

Religion and Schooling go Together

"No teacher of school can escape the problem of life orientation, the ultimate commitments by which every person must live. This is precisely the domain of religion – thus we teach religion in the schools whether we would or not." (Professor Philip Phenix, Teachers' College, Columbia University.)

Evangelical Christians are showing an increasing interest in Christian Day Schools. In 1967 "*Christianity Today*" reported that private Christian schools in America were being founded at the rate of 225 per year. The National Association of Christian Schools in the U.S. recorded a 15 percent increase in schools and pupils for the third consecutive year.

Within the next few years Canada's first full-fledged Christian University will open its doors. This university will be located in the Province of New Brunswick. Evangelicals of international stature are on the Council of Reference.

Why a Christian university in Canada? "It is to state the obvious, to point out that the modern secular post secondary educational institution, practically speaking, neglects and in many cases rejects the fundamental premise of the existence – of the God and Father of our Lord – Jesus Christ.

To the Christian, however, this existential faith assertion provides the *raison d'etre* for the totality of his being. Therefore, the principle of equality of opportunity alone patently demands that the option of studying in a Christo-centric environment in Canada be made available to every serious-minded Christian youth. Viewed from another perspective, Canadian society is the poorer for Christians in general not being able to contribute constructively as formerly, *qua* Christians, to the process of shaping social objectives and public policy.

As a stated purpose,

'St. Stephen's University will encourage its graduates to consider service in positions of social, political and cultural leadership in Canada, and in general it will acquaint all students with their responsibility before God to make a significant contribution to the society in which they live and labour.'

(St. Stephen's University, Educational Prospectus.)

Dr. Robert N. Thompson said at the recent annual convention of the National Union of Christian schools: "In the years ahead I see a massive movement towards Christian day schools, high schools and colleges. As you and I begin to see our chains fall off, and have our slave consciousness liberated in Christ, we'll begin to see that we must have Christian schools at every level that honour the Lord and teach the Good News of salvation.

There will be a Christian mind emerging to checkmate the Humanist mind.

The mountains of secularist, state-controlled education can be moved. I can see Christian thinkers debating the world's greatest experts in defense of the Christian view of man and his task. I can see a community of Christian scholars and students seeking first the Kingdom of God."

For Christian school supporters it is encouraging to know that already four Canadian provinces give substantial government support (a return to our own Christian schools some of our tax payments). These are Alberta, Saskatchewan, Quebec and Newfoundland.

Neutrality in education is impossible. No educational system can avoid dealing with vital questions regarding truth, life and reality. Secular education pretends to be neutral, – but it cannot be.

Any school transmits all sorts of values to students, not only by their textbooks but also through the informal curriculum. It cannot get away from dealing with the vital issues of life. For instance, Alvin Toffler in his book *Future Shock* shows his humanist, secular faith when he suggests in chapter eighteen Education in the Future Tense that students "should be encouraged, not discouraged, from experimenting with communal and other family forms of the future.

Such experimentation, under responsible supervision and constructively channeled, should be seen as part of an appropriate education, not as an interruption or negation of the learning process.

Religious teaching is vital

Many Christians see education (and everything else) through the Bible and not the Bible through education. Our philosophy of life is built on God's Word and not on man's autonomous reason. We want to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and try to relate all of our activity to the Lordship of Christ.

The late Governor General, the Rt. Hon. Vincent Massey, stated: "The essential ingredient of a world-view is a concept that integrates, gives meaning and identity to, all other aspects of experience."

We believe that the integrating principle in education is Colossians 1: 16 17: "For by Him (Christ) were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: And He is before all things and by Him all things consist."

We are also mindful of these words: "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Cor. 10: 31).

Christian education "is the integrating process of making known what God's truth is, not only in Bible studies, but also in every subject of the school and college curriculum." Thus at the basis of Christian education is the Christian world and life view.

We see man as the creation of God, finite, limited and not autonomous. We confess that as far as the Bible is concerned children belong to the parents and that they are responsible for the total upbringing of their children, including the education they receive at the day schools.

Shouldn't the parents' rights be maintained and honoured in giving them a choice of education consistent with their philosophy of life? Parents should be able to send their children to the school of their choice without being penalized for this financially.

There should be a pluralism in education. Incidentally, this parental right is also recognized in Section 26 (3) of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that be given to their children."

Rev. Geoffrey Shaw of St. John's Newfoundland said in his paper *on Christian Education in Canada* presented to the national convention of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada: " 'Non-religious' education, 'neutral' education, is thus a fallacy, a contradiction in terms; not merely a mistake – it is an impossibility. All education is religiously partisan, prejudiced, sectarian – whether, for example, Islam, or secular humanism, or ethical culture, or Nazism, or Communism, or towards any other ideological philosophy. Indeed, all men are religiously 'biased' – and in one sense it can be said that the real quest of life is to discover the true 'bias'. Not everyone realizes this perhaps. One recalls the famous conjugation of the irregular verb, 'I believe the obvious: you are prejudiced; he is a bigot!'

However that may be, so far as education is concerned, whether the schools are denominational, governmental, private, or other, the question is never, 'Shall our children receive religious education in school?' They cannot avoid receiving religious education. The question rather is, 'What kind of religious education shall our children receive in school?'

A secularist has his view of education. But I want to look at education through the Bible and have my children's education based on a Christian world and life view. This should be possible without any strings attached in this society that claims to honour pluralism.

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