

# Catholics and Their Schools

(By MARK O. SHRYVER, JES., in America.)

Catholics are deplorably ignorant of matters concerning Catholic schools. They know little or nothing of the history of Catholic education; they seem calmly oblivious of the attacks made on the schools in Oregon, Washington, and other States. Ask a thousand a simple question as to curricula, organization, numbers, locations, teacher-training, and not five would be able to answer. This information, and much more, is readily available in a small pamphlet, *The Catholicism of Catholic Education*, written by Rev. James H. Ryan of the Educational Department of the National Catholic Welfare Council, to which acknowledgment is made for much of the material in this article.

All of us have heard the ancient calumny that Catholics are opposed to education. Many not of the Faith have been brought to believe it the truth. But how many, even among ourselves, have heard that the first school established in this new world was a Catholic school at St. Augustine in 1606? The Spaniards did that, and before 1629, four years before there were any schools at all in the original colonies, Catholics had many elementary schools in Florida, Texas, New Mexico, and California. By 1776 there were seventy Catholic schools in the Thirteen Colonies as far west as Missouri and as far north as Maine. A Jesuit college had been founded at Newton, Maryland, in 1677, and the direct descendant of that college still exists as Georgetown University.

The public school system, supported by general taxation, as we know it to-day, was non-existent until about 1850. All the early schools were religious, and there was a fine Catholic school-system throughout what is now the United States under the direction of the Society of Jesus. To-day that system has grown and expanded beyond belief. There are 8706 schools of every kind, with 1,981,051 students. Of these 34,000 are in the colleges and universities, 130,000 in the high schools and 1,795,673 in the elementary grades. The remaining 13,000 are in the normal schools and seminaries.

The curriculum of the Catholic school is practically the same as that of the more progressive public school and non-Catholic college. Approximately the same time is given to languages, science, history, and mathematics, but where non-Catholics assign the remaining time to electives, Catholics give it to religion and religious instruction. Religion, of course, permeates Catholic school work; literature, history, and science are interpreted and understood in the light of the Catholic Faith and the religious heritage is given the first place. Educators agree that this is far from a fault. The religious instruction does not consume an undue allowance of time or cause the ordinary studies to be neglected.

Catholic schools have held and hold fast whenever permitted, to an old-fashioned *ratio studiorum*. There is no experimenta-

tion with educational fads and intellectual foibles; innovations and unproved plans meet with little sympathy, for the Catholic curriculum insists on fundamentals. History, language, mathematics and science are its backbone and eclecticism is at a minimum. That is the system. It is what Catholic men and women must support and maintain and defend. It is our heritage, to be guarded and preserved.

The things a man values he safeguards and passes on to his children. Catholics who prize and value the Faith, realising that it can best be handed down by religious instruction in the schools, must rally to the standard of Catholic education, and hand down the precious heritage to those who come after us. No one can be negligent, lethargic, neglectful, when he reads what thoughtful men have said of religious education. Burke has written that true religion is the very foundation of society. Once that is shaken, the whole fabric cannot be stable or lasting. In more modern days, former Vice-President Marshall declared that there has never been a time when men so honestly confessed that government does not hang on constitutions or leagues of nations, but depends on the Gospel of Christ for its salvation; that the real evil of the Church is that it has turned over too many of its functions to the civil power. "We are face to face," writes Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler, "with a teaching that holds Christianity to be not only a superstition and an illusion, but a fraud invented to gain control over men." Speaking to the National Society of London in 1920, Mr. Arthur Bel-four said that a division between secular and religious training was fundamentally erroneous, and that if religious training was a good thing, it should not be divorced from the training of the mind; that a school was not and ought not to be a place merely for filling some unfortunate child to the brim with what is called secular learning. In an address to the Brooklyn Y.M.C.A., Dr. S. Parkes Cadman recently remarked:

"Religious education is the largest task that faces the world to-day. Culture alone cannot save mankind. If it could Athens would be the centre of civilisation."

Mr. Herbert Asquith in a discussion of education writes:

"Denominational schools are an indispensable part of the educational system. You cannot get rid of them because you cannot find a practical substitute for them."

So it goes with Catholic and non-Catholic voicing the need of adequate moral training. For American children, the need is self-evident, if our institutions are to endure. A nation cannot stand when its citizens manifest a disregard for law and order. The future of the country, no less than the future of the Church, depends on allegiance to the idea of religious education, and if religious education is to continue among us, Catholics of America must not swerve in their fidelity to the principles laid down by

the Church. Catholics may not send their children to schools where religious teaching is abandoned, and teaching of morality excluded from the curriculum. Says Mr. Bird S. Coker:

"No system of ethics that had behind it no living faith was ever successful in curbing the evil inclination of the human flesh. No ethical code has even been worth its paper that did not have behind it the authority of a living faith."

There must be religious instruction, and for us that can be had only in the Catholic school.

Catholic schools must bear the burden of teaching a standard of ethics not generally accepted by the masses. Through it they will preserve the Faith for their children and at the same time educate fearless, upright citizens for the State. For Catholics the way is clear; the duty plain. We must know our schools, we must support them, we must defend them. We must see that every Catholic child is blessed with a religious education in a Catholic school, and having before our eyes the experience of Oregon, Michigan, and Alabama, must see to it that the fight for the Catholic school is the fight of every Catholic man and woman in the country.

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