BLACKFRIARS

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DANGERS TO CATHOLIC EDUCATION

IT is reported that the English public's attitude to the latest educational developments in Parliament, as to the Beveridge Report, is one of general apathy and boredom. This is a good sign in that it shows that they have not yet been fired by the blind desire for 'Progress' characteristic of so many of our intelligentsia. But apathy makes it possible for the Government to do what it likes, and it may well take this opportunity to impose some of its 'compromising' plans upon us. Catholics, at least, must follow closely and with vigour the lead of the Hierarchy in its attitude to these educational reforms, and in particular in its criticism of the White Paper. This number of BLACKFRIARS offers some new material for the appraisement of these reforms. The whole is placed under the protection of God the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, whose guidance

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at this juncture is more than ever necessary. The stained glass window, reproduced as a frontispiece, represents the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

The window, presented by the Blackrock College Union to His Grace Archbishop McQuaid of Dublin, was designed by Miss Evie Hone for three very squat lights in a room converted into a chapel. She has expressed the idea of Pentecost by a flame-like rhythm in the figures—especially in the heads and hands—rather than by flames descending on the group of Apostles. Our Lady is the central figure amidst the Apostles, showing thus her central place in any teaching vocation. On the left Miss Hone has placed the Bishop or Priest with hands upraised in prayer, showing at once the two channels through which the Spirit works in teaching the Word—authority and the spirit of prayer. On the right the kneeling figure with the large halo represents the laity, and the others standing sideways are those who have not yet received the Spirit but are waiting for it. This window, therefore, fittingly represents the need of the infusion of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit into the Education Question: Wisdom, knowledge, understanding, counsel—these alone in the present crisis will give priesthood and laity alike the vision and consequent power to avoid the many pitfalls that are at hand to deprive the Catholics' fight for their schools of its value and effectiveness.

Here we would point out two particular dangers which would seem to demand a fervent chanting of the *Veni Creator Spiritus—Mentes tuorum visita . . . Hostem repellas longius*. The first is an external danger, the devil from without. The framers of present reforms assure us that never before have they been so conscious of the importance of religion or of the need for it in the education of the British citizen. This is a true and honest statement which is clearly put by the President of the Board of Education in trying to parry the Catholic Episcopal thrust. Speaking at Colchester on August 31st, he said 'there was no more important feature of the Government's proposals for educational reconstruction than those which made provision for religious teaching. Experience of the war contributed a striking testimony to the value of moral and spiritual strength. This had been particularly realised in the Forces . . .' (*The Times*, September 1st).

This is an honest avowal of a purely secular government, and so discloses the danger patently. A secular State has found by experience that it does not pay to secularise the masses, that religion is required for the stability and strength of the country, to preserve the morale of the people. Apart from the fact that this attitude very nearly justifies the definition of religion as 'dope for the

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masses,' the inversion of values offers a serious threat to any co-operation between Catholic and civil educators. It is, after all, the end that specifies an action, so that to teach religion (and almost any ethical religion will satisfy the secular purpose) for the sake of morale can never be the same as teaching religion for the sake of eternal life (and for this only one religion can be genuine). The only co-operation possible is that of the monkeys or seals and the acrobats in the circus—all in the same show; but the show cannot be run by the monkeys.

The danger lies in the necessity we are under of taking every favourable opportunity for teaching religion to our own people. When the Air Force offers facilities for Youth Leader courses, it would be wrong to refuse such an offer, although the purpose of military officialdom could not be other than that outlined by the President of the Board of Education. But to accept these opportunities on the level at which they are offered would be to subordinate the higher to the lower end, and would in fact place religion in the position it holds in the Totalitarian regimes.

Two things are therefore clear. First of all that the secular government cannot be expected to understand the Catholic claims, since its conception of religious education differs so much from the Catholic. It is therefore unwilling to make further 'compromise' for Catholic schools. Secondly, if any concessions are wrung from the Government the motives behind the granting of them will be precisely this secular aim, so that Catholics must necessarily be wary if not suspicious of any offers that are made. The whole situation is surrounded with pitfalls, and it would of course be simpler though more difficult if the Government were to refuse to have anything to do with Catholic education. A Christian Church within a secular State must be always on guard, and can never relax.

The second danger comes from within, an inward devil that lurks in the exercise of good works. Those who are occupied in the upbringing of youth are involved in some way in one of the chief works of mercy. It is a special vocation by which God shares his prerogatives of First Truth and First Teacher with the human beings he has created. The works of mercy both spiritual and corporal have always had this element of a special vocation which was answered without much thought of self. Nursing the sick in the medieval hospitals was inspired primarily by charity. The poor were catered for similarly—for that was before charity had become an institution. The same applies to teaching, which was mainly carried on by men and women devoted officially to the service of God by holy orders or the vows of religion.

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The cultivating of these works of mercy under the guidance of the love of God did not of course prevent their being also 'professions.' To be a nurse, a doctor or a teacher does not differ in this sense from being a priest, a monk or a nun, those who are in fact professed religious. St. Paul made tents to support himself, but insisted that the labourer is worthy of his hire.

The danger lies in the relation in the mind of the teacher between his vocation and his profession. For many it is a vocation, and their first concern is for the child not just as the material for their work, but as a human person in whose development they are privileged to play an active part. The vocation is a difficult and trying one, involving great responsibility, but the spirit of sacrifice in which it is undertaken will be one of the greatest factors in the education of the teacher as well as of the taught.

But there must be a great many also who take up teaching as a career, whose primary concern in choosing this career is the benefits it offers to the teacher: a regular salary, regular and comparatively long holidays, security for life. There are many 'openings' for those with a moderate education, openings to the black-coated professions, and teaching and clerking make rival offers in the same category. Who can blame a man for choosing according to his own convenience? It means, however, that 'profession' dominates and the child becomes a means to a salary; the child may be treated well, but with the same care that a typist lavishes on her machine. Again it is a question of ends, and where the end is measured in cash values by the teacher for the teacher, the school has become a shop and true education has ceased.

The failure of so many Catholic schools to bear real and lasting fruit must surely be due at least in part to this careerism. Such professionalism is a very common feature among non-Catholic teachers, and it would be surprising in this era of picking and choosing careers if many Catholic teachers did not catch the disease. Catholic schools will never be really worth fighting for if they become institutional like charity to the poor or the diseased. The end of education must be kept clearly before all who are concerned with Catholic education in order to exorcise these two devils, one lurking without the other within the school. A great safeguard against these devils would be the proper understanding by Catholic educators of a saying of Father Vincent McNabb's: 'A school is not a building; it is the relation between master and pupils.'

EDITOR.

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