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# The School Question

From a Catholic Point of View.

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31

## THE "GRIEVOUS SCHOOL QUESTION" AGAIN DISCUSSED.

BY REV. P. R. McDEVITT (*Superintendent of Parish Schools in Philadelphia*).

THE following words are taken from an editorial in the *New York Tribune*, and are quoted here because they are indicative of a growing tendency to treat the question of educational methods in a broad spirit of liberality:

"Mr. Miles O'Brien, the president of the Board of Education, New York City, has put forward and is advocating with his usual earnestness a plan for bringing practically all the schools of the city—save the select private and boarding schools—under municipal control as a part of the public-school system. There are now many schools maintained by charitable organizations and churches which are working on lines largely parallel with those of the common schools. Some of them receive aid from the public funds and are subject to a measure of public supervision, while others are entirely independent thereof. Mr. O'Brien's proposal was at first understood to apply only to the former class, but now appears to apply equally to the latter. He would have the city purchase at a fair price such of the private school buildings as it could advantageously utilize, and even retain the teachers, or such of them as could pass the necessary examinations, and would thus transform private into public schools with no change in plant and little or none in personal organization.

"Mr. O'Brien is an intelligent and ambitious friend of the public school, who wants to make New York's school system the best in the world. He has done much good work, and is doubtless entirely sincere in his belief in the practicality and beneficence of the great change he is now advocating. More than that, we may say that in principle his plan is to be commended and its execution is to be desired."

Then the editorial continues by suggesting some difficulties which are after all not of an insurmountable nature. There is so much good will indicated in the statements quoted that it should not be difficult to find a way of solving the problem.

In the Report for 1899-1900 of the Commissioner of Education, Hon. W. T. Harris, the following interesting and valuable statistics are given. There are in the

## THE "GRIEVOUS SCHOOL QUESTION."

	<i>Public.</i>	<i>Private.</i>	
Elementary Schools, . . .	14,662,488	1,193,882	pupils.
Secondary Schools, . . .	488,549	166,678	
Universities and Colleges, . . .	30,050	73,201	
Professional Schools, . . .	8,540	46,594	
Normal Schools, . . .	44 808	23,572	
	<u>15 234 435</u>	<u>1,503 927</u>	

## ENROLLMENT IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS.

City Evening Schools, . . .	185,000
Business Schools, . . .	70,686
Indian Schools, . . .	23,500
Schools for Defectives, . . .	23,691
Reform Schools, . . .	24,925
Orphan Asylums and other Benevo- lent Institutions, . . .	14,000
Schools in Alaska, . . .	1,369
Kindergartens, . . .	93,737
Miscellaneous, . . .	50 000
	<u>486,908</u>

Summarizing, then, we find total enrollment was 17,225,270, distributed as follows:

In Public Institutions, . . .	15,234,435
In Private Institutions, . . .	1,503 927
In Special Schools, . . .	486,908

Under the term "Common Schools" the Report includes public schools of elementary and secondary grades; the former including all pupils in the first eight years of the course of study, and the latter the pupils of the next four years of the course usually conducted in high-schools or academies.

In educating the vast number that attend the "Common Schools" (15,151,037), 415,660 teachers were employed, and to meet the expenses of these schools the sum of \$204,017,612 was

raised; the average expenditure for each child being \$18.99. This enormous outlay, as well as the vast number of pupils enrolled, clearly demonstrate the high place that popular education holds in the estimation of the American people; this fact is emphasized when we compare with it the corresponding data shown by other countries.

#### THE CATHOLIC-AMERICAN IS NO LAGGARD.

That the Catholic-American is no laggard in this great educational work is proved by statistics of our Catholic educational institutions during the year 1899-1900, which give 3,812 parish schools with an enrollment of 903,980 pupils, 183 colleges for boys, and 617 academies for girls; the enrollment in the latter not being given.

It is safe, then, to say that nearly 1,000,000 pupils of all grades are being educated under distinctly Catholic influences.

