

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

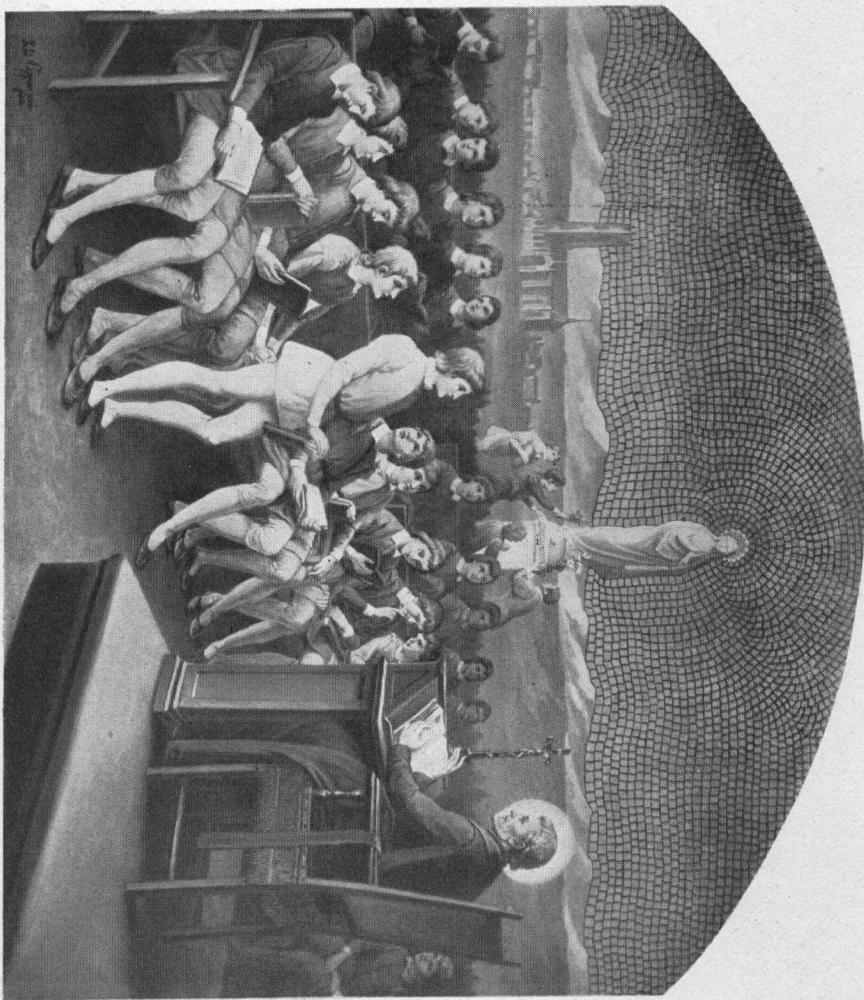
One of the fatal consequences of the fall of our first parents was the plunging of the human soul into an abyss of corruption, darkness and misery. This being an obstacle to man's progress, he ever craves for some means that will draw him from this valley of darkness to heights from which he may view with clearer vision the things about him, and afford him a better opportunity of working out his eternal destiny. Such a means is Christian education.

