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THE CATHOLIC HOUR

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# CATHOLIC CHURCH AND EDUCATION

BY

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**National Council of Catholic Men**  
**Washington, D. C.**

## CATHOLIC CHURCH AND EDUCATION

My dear Friends of the Catholic Hour,

It is not without significance that this address on Catholic Education comes to you from the city of San Francisco, the city named after the Seraphic St. Francis of Assisi. The name of the patron of this city is intimately connected with the beginnings of education in the United States. We may trace the origin of educational work in this country to the mission schools established by the spiritual sons of St. Francis, the Franciscan Friars. In Florida in the year 1594 and in New Mexico in 1589, the first opportunities for education within the boundries of the present United States were provided by the Spanish Franciscans. Here in this far western country we trace the beginnings of education to the twenty California missions founded by the saintly Father Junipero Serra, and his Franciscan companions. The Franciscan mission schools in Florida and New Mexico preceded by several years the establishment of schools in the English colonies. Indeed it is certainly appropriate to identify the name of St. Francis of Assisi with the establishment of schools in the United States.

From those Franciscan foundations, there has developed the Catholic school system. A visitor to our

country has called this system the greatest single educational fact in the United States. Such a statement may seem to some to be an exaggeration. But yet when we consider the number of schools conducted by the Catholic Church in America, the assertion has a real foundation. In the United States at the present time, there are 2,584,561 students attending Catholic educational institutions. These students are enrolled in 7,944 Catholic elementary schools, 2,105 high schools, 168 colleges, 25 universities, and 181 seminaries. When we realize that American Catholics have built and supported these institutions without any financial aid from the State, we are forced to conclude that this system of schools and colleges is unparalleled either in this country or abroad.

The question readily comes to mind: Why do Catholic people of America maintain an elaborate system of schools at the expense of millions of dollars when their children could attend public schools which they help to support as taxpayers? Surely there must be serious reasons for the course of action which Catholics have adopted. And serious reasons there are. Primarily, Catholics have established their own system of schools because they have a very definite an-

swer to the question: "What is education?" The answer to that question is of vital importance because upon it depends the kind of education which children are to receive. In approaching the Catholic answer to this question, we may observe that education has two major elements. There is a constant element and a variable one. Those who are familiar with the trends of education will agree that the majority of modern educators deal principally with changing factors, with methods of instruction and technique of administration. They are not mainly concerned about the reason for teaching.

The method of teaching or the science of education varies with the development of knowledge in the natural and social sciences. An advance in psychology, or biology, or sociology may cause radical changes in the character of an educational system. In fact, modern research has introduced many improvements in methods of teaching and school administration. As a result the typical school to-day bears little resemblance to the 'little red school house' of a few generations ago. In the main the research of the competent psychologists and educators has brought progress in education. However, because they emphasize experimentation unduly, and neglect reflective thinking, many educators have

come to believe that the main reality in education is change. They concentrate on the particular and changeable aspects and give a secondary place to the purpose of education which is the more general and unchanging element.

The stable element in education concerns man and his destiny; it concerns his relation to God. Educators must have a definite understanding concerning the nature and destiny of man. If they lack this, then all methods and procedures, no matter how scientific, will lack intelligent direction. In making a journey, our destination is of prime importance. Likewise in education the first essential is knowledge of the goal to which we are to lead the child. Of course the goal of education is determined by the nature and destiny which God has given to the child.

The Catholic school gives a primary place to the purpose of education. Therefore it bases its program on the clear teaching of philosophy and divine revelation concerning the origin, nature, and destiny of man. That teaching gives an answer to the momentous questions asked in all ages and so well expressed by Carlyle when he said, "Whence and O God whither?" The Catholic knows the answer to the question of the whence, the what, and the whither of life, partly by the use of human intelligence,

more adequately through the word of God, speaking through the prophets in the Old Testament, and still more fully through the word made Flesh, Our Lord Jesus Christ. And the answer is one known by the child in every Catholic school—that man is unique in the universe; that he is a union of body and soul created by a Personal God; that he is a person with a sacred dignity; that he has not here a lasting city but seeks one that is to come. For the Catholic the ultimate goal of life is complete union with God. That is the true term of human progress. That is the final end of the divine creative act.

Since the Catholic has this understanding of the nature and destiny of man, he can only be satisfied with an education which is defined in terms which respect man's sacred character and final end. With this in mind, we may define education as the process whereby the physical, intellectual, social, and moral powers of a person are so developed as to enable him to accomplish his life work here and to attain his eternal destiny. The latter part of this definition is at least as important as the earlier. For Catholics it predominates.

The implications of this definition are obvious. Educational

means must be selected which are in conformity with human nature and adequately suited to achieve the main purpose of human life, union with God. Certainly secular means will not be sufficient. The educator who embraces a secular philosophy considers man as the measure of all things. He believes that man should seek ends which are exclusively human and natural. He assumes that all goals which claim to lie beyond nature and human life are illusory. He simply concentrates on man and ignores everything else. Therefore, in education he chooses natural means to achieve his natural goal. Certainly means which are man-centered cannot attain an end which is God-centered.

