

Education and The State

A Christian Critique of the 1944 Education Act

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I.

AN educational system can be studied under three aspects, its underlying philosophy and basic assumptions, its content, and its organisation. The one must flow from the other. Until the educator knows what he is doing, he cannot frame a curriculum or evolve an educational technique. Furthermore, it is essential that the three should be "of a piece," for education is above all personal relationship, and it is only too easy to organise an educational system in such a way that the underlying aim is radically changed in the process of carrying it out. Overmuch concern for, and concentration upon, method and organisation is the outstanding temptation of the modern age, and this is quite fatal in education. The fundamental question for the educator is not "How should I teach?" but "Why should I teach?" Until he is clear about this, the more efficient is his method, the more harm he will do. It is worth noting in passing that since education has been "promoted" to the status of a science, increasing importance has been attached to method, and the more engrossed the scientific pedagogue has become in his subject, the less has he been concerned with the purpose underlying all education. It is not without significance that almost all the educational research being done in England and America is mathematical and psychological. Books and theses without end are written on the measurement of intelligence and aptitude, but few people are aware that the crisis in education to-day is not capable of solution in the laboratory but in the realm of values. It is fundamentally a religious crisis. More efficient education will only enable us the quicker to destroy ourselves unless we hasten to assert the supremacy of faith over method, of purpose over technique, of the personal over the functional.

When we turn to the Education Act of 1944, bearing in mind the long discussions that led up to it and the White Paper which preceded it, we are not surprised to find that it is weakest in its discussion of fundamental principles. It is quite true that a large section of the Act is concerned with religious instruction and with the organisational problems connected with denominational schools, but a Christian critique of a system of national education is directed to more fundamental questions than these. One of the saddest features of the situation has been the ineffectiveness of the Churches in getting to the root of the matter. On the whole, they have accepted the Act uncritically, except where vested interests have been concerned, and then opposition has been directed, not so much to the aim of the Act and the assumptions on which it is based, as to certain financial

provisions relating to school buildings. It is true, of course, that a small minority of Anglo-Catholics have been extremely vocal on the subject of denominational instruction, but the question at issue is not to be confined within such narrow limits and is one that is of vital importance to all Christians. It is nothing less than whether the assumptions upon which the Act is based are compatible with the Christian Faith. Will our grandchildren, looking back upon the history of their country, say that the Education Act of 1944 was the beginning of a process which conditioned the people of these islands to live in a totalitarian society?

The study of the history of Education brings to light the basic relationship between the generally held assumptions in a society and its educational philosophy. We do not begin afresh with each generation of children, we pass on to them the way of life and world-view of the age in which they are born. The values inculcated in the school cannot be radically different from those of the home and the adult community. Children are taught by teachers, and teachers are paid by the State, in the name of the community, to impart the generally accepted values of their time. The most that can be done is to train children to be critically constructive of the society in which they live, and if teachers attempted to do more than this, they would rightly be dismissed. In no society is the teacher a free agent; if he is in the employment of the State he has to accept its philosophy. If there is a sudden change in this philosophy, as there was in Germany, this is at once reflected in the schools. If the change is not sudden, it does not mean that society is standing still but that the changes in its values can only be assessed by a more careful analysis over a period of years.

The British educational system, like any other, is a product of its time. The State became directly responsible for Education in 1870, the heyday of 19th century liberalism. It was, moreover, a period of great industrial expansion when the need for a more intelligent working class was forcing itself upon employers of labour. It is impossible to understand the development of popular education in Britain without having these two facts in mind. One more fact must be remembered. We have had, in Britain, not one educational system, but two. In the 19th century, the ruling class was educated at the Public Schools and the ancient Universities, and it was from this class that the State recruited its educational administrators. Those who have framed the legislation upon which the State has built its educational system have not themselves been the product of it. Its values have been derived from another tradition and this must be borne in mind when we examine them.

Before 1870, there was a widespread system of elementary education in this country for which the Churches were responsible. Both the Established Church and the Free Churches had large numbers of schools in which was given a grounding in the three R's and religious instruction according to the beliefs of the founders. Moreover, there was, generally speaking, a close link between the school and the Church to which it belonged. When the State decided to supplement this system by providing its own schools, the problem arose as to

what the basis of this education should be. Since everyone was to be compelled to attend school, the rights of those parents who did not wish their children to receive religious instruction had to be safeguarded, with the result that the Christian religion, as such, could not be recognised as the philosophy underlying popular education. What was to take its place? It so happened that those responsible for the framing of the new system had been brought up at the Public Schools in the classical tradition, and this had the great advantage of being unpolluted by denominational controversy and at the same time of being (apparently) compatible with the Christian Faith. The ideal put before teachers was that of character-training, based upon the Greek virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude. These virtues were also completely endorsed by the employers, who demanded nothing more of popular education than that it should produce sober, obedient and willing workers, with enough intelligence to operate the new machines.

