

McNicholas, John T.

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NO WALL

GOD AND THE CHILD



JOHN T. McNICHOLAS, Archbishop of Cincinnati

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NO WALL BETWEEN GOD AND THE CHILD

THE MOST REV. JOHN T. McNICHOLES, O.P., S.T.M., S.T.D.

Archbishop of Cincinnati and

President General, National Catholic Educational Association



EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

NATIONAL CATHOLIC WELFARE CONFERENCE

1312 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, N. W.

Washington 5, D. C.

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National Catholic Welfare Conference

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No Wall Between God and the Child

ALL who have meditated on the art of governing mankind have been convinced that the fate of empires depends upon the education of youth. Education may be used either for freedom or for enslavement. It seems well that we should restate and reaffirm in our United States, this citadel of freedom, the fundamental principles governing the education of minor children.

The education of a child is a matter of supreme importance to the individual, to the family, to the Church, and to the State. The individual and the three vitally interested units of society should not discharge their respective duties as enemies. Their obvious obligation is to cooperate in an unselfish and friendly way. There should be a cordial relationship between the family, the Church, and the State in educating the child. If there is not, the child shall be the victim of misunderstanding, antagonism, and enmity. There are dangerous trends of education in our country because domestic, civil, and religious societies are not working harmoniously. Irreparable harm can come to America if false principles of education prevail and if freedom of education be lost or impaired.

There is not one definition of education; there are many definitions. To define education we must first define human life. A true understanding of the life of the child—physically, intellectually, morally, and spiritually—enables one to give a true definition of education. A false appraisal of human life and a failure to consider man's true nature, his immortal soul, his eternal destiny, his relation to God and to his fellow man, necessarily forces one to formulate an erroneous definition of education.

I

God's Rights

Man, made to the image and likeness of God, is destined to return to Him. The human soul comes immediately and directly from the creative hand of God. In the divine economy, soul and body are joined to be partners during the fleeting years of time and during the eternal ages of life hereafter. The whole child, therefore, body and soul, must be educated for time and eternity. All of the child's faculties and capacities of soul and body—intellect, memory, will, imagination, emotions, and senses—must be harmoniously trained and refined to fit into the pattern of time and eternity. Education of the child ceases to be education when it rifts soul from body, intellect from will; imagination, emotions, and senses from the guidance of the intellect or from the discipline of the will; time from eternity; the child from its Creator.

The educable child belongs first and in the highest degree to God. The child has a native and imprescriptible right to the air it breathes, to food that nourishes it, to opportunities to develop its mind and the powers of its soul, which perfect it as a human being. The child, from the dawn of reason, has even a greater right to know something about its Divine Creator. Neither parents, nor State, nor any power on earth can rightly shut out God from the life of the child. Every attempt to separate the child from God by any civil constitution or legislative enactment is an attack on the Divine Creator of the child; it is also an unjust penalty depriving the child of its greatest opportunity in education. The degrading result of the separation of God and the child is found in atheistic, totalitarian, and secularistic education. Our secularist educators are crusaders for the separation of the child from God.

There must be no wall of separation between God and the child. The secularistic educators who raise this wall are sending out, perhaps without realizing it, millions of young people

ignorant of moral principles, who have no religious convictions and little if any realization that the solution of the seemingly impossible problems of our day is to be found only in the unchangeable code of morality. Government monopoly of education, which is in reality Fascistic control of schools, will raise a wall of separation between God and the child. This separation will give our country a majority of citizens who will substitute blind loyalty to the State in place of primary loyalty to man's Creator, with its heart-warming love and its informed judgment of basic morality. This is the terrible consequence of secular education—call it Fascist or Nazi or Soviet or totalitarian.

II

Parents' Rights

The child next belongs to its parents, who have been called into a partnership with God as its co-creators. The parents are the founders, under God, of the divine institution of the family, which is the fundamental unit of society, having natural, primary, fundamental, inalienable, and imprescriptible rights, which are antecedent and superior to all positive human laws. The family, with its domestic authority and its constitution conferred upon it by nature, must be accepted by all right-thinking persons and nations as the basic unit of society.

