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Why Catholics Ask Government Funds for Their Schools?

The following address was delivered by the Rev. William E. McManus at the Catholic Press Association's national convention in Cleveland, May 21, 1948.

Almost every issue of our Catholic papers carries one or more articles on some phase of the constant dispute over the use of tax funds for parochial schools.

One week federal aid hits the headlines, another week feature stories report the latest developments in the New Mexico or North Dakota religious garb controversies.

And, on the trail of the news are the inevitable public statements and topical sermons of ecclesiastics, Catholic and non-Catholic, who wish to take sides in this controversy.

Then there are the editorials and columns, which repeatedly hammer home the idea that Catholic schools should be given a fair share of public funds.

This barrage of news stories and editorials has stunned the average Catholic lay person who until recently had been under the impression that Catholic school authorities wanted no part of public funds.

In the opinion of most lay persons, the current agitation to secure concessions from the government betrays an unpardonable disregard for the traditions of Catholic education.

Why is the Catholic Church working so vigorously for something it really doesn't want? A Catholic lawyer put the same question even more forcefully.

That is a hard question I hope to propose an answer to here. But before taking up the question, may I offer this observation: that this question, and many more like it, are frequently raised by Catholic lay persons.

And immediately to put the blame for this situation where it belongs, I should say that the specialists in educational politics and church-state relations have not fully clarified their own thinking on these intricate issues.

Let us begin with facts. Are Catholic schools in this country entitled to a share of public funds? The answer to this question is clearly set forth in Pope Pius XI's Encyclical on the "Christian Education of Youth."

And let me no say that in a nation where there are different religious beliefs, it is impossible to provide for public instruction otherwise than by neutral or mixed schools.

That this can be done to the full satisfaction of families, and to the advantage of education and of public peace and tranquility, is clear from the actual experience of some countries comprising different religious denominations.

In another statement in the same Encyclical, the Holy Father called attention to the fact that in the United States Catholics openly profess as their motto: Catholic education in Catholic schools for all Catholic youth.

Immediately after this statement the Holy Father asked Catholics to promote the enactment of laws that respect the norms of distributive justice.

Holy Father's Encyclical that distributive justice obliges government to support parochial schools.

Unfortunately, however, distributive justice is one of those very intricate moral principles about which academic moralists have said and written very little.

That Catholic schools actually do render a public service is a fact beyond dispute, for, like the public schools, they too prepare their students for the responsibilities of American citizenship.

The extent of the parochial schools' service to the public is as difficult to determine as its correlative, the precise dollar and cents amount of public funds which parochial schools may claim in distributive justice.

Certainly it would be a gross oversimplification to assume that public and parochial schools should receive exactly the same amount of public funds.

Therefore, in adjudicating the claims of educational institutions, government, mindful of its duty of distributive justice, must take into consideration the amount of tax funds available, the need for a coordinated school system.

Accordingly, a local government may justifiably grant a priority of public funds to public schools which depend upon these funds for their entire support.

My explanation of distributive justice somewhat deflates the stock polemic that "because Catholic taxpayers, and particularly Catholic parents, pay school taxes, parochial schools should be supported."

Liberty and Justice!

The demand that Catholic parochial schools share in public funds is inspired by justice and legitimate liberty. Furthermore, the Catholic campaign in behalf of state aid for parochial schools serves to check the totalitarian and secularistic attempts of those who seek to destroy America's traditions of educational freedom.

Rev. Wm. McManus

besides Catholic also receive no direct return from their school taxes.

Fortunately, in this nation, school taxes are not earmarked according to the religious denomination of the taxpayer.

In short, Catholics protest government's refusal to support parochial schools, not as Catholics, not as taxpayers, but as citizens interested in a fair and equitable distribution of public funds.

The next fact is it futile for Catholics to ask any branch of our government to allocate a fair share of public funds to parochial schools? Futility is about the same as hopelessness.

I doubt, however, whether for some time the majority of the American people will allow their government to grant full support to parochial schools.

The fact remains, however, that under existing laws, local and State tax funds may not be used for the direct aid of parochial schools.

Another fact: Would public support of non-public schools subject them to public control? I think it would, but I hasten to add that public control of Catholic parochial schools is not inherently vicious.



POPE PIUS XI

His encyclical clearly sets forth the answer... control over either public or nonpublic schools should not be granted to any branch of our government.

I do not think that public support would force parochial schools to submit to governmental management, it might subject them to a degree of governmental supervision.

Catholic schools have nothing to hide from our government, their teachers, textbooks and general academic standards are on the average as satisfactory as those of the public schools.

As for administrative control Catholic schools like any other reputable agency serving the public need have no qualms about an audit of their expenditures of public funds.

One final fact: Has the so-called Catholic campaign for public funds antagonized our Protestants and other non-Catholic neighbors? In a way it has.

POAU's manifesto announced its determination to arouse public opinion against the Catholic Hierarchy's alleged maneuvers to capture control of American public education.

