



May the state educate ?

Rev. Father Peter Scott

Having considered last month who has the right and duty to educate, namely firstly the family, secondly the Church and thirdly schools established by the Church and families, it remains to consider what role, if any, the State may and ought to play in the work of Catholic education. Clear principles on this issue are fundamental to the resolution of a hotly disputed issue, namely whether or not the Church should accept state aid for the running of its Catholic schools. Last September Bishop Durocher of the Alexandria-Cornwall diocese, Ontario, objected to the pol-

icy that the public funding of Catholic schools, so necessary to their survival, had become the grounds for introducing a new aggressive secularism, that excludes public signs of religion even from Catholic schools. The same problem exists in England, where last March the Bishop of Lancaster, Bishop Patrick O'Donoghue, was summoned to appear before the government's "Children, Schools and Families Select Committee" and accused of having "fundamentalist" views because he issued a document that "directed his diocesan schools to instruct their students in Catholic teaching and morality" (Zenit.org).

Cardinal warns against anti-catholic Education

The new religious diversity curriculum introduced in the Quebec school system is a violation of parents' rights and borders on being "anti-Catholic," according to Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski, the prefect of the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education.

In September 2008, the Quebec Ministry of Education introduced the new curriculum into all public and private schools in the province. The mandatory courses replaced the "Catholic Religious and Moral Instruction," "Protestant Moral and Religious Education" and "Moral Education" programs, between which parents could choose for their children.

In the new program, students are taught a diversity of world religions and secular ethics.

"Talking about all religions violates the right of parents to educate their own children according to their own religion," explained the Polish cardinal, echoing the protests of some parents in the province who say the textbooks are not ideologically neutral. "Talking in the same way about all religions," Cardinal Grocholewski continued, "is almost like an anti-Catholic education, because this creates a certain relativism." He concluded that this approach to instruction could ultimately be anti-religious, since youth are left with the impression that each faith is a fictional narrative.

The Assembly of Quebec Catholic Bishops have been measured in their criticism of the "Ethics and Religious Culture" program, recognizing in a March 2008 statement that the curriculum would "promote the development of a better mutual understanding between those who have different religious or secular beliefs."

However, the bishops reaffirmed their preference for parental choice and described their stance as "critical and vigilant." The bishops further worried that teaching religion from a purely socio-cultural view could lead to a restrictive understanding of religious experience.

Some Canadian clerics, such as Cardinal Marc Ouellet of Quebec City, maintain that parents should be able to exempt their children from the program for reasons of conscience. Presently, the provincial government has permitted no such allowances for concerned parents.

Quebec's ethics & religious culture program

Then on February 19 last, the Acton Institute in Rome hosted a debate on the question as to whether state aid for Catholic schools is a help or a hindrance, under the chairmanship of Cardinal Grocholewski, prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education. He there commented on the Quebec Ministry of Education Ethics and Religious Culture Program, which has become obligatory in all public and private schools in the province, replacing all other Catholic, Protestant and moral education programs, between which parents could previously choose. This new program is based upon pluralism, namely the teaching of a diversity of world religions and of secular ethics. Cardinal Grocholewski rightly objected to this program: "Talking about all religions violates the right of parents to educate their own children according to their own religion... Talking in the same way about all religions is almost like an anti-Catholic education, because this creates a certain relativism... this approach to instruction could ultimately be anti-religious, since youth are left with the impression that each faith is a fictional narrative". (Ib.)

We cannot but agree with the Cardinal's remarks, although he equates Catholic and non-Catholic parents, in virtue of the principle of religious liberty, and fails to mention that Catholic parents have the divine obligation and right of teaching their children the Catholic Faith, because it is the one true Faith, whereas the right of Protestants and others of instructing their children in their religion derives only from the natural law. It is also a great pity that he fails to point out that the vast majority of high school religion programs in the post-conciliar schools follow precisely this guideline of pluralism, and are not much less a course in comparative religion than that legislated by the province of Quebec.