An examination of the Elementary Code and the Handbook of Suggestions for Teachers will abundantly prove the point here made. The Public School conception of the English Gentleman was translated into terms suitable for the workers and, with this religiously neutral idea of character building, the State was well content. It is, of course, true that one of the vehicles for the training of children's characters was the Scripture lesson. But religious teaching was to be predominantly ethical. Divine sanction was to be given to a socially desirable code of behaviour. Professor Jeffreys has shown in a recent book (*Education—Christian or Pagan*) that there is no place in the official pronouncements of the Board of Education for the essential insights of the Christian revelation. Pages are devoted to the value of religious instruction as a moral code, but no one suggests that only the power of the Holy Spirit can enable a child to live out the conduct which is being placed before him. Prof. Jeffreys, after concluding a representative survey of the philosophy of education given in official documents, comments thus: "There is no recognition of Christianity as God's revelation to man, nor of Christ as Saviour, nor even of any need of salvation."

II.

It is against this background that we must place the Education Act of 1944. The most significant happening in the realm of values in the intervening half-a-century had been the rise of the totalitarian states. While Britain had been muddling along on an outworn philosophy, great nations had explicitly repudiated nineteenth century ethics and the European Graeco-Roman tradition upon which it was based, and had adopted either Communism or National Socialism. Both ideologies had seen at once that the training of the young in their way of life was of fundamental importance to their survival, and total reconstruction of education had taken place in both Russia and Germany. British educationists were forced to consider once more the fundamentals of their craft and a great deal of discussion took place on the principles and aims underlying our system of popular

education. The result of this concern can be seen in the White Paper of 1943 and in the Act itself. The compulsory introduction into all schools of a daily period of worship, together with a new emphasis upon the importance of religious instruction, may be taken to indicate that the people of this country desire no other faith than Christianity to be taught in their schools and, more positively, that the Christian religion shall be more thoroughly taught than heretofore. Christians may not be happy about the reasons for this new emphasis upon the value of their religion and may quite rightly suspect the motives of many who have advocated it. The fact remains that the challenge that has now been presented to the Church for the working out of the Act in our schools will depend entirely upon the living faith of teachers and administrators. Unless there are enough convinced and practising Christians to staff our schools, colleges and education offices, the children of this country will not be educated to be Christian citizens.

We must now look more closely at what is involved in a Christian philosophy of education, for it is obviously something much wider than the giving of religious instruction to an otherwise secular school. The claim of Christianity is that it is a way of life and that God in Christ makes a total demand upon the allegiance of the Christian. The Christian Faith is not something which can be used by a State for its own ends, however laudable they may be. If the State really believes that its educational philosophy is Christian then it must be prepared for great changes in its schools. The first thing about a good school is that it is a community, imparting a way of life to those who pass through it. As the pupils progress through the school, they will become increasingly aware of the fact that there is an underlying unity and that their teachers really believe something about the nature and destiny of man which affects their day-to-day intercourse with them. In other words, the teacher is not merely imparting knowledge but is in very truth a guide, philosopher and friend to those whom he teaches. In the set period of religious instruction and, above all, in corporate worship, the underlying values of the community will become explicit and the pupils will have revealed to them the spiritual foundations of the community. They will not only know about God: they will believe in Him and trust Him. It may be a half truth to say that Christianity is caught and not taught; it is certainly true that it is much easier to teach Christianity after it is caught than before. In other words, the daily life of the school community should so affect the personality of the growing child that at each stage of his mental development he should be able to understand, against the background of his own emotional and spiritual experience, the truths of the Christian revelation.

At this point we must remember once again that the school is not isolated from the rest of the world but is a part of a larger community which includes the home and the neighbourhood. It is of the greatest importance, especially in day schools, that there should be close links with the pupils' out-of-school environment. The more links that can be made with homes, factories, civic and cultural centres and churches, the more integrated the life of the child will become. The Christian

School must see its mission as the changing of the society in which it is placed. It will, of course, be a long and difficult task and will call for a dedicated and more imaginative teaching profession. That it can be done is proved by isolated examples in this country and by many examples from the mission field. In the 1944 Act, the State has given the Christian Churches in this country what may well be their last opportunity of demonstrating their determination to base the education of the future upon a conscious Christian philosophy rather than upon the neutral liberalism of the 19th century. Are we prepared to fill the void before some other faith steps in?