While, therefore, other private educational institutions outside of the Catholic Church are important in number, character, and enrollment of pupils, it is clear that the Catholic schools contain double the number that are being educated in all the other schools not of distinctly public character.

In the education of the youth of our country, then, we find two clearly defined agencies working side by side: one, the creation of the state; the other, the offspring of private enterprise. The state supports hers from a revenue obtained by the taxation of all classes without exception; the other is maintained by the generosity of private individuals, and receives no financial aid, and very little professional recognition, from state authority.

The dominating thought and purpose of both agencies are the same—the formation and development of character, and the instilling of those principles which beget the highest ideal of true womanhood and manhood. Though this high end is the aim of all educators, there is some variance of opinion as to the means best suited to accomplish the end.

The vast majority seem to believe that that end can, under

existing circumstances, be best attained by the plan of education offered to all children in the common or state schools, while others find in that same plan a lack of what to them is essential in the development of a human being, namely, the religious instruction so wholly ignored in the public-school system. This difference of opinion accounts for the existence of both public and private schools. A few private institutions of learning owe their existence to the desire of some parents for social distinction, and their disinclination to allow their children to frequent schools wherein the lines of social caste lose effect; these schools differ from the public schools only in their exclusiveness.

The majority, therefore, of private schools exist because conscientious and God-fearing parents recognize the necessity of daily religious instruction; and, as a result, parish schools are not merely *private* but distinctly Catholic, and the difference between them and the state school consists in the presence or absence of a religious atmosphere.

#### DIFFERENT VIEW-POINTS OF EDUCATORS.

All educators who believe in Christianity agree that religion and morality must have a share in the education of youth; they differ, however, as to the manner and time and place in which religion and morality are to be taught.

Education in its true and complete acceptance is the bringing out of all the powers of man. It means the training of the heart, the cultivation of the mind, and the development of the physical powers. A system of education which ignores any of these is defective, and becomes disastrous in proportion to the dignity and relative importance of the part that is neglected. I take it that, in the main, non-Catholics hold that moral training should be a part of the daily curriculum. Thus, in the Boston course of study for the high-school we read: "In giving instruction in morals and manners, teachers will at all times exert their best endeavors to impress on the minds of youth the principles of piety and justice, and a sacred re-



gard to truth ; love of their country, humanity, and universal benevolence ; sobriety, industry, and frugality ; chastity, moderation, and temperance." This moral instruction, however, it is declared, shall have no trace or shadow of sectarian or doctrinal teaching, for in the course of study for primary schools of the same city it is said : "In giving this instruction teachers should keep strictly within the bounds of manners and morals, and thus avoid all occasion for treating of or alluding to sectarian subjects."

Again, I say, it is evident all agree as to the necessity of moral and religious teaching ; there is no agreement as to the manner, places, and times wherein it is to be given. Outside of the Catholic Church it is almost universally maintained that, though morality may be inculcated in the school-room, all religious teaching is to be relegated to the church and the family circle.

#### THE CATHOLIC IDEA OF EDUCATION.

Catholics hold that as ever and always the child's soul and his duties to God are the highest and greatest, so there is no place, time, or method from which the teaching of morals and religion may be eliminated. They hold that as the knowledge of the relations of the creature to his Creator is the most sacred and essential of all subjects, the most imperative of all obligations, these relations shall receive at least as much attention as is given to any secular branch ; that as a child cannot become proficient in reading, writing, or arithmetic without daily instruction therein, so neither can he acquire the necessary knowledge of God, his laws, his rewards and punishments, without the daily presentation of these truths. Nor do they believe that morality and religion are separable ; that men will revere the law, if they ignore the law-giver. Now, since morality has Divine sanction, to attempt to teach its principles without reference to the Divinity is to ignore the law-giver ; yet just as surely as you speak of the Law-giver, so surely do you trench on the ground of doctrinal teaching. But even should any one hold that religion and morality are

separable, the Catholic Church, with her ages of experience, with her realization that religion and morality must be united; and knowing from the same experience that the instruction given her children at church and at home is inadequate for the requisite religious training of the child, has created a system of schools wherein religious, moral, and secular training shall go hand-in-hand for the perfecting of the whole human being. As says one of the ablest Catholic educators:

