

AN OBJECTIVE DEFENCE OF DENOMINATIONAL EDUCATION

THE denominationalist claim to equality of treatment in education is still regarded by most people as a claim to special privileges and subsidies, to be granted, if at all, on traditional and sentimental grounds and on the grounds that denominationalism derives some vague rights from the fact that it is still 'in possession' in the legal sense. This confusion may be due in part to the fact that only one denomination, the Church, has stated with clarity the case for equal treatment, and that the statements have nearly all been made by clergy, who are naturally supposed to be arguing in their own interests. The following paragraphs contain a statement of the case for denominational education based solely on first principles and in such a form as to be valid for any denomination.

Education is for the sake of the child; but since the child is irresponsible, the first of all educational principles derives from the right to control the child and to control those things which exist for the sake of the child. Now the child belongs by nature to its parents first of all. By natural right the parents have control of the child until it is able to control itself. It is true that men are born citizens, and to that extent belong to the State, but parental ownership is anterior to, and takes precedence of, civil ownership. This follows necessarily from the fact that, before being a citizen, a child must exist; and existence comes not from the State, but from the parents.

Consequently the parents hold directly from Nature the right and duty of educating their offspring, and this right is anterior to any right whatever of civil society or of the State. From this it follows that any system whereby parents are compelled to submit their children for education wholly to some authority not of their own free choice, is an unwarrantable interference with one of those fundamental liberties the protection of which is the first reason for the existence of the State and of civil society.

The reasons for the existence of the State have been given as follows: 'This end and object, the common welfare, consists in that peace and security in which families

and individual citizens have the free exercise of their rights, and at the same time enjoy the greatest possible prosperity The function, therefore, of the civil authority residing in the State is to protect and to foster, but by no means to absorb the family and the individual, or to substitute itself for them' (Encyclical, *Repraesentens in terra*).

Thus it is the right and duty of the State to protect in its legislation the prior rights of the family, and it is direct denial of its right and its duty to force parents, whose impenuniosity leaves them no choice, to send their children to some type of school suitable for, or acceptable to, a section of the community only, even when that section is in the majority, and even if it has in consequence succeeded in financing that type of school from the public purse.

It is also the duty of the State to protect the rights of the child, if the parents are either unable or unwilling (*i.e.*, through default, incapacity or misconduct) to undertake the proper education of the child. A perfect society is one which has in itself all the means necessary for its full development. Now the family is not a perfect society, and when the deficiencies of the family interfere with the proper education of the children, it is the duty of the State to come forward and supply the deficiency, not by putting itself in place of the family, but by providing suitable means in conformity with the rights of the child.

In addition to this, the State has the right to demand that all its citizens shall be properly instructed in their civic and political duties, and to take measures necessary to ensure this instruction. The State may also demand whatever degree of physical, intellectual and moral culture is really necessary for the common good, having regard to the circumstances and to the particular needs of the age, and may even reserve to itself the control of schools for such special civil and military studies as it may deem necessary.

The statement made above that a parent must educate his child conformably to the ends for which human beings come into existence is almost a self-evident one, but it may also be deduced from the natural law that all things properly seek their perfection, and that the perfection of

anything is to fulfil the end for which it came into existence.

But whereas unconscious beings and those not possessed of self-determination seek their ends by their own nature or by instinct, man, who is possessed of reason and of self-determination, is bound to use his liberty to seek his proper end and to use his reason to discover that end.

The question of the last end of man has been answered in a variety of ways by different philosophies and religions. But as soon as a philosophical answer is embraced with sufficient conviction to cause persistent action in the direction indicated by it, that philosophy becomes a religion (or anti-religion) or a part of a religion. Consequently the last end of man, considered as the ideal of action, pedagogic or other, is always and ultimately a religious matter.

Therefore, a parent who really accepts any particular religion or world-view is bound in conscience to educate his children in conformity therewith; and the parent who is unable as yet to accept any religion or world-view which he has so far heard of and studied is bound to seek an answer which he can accept to what is necessarily the most important of all questions for every man.

Since this is the most important question for all men, the knowledge of the answer to it, and the daily training in the carrying into effect of the principles which that answer enjoins—these things, commonly known as religion, are not something extra, superadded to education by each man at his own pleasure, but the very foundation and basis of education, since they claim to fit man for his supreme end.

Therefore, those who, like the Jews, Samaritans, Moham-medans and Christians, believe that the end of man is service of, knowledge of, and enjoyment of the Divinity, and those who, like the Advaitin and Visishtadvaitin Hindus and the Eddyists and Newthoughtists, believe that the end of man is deliverance by realization of unity with the Divine, together with those who, like the Mahâyâna, Hinayâna and Pure-Land Buddhists, and certain Western Quietists and Allenites, believe that the end of man is absorption into the Divinity by the abandonment of desire, as well as those who believe that the supreme end is the material and intellectual progress of the race, have the

right to insist that any education which their children receive and for which they themselves pay, whether as private individuals to a tutor or school, or as tax-payers to the State, shall be ultimately and in its entirety ordained to the supreme end as they conceive it.

It is in vain to strive to establish a neutral system of education which will give training in the subjects on which all agree, and which will leave those on which men differ to be taught in private. Such a system is in fact not a neutral one, but a specifically denominational one, and when logically carried out is a specifically secularist education, for the alleged neutral subjects are not taught in a manner to subserve, in a spirit of subservience to, and as subserving, the supreme end for which the life is to be lived.

There is no subject, however exact and objective, not even mathematics, which can be taught in an entirely neutral manner. The reason for which it is taught, the method of instruction used, the suasions and sanctions employed to enforce the learning, the motives inculcated and the inevitable moral and philosophical deductions, implicit or explicit, are all matters intimately connected with just those points on which men differ most keenly.

Moreover, it is an offence against distributive justice for a party in a State, in however large a majority, to use the general resources of the community to further its own private ends. The establishment of secularist, non-denominational, liberal, neutral, 'unique,' or *konfessionslos* schools at the expense of the State is an abuse of power by a party unless exactly the same assistance is given to denominational schools wherever there is a demand for them. To compel those who belong to a religion which demands the exclusive allegiance of its votaries to pay their share for the erection of schools which they are in conscience unable to use, and then to leave them to pay in addition for themselves the whole cost or part of the cost of their own schools, is an intolerable injustice and a flagrant outrage against the principles of equity.

In recent years the inhabitants of several English-speaking countries have become so used to the attempt to produce neutral State schools that such ideas as those expressed above would strike them as strange and novel. Such people

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need to be reminded that denominational education has always been, and still is, the practice and policy of the vast majority of humanity. Those who assert that the policy is impossible in these days of increased education should realize that in several countries this policy is already realized and that in one of these countries the few (less than half-a-dozen) 'neutral' schools still existing are a source of embarrassment to the government which would gladly hand them over to denominational hands if it could do so fairly; and this particular country is described by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as the country in Europe best provided with higher and lower centres of education.

These are the considerations which should be put before our present political authorities. They are, of course, subject to certain modifications in favour of the true religion as such and against bodies teaching doctrines contrary to the natural law, but these modifications cannot usefully be urged except to those who accept that religion and repudiate doctrines contrary to natural morality.

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Acknowledgment is due to the kindness of the Editor of the *A.M.A.*, who has permitted me to use the substance of two articles I had contributed to that paper under the heading, *In Defence of First Principles*.