

## THE BISHOPS' STATEMENT ON EDUCATION

### (A Query and a Reply)

‘IN view of the approaching General Election the Archbishops and Bishops of England and Wales deem it well to remind all Catholic voters of the following principles which underlie the Catholic attitude on Education, so that in giving their votes such electors may act in conformity with Catholic teaching and tradition in this matter of vital importance.

#### PRINCIPLES TO BE REMEMBERED.

(1) It is no part of the *normal* function of the State to *teach*.

(2) The State is entitled to see that citizens receive due education sufficient to enable them to discharge the duties of citizenship in its various degrees.

(3) The State ought, therefore, to encourage every form of sound educational endeavour, and may take means to safeguard the efficiency of education.

(4) To parents whose economic means are insufficient to pay for the education of their children, it is the duty of the State to furnish the necessary means, providing them from the common funds arising out of the taxation of the whole community. But in so doing the State must not interfere with parental responsibility, nor hamper the reasonable liberty of parents in their choice of a school for their children. Above all, where the people are not all of one creed, there must be no differentiation on the ground of religion.

(5) Where there is need of greater school accommodation the State may, in default of other agencies, intervene to supply it; but it may do so only “in de-

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fault of, and in substitution for, and to the extent of, the responsibility of the parents ” of the children who need this accommodation.

(6) The teacher is always acting *in loco parentis*, never *in loco civitalis*, though the State to safeguard its citizenship may take reasonable care to see that teachers are efficient.

(7) Thus a teacher never is and never can be a civil servant, and should never regard himself or allow himself to be so regarded. Whatever authority he may possess to teach and control children, and to claim their respect and obedience, comes to him from God, through the parents, and not through the State, except in so far as the State is acting on behalf of the parents.

*Low Week, 1929.*

A staunch Lancashire Catholic has sent me a letter containing such a significant criticism of the Bishops' statement of Principles of Education that we must deal with it in detail. He writes *à propos* of my article in BLACKFRIARS (July) :

‘ I venture to accept your invitation to write to you in the BLACKFRIARS of this month.

‘ I cut the Bishops' statement out of the *Catholic Times* because I could not follow it ; and I held it in hope of further enlightenment that would be vouchsafed by the contemporary Catholic press.

‘ Your article does not help me, because I cannot follow the internal links in your mind which made it clear to you. To an outsider, in the absence of these lines of thought, your statement, as well as the Bishops', seems disconnected. May I therefore trespass on your time not for controversy, but for enlightenment ; and try to put before you my confusion ?

‘ (a) I cannot follow the logical sequence between the *no part of the normal function of the State to teach* in par. 1, and the *State is entitled* in par. 2, and then *the State ought* in par. 3 ; and *it is the duty of the State* in par. 4. These pro-

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gressive imperatives do not seem to follow logically unless there is some internal sequence which you have not shown to us.

'(b) You, in commenting, speak of this teaching (*i.e.* the Bishops' statement) being fundamental; and then qualify it by time and place, *i.e.* in England and Wales on the eve of a General Election.

'(c) As to the Pope's speech, if I read it aright, he began by insisting on the parents' right alone; and then, as he proceeded, slipped in an addition, parents *and the Church*, without any warning; and ended an argument, which began as parents' right, with a conclusion on the *parents' and Church's rights*. Is not this one of the named faults (I forget for the moment) in Logic?

'(d) May I finally ask why Catholic parents are refused absolution for sending their children to non-Catholic schools, if the Church insists so strongly on parents' rights?

'I am most anxious to be made clearer on these points, for they are being much discussed amongst groups of Catholics. And as to some of the claims made as principles, we are in a grave difficulty in trying to make them fundamental enough to apply to the position of our non-Catholic friends who question us on them.'

### A

1. It is significant that a statement of principles which, no doubt, the Bishops thought axiomatic should arouse discussion amongst groups of Lancashire Catholics. If there is truth in the old proverb 'What Lancashire says to-day England says to-morrow,' then these discussions of Lancashire Catholics will soon be on the lips of the Catholics of England.

2. There is much to be thankful for in the desire for a reasonable statement of principles which staunch Catholics can use in their now daily discussions with their non-Catholic fellow-countrymen. Every well-informed—and indeed, for that matter, even ill-informed—Catholic man and woman is now called to the lay apostolate. Ignorance, even when not a fault, is yet a danger.

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3. The present writer finds his mind relieved by the Lancashire Catholic's frank recognition that the difficulties do not spring from the article in BLACKFRIARS on the Bishops' statement of principles, but from this statement and indeed from the statement of His Holiness Pope Pius XI. With true loyalty this distressed Catholic has voiced his difficulties—and the difficulties of an earnest group of Catholics—as a series not of protests but of questions. Yet unanswered or ill-answered questions may easily harden into protests.