Nor can the supernatural goal of Catholic education be reached by methods and procedures which are erroneously termed neutral. There is no such thing as neutral education, for as Professor Harold Rugg has stated, "As we look upon life, so we teach. What we believe, the loyalties to which we hold, subtly determine the content and method of our teaching." The professedly neutral school is actually sectarian, since it implies that the principles of religion have no necessary connection with the realities of life. Such a system of education proclaims a highly sectarian set of dogmas regarding religion and

tends definitely toward indifferentism.

No, secular and neutral means simply will not do. To achieve the desired goal of life and education, union with God in this life and hereafter, adequate means must be used. The only means adequate for such a sublime educational objective is the school which begins and ends in Jesus Christ, the religious school. In any school worthy of the name Catholic, the truths of religion must enter into all the processes of education. The entire school program must be permeated with religious principles. As the poet Browning has said,

“Religion is all or nothing; its no  
mere smile  
O’contentment, sigh, or aspiration,  
sir—  
No quality o’ the finelier tempered  
clay,  
Like its whiteness or its lightness;  
rather stuff  
O’ the very stuff; life of life, and  
self of self.”

Religion in the Catholic school is no mere subject; it is not “a side current apart from the main gulf-stream of culture.” Rather it penetrates into every relation of the child and touches his every ideal and aim and act. This does not, of course, imply the continuous direct teaching of religion, but it does imply that the approach to all

subjects will be from the Christian point of view.

Moreover, the Catholic school is able to achieve unity in its instruction. It sees the child as a whole child, possessing religious, intellectual, physical, and social powers given to him by Almighty God, as means to an end, union with Him. These powers are to be developed harmoniously—not with the lopsided development of the natural man, the economic man, or the social man, but unto the full perfection of the Christian man, “the supernatural man who thinks, judges, and acts by the supernatural light of the example and teaching of Christ; in other words . . . the true and finished man of character.”

In brief, such are the fundamental and serious reasons for the Catholic school system. By its schools, the Catholic Church in America is making an indispensable contribution to the youth under its direction. Moreover, by its positive position it proclaims the inherently American principle that religion is essential in education. In recent years, we have heard the voices of the presidents of the two largest universities in the United States urging American educators to return to the religious ways of their fathers. From New York we have heard the voice of Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler stat-

ing, "The separation of church and state is fundamental in our American political order, but so far as religious instruction is concerned, the principle has been so far departed from as to put the whole force and influence of the tax supported school on the side of one element of the population, namely, that which is pagan and believes in no religion whatsoever." A plan was suggested by Dr. Butler whereby . . . "school children and their parents . . . would come to look upon religious instruction as vitally important and as constituting an essential part of the educational process." From Berkeley in California, Dr. Robert Gordan Sproul, President of the State University, made the following striking statement: "While I am a firm believer in the separation of Church and state, I also believe that our people have carried this principle to an extreme." He added, "Without the vital issues of religion students might become merely efficient in the Nazi manner, and, therefore, a menace rather than a help to civilization and democracy. Something more than brilliance, cleverness, and getting degrees is needed in our educational system." These two leaders of American education recognize the fact that a complete education is the rightful heritage

of every American youth. They realize that no part of a complete education should be eliminated, least of all the religious part which emphasizes our relation to God and our fellowman.

This American principle of religion in education has been the soul of the Catholic educational tradition from the days of the Franciscan Fathers to the present. The Catholic educator strives to be true to that tradition and desires to share its manifold treasures with others. He is interested not only in Catholic schools and colleges, but also in the best kind of education for all the children of all the people. He remembers that he is an apostle of Christ, who by Baptism and Confirmation is appointed to the service of his brothers within the household of the faith as well as to the service and edification of those who are potential members of Christ's Mystical Body. In all his efforts to attain the educational ideals of the Catholic school, union with God, he faces the future with confidence, knowing that with the help of a kindly and omnipotent Providence, he will not relinquish a ray of splendor of his vision, nor a fragment of the faith which will lead him with clear eyes through a lifetime of fruitfulness to the eternal city of God.



# THE CATHOLIC HOUR

1930—Fourteenth Year—1943

The nationwide Catholic Hour was inaugurated on March 2, 1930, by the National Council of Catholic Men in cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company and its associated stations. Radio facilities are provided gratuitously by NBC and the stations associated with it; the program is arranged and produced by NCCM.

The Catholic Hour was begun on a network of 22 stations, and now carries its message of Catholic truth on each Sunday of the year (and Good Friday) through a number of stations varying from 90 to 107, situated in 40 states, the District of Columbia, and Hawaii. Consisting of an address mainly expository, by one or another of America's leading Catholic preachers, and of sacred music provided usually by a unit of the Paulist Choir, the Catholic Hour has distinguished itself as one of the most popular and extensive religious broadcasts in the world. A current average of 41,000 audience letters a month, about twenty per cent of which come from listeners of other faiths, gives some indication of its popularity and influence.

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