The divine authority of the family, and consequently of the parents, in educating their children obliges father and mother or those charged with parental responsibility, to accept the God-given constitution through which nature regulates family life. No power on earth can lawfully separate parents from their child in the field of education, provided parents are complying with the divine constitution controlling normal family life. The right of parents to educate their children is as natural, as inherent, as inalienable, and as imprescriptible as is their right, through marriage, to beget children. Marriage, whether in a lifelong contract

among non-Christians or in a sacramental Christian contract, gives husband and wife two rights which cannot be separated in the court of God and of all right-thinking men. These two rights are: first, to become co-creators with God in bringing children into the world; and secondly, the right to educate these children. Procreation and education of children are inseparably bound together through marriage. Any State arbitrarily attempting to separate these two rights usurps the divine authority conferred on the family. It thereby arrogates to itself supremacy in the exercise of one of these rights—the education of the child. There must be no wall of separation between qualified parents and their educable children in preparing the latter for their life's work.

Those who are raising this wall of separation between parents and the child are Fascists in education. Our secularist educators, and those members of the school profession or administration who would take away the child from its parents, in reality are insisting on the false assumption that parents have only those rights in education which the State grants them; that parents have the right and duty to care for the bodies of their children but the State must have an absolute right to develop and form the minds of their children. Pope Benedict XV, speaking of parents to the Italian Catholic Women's Union, said:

“They claim the right of liberty of education of their children because it would be barbarous to pretend that while not excluded from the formation of the less noble part of their children, they would be shut out from the care and development of their more noble part.”

There is a very un-American discrimination between parents. It is taken for granted that rich parents shall have full liberty to educate their children in any school of their choice, or in any way they wish; but there is a growing tendency which would deprive poor, religious parents of freedom of education. Many superficial educators, who have never studied basic principles, assert that the children of the masses should all be pupils of one system in order to avoid

divisions among our adult citizens. The real prejudice seems to be against schools conducted under the auspices of religion.

I venture to think that it is timely for Catholic educators to urge a proclamation from every housetop in America, which will assert the divine rights of parents to educate their children according to their conscientious judgment. A serious and profound study ought to be inspired by educational leaders, which will enable all fair-minded educators, whether of State or nation, to understand the fundamental rights of the family in education. The God-given rights of parents either are not understood or are ignored by our secularist educators and by many school administrators who, in a delusion of sovereignty, act as though they, not the parents, have complete control of the education of the child. Those who do not understand the basic principles of the whole social Christian order readily become Fascists or totalitarians in education.

I trust that Christian educators may be able to induce all parents of America—whatever be their creed, the origin of their blood, or their color—to know and to exercise their God-given authority as fathers and mothers in the education of their children during their minor years. Parents should know the unchangeable principles which authorize them to educate their children or to depute others to do so. Cannot all the parents of America who worship an omnipotent God and accept an eternal destiny of man, because of the divine dignity of every soul, unite to defend parental rights in the education of children and to counteract the erroneous propaganda of our Fascist and secularist educators, who are in reality raising up a wall of separation between parents and children in the field of education?

I hope educational authorities can induce all thoughtful and informed men and women, all members of the legal profession having a sense of moral values, and all fair-minded persons of the teaching profession, to study seriously and profoundly the God-given rights of parents and of the family in the education of children. Such a study will make clear,

(1) that the authority of parents extends to every hour spent by their children in school, and (2) that the teachers of the school, and the State itself, are but the deputies of the parents in the education of their children.

III

The Rights of the Church

The Catholic Church is vitally concerned about the education of children. She knows the place that God should have in the life of the child; she knows that the rejection of God can make the child the most dangerous adult citizen. The militant atheist, highly educated, can be the most dangerous citizen of any country. The Catholic Church is very anxious to cooperate with parents and with the State in the education of the child. Coming out of the Catacombs, the Church for sixteen hundred years has been the peerless teacher, instructing parents about their native, fundamental, and imprescriptible rights and duties. She has been the opponent of every form of government in the world that has encroached on the authority of the family in the field of education. She has opposed, throughout the centuries, State idolatry, which puts Statism before God, before parents, and before the Church in developing the child intellectually and morally.

