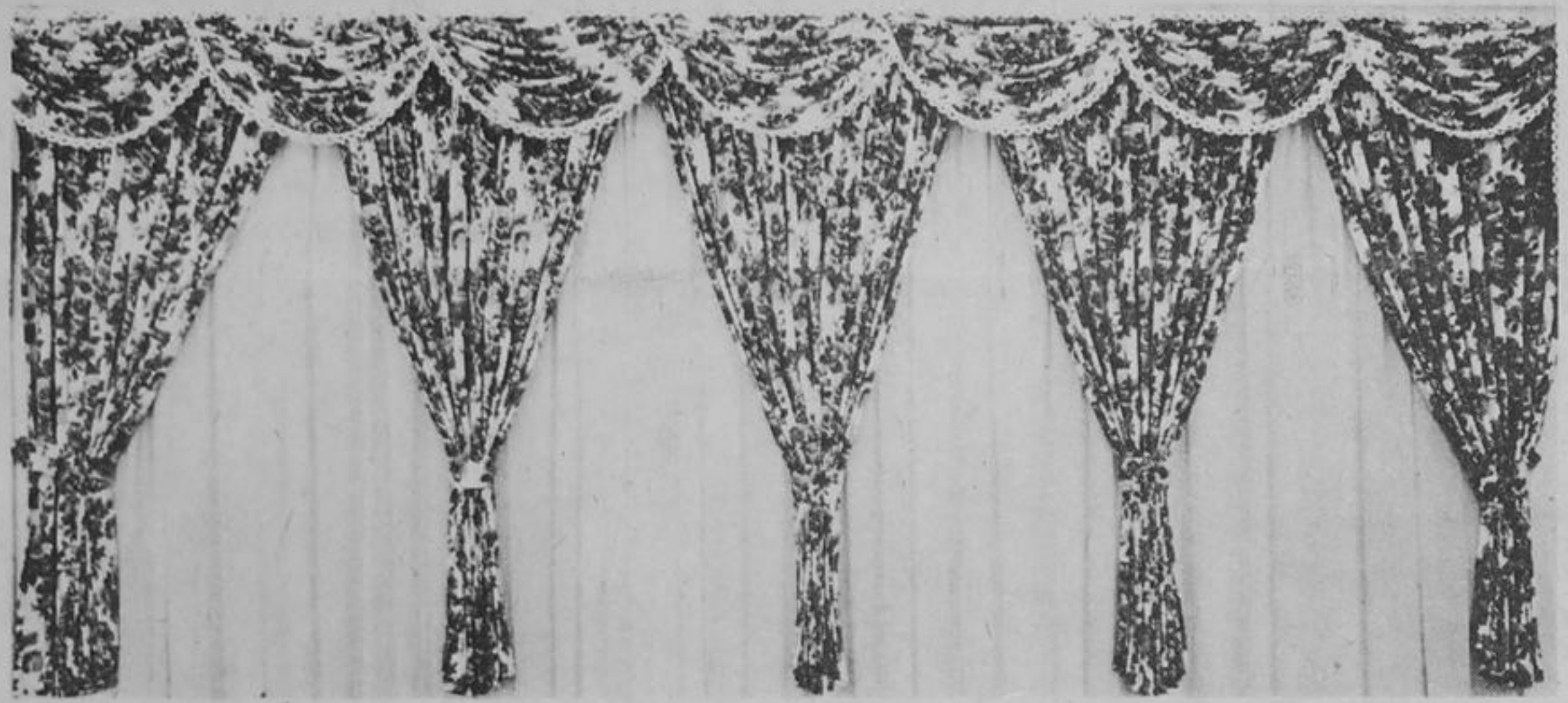
feelings are more prevalent among the older students as an alternative to factual knowledge. Teachers were also asked to take the test and evaluate the survey. They raised three or four concerns that will likely be considered the next time such a study is undertaken, amateur or professional. Some teachers wondered about asking personal questions about attending Mass and other practices: "Asking such personal questions can only harm the students by initiating guilt feelings and fear," wrote one teacher. Another asked if factual knowledge is accurate as an indicator of real faith: "Emphasis in religious studies has not been on drill and facts; religion is a way of life, not a head full of historical facts and

theological teachings." Mr. Cooper agreed some aspects of the questionnaire were defective. He felt some objectives were accomplished by it, however. "Generally, most teachers found the process interesting and helpful to 'see what students remember what we've taught'... I'm sure the survey will assist teachers in evaluating their own teaching of religion," he said. Mr. Cooper welcomed any help from trustees and hoped the board would seek the advice of professional services in its next attempt at a definitive sampling of students and teachers of religion. The Education Committee of the board will take an in-depth look at the test on February 7.

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