"However, we do not hold that religion can be imparted as is the knowledge of history or grammar; the repetition of the catechism or the reading of the Gospel is not religion. Religion is something more subtle, more intimate, more all-pervading; it speaks to the heart and the head; it is an ever-living presence in the school-room; it is reflected from the pages of our reading books. It is nourished by the prayers with which our daily exercises are opened and closed; it is brought in to control the affections, to keep watch over the imagination; it forbids to the mind any but useful, holy, and innocent thoughts; it enables the soul to resist temptation, it guides the conscience, inspires horror for sin and love of virtue. It must be an essential element of our lives, the very atmosphere of our breathing, the soul of every action.

"This is religion as the Catholic Church understands it, and this is why she seeks to foster the religious spirit in every soul confided to her, at all times, under all circumstances, without rest, without break, from the cradle to the grave" (*Brother Azarias*).

In the maintaining of her parish school the Catholic Church not only contends for the union of secular learning and religious training, but, furthermore, in the very contention, emphasizes the conscientious duty of Catholic parents to thus educate their offspring.

#### DANGERS OF STATE PATERNALISM.

There is undoubtedly at the present time a more than mere tendency towards state "paternalism." It is a fact, however

much it may be deplored, that many parents are only too willing to relegate to the state the rights, duties, and responsibilities that devolve on them in this matter of education.

The result of this shirking of duty on one side, and the assumption of it on the other, must, ultimately, be harmful to both. The family is the basal unit of the state; any weakness, much more any unsoundness, in the foundation or in any of the component parts imperils the whole of the edifice.

If the parent does not fulfil his duty—far worse if he deliberately ignores it—the resultant moral and civic weakness must show itself in the character and stability of the state.

Let me not be misunderstood on this point. I would not derogate one iota from the right of the state to look after the well-being of its citizens. But this right has its legitimate limits; neither do I admit the state's right of absolute control of the character of the education to be imparted to a pupil, any more than I would accord it the privilege of determining that pupil's religion.

The state surely may, and should, insist that her citizens should be fitted for the discharge of their duties to the commonwealth. If parents fail in their duty to their children, let the state step in and become father and mother to the outcast and neglected ones; but, in the name of natural right, let us remember that the state is not the *natural* but only a *foster* parent, and that the first duty and privilege as regards the child belongs to its parent by nature.

#### CHURCH STANDS FOR LAW AND ORDER.

More firmly than any other teaching body, the church has ever stood for law and order. Her enemies make it a reproach that her conservatism at times stifles the aspirations of an oppressed people for natural freedom. But, guided by the Holy Spirit, and rich with the experience of nineteen hundred years among the nations of the earth, she insists that her children shall respect and obey all civil power, because all authority comes from God.

She may both see and feel the tyranny and oppression that are weighing down the people, but she knows that sometimes it is better to bear the ills we have than to attempt to escape to others we know not of.

The simple fact that the child lives in a little world, whether in a state school or in any private school, wherein it sees order, discipline, and self-restraint, exercises a deep influence on its whole being. Even in schools from whose curriculum all religious instruction is eliminated, if the cultivation of natural virtues from even purely natural motives be there emphasized, habits of mind and heart are developed that will have much to do with the character of the future citizen.

When, however, this wholesome influence is intensified by positive religious instruction that demands the acquisition and cultivation of virtues, not merely from natural but from supernatural motives also, then a mighty power works in the heart that will develop a deep and lasting reverence for all legitimate authority, and eventually give to the state a faithful citizen, a strong upholder of right and order.

Well do we know that the more faithful a Catholic is to his faith and its teaching, the more loyal is he to the laws of the land; the God-fearing man must necessarily be the upright, law-abiding citizen. God and Fatherland are the dominant notes of Catholic teaching.

In the words of her Divine Founder, she bids her children "Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's." If any one bearing the name of Catholic be found a law-breaker or a traitor to his country, he is a Catholic but in name. And to the same extent that he breaks the laws of the land, in so far does he ruthlessly defy the teachings of her whose name he bears.

