

'Face The Issue' — Dr. Mahoney's School Report

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Face The Issue

The question remains—do the American people want religious education? Are they willing to recognize its tremendous value as a supporting bulwark to our society. If this is what the American people want then they must be willing to bring the question into open discussion and to consider every reasonable means for its solution. The question must be fairly and squarely faced, dispassionately and without prejudice and without the contentious emotions that have characterized its discussion in the past. It is a matter that must be considered grave because it affects the whole future of our nation. It must be brought out in the open both in the grass roots of America in the halls of government, in state legislatures and Congress.

Nor should the Supreme Court decision in the McCollum case which forbade government agencies from appropriating monies for religious education stand in the way of seeking and honest and salutary solution. It must be pointed out that this Court has frequently reversed decisions when the light of justice has been shed upon them. In fact the decision in the McCollum case was in reality, by implication at least, a reversal of the decision of the Oregon school case where in the Supreme Court stated "The fundamental theory of liberty upon which all governments in this Union repose excludes any general power of the State to standardize its children by forcing them to accept instruction from public teachers only. The child is not the mere creature of the State; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional duties." U.S. Supreme Court Decision in the Oregon School Case, June 1, 1925.

There is no reason why a true interpretation of the Constitution cannot be brought to bear in this grave and serious matter. Nor should Americans forget that there is another legal and democratic process that can be brought into action if the American people sincerely desire religious education in their schools.

Considering the question from the standpoint of Catholics they will not be at a loss for proper incentive and direction in the course laid down for them. This course that they are to follow has been clearly defined by Plus XI in the encyclical on the Christian Education of Youth!

"Let no man say that in a nation where there are different religious beliefs it is impossible to provide for public instruction otherwise than by mixed or neutral schools. In such a case it becomes the duty of the State, indeed it is the easier and more reasonable method of procedure, to leave free scope to the initiative of the Church and the family, while giving them such assistance as justice demands. That this can be done with full satisfaction to the families and to the advantage of public peace and tranquillity is clear from the actual experience of some countries comprising different religious denominations. There 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 evinced by the State to the several schools demanded by the families."

It may be said here in passing that because of the McCollum decision forbidding public monies to religious schools, Catholics as a matter of policy have concentrated their efforts in securing transportation and health services because these as such are admitted under law as services to the child and

not to the school.

Let us hope that we will not mistake the forest for the trees nor confuse the part for the whole, that Catholics will ever keep in mind the words of the Holy Father: "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."

Burden on Protestants
But while Catholics ever stand ready to cooperate in arriving at an adjustment it must be said that the success or failure of returning religion to American schools depends on its fair consideration by Protestants for Protestants are in the majority. But if sincere and right thinking Protestants are to return religion to the schools they must be prepared to battle first with the minority group of Protestants who place blind prejudice before the welfare of the country and the moral good of its children. Such a minority group is the Protestants and Other Americans United.

Secondly, they must be prepared to take issue with the forces of entrenched secularism that exert such an unwarranted influence in the control and direction of public school policy. Such forces are represented by the powerful National Education Association that has continually declared its opposition to tax monies being appropriated for education that is religious. Recently this organization extended even further its policy of opposition when it stated in the February issue of the National Education Association Journal "One . . . may properly question the wisdom in our democracy of segregating several million young citizens on the basis of religion . . ."

This can refer only to the Catholic school system of religious schools and publicly questions the wisdom of the parochial school system in American democracy. This statement confirms a long standing fear that opposition from the National Education Association to bus rides and health and welfare services for parochial school children bus in reality has been opposition to the parochial schools themselves. The logical inference from the statement quoted above is that all children should attend parochial schools. This is the kind of a system that Hitler had in Nazi Germany. It is the system that Stalin has in Soviet Russia and its satellite countries today. One trembles at what might happen to the freedom of American education if this Association is allowed to extend further its influence.

Niebuhr Cited
Nor will Protestants find themselves without leadership in talking issues with biased religious forces and secularistic groups in this matter. The recent forthright statement of Dr. Niebuhr might well be taken as a sound basis for approach. Dr. Niebuhr recognized as one of the Nation's foremost Protestant philosopher-theologians speaking on "The Heritage of Modern Man" disagreed with the United States Supreme Court and other courts on the position they have taken that the Constitution forbids government to encourage or assist religious education. The whole question of Federal aid to education could have been settled long ago, he said, "If Protestants had not adopted an unreasonable, 'die-hard' opposition to welfare service for parochial school students."