In the years that led up to the second World War, the Catholic Church condemned fearlessly the false principles of Fascism, Nazism, Sovietism, and totalitarianism, wherever found in education. The Church, for centuries, through concordats, has dealt with education, often being obliged to make the best of a bad bargain. The Church has a divine mandate from the Lord Christ as a teacher: "Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). The Church, as a spiritual mother, is solicitous for all her educable children. The Church can not abrogate God-given powers communicated to parents, nor has she the slightest wish to do so. The Church must defend the laws

of God and of nature regarding the education of children. She must teach children from the very dawn of reason that they should move Godward; that they have an eternal destiny, an immortal soul; that God wishes all men to be saved; and that the Lord Christ, true God, has provided means for the salvation of all men. The Church must integrate this teaching with all subjects of human knowledge. In the domain of spirituality and in the moral training of children the Church must be supreme.

Before the second World War, totalitarian governments either suppressed schools conducted under the auspices of religion, or severely restricted them in their activities. In the democracies, private and church-controlled schools were permitted freedom of action, and in many of these countries, have been supported by public taxation.

Today there is a titanic struggle throughout the nations between totalitarian slavery and freedom. The battleground is the school. On the side of totalitarianism, no church or private schools are permitted. On the side of freedom, even where there is only fragmentary freedom, there are varying degrees of liberty of action, all of which is largely centered about the school. Socialists and democrats are divided on the school question. State, neutral, secularized schools are showing stronger opposition to any educational system conducted under the auspices of religion. In the United States atheists, agnostics, communists, certain fraternal organizations, indifferentists, and secularists are opposing freedom of education and consequently taking a stronger position against church schools. These several groups make the claim—clandestinely, semi-publicly, boldly—that the only American system of education is the tax-supported school. The strategy of these opponents would depreciate the value of schools conducted by religious bodies; would make it more difficult for these schools to continue to function. Many in the secular school profession would have the general public think that religious schools teach only religion, that they are foreign in character, and that they should be relegated to a second-class

status and merely tolerated. This attack on freedom of education is only the initial move. The attack is really directed against the unchangeable principles of Christianity.

Some of us have gone through APAism and Ku-Kluxism. These crude organizations viciously attacked the Catholic Church. Today there is a more subtle and more dangerous movement. It is promoted by the atheists and by their front organizations, and by secularist educators who oppose religious schools and American freedom of education in order to strike at the Catholic Church. No American, well informed in the history of education of his country, is deceived by their strategy, or by their dangerous propaganda that only tax-supported schools are American schools. The American system of education embraces three classes of schools; first, those that are tax-supported; second, those conducted under the auspices of religion; and third, the private schools.

Let it be said, with all possible emphasis, that the Catholic Church is not opposed to tax-supported schools. On the contrary, she heartily endorses our compulsory system of education in America; she sincerely commends the traditional freedom of American education, and also the generous spirit of America to make adequate provision for education, which generosity will again be manifested to our teachers in the post-war crisis through which we are passing. At the same time, the Catholic Church, as the wisest and most patient mother, recognizes the fundamental injustice to which religious schools are subjected. She also knows that her schools are rendering an unsurpassed public service. She knows that her school is a school, not a church. The Catholic school is not failing to do anything that any properly standardized American school should do. Catholic schools will stand any test to which tax-supported schools will submit.

The opponents of church schools in the teaching profession, and in school administration, know the unsurpassed public service rendered to our country by Catholic schools, yet they continue their unreasonable opposition; they discount the public service of our schools, either passing over it

or even denying it. The present unjust treatment of 30,000,000 Catholics in the field of education can never be settled until it is settled justly. The Catholic Church is training her children to be law-abiding citizens; she is teaching them to love America and to serve it, even at the cost of life, in time of war; she is teaching her pupils to respect, love, and obey their parents, and also to respect and obey civil authority as having its source in God. It is hard to understand how even the prejudiced mind can deny the character of the notable public service of our schools, which render, according to the judgment of all informed and fair-minded persons, as much public service as any tax-supported school. In reality, they render a greater measure of service. There can be no reasonable contradiction of the fact that the Catholic primary and secondary schools of our country are turning out the best of American citizens. I say this not in a boasting spirit, but for the sake of truth and justice, and, I hope, for the benefit of those who are opposed to, or who have lifelong prejudice against, our schools. I say it as a tribute to the 100,000 or more Sisters, Brothers, and Priests whose consecrated lives are dedicated to Christian education. I say it because of my deep conviction that only Christian education can save America from all the subversive teaching tolerated, permitted, or even encouraged in our country.