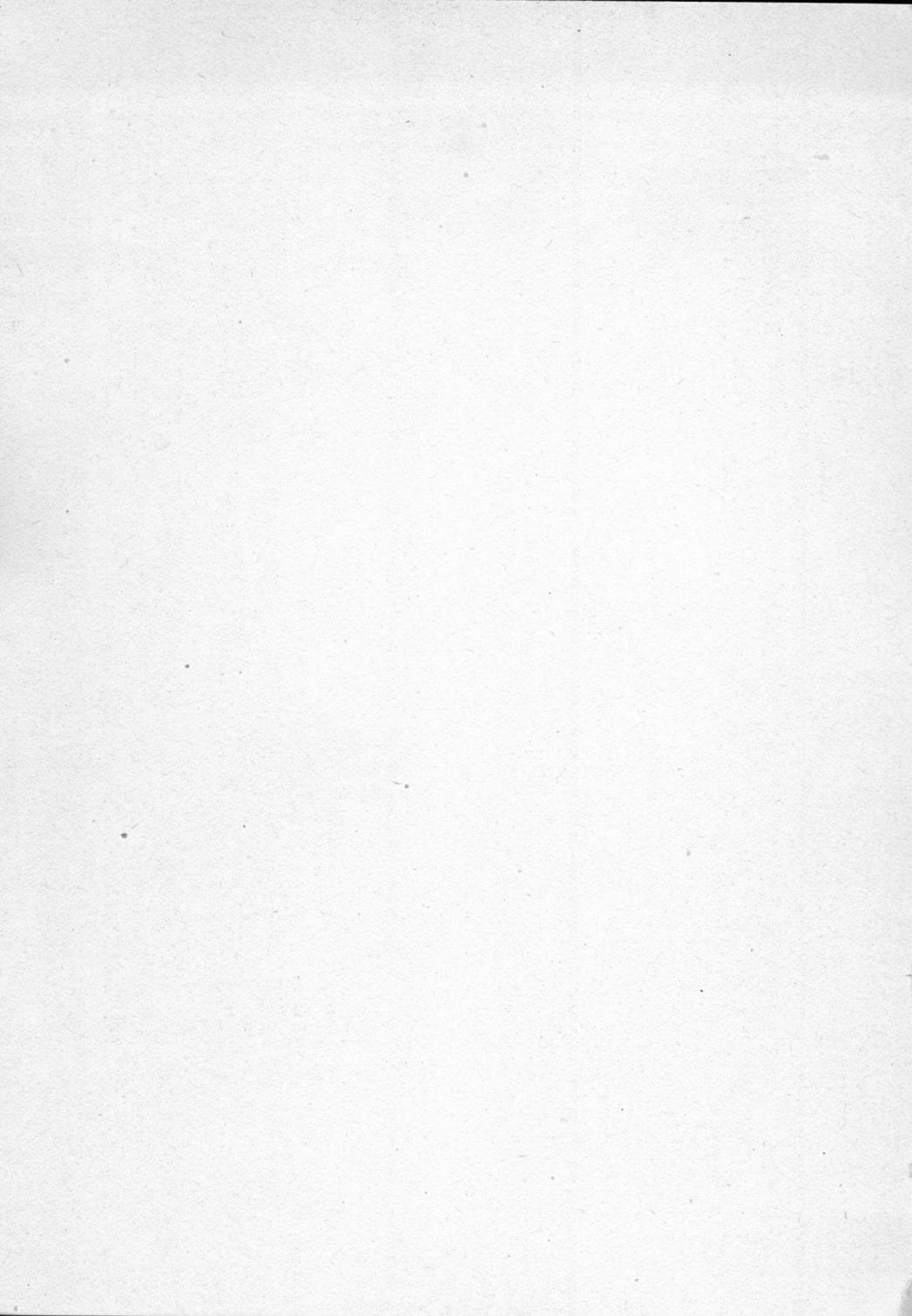
Concerning this all important factor in human life, many false conceptions as to its true role have arisen. Many disregarding its true purpose as a means aiding man in the realization of his end in life, have made it an end in itself, have made it the height of their ambition, and for every reason but the true one. Man's attitude towards education depends on his attitude towards life, his philosophy of life. If he errs on this point, what are we to believe will be his attitude towards the means at his disposal, regulating his mode of living?

For the Catholic the greatest difficulty about education is overcome, because his philosophy of life is true. He accepts Christ as the Ideal of all men, a supernatural end as the prime matter of consideration. He realizes the limits of education, and at the same time its help as a means to attain the end for which he was created. His principles are laid down by a body to which has been confided the office of teaching the whole world, namely the Catholic Church, which has witnessed the workings of man for many centuries and in many places, whose Founder has witnessed them since the world's beginning and in all places, and has promised to protect, guide and remain with its teachers forever. When, therefore, this body places before us a model of education which is Christ-like, is it to be scoffed at? Has it not some weight among those to whom life is a serious matter, who understand fully the reason of their pilgrimage here upon earth, to whom the things of this world are but transitory, means for the attainment of a higher end, an immutable good, and a state of everlasting happiness?

There is no need of offering an apology for bringing Christianity into education. What Christianity has accomplished for the world since its institution, are facts of history. Its trans-

Christian Education





formation of barbarism, untireless energy during the dark ages, controlling power during the middle ages, vast growth in our own times, and its beneficial influences over domestic and civil life have been seen by all.