"I have seen in Washington again and again the possibility of solving this problem if Protestants had been willing to yield on this point. I believe that Protestantism and secularism are too formally legalistic and righteous when they say that children in parish schools

should not get any support at all. I do not think this realistic."

Dr. Niebuhr pointed out that every time Protestants and secularists were asked to consent to a slight compromise in favor of children in religious and private schools, their answer always has been: "No, this is the camel's nose getting under the tent." He added: "I am sick of camels' noses." He declared also that freedom of conscience was the primary objective of the Constitutional Fathers.

"From the 17th through the 19th centuries a great debate raged on the problem of social peace among people of various religions", he said, "and the nation's founding fathers entered the debate with an affirmation that social peace could be guaranteed in such circumstances and that government should not try to force a 'pluralistic society' into a particular mold. In this sense, separation of Church and State" the Founders conceived from a desire of freedom of conscience. They did not want politics interfering in the field of religion or religion interfering in the field of politics."

He added, "I do not think that the Founding fathers stood for an absolute wall of separation of Church and State," and advocated that Protestants retreat from their position of opposition to services for children in religious schools."

Secularistic education recently was also assailed by Henry Van Dusen another outstanding Protestant and president of the faculty of Manhattan Union Theological Seminary in his book *God and Education*. Dr. Van Dusen advocated a return to religion in American schools not as an added course of study but as the central core and principle of the entire educational process. "What is required is revolution," he writes "conversion, an about-face in both the assumptions and goals of our living and likewise of the training of our youth. Religion that is, a true knowledge of God is the Queen of the Sciences. This is its rightful position, not because the churches say so but because of the nature of Reality, because if there be a God at all, He must be the ultimate and controlling Reality through which all else derives its being, and the truth concerning Him . . . must be the keystone of the ever incomplete arch of human knowledge."

Discussing the principle of the union of Church and State, Dr. Van Dusen also points out that it was never the intention of the Founding Fathers to eliminate religion from education, or to educate "a nation without religious faith, or (build) a system of education, for that nation's youth without implicit, and probably explicit, recognition of God as the ground of Truth. It has been aptly said: they were seeking to provide freedom of religion, not freedom from religion . . ." In its recent decisions, therefore, the court has travestied history. The theory of separation "as currently propounded, far from being a perpetuation of the national tradition, represents a novel innovation in direct contradiction to the conviction of our forebears and the established habits of the nation. At the present hour, this cherished American principle is being refurbished and redefined to ends for which it was never intended. The Constitutional guarantees of 'freedom of religion' have lately been reinterpreted by no less august a body than the United States Supreme Court with meanings which were never foreseen by, and which, it may safely be suggested, would have outraged, the framers of the Constitution."

The purpose here has been to show the possibility of removing from our American life a condition which was forced upon the American people by

a group of zealots in the last century. No sympathy should be extended to the plea of some that this condition has endured so long and is so strongly established that its amelioration is impossible. Let them be reminded that similar situations formerly obtained in other countries—in Holland, for example, and in Canada and that just solutions were ultimately obtained to the immeasurable benefit of their peoples and to the peace and tranquility of the State.

Admittedly there are difficulties to be overcome, but there is no reason why American statesmanship cannot achieve what statesmanship in other countries has achieved. This is a problem which calls for men of justice, of high intelligence, of sincere love of country.

Nothing is to be gained by hurting defiance. The end desired is too sacred to have sincere effort to close this un-

happy struggle disturbed by emotional distortions. All desire peace—Catholics and Protestants—public educators as well as Catholic educators are convinced that our present situation is wrong and that there can be no harmony until this intolerable situation, so damaging to the cause of Christian society is made right. A just solution will remove from American life an injustice which is in discord with our spirit of freedom and equality. A just solution would enable the enlightened educators of the twentieth century to restore to the public schools the cure of religion torn out by the misguided zealots of the nineteenth century. It would enable all the educational forces of America to labor mightily together for the advancement of our true American way of life.

Respectfully submitted,
(Rev.) Charles J. Mahoney
Superintendent
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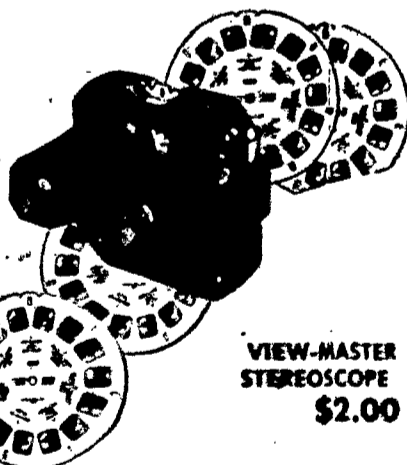


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