It is also very interesting to note that the Assembly of Quebec Catholic Bishops, faithful to the principles of pluralism and dialogue promoted by Vatican II failed to condemn the "Ethics and Religious Culture" program itself, rather "applauding the course for highlighting the distinct role played by Catholicism in the French Canadian province's history" and because it would "promote the development of a better mutual understanding between those who have different religious or secular beliefs" (March

2008, quoted by Zenit, op. cit.). Their opposition was not so much to the program itself, as to the fact that it is imposed as obligatory, Cardinal Ouellet of Quebec City unsuccessfully requesting that parents be able to exempt their children for reasons of conscience.

The long term problem highlighted by such programs is whether or not Catholic schools should accept public funding, given the pluralism that has become attached to it. Professor Sam Gregg of the Acton Institute states that this is impermissible interference and that the Church ought to be radical in refusing such funding: "Anything that impedes the ability of Catholic schools from maintaining and promoting that which is at the very heart of its inspiration - which is the Catholic Faith - ought to be dispensed with... In our age, if this includes state funding, then it, too ought to be one of those things that the Church casts off..." (Quoted by Zenit.org). How right he is! The problem, however, is that many years and decades of public funding have made the Catholic school system in many countries entirely dependent upon it. Will those who believe in the pluralism of Vatican II have the courage to cast off the yoke of the more radical pluralism of the secular state?

"It is clear that there can be no true education which is not wholly directed to man's last end, and that in the present order of Providence...there can be no ideally perfect education which is not Christian education."

(Pope Pius XI)

Principles for the role of the state

The true role of the State in education follows clearly from the principles that are so well explained in the 1929 encyclical of Pope Pius XI *Divini illius magistri*, On the Education of the Redeemed man. He there explains that there is no education that is not Catholic, for "it is clear that there can be no true education which is not wholly directed to man's last end, and that in the present order of Providence...there can be no ideally perfect education which is not Christian education." The conclusion the Pope draws concerns the excellence and the importance of

Catholic education: “Hence the supreme importance of Christian education... from these same principles, the excellence, we may well call it the unsurpassed excellence, of the work of Christian education becomes manifest and clear: for after all it aims at securing the Supreme Good, that is God, for the souls of those who are being educated” (Ib.)

Pius XI goes on to explain that the State does indeed have a role in education, for the educated person belongs to three societies, two in the natural order, the family and the State, and one in the supernatural order, the Church: “Education which is concerned with man as a whole, individually and socially, in the order of nature and in the order of grace, necessarily belongs to all these three societies, in due proportion, corresponding, according to the disposition of Divine Providence, to the coordination of their respective ends”. This principle determines everything. Education belongs pre-eminently to the Church, for it educates in the supernatural order, but under her supernatural authority to the family and to the State, for grace perfects na-

ture. Amongst these two, though, it is the family that has precedence in the natural order, for it is the principle of life. As Pius XI states: “The family holds, therefore, directly from the Creator the mission, and hence the right, to educate the young, a right inalienable because inseparably joined to a strict obligation, a right anterior to any right whatever of civil society and of the State...” (Ib.).

State’s duty in justice

The conclusion is that the role of the State in education is subordinate to that of the Church in the supernatural order and that of the family in the natural order, protecting and fostering each one so that it can perform its proper function. “Consequently, in the matter of education, it is the right, or to speak more correctly, it is the duty of the State to protect by means of its legislation, the prior rights...of the family as regards the Christian education of its offspring, and consequently also to respect the supernatural rights of the Church in this same realm of Christian education.” (Pius XI, Ib.) It most certainly cannot interfere with, but must “respect the inherent rights of the Church and of the family concerning Christian education, and should moreover have regard for distributive justice” (Ib.). Distributive justice means the use of public funds, contributed by taxes, to a just proportion of which Catholics have a right in justice, so that it is fraudulent and against justice for a government to deprive Catholic schools of these funds, or worse still to deprive truly Catholic schools of the right to exist, as Communism does. For a government to say that because it pays, it has a right to determine what is taught in the schools it funds, is entirely false and iniquitous, deceptive and unjust. It is the divinization of the State, become a law unto itself. The Pope continues: “Accordingly, monopoly, whether educational or scholastic, which, physically or morally, forces families to make use of government schools...is unjust and unlawful”. It is precisely this communist monopoly of pluralism that secular governments, and in particular the province of Quebec, are attempting to impose by law.