#### LIBERTY TO EDUCATE AS IS DEEMED BEST.

As the very fact of our having Catholic schools has at times aroused comment, and even ill-feeling, I shall here advert to some facts that ought to be taken into consideration. One is the constitutional right of Catholics or any body of

citizens to establish schools, provided such schools be not incompatible with public morality, or not opposed to public welfare.

Citizens have a right to use the public schools; if they renounce that right, it is no privilege to allow them to establish their own educational institutions. We often hear the self-constituted defenders and justifiers of the state system use emphatically the term "our schools," and "our public-school system." Allow me to remark that it is an impertinence for any individual to refer to the public schools as "our" schools, to the exclusion of Catholics, or any other members of the commonwealth.

If the state schools do not, in Catholic estimation, afford all the facilities necessary for the acquisition of the highest moral virtue, we have the liberty of stating this fact and of providing other means; for it is also the constitutional right of any citizen, whether Catholic or Protestant, Jew or infidel, to criticise, condemn, approve or disapprove any institution which is the creation of the state and supported by general taxation.

Those outside the church sometimes declare that the Catholic laity are not in sympathy with the policy of the church in the matter of education; that it is bishops and priests alone that are unreservedly insistent on the question.

Certainly it is true that some Catholic laymen think the position of the church on education extreme and unnecessary. But to say that the Catholics of America are not substantially united on the Catholic Parish School question is to be sadly ignorant of the actual state of affairs. Catholics would indeed rejoice were they able in conscience to partake of the educational advantages provided by the state, for they are taxed to provide those advantages, yet they are also eager to support their parish school; and should they desire for their children an academical or collegiate education, they are willing to bear the additional expense incurred thereby. To their credit be it said, when the question of a choice between an education with-

out religion and an education with religion is put plainly before them, there is no mistaking their position, even though they thereby burden themselves with financial sacrifice and self-denial.

The history of Catholic education shows that the most earnest advocates of its undying, unchangeable principles have been laymen, and, were any distinction to be made, the honor should go to laymen who are converts to the Catholic faith and have had personal experience of the disastrous effects of education without religion.

Were this not the condition of affairs, neither the church nor any other organization could force upon the people an institution as broad, as far-reaching, and as expensive as the parish-school system.

#### CATHOLICS NOT ALONE IN OPPOSITION TO EDUCATION WITHOUT RELIGION.

\* The opponents of Catholic education also say that we are practically alone in our opposition to purely secular training which eliminates religion.

If they are at all conversant with current facts and opinions, such a contention is false; for among the most earnest defenders of religion in education are found men, non-Catholics, who voice their protest in no doubtful terms. I might cite many proofs of this, but shall content myself with the words of one who is an esteemed minister of religion—one who has been an educator for many years, has occupied a chair in one of our largest universities, and at present is president of the high-school of a city that boasts of nearly a million and a half population. I refer to Rev. Robert Ellis Thompson, president of the Central High-School of Philadelphia, who says:

"As to the sufficiency of religious instruction in church and Sunday-school, we reply that one of the first practical dangers of society is that the greatest truths that bear on human life shall come to be identified in the public mind with Sundays, churches, and Sunday-school."

"We certainly are helping that when we provide that the

most aroused activities of a boy's mind shall be divorced from those truths, and that the subjects of science, literature, and history, with which church and Sunday-school cannot deal, shall be taught with a studied absence of reference to 'the Divine Intelligence at the heart of things.'"

"What is this but a lesson in the practical atheism that shuts God out of all but certain selected parts of life with which the young man may have as little to do as he pleases."

"What would be the effect upon a child's mind of excluding studiously all mention of his earthly father from his work and play for five or six days of the week, of treating all his belongings and relations without reference to the parents to whom he owes them, and permitting such reference only on stated times when they are declared in order."