If such a task is to be undertaken, it will only be by a body of men and women who have thought through the implications of their personal loyalty to Christ in terms of their profession as teachers. The teacher who is a good Churchman is not necessarily a Christian teacher in the sense meant in this article. The Christian teacher will not only hold with deep conviction the truths of Christianity and will have experienced in his own life the saving power of Jesus Christ, but he will have translated these beliefs and experiences into educational values. Thus his belief in a God-controlled universe and in a God who rules in wisdom and love, will give him a reverence for truth which will make the idea that truth is mere expedience or that which best serves the interests of the State, abhorrent to him. His belief in the Incarnation will issue in a reverence for the child's personality and a refusal to exploit it to unworthy ends. His conception of human society as a family united together by love and service will safeguard against the instilling of a narrow nationalism or an aggressive individualism. At the same time, his knowledge of the Cross will give him a realistic view of human nature and will save him from sentimentality or false optimism. He will know the reality of the powers of evil and will leave no doubt in the minds of his pupils that he believes that Christ alone has won the victory over sin and death. Finally, his belief in the eternal destiny of the child will give the teacher that sense of reverence and wonder which will help him to realise the greatness of his responsibility.

It is the task of the Church, both in her training colleges and through such voluntary associations of teachers as the Institute of Christian Education, to train teachers who will be in this far-reaching sense a ministry of teaching. Only so will the philosophy upon which our education is based be really Christian. We might bear in mind some words on this subject by Dr. J. H. Oldham. "The knowledge of God comes to us, not through the acquisition of ideas about Him, but through the living witness of those who know Him and through His voice speaking to us in our relations with our fellow-men. Hence the chief means of Christian education is participation in the life of the Christian Community."

III.

If we now turn to the content of our educational system, we shall have to ask ourselves whether the curriculum of the state school is so ordered that the child will acquire such knowledge as will enable him

to be spiritually, mentally and physically adjusted to his environment. It is a fascinating exercise to trace the connexion between the subject matter of education at different times and places and the social and economic background of the community. Why, for instance, was classics universally taught in the middle ages and why is it almost completely neglected to-day? Why do different modern languages change places in their order of priority? Why does a science like biology or economics suddenly find itself in the timetables of our schools? All these changes reflect great social changes in the life of the nation and in its relation to other nations. They are, in short, symptoms of a process of adaptation that is constantly going on but which varies in tempo in relation to the speed of social change. After a great war, the speed of change is rapid, and Educationists realise that the needs of a new order of society can only be met by far-reaching changes in the schools, for it is in the schools that the new generation has to be taught how to live in this new environment. Some words of Professor A. N. Whitehead are significant here: "There is only one subject-matter for Education, and that is life in all its manifestations. Instead of this single unit, we offer children—Algebra, from which nothing follows; History, from which nothing follows; a couple of languages, never mastered, and lastly, most dreary of all, literature, represented by plays of Shakespeare, with philological works and short analyses of plot and characters to be in substance committed to memory. Can such a list be said to represent life, as it is known in the midst of the living of it?"

Whitehead's criticism is now widely accepted by Educationists. It is generally agreed that the division of knowledge into watertight departments has led to over-specialisation, so that people have learnt "more and more about less and less" and have failed to see life as a whole. This sectionalising of knowledge has been one of the products of the scientific way of looking at the world. Science is analytical, its method is that of isolating from the environment for experimental purposes. But the analytical method ends in the dilemma of the old nursery rhyme, "All the king's horses and all the king's men, could not put Humpty Dumpty together again." It is now recognised that the parts cannot be understood unless there is a clear vision of the whole. The analytical approach to knowledge is now giving way to the synthetical. In the same way that we now think of the whole person—body, mind and spirit—as the unit and know that the closest relation exists between these parts of the personality; so we are now coming to think of knowledge as a single whole rather than as a collection of isolated "subjects." This new approach is being worked out in terms of curriculum reform and is finding expression in new experiments in method in our schools. "Subjects" will, of course, still be taught but they will be presented in terms of a larger whole. Thus, if we think of Education as the opening up of the personality to "life in all its manifestations" we can divide life into three main departments: the material environment, the spiritual environment, and the relation of the individual to other human beings. True education is the process of adaptation to, of coming to terms with,

God, our fellow men and the material world. The subjects of the curriculum can thus be grouped into three categories. In the first we shall have Art, Music, Philosophy and Theology; in the second, Literature, History, Geography and Languages; in the third, the natural sciences. Even these divisions are only for convenience, for obviously they are closely related. Connecting them all together is the faith of the teacher and the generally accepted view of life of the community. In a Christian school, belief in the Christian doctrines of God and Man will provide the framework in which they are all set. The broad pattern in which all the facts are to be related will be that given to us in the Christian revelation.