4. Our distressed Catholic finds a logical inconsequence between propositions which we will put down in two columns :

1. It is no part of the normal function of the State to teach.

2. The State is *entitled* to see that citizens receive due education, &c.

3. The State ought to encourage every form of sound educational endeavour, &c.

4. To parents whose economic means are insufficient . . . it is the duty of the State to furnish the necessary means.

We cannot see how there appears any logical inconsequence or contradiction between Proposition 1 and Propositions 2, 3 and 4.

Perhaps an example will make this clearer. Speaking of health we may say, 'It is no part of the normal function of parents to prescribe medicine.' But this is the normal official function of doctors.

Yet of course parents 'are entitled to see that their children receive due medicine' for the needs of their health. Parents are ultimately responsible; but are

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not ultimately capable. The parent's responsibility is fulfilled, not when he diagnoses the ailment and prescribes the medicine (for of this the parent as such is not capable) but when the parent calls in the one who is ultimately capable, *i.e.*, the doctor.

Again, though it is no part of the normal function of a parent to prescribe medicine, yet the parent ought to encourage every form of sound 'medical endeavour' as indeed the vast majority of the parents do.

Moreover, when the economic means of the child are insufficient, 'it is the duty of the parent to furnish the necessary means' for the medical treatment which is no part of their normal function.

In other words the parent as such does not give medical treatment to his children, yet the parent should

- (a) see that his children have medical treatment,
- (b) encourage medical treatment,
- (c) pay the expenses of medical treatment.

### B

We have said that the Bishops' principles of Education are fundamental; and that the *promulgation* of these fundamental principles was fitting as to time and place. If the promulgation of fundamental principles has a time and place, it is at such times and places as witness the denial of or ignorance of these principles. The England of yesterday neither overlooked nor denied what the Bishops assert. But the England of to-day is in danger of forgetting or ignoring what was sacred to the England of yesterday.

As might be expected, the philosophy of promulgation has been outlined by St. Thomas in his *Summa Theologica*. In answer to the question, 'Whether

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the Old Law was suitably given at the time of Moses?'  
St. Thomas says :

' It was most fitting for the Law to be given at the time of Moses. The reason of this may be taken from two things in respect of which every law is imposed on two sorts of men. Because it is imposed on some men who are hard-hearted and proud, whom the law restrains and tames; and it is imposed on good men who through being instructed by the law, are helped to fulfil what they have to do.

' Hence it was fitting that the Law should be given at such a time as would be appropriate for the overcoming of man's pride. For man was proud of two things, *viz.*, of knowledge, as though his natural reason could suffice him for salvation; and accordingly in order that his pride might be overcome in this matter, man was left to the guidance of his reason without the help of a written law; and man was able to learn from experience that his reason was deficient, since about the time of Abraham man had fallen headlong into idolatry and the most shameful vices. Wherefore after those times it was necessary for a written law to be given as a remedy for human ignorance, because *by the Law is the knowledge of sin* (Rom. iii, 20). . . But after man had been instructed by the Law, his pride was convinced of his weakness, through his being unable to fulfil what he knew. Hence as the Apostle concludes : *What the Law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sent His own Son . . . that the justification of the Law might be fulfilled in us.* (Rom. viii, 3, 4).

' With regard to good men, the Law was given to them as a help; which was most needed by the people at the time when the Natural Law began to be obscured on account of the exuberance of sin.'

The present writer is of opinion that in this close analysis of the reason why the promulgation of a law does not pre-suppose the previous non-existence of the moral obligation of the law, is to be found the reason why the promulgation of a dogma does not pre-suppose the previous non-existence of the dogma. Moreover it will be seen that St. Thomas has given an accurate analysis of this principle.

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### C

The Pope may well insist not only on the fundamental rights of the parent, but on the essential rights of the Church in the matter. It will be seen that the Bishops have not said that *under no conditions* has the State any rights. Indeed on the contrary the Bishops have clearly said that *under certain conditions* the State has duties. But who says duty says right; since right is but a moral claim to the means for fulfilling a duty.

It was no part of Pope Pius XI's answer to Mussolini to deny under all circumstances all rights to the State. He merely reminded the forgetful statesman that all true statesmanship in the matter of education should begin by recognising the fundamental rights of the parent and the essential rights of the Church.

### D

Several Bishops, in the exercise of their ordinary jurisdiction as shepherds of the flock, have promulgated a decree that Catholic parents, before sending their children to non-Catholic schools, shall obtain the Bishop's permission.

The action of their Lordships nowise denies the fundamental right of parents. It is but an ethical judgment that certain actions are ethically wrong because dangerous to morals. And it is clear that no one, parent, child, man, woman, has a right to do wrong.

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