IV

The Rights of the State

The State has very definite rights in education. The State arises from the very nature of organized society. Its origin, therefore, goes back to God, from whom its authority is derived. The State is supreme in its sphere. It governs the material order and is responsible for the physical well-being of its citizens. It is the custodian of the common good, of an orderly society, affording due protection and security. The State should be a help, not an impediment, to the moral well-being of its citizens. The State that undermines the

authority of God and rejects the supremacy of the moral order is thereby destroying the strongest supports of its own authority and is on the way to ruin.

While the State has responsibility in education, it is not constituted by nature a teacher. Its duty is to encourage parents and to help them in the instruction and moral training of their children. Our country has wisely established no religion and has expressed no preference for any religion. The State should see that its minor children are duly informed about their patriotic duties, and that they be imbued with a true loyalty to our country, which they must love as a parent. Patriotism is classified under the virtue of piety. Filial piety makes us respect and love our parents; patriotic piety makes us true, loyal citizens, loving our country as our parent. As the custodian of the common welfare, our country wisely insists on compulsory education, remaining in theory at least the protector of parents, and guaranteeing to fathers and mothers freedom of education, setting standards of education and supporting in large measure the schools of our country. If the family or parents can not or will not discharge their duty in educating children, then the State, as the custodian of the common welfare, must assume parental responsibilities, always having due regard for the faith of parents. When the State assumes parental obligations, when it establishes State or local schools, as it must do in a modern world in order to assure suitable education for a country blessed as ours is, it can not endow itself with arbitrary powers. If it does so, it becomes a Fascist State in education. Usurped totalitarian powers in education, if not checked by freedom of education, will inevitably lead to a Fascist State in all functions.

A conference with representatives of parents, who know parental rights and duties; and of religion, who know basic and unchangeable moral principles; and of schools, who know the field of education, could do immeasurable good. This conference must not lead to a union of Church and State, nor even to an inter-faith organization. No religious group

in America is asking for the union of Church and State; least of all are Catholics. There is a most unreasonable fear about the growing influence of the religious schools in America. Until recently there was little fear of what atheistic communists would do in our country if they took over its government. But there was an incredible fear, with whispered forecasts, of what would happen if students of religious schools were in control. The patriotism of Catholic school graduates evident during the war proves how fair and how truly American are the men and women who have come out of Christian schools.

We should welcome also a conference of legal men, educators, and moral leaders, who know the province of the State in which it is supreme, and who also are thoroughly conversant with the limitations of the State in education and who understand the obligations of the State which arise from distributive justice.

In general, we must be happy about the partnership of family, Church, and State in our country, regarding the development of tax-supported schools, and about freedom of education in schools conducted under the auspices of religion. Our complaint is not so much against government, as it is against high-pressure groups of the school profession that attempt to foist on the American public the pseudo-religion of public education as if it were the only true American education. These same groups are becoming more insistent on the complete secularization of American education; they are presenting separation of Church and State in a wrong light; they are increasing the economic burdens of parents who wish their children trained in religious schools; they are striving, unwittingly perhaps, to make our government a dictator in education. They do not seem to realize that freedom of education is a perfecting power and that monopoly of education is a tyrannous or degrading power. Perhaps without grasping its implications, they are promoting Fascism in education. They are promoting a false theory of democracy by condemning the divisive influence of religious schools, and by

making a false application of majority rule. I would not be understood as condemning the whole school profession when I say that true Americans cannot subscribe to the narrow, bigoted opinions of some educators; nor can true Americans subscribe to the growing tendency which would directly or indirectly interfere with the rights of the family or of the Church in education. In many spheres we recognize the danger to a community from leaders who promote and uphold monopolies. I hope that all Christian educators will stand firmly for freedom of education, for the rights of parents, the rights of the Church, and the rights of the State. I trust that they will condemn fearlessly the monopolistic tendencies of education which many of the school profession and of school administration are promoting.

All who have meditated on the art of governing mankind have been convinced that the fate of empires depends upon the education of youth.

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