The bringing together of liberal and technical education into a creative and redemptive partnership is one of the main educational problems of our time, for unless our technical society is humanised, it will enslave us; and this process of the humanising of technics must begin in our schools. Milton defined the purpose of education as follows: "I call therefore a complete and generous education that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully, and magnanimously all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war." Skill is the product of technical education, justice and magnanimity are the fruits of a sensitive spirit. It was this sensitivity to spiritual and cultural values which liberal education at its best was able to give. It is the same sensitivity which to-day will redeem our technical skills, but it can only do this if it is brought to bear upon them.

This means that training for earning a living must be, not an end in itself, but a part of the larger aim of training to live a worthwhile life. In terms of the content of education, it means that there must be no hard and fast line drawn between different kinds of school and that the curriculum in all schools should be rightly balanced between theoretical and practical subjects. It will be quite fatal if it is thought that some schools should train for "white collar" jobs and others for "manual" work. The curriculum of the "technical" schools, in particular, must be carefully worked out so that those who pass through them should have a real understanding of the spiritual and social significance of a technical civilization. Similarly in the Grammar Schools, the relevance of the subjects taught to the actual kind of Society in which the pupils will live and work must be constantly borne in mind. The Secondary Modern School, which will educate the working class of the future, will have to devise a curriculum which will meet the real personal needs of the pupils. The work that these children will do in after life will often be dull and monotonous. They must be given a wide education calculated to open their minds and spirits to new avenues of experience, so that they will be fitted to use their leisure time profitably to themselves and to the community and will have some realisation of the contribution which their work is making to the good of others. In the last resort, education fails unless it gains the interest of the child, and the arousing of this interest is the sign of successful teaching. Only the teacher who is really alive and alert himself to the world in which he lives can attract the enthusiasm of the child. Wonderful schemes of education may be

devised upon paper ; only teachers of vision, faith, enthusiasm and imagination can bring them to life in our schools. No Act can succeed unless the right people can be found and properly trained for this most responsible of all jobs.

IV.

The English educational system has grown up piecemeal and was not, in fact, one system but several. At different times, new kinds of schools had been started to meet new needs and there was often lack of any kind of co-ordination. The 1944 Act has overhauled the whole system, greatly reduced the number of education authorities, and given considerable powers to the newly formed Ministry of Education. The Act is a recognition by Government of the immense importance of education to the State in modern times and of the necessity of making up for our lack of numerical superiority by developing to the fullest extent the powers of each individual member of the community. But the Act attempts more than this. It is, as Archbishop Temple said, an expression of social justice, and it gives a much greater degree of equality of opportunity to every British child. The greatest blot upon our old system was that the majority of our children left school at the age of fourteen, and that, from then until they joined the Army, they were totally neglected both physically and mentally by the State. This neglect of the adolescent was beginning to attract attention even before the war, for it was realised that much of the good that was done in our schools was undone within two years of leaving. It was discovered that only about 40% of our adolescents attended any sort of voluntary organisation and that there was a marked deterioration in health, especially where juvenile unemployment was prevalent.

It was not surprising, therefore, that the 1944 Act concentrated its attention, in the main, upon post-primary education. The school leaving age has been raised to fifteen and children will get the kind of post-primary education for which they are best suited, irrespective of economic circumstances. In addition, the transition from school to industry is to be made more gradual by the provision of "County Colleges" at which children will work for one day a week until they reach the age of eighteen. It is intended to bring these into being by 1950. Another section of the Act deals with Further Education, and in a recent book of that title published by the Ministry (M. of E. Pamphlet No. 8) many far reaching plans for Adult Education are set out.

