

THE HIERARCHY AND CATHOLIC PRINCIPLES ON EDUCATION

‘**I**N 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-

Blackfriars

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 civitatis*, 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.

* * * * *

It is one of the symptoms of the times that this clear, bold statement of principles has attracted almost no attention even in the Catholic Press. Perhaps the Catholic Press could excuse itself on the plea that these principles, so fearlessly trumpeted by the English and Welsh Hierarchy, are sufficiently known and accepted by the Catholics of England and Wales. The silence of the non-Catholic Press, on the other hand, may be due either to ignorance, apathy or dissent. But, as BLACKFRIARS from the beginning has aimed at discussing subjects of permanent value by an appeal to principles, this Statement of the Hierarchy demands our pen.

The present writer will begin at once by asking his readers to correct him if he is wrong in looking on this Statement as one of the most important social documents of the twentieth century. Its importance is to be weighed not only by the nature of its teaching,

The Hierarchy and Catholic Principles on Education

which is fundamental though largely forgotten, but by the circumstances of place where, and time when its teaching has been promulgated.

It is promulgated in England and Wales on the eve of a General Election. Now, England has a system of Education compulsory and socialised to a degree almost without parallel in the world, even in Soviet Russia. For the moment we are not saying that this compulsory, socialised system is or is not good—should or should not have been brought into being before the Socialists came to power. We are only asking our readers to reflect on the importance of an ecclesiastical manifesto which in the very home of state-socialised education ventures to challenge the first principles of educational state-supremacy.

Of equal importance with the circumstance of place is the circumstance of time. It will be seen that the Hierarchy was well minded to issue their Statement on the eve of a General Election which all men felt to be historic. The common feeling of expectation has been realised by the country voting into power once again a Labour, or, as it is sometimes called, a Socialist Government. Had the Bishops' Statement been delayed till after the General Election men might have thought that the Bishops, in issuing the Statement, were more concerned to hamper a political party than to state ethical principles without respect of party. The Hierarchy have, therefore, been wiser than they knew in making a clear statement of ultimate principles at the dramatic moment when alone it could be fittingly made and was most urgently needed.

There is, perhaps, a further element of importance in the reply made by Pope Pius XI to Mussolini's ill-chosen remarks in proposing the Lateran Treaty to the Italian Chamber. In saying with pontifical emphasis what the English Bishops had said a few weeks

Blackfriars

before, His Holiness may have shown us more than a temporal sequence between the two utterances of England and of Rome.

Let us call the reader's attention to some of the important points of the Bishops' Statement.

1. In saying that 'it is no part of the normal function of the State to teach,' the Bishops have enunciated a principle of wider scope than mere education. There is a group of political thinkers whose doctrine is that the best State is the one which exercises the greatest number of functions. In other words, the State has the moral power to do all that it has the physical power to do. Of course, this is the old false principle: 'Might is Right.' No wonder this political heresy is condemned by the Bishops.

2 and 3 (a). The State ought not to have a monopoly of education: in other words, the State ought not to socialise education. It is significant that the Bishops, thinking mainly of education, have formulated a wide-reaching principle. If the State was justified in socialising education, which is one of the most important activities, or industries, of the citizens, no argument would be valid against the State's claim to socialise all other industries of the country.

(b) The State must act as safe-guardian of the citizens' education. In saying this accurately the Bishops would have us clearly distinguish between guardianship and authority. Thus outside 10 Downing Street, whether it is occupied by Mr. Baldwin, Mr. Lloyd George, or Mr. MacDonald, there will be a member of the Police. He will be a guardian of the Prime Minister. But he will not be an authority higher than the Prime Minister. In the same way the State, whilst empowered and bound to safeguard the parental right to educate, must not claim a higher authority than the parent. Hence,

The Hierarchy and Catholic Principles on Education

(4) If through any circumstances an individual parent has not the financial means to give his children a due education, the State must provide these means.

This principle is a still greater force in the case, not of an individual poor parent, but of a large group or class of poor. And especially is the principle of force when, as Pope Leo XIII says, 'A small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the labouring poor a yoke little better than that of slavery itself' (*Rerum Novarum*).

(5) The Bishops never proved themselves truer fathers in God of their people than when they laid it down that the State, in giving financial help to poor parents, 'must not interfere with parental responsibility.' Every responsibility or duty connotes a right. Now if *right* is the fundamental property it will be seen how fine is the statesmanship of these Bishops, who are safeguarding the fundamental property of the parent. Legislation which would grant financial aid to parents at the cost of parental responsibility 'would be no law at all; but a species of violence' (*Rerum Novarum*).

(6) This is one of the most needed and most momentous principles of statecraft enunciated in the twentieth century. As a Declaration of the Rights of Man it is without parallel. We may well ask if it would be accepted by any—and which—of the political parties now active in this country.¹

(7) (a) 'The teacher never is and never can be a civil servant, and should never regard himself or

¹ The following incident means much: An agnostic, wealthy Jew came to Mass on the Sunday when the Bishops' Statement was read from the pulpit. After Mass he said indignantly to his friends: 'I told you so. I never go into a Catholic Church without hearing them preach Socialism.'

Blackfriars

allow himself to be so regarded.'² In saying this the Bishops have taken their courage in their hands. Whitehall and the National Union of Teachers could hardly be expected to accept this view of the relationship between the teachers and the State; until, indeed, they see the craft of teaching in its relation to the soul and God.

(b) But with almost a climax of dramatic power the Bishops conclude: 'Whatever authority he (the teacher) 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.'

These words of adamant wisdom deserve a commentary far beyond the limits of this article or the powers of this writer. They are but another proof that in making Bishops, under their chief Bishop, the foundation of the Teaching Church, Jesus was minded to save not merely souls, but even civilisation.

VINCENT McNABB, O.P.

² It is regrettable that *The Universe* (April 19th) left out the words 'and never can be a civil servant.'