"But the monstrosity and the mischievousness of such an arrangement would be as nothing to the scholastic taboo of the living God, to whom the child owes every breath of its daily life, who lies about it as a great flood of light and life seeking to enter in and possess its spirit, and who as much feeds its mind with knowledge and wisdom as its spirit with righteousness, and its body with earthly food, in providing 'food convenient for it'" (*Divine Order of Human Society*, pp. 189, 190).

Now, has any Catholic priest or layman spoken more emphatically on this subject than has Dr. Thompson? Again, he says:

"The church, through its clergy, can bring to bear an authority in education of a highly ethical kind, which it is not easy for laymen to exert. It can supplement or replace parental authority more readily than a force of lay teachers. And it is less likely than they to be swayed by the intellectual fashions of the time, and the place; less likely to accept as its divinity the spirit of the age, because committed to a preference for what Jean Paul calls 'the spirit of all the ages.'"

There is no reason why the state should desire or claim the sole right of educating the youth of the country; to assert

that it alone can properly carry on this work is to ignore or condemn the splendid history of the past, when the church or private energy were the only agencies that looked after the education of the masses.

THE STATE PRACTICALLY IS UNABLE TO EDUCATE ALL THE CHILDREN.

In many parts of this country the state is either unable or refuses to carry on alone the work. It is noteworthy that in the City of Philadelphia there are not adequate school accommodations for thousands of children who are not Catholic, and this is only one instance of the existing state of affairs in other sections of the country. With such a shameful truth confronting it, the state should welcome the aid of other agencies in this great work.

I may remark here, incidentally, that as the parish schools are educating 35,000 children in Philadelphia alone, were these schools to be closed 35,000 more would be on the streets.

The most dangerous of all monopolies is that of education. Catholics are not singular in seeing danger in the state arrogating to itself the exclusive work of education.

Says Dr. Thompson:

"Nor do we really escape from the narrowing influence of class in setting aside the church's ministry in educational work. We only create another class, more certain to be narrow, professional, and, in the long run, obstructive to sound progress."

"The teaching profession, in those countries of Europe in which the state system has been longest established, constitutes a new clergy, not behind any other clergy in dogmatism and intolerance, even while it claims to be pervaded by the 'liberal' and the 'modern' spirit. And those who are familiar with the teaching class in America, I think, must be aware of the tendency to move in the same direction, to regard teachers as a distinct body governed by an *esprit de corps* of their own, and bound to act together against every opposing interest, on



the assumption that their ideas of the right and the fit are coextensive with sound principles of educational policy."

"We may yet have a new clergy on our hands in America, and one whose numbers and unity may make them as inimical to the public interests as any priesthood of any church could be."

By judicious encouragement, by helpful sympathy, just financial aid, and proper supervision of private schools the state can accomplish all that can be achieved by its assuming complete control of education; yet by this mode of procedure it would avoid interfering with the parental rights and conscientious belief of her citizens.

I might touch here on the widely discussed policy of state recognition of Catholic schools. A stranger to our institutions and methods of government coming to this country and reading certain articles bearing on the school question might believe, were he a merely superficial observer, that arrayed on one side were the followers of the Catholic Church, insignificant in numbers and influence, hostile to existing state institutions, and out of harmony with the progressive spirit of the age; on the other were their opponents, influential in numbers, wealth, and intelligence; representative of all that is best and noblest in this broad land.

He might also be led to think that Catholics were so unreasonably exacting, so unjustly insistent for recognition, that they were striving to force by law their non-Catholic fellow-citizens to support Catholic educational institutions.

#### CATHOLICS ARE NOT AN UNIMPORTANT MINORITY.

Yet Catholics are not an unimportant minority: they comprise from ten to fifteen millions of the population, they are an integral part of this great country, and history demonstrates their loyalty to the land of their birth or adoption, since in every crisis of our history their patriotism and fidelity have been in evidence.

They look for no favor, privilege, or charity; they do de-

mand a constitutional right to have a voice in the affairs of government. In seeking some financial recognition for their schools they are but asking that their own money, not other people's, shall be applied to the education of the children of the nation. Who shall dare say they ask more than their right? The state is not the absolute master of all moneys in its treasury. It is the custodian only, and justice requires that the moneys raised by general taxation be distributed according to the reasonable and just wishes of the tax-payers. Our opposition to the existing state of affairs proceeds from no sinister, selfish purpose.