The teachings and practices of Christianity are intimately blended with our whole personal life. Christian influences must needs preside over every important act from the cradle to the grave. So the Church thinks, and she acts accordingly. At no time in the life of man does the Church relax in her care of him. Least of all is she disposed to leave him to himself at that period when he is most amenable to impression, and when she can best lay hold upon his whole nature, and mold it in the ideal that is solely hers. Hence the teachings and practices of Christianity form an essential part in our education. Even those who would deny its power bow before it in spite of themselves. Their ideal of life is the Christian ideal without the Christian soul, the vital principle that made that ideal an actuality. In thought and in external conduct they cannot rid themselves of that ideal. It is bred in the bone; it is part of themselves.

In dealing with this subject of education it will be readily admitted that many phases may enter into consideration. In what is to follow we shall confine ourselves to that part which treats of the education of youth, its proper educators, and the proper mode of education.

First of all, how may education be defined? It has been ably defined as the formation of a noble character, its perfection by Christianity, and the preparing of the Christian to be a saint. Behold the sum total of the duties of parents: the sacred purpose of domestic government.

Since, then, so many requisites enter into the education of the child, upon whom does the burden of their fulfillment fall, in other words, to whom belongs the right of educating children? Before going further it might be well to say a few words about the true meaning of the term "right," for it seems to have undergone a very wide misinterpretation. A vague understanding of what constitutes a right, is very prevalent. It is a phrase frequently used, without knowing its exact signification. It has been the battle cry of freedom, as well as a justification of the most terrible tyranny. Right in its true signification may be described as the means to achieve duty. Every right is dependent upon some duty that must precede it. Once I learn that I

have a duty to perform, I shall deduce all sorts of conclusions following immediately, and these conclusions establish definite rights. These two ideas are interrelated, interdependent. Therefore right may be defined briefly, as the necessary means to achieve an essential end.

From our definition it is clear that the right of educating the child belongs primarily to the parents. For parents having the natural and indispensable duty to educate their children, have the natural right to fulfill that duty. That parents have such a duty is evident from the primary object of matrimony, which is not merely the generation of children, but especially the educating of new members of the human family in a manner worthy of their rational nature. The child on his part has an inalienable right to the means necessary for the attainment of his last end. Since education of some kind is such a means, he has a right to receive it. This is not a vague, abstract right, but it is something determinate, and connotes determinate persons who are under positive obligation to care for that right. These persons nature clearly points out. The parents are naturally the most closely related to the child; in them nature has implanted the enduring, patient love required for such a work. The child is naturally disposed to revere and love his parents, and to receive their instructions and corrections with ready docility.

Some will insist that to educate is a state right. To deny this would be ridiculous, but to say that the state has the primary right would be folly, for have we not already seen that this right belongs to parenthood by its very nature? Being a natural right it is inalienable, and it would be contrary to the fundamental principles of justice for any power to step in and usurp it. Hence the state cannot under any pretence whatsoever usurp this right unless the parents are unable or refuse to exercise it. No fair-minded person will say that the state has the right to step in and assume the duty of clothing and feeding children when they are well enough provided for by those to whom they belong. Why not the same in respect to education? Education, especially that which is called elementary education, can be well enough imparted by parents and those whom they choose as aids in their work. The state has been instituted for the protection of private rights, not for their usurpation. It must aid, foster and control whatsoever bears on the public good in so far as it is incumbent upon it, and ought not reduce the nation to slavery.

Again, the state was founded for all creeds and races, how then can it educate in a manner, satisfying all? The state may be called the patron of education. To be the patron of education is an honor; to usurp its functions is injustice.

Thus far we have considered the educators of children, and the determinate right which children have to be educated. The next thing is to consider the nature of the child's education.

We have already seen that education of some kind is a necessary means for the child to attain its last end, therefore the education it receives must be conducive to that end. Experience teaches that the only education which is such a means, is one founded on the principles of Christianity. This manner of educating imposes upon the parents a twofold obligation towards their offspring: the building of a healthy body and a healthy soul, whereby the child, with faculties proportionately and fully developed might strive for greater happiness in this world and in the next. Bodily development is the first order of time, moral and religious education is the first in the order of importance, for religion and morality lead to the highest and most lasting happiness.

Concerning the care of the body there is little to be said, since this obligation is dictated by nature itself. Even the brute animal provides food, shelter and other necessities for its offspring. Parents must remember that this is a strict obligation placed upon them, the noncompliance with which may lead to serious sin; and also that this obligation begins long before the child is born.

