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## Box 11, Folder 31 - "The Altar - What Is It?" (E.M.S.)

Edwin Mortimer Standing

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THE ALTAR - WHAT IS IT?

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(TAKEN FROM LECTURE III AT THE ASSUMPTION CONVENT

LONDON . 19

Last time I spoke of the Liturgical Calendar and the various sensorial-motor exercises. Today we will take up another point. Our aim is to show how we can make even very small children understand what the altar is, or represents.

And we shall do this, not underlined by oral teaching but by activity. The Atrium would have special furniture in it and included would be the following:-

- (a) Twelve little stools, very simple and severe in style (like prisms)
- (b) A little arm chair in liturgical style
- (c) A table, which is so constructed that it can be made smaller. This could be done by having the two ends hang down by means of hinges, when the supporting struts are folded in.
- (d) White table cloths. (three as on an altar)

How to begin

We begin with exercises similar to what we have done in our ordinary Montessori school. Thus they move this furniture silently - without any noise - and learn to put each piece in its right place.

The table and stools are placed along the wall. The armchair, whose place is distinguished on the wall by a small crucifix is placed in the middle of the table between it on the wall. It is the same table we mentioned before, on which on other occasions we place table cloths with the liturgical color of the day. So then it is a special table. But today we are doing a special exercise. The children will take the twelve little stools placing six on one side of the armchair and six on the other round the table,



doing it very quietly and very exactly. At first then it is just an exercise of exactness to know how to place and replace the chairs, or rather stools.

Little Vestments

Another means to our end in view is to have the little ones put on vestments - white vestments adorned with ribbons of different colors.

- (a) One has a red ribbon.
- (b) One has a green ribbon.
- (c) One has a dark violet ribbon.
- (d) The others have white ribbons.

So And then we choose thirteen children to take part in a little drama. The one with the red ribbon stands for Our Lord; the one with the green ribbon - symbolical of hope - stands for St. Peter, the first Pope; the one with the dark violet ribbon stands for Judas. These little details don't give much information, but they are important to fix certain points on the mind.

Thus we have so far:-

- (a) The table with armchair and stools to place and replace.
- (b) Little vestments and ribbons.
- (c) Certain special people.
- (d) The number thirteen.

Then come the exercises for the children to take their seats on the little stools, six on each side of the armchair with its occupant with the red ribbon.

(Tablecloths: Chalice and Plate.) After the children have done this same exercise a good many times and know how to do it perfectly, later they can add to it by placing three white table cloths on the table and when that is done a Chalice and a Plate. The explanation.



## The Explanation

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The teacher can now collect the children together and explain to them that what they have been doing was done before, when the table was made ready for Jesus and His disciples to take their Last Supper together. So up to now then we have had these little scenes of dramatic representation, done through actions. And they bring to our minds these things: the table, twelve disciples, our Lord, bread and wine, and certain special people, Peter and Judas.

The Story is told simply

When all that is told above has been done and understood the teacher will now give a simple explanation of what happened.-

(a) that Jesus is dead, and one of the disciples was the cause of His death. This was Judas who is also dead.

(b) So two persons are missing. Therefore we only have green and white ribbons left.

(It seems rather hard on the child who plays Judas to be excluded from the banquet; so we suggest - although Montessori never said so - that the same child could now don a white vestment with a white ribbon and represent Matthias who was appointed afterwards by St. Peter to take the place of Judas.)

(c) So now they go to the table again; but meanwhile the ends have been dropped down and the table made smaller; in fact it looks more like an altar with the table cloth hanging down at each end.

(d) Where on former occasions the armchair had been placed in the middle for our Lord to sit at there is now placed on the table in His memory a large crucifix.

(e) Two candles are now brought in and put one on each side. And they can be lit.

(f) This then is a memorial; and the Chalice and the bread are



brought in. They are covered up as if there was no longer any use for them, our Lord being dead. It all seems very sad.

- (g) Whilst this is being done the other children stand solemnly and look on.
- (h) They sing a hymn and make a procession.
- (i) The children could tie a cord or a black sash around thier waist, asthough in mourning.
- (j) The procession over they return to the table, the one with the green ribbon, St. Peter, in the middle and the others on the two sides they may line like the priest and the communicants.
- (k) The aim of all this is to give to these little children the impression or the idea that the altar in the Church is the same as the table used in the Last Supper; and the things done at the altar are a record - more than that - a continuation of what took place at he Last Supper.