The history of the agitation concerning "denominational" schools cannot but make Catholics think that partisan feeling and religious prejudice, and not the merits of the question, have brought about the present state of public opinion—the unwillingness to look calmly and justly on the claims of the Catholic minority.

It is a notorious fact that the so-called "non-sectarian" character was given to our state system of education only when Catholics asked, in justice, for such consideration as was accorded to the Protestant sects.

One who is far from being *just*, much less partial, to the Catholic Church writes: "Many may be surprised to learn that the first appeal for a division of the public funds in the country was made by a Protestant denomination, and the first sectarian division actually made was to that body. The other Protestant churches, instead of objecting, attempted to obtain their share of the public schools fund" (*Romanism vs. Public School System*, p. 1).

#### TO EXCLUDE RELIGION IS TO PROFESS IRRELIGION.

A common objection to the appropriation of any money from the public treasury to denominational schools is that such an act would be a violation of the fundamental law of the land, which recognizes no religion or sect.

"The government's basis is broad, ignoring party and

creed." Does it ever occur to those who insist on this view that the very policy of excluding religious instruction from schools maintained by a general taxation is a *de facto* class legislation in favor of unbelievers and agnostics, and utterly opposed to the principles of Christian denominations?

Unbelief is actually some kind of belief. Consequently, may not the mass of Christians justly protest against a system which permits any state institutions becoming tacitly an agency for the spread of infidelity?

It is said that the official machinery required to carry out a system which recognizes denominational schools would be so complicated as to be practically impossible because of the multitude of sects in the country which would claim recognition. Any agency which will meet the requirements of the state in the amount and character of the education demanded ought to receive recognition. The difficulties incidental to such recognition should not rule out of court any just claimant. Does the national government refrain from collecting its revenues simply because from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, a thoroughly disciplined army of revenue officers must be drafted into service? Does the insignificance of the tribute render the humblest citizen in the remotest town of the Union free from the tax-gatherer's demands?

#### THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM CANNOT BE IGNORED.

All that is asked is simply the recognition of results secured in good educational work. It is a good policy, affirmed over and over again in municipal administration, to utilize existing agencies. A hospital, though it be under denominational control, yet has facilities to treat accidents. The city authorizes it to run a public ambulance, and pays it for the public service it renders. Why not apply the same principle in matters of education? It makes no difference to a municipality what particular form of religion is taught, as long as good citizenship is cultivated; and if a corporation of men will give as good

an education when tested by examination as the common school, why not compensate them for the work done?

There is no argument against the system. What is done in England, Germany, and Canada should not be impossible in the United States. In all these countries denominational schools are recognized. No unanswerable argument has ever been adduced which destroys the justice of the Catholic claim in the matter of education. There is a just solution of the difficulty. Catholics are not clamoring for what is unjust or unreasonable.

The Catholic school system cannot be ignored by the state. It is a fact, a mighty fact, and one that has come to stay. The Catholic Church is contending for a principle, from which she can never recede.

Whether recognition come or not, she will continue her mission of educating a million children. If the state be sincere in the declaration that it looks to the welfare of the whole people, Catholic education will yet receive proper consideration.

It should be recognized, because recognition of the reasonable demands of the minority has ever characterized broad statesmanship and wise leadership. Fair treatment harmonizes and makes loyal the minority of a country.

The summary dismissal of every Catholic protest and petition with wild charges of sinister designs upon the government by the Catholic Church is no answer to a just contention, and is not calculated to strengthen in the hearts of Catholics loyalty and respect for the laws and Constitution of their country.

May the day soon dawn when America and Americans will clearly see what the Catholic Church has done in her parish schools for the family and the state by jealously safeguarding the moral, religious, and intellectual welfare of the child, and when all will recognize the necessity and the permanence of the Catholic parish school!



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