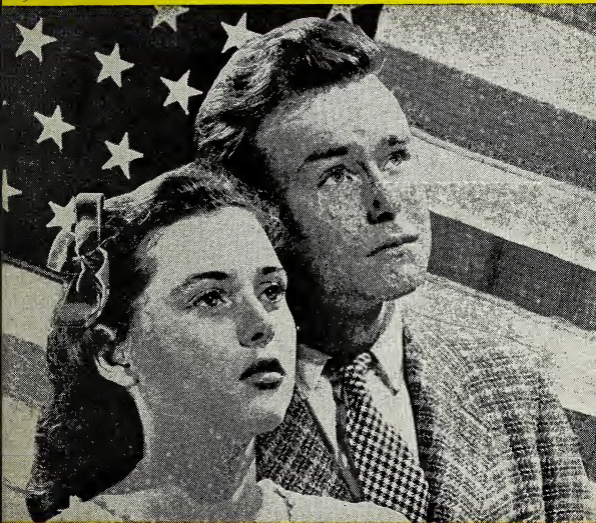


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What About **Catholic Schools?**



WHAT
ABOUT
CATHOLIC
SCHOOLS?

by

RICHARD GINDER



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WE CATHOLICS have a very efficient school system all our own, presided over by a teaching force which begins with gentle little sisters in the first grade and ends with research specialists hiding behind double-barreled spectacles in university libraries.

We hold that children do not learn enough in the common schools. They learn to read and write and figure, but their education stops there. They are never taught who made them and why. They never learn about Jesus and their soul. Non-Catholics may regard all these subjects as matters of opinion, patient of argument: but Catholics have always held their beliefs as matters of fact.

So, rather than send our children to schools where the whole thing is ignored, we Catholics prefer to build and maintain our own schools, and train and support an independent body of teachers.

It was not always that way with our public schools. Long ago, Americans as a group believed in God as the Creator of all things. Everyone agreed that we were not all flesh; that there was a higher something, the soul, created by God and destined to everlasting life. Books were written and studied, and classes were taught on that basis.

You know the changes which have been brought about with the passing years. A great part of non-Catholic America has given up those beliefs, or holds them only in a loose way; especially, one might say, the intellectual leaders of the country, the writers of school-books and the teachers in normal schools; so that, strangely, to mention God's name in a public class-room is to poke at a hornet's nest and, worse than that, to commit a breach of good taste. God, if He is at all, is to be ignored.

At first Americans got plenty of religious instruction at home. It was still a Christian era. Convocations of every kind opened with a prayer and closed with a blessing. There was grace before and after meals. Even nations preserved at least a fiction of piety by beginning their legal instruments "In the name of God. Amen." Religion, if it was debated, was still respected. Christian customs influenced the people. There was no love lost among Protestants themselves, much less between Protestant and Catholic, but all of them could agree on such fundamentals as the malice of perjury and the evil of divorce.

Enter Charles Darwin

Evolution sidled in on the scene sometime after the year 1859. That was the year Charles Darwin's manuscript, *The Origin of Species*, was accepted by a London publisher. Strange talk was heard. Children heard the matter disposed of at the dinner-table. It was vulgarized in the Sunday papers. The new science had exploded the Bible—a beautiful book with some basis in

fact, they said, but mainly the folklore of a migrant race.

All this began in the universities and colleges; then it trickled into the old-fashioned high-school course in natural philosophy; and finally it seeped into the home.

Catholic churchmen watched these developments with concern. The Church could control environment in Catholic homes, but not in public-schools; and her children were being taken from their good mothers and delivered into the hands of teachers who were afraid now to speak of God, and the soul, and heaven, and hell. They were with those teachers from nine in the morning until three or four in the afternoon so that home influences hardly had a chance in the matter of education.