As to the spiritual education of the child there is much to be said, for in this parents are the most apt to fail. According to Christian principles, spiritual instruction, avoiding of scandal, prudence in correction and careful selection of schools and teachers are required for the nourishment of the child's soul.

The spiritual instruction of the child begins with the strict obligation of having the child baptized soon after birth. As the child advances in age the parents must see that it also advances in the knowledge of God, teaching it the essentials of religion, and the true love of God. They must also teach it to fear God, and to abhor sin above all things, ever mindful of that which is written of the young Tobias: From his infancy his father taught him to fear God and to abstain from all sin. Instill in the child the sciences and virtues necessary for the attainment of its su-

pernatorial end, for, having a rational soul, it is destined to enjoy eternal happiness. In a word, parents must strive ceaselessly to lead their child to Jesus.

The avoidance of any word or act which may prove a scandal to their children, is a matter about which parents cannot be too careful. They must remove from the child anything that would poison and corrupt the innocent heart open to every impression, whether it be evil companions abroad or bad example in the home. Concerning example St. Jerome says: "Far more is taught by example than by words"; and as Edmund Burke once said, "Example is the school of mankind, and they will learn at no other." Parents cannot afford to be negligent at any time in their watchfulness over the young soul entrusted to their charge. Let them remember that negligence is the parent of weakness, an accomplice of pernicious influences, which, penetrating into the soul of the child, causes its corruption. A well known author writing on the duty of parents says: "Fathers and mothers have in their hands the plastic matter of young life. They may by clumsy handling or by mere negligence allow this to become hardened in a fashion inimical to itself." Parents should also remember the words of Our Lord, denouncing strenuously those who would scandalize little children: "But he that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone should be hung about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depths of the sea." (Matt. 18:6).

Parents are bound to love their children, but they are equally bound to correct them, whenever necessary. Their love for them must not be merely sensual, but a love founded on the divine precept. When it is necessary to correct them it should be done prudently, and not in a manner more detrimental than beneficial, mindful of the words of the Apostle, "Fathers, provoke not your children to indignation, lest they be discouraged." Holy Scripture also warns parents so to correct their children that they may rejoice in their latter end, and free their souls from hell. In the course of time, generally speaking, it is necessary for parents to seek aid in the education of their children. Parents must be careful in their choice of schools and persons who are to co-operate with them in the fulfillment of their obligation, entrusting their children to those who will train not only their intellects but train them also in the practice of virtue and religion.

There are many who would bar religious training entirely from the classroom, leaving this important element of the child's education to the parents or religious teachers. This folly we answer in the words of Cardinal Manning. "The heartless talk," says this eminent churchman, "about teaching and training children in religion by their parents, and at home, and in the evening when parents are worn out by daily toil, or in one day in seven by Sunday schools, deserves no serious reply. To sincere common sense it answers itself." These people would have only intellectual training in the classroom. The evil effects of such a principle is but too well known by experience. To follow out this principle would be to ignore the supernatural destiny of man. Knowledge is, in itself, good; it is a great power; but knowledge is not all. What great truth is contained in these lines of the poet:

"Make knowledge circle with the winds;
But let her herald, Reverence, fly
Before her to whatever sky
Bears seed of men and growth of minds."

Knowledge exclusively cultivated will lack this reverence, and only serve to puff up the fickle mind of man. Education should develop the whole man, and any system of education that falls short of this cannot truly be called education. Such a system is one which totally bars God from the school-room, fails to inculcate piety, reverence and religious doctrine. It should be remembered that religion is not a thing to be taken up and set aside at will, but should enter into and so permeate one's life, that it becomes a second nature, and the guiding principle of all one's actions.

Religious training then is a very important factor in education, a fact of which we are no less convinced than were the pagans of old. Nations cannot live without the vitalizing energy of religion, since it is the conservative element of states, of literature and of civilization. If then all religious training is taken away from the class-room at a time when the child's inquisitiveness and intellectual activity are at their highest pitch, what are our hopes for the future of the nation? Whatever is sown in the school is reaped in the nation.

We know not how forcibly we have presented the plea for Christian Education; but we do know that we have not endeavored to state mere individual impressions, but, to repeat, the pro-

found doctrine of that body to whom has been given by God Himself the office of teaching the whole world, namely the Roman Catholic Church. She knows no compromise; she can entertain no compromise; she has no room for compromise, for she has never had a moment's indecision on the matter of education.

—Bro. Raymond Grace, O. P.