It is unnecessary to go into the details of the Act as it affects Church Schools. It was impossible to bring the "dual system" to an end, and the Church has been given the opportunity to retain many of her schools on condition that they are brought up to standard in regard to accommodation and equipment. It is a fact, however, that most of the Church Schools of the future will be junior schools, and that at the age of eleven children will proceed to secondary schools which are not in any way controlled by the Church. The Roman Catholic Church will retain more secondary schools than will the Church of England. The chief criticism that Christians will bring against the

working out of the Act in secondary education is that, in a laudable attempt to secure equality of status as between the three types of school (Grammar, Technical and Modern), there is a real danger that the educational standards laboriously built up in the existing secondary schools will be levelled down to those of the former "elementary" school, now known as the secondary modern school. The grammar schools have always been freer from bureaucratic control than have the elementary schools, and their heads have had greater scope for experiment and initiative. The danger now is that this freedom will be taken away and that there will be more uniformity and control from education offices. Already there is considerable discontent among Grammar School staffs. It is difficult to say whether this unhappy state of affairs is only transitional or likely to be permanent. Parity of status between the three kinds of secondary school was one of the main features of the Act. Unfortunately, the neglect of elementary education after the age of eleven had produced a wide disparity between the old senior elementary school and the secondary school. At the same time, quality should not be sacrificed to quantity; it is better that some should have a really good education than that all should have a less good one. It will probably right itself when new secondary modern schools have been built and have established themselves in the public esteem. In spite of their claims, all was not well with the grammar schools. Too often the education they gave was too academic and was suited to the minority who proceeded to the universities rather than to the majority who left at sixteen and went into business or apprenticeship.

It seems likely that the Ministry will allow the local education authorities to experiment with their plans for secondary education. Several have published their plans already and novel suggestions have emerged. Some educationists urge that eleven is too soon to divide children into the three streams and that the two years from eleven to thirteen should be used as a selection period in which the bility and aptitude of the children could be thoroughly investigated. Another suggestion is the multi-lateral school in which grammar, technical and modern would be three streams in the same school rather than three separate schools. This would make it possible to transfer pupils from one stream to another without great difficulty and would also ensure that the three kinds of education were given equal status. Such schools would be large (1,000 or more in towns) and would have to be divided into houses or other small units. From the Christian point of view it is essential that a class unit should be small enough for a real personal relationship to exist between teacher and pupil.

Religious instruction will be given in the State schools several times a week based upon an Agreed Syllabus. Many of these syllabuses are now in use and the best of them are excellent handbooks to a scheme of Biblical instruction, Church history and Christian ethics. The real difficulty is not to draw up a syllabus but to get enough teachers who are willing and able to teach the subject. There is, too, a further important point that must be made. After the syllabus has been drawn up, the Churches have no further control over what is taught in

the schools. The subject will be inspected by the Inspectors of the Ministry. What safeguard is there that the Christian religion, in the form in which it has been handed down through the centuries, will, in fact, be taught? There is no such safeguard. This would seem to be the weakest part of the Act so far as religious teaching is concerned. There is nothing to prevent Jewish or Unitarian teachers giving religious instruction and no reason why a teacher who is an agnostic or an atheist should not do so if he wishes. In fact, the Spens Report suggests that a good teacher can teach the Bible "objectively" even though he may not be a believing Christian. A good deal is being done to raise the standard of teaching in Scripture, and courses are being held for teachers at which they can hear the best Biblical scholars of all denominations. Many teachers are availing themselves of the facilities provided by the Universities and are qualifying as specialised teachers in divinity. But, as we have already said, religious instruction does not, of itself, produce a Christian school; the only way in which this can happen is if the majority of the staff and of the children are conscious Christians embodying the Christian way of life in the everyday life of the school community. Close co-operation is also needed with the parents, for the values of the home and the school must not contradict one another if the child is to grow up without spiritual conflicts leading to indifference and apathy in matters of religious faith and practice.

May we conclude this article with a plea that Christian laymen and women will take a greater practical interest in the nation's schools? Only too often has it been the case that those who could afford to send their children to private boarding schools have totally ignored the State schools. Local Education Committees and the Boards of Management of secondary schools have very considerable powers in ordering and supervising the work of our schools and it is essential that Christians should serve on these bodies. If the members of these bodies are people of wide cultural interests with Christian convictions, the effect in the schools will quickly be felt and a new spirit will infuse our educational system. Christians have no right to stand aloof and talk from outside about "pagan" schools. Their duty is to influence the work of government in education in such a way that, so far as is compatible with freedom of conscience, the education of this country may be a means of evangelising the growing generation. The 1944 Act gives us immense opportunities. Shall we be found ready to take full advantage of them?