But religion is not a subject to be so easily ignored. It is too vast. It touches every phase of our lives. How can any subject be taught without some reference to religion? We do not know the whole truth about Columbus, for instance, if we do not know that he brought priests with him on

his second and third voyages to convert the Indians.—And how else was the Mississippi discovered, if not by a wandering priest in search of souls to baptize? We cannot know anything about art, if we do not know that a madonna represents the Mother of God, or that the medieval cathedrals were built as palaces for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

The Bishops' Decree . . .

Examples are countless. But the bishops of the country saw these holes opening in the public educational system, and when they acted, they moved swiftly. In 1884 they decreed that "near each church, where it does not exist, a parochial school is to be erected within two years from the promulgation of this Council, and is to be maintained in perpetuity, unless the bishop, on account of grave difficulties, judge that a postponement be allowed."

It was a great and expensive problem, but it was a work to which priests and people gave themselves generously. They had convictions on the subject. And now,

wherever possible, the Catholic school stands within the shadow of the Church.

We have 7,660 parish schools with a few more than 2,000,000 children in attendance; 1442 high schools registering 493,754 students; and we have 825 universities, colleges, and academies for Catholic boys and girls.

It involves a staggering outlay in money and sacrifice. Our people are not wealthy as a rule, and one would judge it hard enough just to support a church and rectory; but here we have a school system in addition with no exemption of any sort from taxation for the support of public schools. In other words, Catholics are supporting two school systems.

Priceless Truths

Is it worth it?—Well, judge for yourself. In his first week at school, the Catholic child, hardly more than a baby, learns more than the solemn philosophers of our day have discovered in a lifetime of groping. Our child learns who made him and why. He learns what he is, where he came

from, and where he is going. In other words, he learns the purpose of life.

It is drilled into him. He hears it every day. It is the beginning and end of every study, the foundation of all his classes. God made the child for Himself. The fact breathes life into the dead bones of history; for history is more than a casual list of dates and a string of factual items—it is the story of God's dealings with men and the progress of His Church in a stubborn world. Even geography shows how the mountains and rivers and lakes glorify God.

The children in many places assist at Mass before school. They learn to begin and end their work with prayer. They are taught the beautiful routine of Catholic devotion and they assume our ancient Catholic practices with easy grace. Holy water consecrates their entering and leaving the classroom. The crucifix catches and stops their wandering stare.

They spend their class-days in the presence of a religious, one whose garb bespeaks a life completely consecrated to

God, a constant and living model of self-sacrifice.

How else could religion be taught? Some places, too poor to have a school, or with congregations too scattered, try to get along by gathering the children together for an hour a week after the Sunday Mass or on some week-day. It is a makeshift and it gives religion not one-seventh the importance it should have.

No Obedience Without God

Children in Catholic schools learn reverence for superiors. We teach our children that, when the parent speaks, it is not just Mother or Father; it is God, speaking through human lips. Few Catholic mothers know the anguish, thank God, of having children who are not only disobedient, but disrespectful as well. It is the non-Catholic parent who realizes when God has been taken from his side how his own authority disappears. It is a discovery always made too late, unfortunately, for by the time children are old enough to have minds of their own, they are too old to be

disciplined and certainly too old to be taught the Fourth Commandment.

This is not intended to belittle the public schools. What they teach, they teach well. They have high standards and a teaching body of integrity. Our protest is that they do not teach enough.

Our Catholic schools are catching up with the rising age of compulsory education. About half of our children are now in Catholic high schools. That is a good figure when we consider how only the more densely settled areas can people and support a high school!

One need hardly develop the importance of a religious atmosphere during this phase of a boy's and girl's life. They enter high school children, and graduate adults. Adolescence overtakes them. They must adapt themselves reasonably to the privileges of young manhood and womanhood.

These are the years when boys and girls need sympathetic and inspired guidance. There are an endless number of delicate adjustments to be made. Emotional values are changing and the youngster is at a dis-

advantage if he finds himself during these crucial years in the hands of advisers out of sympathy with the religious motives of his childhood.