Unquestionably, POAU's propaganda has had considerable influence in non-Catholic circles, and not a few Protestants probably do believe that the Catholic Church is a serious threat to religious liberty in our nation.

On the other hand, POAU's flashy success may be a blessing in disguise, for its success has sounded an alarm in those Protestant organizations which now know that the real enemy of religion itself—not to mention religious liberty—is not the Catholic Church but the secularism that is gnawing away at the very roots of religion.

And these anti-secularists, or moderate Protestants, as they would like to be called, now know that they too soon must issue manifestos calling upon the Protestant faithful to take stock of secularism's insidious inroads in Protestant thought and action.

One thing is certain—POAU may make a lot of noise, but it does not speak for the majority of Protestants. And the sooner the moderate Protestants let this fact be widely known, the better will be their opportunity to combat secularism.

religious groups may dissuade well disposed persons from entering the Church.

There are the facts; what is their significance for Catholic schools? The facts clearly demonstrate that Catholic schools have a right to funds which they probably will not receive.

Shall Catholic school authorities fold their tents and give up the fight; shall they declare that parochial schools are absolutely independent institutions, accountable to nobody but the Church, supported by nobody except their own generous benefactors?

In my opinion, they should not give up the fight for in pleading the cause of public aid for parochial schools, they are upholding the best interests of both public and parochial schools.

These two issues are: the relationship of government to education, and the relationship of church and state.

On the church and state issue, the proponents argue that the First Amendment simply forbids the establishment of an official church (an historical fact recently scuttled by the United States Supreme Court) or at most it forbids aid to religion as such.

Certainly these issues must be of great concern to all persons interested in the welfare of our nation's public and parochial schools. Consider the basic questions raised by the dispute on these issues: Are we tending toward a government monopoly of education? Must all educational, health and charitable institutions submit to a process of secularization before they dare ask for a State subsidy?

The importance of the first issue, the relationship of government to education, cannot be stressed too much. This issue is a live one in almost every nation of the world.

In almost every nation of the world there is a struggle between democracy and totalitarianism. A major battleground is the school, particularly the private school.

How secure then is democracy in the United States? The Oregon decision guarantees every parent a right to send his child to a parochial school. But many parents cannot exercise this right because they and others so minded cannot raise enough money to finance a parochial school.

A democratic government whose practice negates one of the fundamental principles on which it is supposed to operate is indulging in a form of schizoid activity which is an open invitation to totalitarianism.

The Oregon decision and public support of parochial schools go together like the right to vote and repeal of the poll tax, the right to collective bargaining and the right to strike, the right to a job and the FEPC, the right to restrictive covenants, the right to a decent livelihood and the enactment of a minimum wage law.

Therefore, even if a single penny of public funds never reaches a parochial school, the endeavor to secure public funds will not be wasted effort, for only a persistent struggle against any trend toward government monopoly of education will at least forestall the threat to democracy when the schools no longer would use the government but the government would use them.

For the present, however, there is no gain-saying the fact that any attempt to secure public funds for parochial schools will be met with a sharp rebuttal from POAU and its affiliates, and the resultant scandalous wrangling among

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Four Golden Jubilees

The fiftieth year shall be the Year of Jubilee. So ran the law of God in the Old Testament. The law is still observed under the New Testament. And perhaps with greater solemnity, fuller joy.

Monsignor Burns

To the pastor of the Pro-Cathedral we address our first word of commendation and congratulation. Monsignor Burns was a boy of the old Cathedral Parish, served his first years of priesthood as assistant pastor of St. Patrick's.

Monsignor Connors

The entire career of Monsignor Thomas Connors has been devoted to parish work. Three years as an assistant pastor of St. Mary's Church was his preparation for the many years as pastor he has given to Blessed Sacrament Church in its founding, in its development from small beginnings into one of the largest and most important parishes in the diocese.

Father James B. Keenan

Fifty years of consecration to the Great High-Priest, of devout dedication to the Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, receive their crown in the Golden Jubilee of Father James Keenan.

Monsignor Rawlinson

A priest of outstanding and heroic service in his earlier years at St. Mary's Parish, a sturdy aid to Archbishop Hickey in inaugurating and developing the Chancery Office for effective service to all the diocese, an earnest and active pastor of souls at St. Patrick's Parish in Corning and builder of its stately Church, Monsignor Edmund A. Rawlinson enters on his Golden Jubilee Year worthy of all the honors proper to the occasion.

At Thy Word

Peter and his partners had finished their work for the night. They had given up any hope of catching any fish, having experienced failure all through the weary hours since midnight.

Peter obeyed the request of Christ to pull away from the shore that He might instruct the multitudes. Peter obeyed the second command of Christ that he resume his fishing, let down his net for a draught.

At thy word, Well may we imitate the docility of Peter and may we follow him in the readiness with which he obeyed the call of the Lord. At thy word, To God we say in all the difficulties that unfaith and unbelief raise up in the world today, that we may follow Him, to preface our obedience to Him with the statement: "At thy word!"