The objection that is frequently made is that Catholic societies no longer exist, and that consequently the State can no longer show any preference for Catholic education. This is the logical conclusion of the damnable separation of

**Cardinal Grocholewski,
prefect of the
Congregation for
Catholic Education.**



Church and State promoted by Vatican II, but not at all a necessary consequence of the divided nature of modern society. Pope Pius XI already answered this objection in 1929 when he stated that in “a nation where there are different religious beliefs... it is the duty of the State... to leave free scope to the initiative of the Church and the family, while giving them such assistance as justice demands.” He further points out there are such countries where “the school legislation respects the rights of the family, and Catholics are free to follow their own system of teaching in schools that are entirely Catholic. Nor is distributive justice lost sight of, as is evidenced by the financial aid granted by the State to the several schools demanded by families.”

Refusal of state funding

The Pope goes on to answer precisely the present day predicament, nor does he leave any doubt whatsoever as to what a Catholic is bound to do in the face of such iniquitous controls by the State. For in countries where there is no government support for entirely free schools, Catholics take upon themselves the heavy burden of supporting “Catholic schools for their children entirely at their own expense; to this they feel obliged in conscience, and with a generosity and constancy worthy of all praise, they are firmly determined to make adequate provision for what they openly profess as their motto: ‘Catholic education in Catholic schools for all Catholic youth’. If such education is not aided from public funds, as distributive justice requires, certainly it may not be opposed by any civil authority ready to recognize the rights of the family...” (Ib.).

There can be no doubt. Catholic schools must refuse state funding in any case where the government attempts to dictate the form and kind of education, inasmuch as it affects the teaching of morality and religion, and in particular when it attempts to impose pluralism. Catholics have no choice in this matter. They must be heroic in their sacrifices or they will lose their Faith and their children. It was what Pope Pius XI goes on to say: “Where this fundamental liberty is interfered with, Catholics will never feel, whatever may have been the sacrifices already made, that they have done enough, for the support and defense of their schools and for the securing of laws that will do them justice.” As traditional

Catholics, we must reasonably foresee, that with the ongoing self-destruction of the Church and promotion of liberalism in public life, will come a progressive increase in the imposition of pluralism, destroying all true education, and consequently the obligation of freeing ourselves from the temptation of accepting government funding.

Allow me to conclude with a quote from Father Edward Leen, C. Ss. P., that expresses the supernatural elevation of Catholic education that justifies any and every sacrifice made on its behalf: “It is plain that for a Christian education, as thorough an initiation as possible into the ‘discipline’ that sets forth in full the nature of the relations established between God and man by Sanctifying Grace is of supreme importance. To live rightly a man must know what is implied by his adoptive sonship of God, and what practical consequences flow from that sonship... The religion of God, that is, the religion framed by God,

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is necessarily calculated to forge a complete personality... The formative purpose of Christian doctrine, as distinct from all the other ‘disciplines’ comprehends the whole man. It aims at forming not the intellect only, but the will and the emotions as well. It must, therefore, occupy a central position in the plan of a Christian education. All the other courses must get their inspiration from it. The healthiness of their formative effect corresponds to their dependence on it... On it largely depends what a student is to become.” (What is true education, pp. 157, 158). If the secular State will not support such an education, then let it keep its money unjustly, and let Catholics take the sacred responsibility of funding true education as well as that of imparting it.