Catholic Colleges and Universities

Our higher education — colleges and universities — is an institution almost as old as the Church. The Church always acknowledged preaching and teaching as her mission. From the first she taught and defended truth, religious truth, to be sure, but she had a great curiosity concerning all truth.

Paris, Oxford, Salerno, Bologna, great universities, all of them, depended on the Holy Father for their franchise. They were organized by Catholics, priests and laymen, and they all recognized theology as the queen of the sciences, with philosophy as her handmaid. Catholicism's systematic theology was hammered out in the lecture halls of these universities by men like SS. Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Albert, and Duns Scotus.

These schools were the husky offspring

of monastic scholarship. Think of Alcuin, and St. Bede, and the little school which flourished in Charlemagne's palace!

The monks were busy in their scriptoria, copying off the literary and historical monuments for posterity, teaching the neighborhood children to read and write and conduct themselves with the modesty and politeness of Christian gentlemen.

It was all democratic. The monasteries, themselves supported by charity, dispensed charity lavishly. The monks had a keen eye for talent and they never let a bright child escape without an education. On the other hand, they never committed our frequent blunder of trying to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

Education of Poor Students

Medieval universities exercised their charity through loans. By statute, no student was to be kept out for lack of funds. A poor boy could beg (not dishonorable in those times), or find a job or, if worst came to worst, he could be admitted on a

pauper's oath and his promise to pay back later.

When these ancient universities were stolen from the church, theology was dethroned and banished and there was no longer any authority to keep the professors from teaching error. Which they did. So Catholics stopped sending their boys and girls. Instead they organized new colleges and universities, to be supervised by men who really loved the students and who felt themselves responsible for what they learned while under their charge.

In this country, we have the Catholic University in Washington, the center of our educational activity, and a recognized seat of higher learning. Like the universities of old, it has its power to confer degrees from the Holy Father — degrees which are recognized by the state and by all her sister universities here and abroad and which are honored by every reputable accrediting organization in the world.

Fanning out from that and depending on it for leadership are the multiplicity of colleges, academies and other universities:

Notre Dame, for instance, Georgetown, and Duquesne; Holy Cross, Fordham, the several Loyolas, Marquette; Trinity College, Seton Hill, and the College of St. Therese at Winona.

Why Not Your Children Too?

A Catholic parent can send his child to school from first grade all the way up to his last year of medical or law school, and be confident that not once will the lad hear a word spoken against Christianity or the Christian ethic. Virtue will be made as easy as possible for the boy. (Sometimes, you know, it is painted as an unattainable ideal, which makes it a practical and moral impossibility.) He will be given clear principles. The ethic behind them will be expanded from year to year as his understanding develops. Sin will be described sincerely as the greatest unimaginable misfortune. And all the time the lad's life will be under the scrutiny of shrewd advisers, accustomed to appraising character and anxious to help the boy with all their powers. Finally he will graduate, well

trained and well disciplined, possessed of all he needs for the happy life.

Why not put your children in a Catholic school?

The president of George Washington University, writing in the Chicago Examiner, August 15, 1909, said: "Whatever may be said of the schools of this country, none have won a higher plane than those conducted by the various religious organizations, and none have created a higher record than those conducted by the Catholic Church. This holds good from the parochial school to the Catholic Colleges and Catholic Universities, whether conducted by those self-abnegating women of the various sisterhoods or the various branches of brotherhoods which are so prominent in the Catholic Church's activities. The Catholic system of schools has been a great factor in the development and advancement of the Nation."

Woodrow Wilson, while President of Princeton, said: "We all know that the children of the last two decades in our schools have not been educated. With all our training, we have trained nobody. With all of our instructing, we have instructed nobody."

The late President Harper, of Chicago University, one time said: "It is difficult to foretell the outcome of another fifty years of our educational system, which trains the mind only, but for the most part leaves the moral side untouched. The Roman Catholics meet this difficulty, while our Protestant churches utterly ignore it."

PUBLISHED BY

THE CATHOLIC INFORMATION SOCIETY

214 WEST 31ST ST., NEW YORK 1, N. Y.

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