



The School

Other-Worldliness in Education

IT is still asserted that the Catholic concept of the ultimate aim of education warps the mental growth of children, cramps their outlook on life, and dulls their sympathies with nature and humanity. We read that the insistence placed by the Catholic school on the supernatural aspect of things turns their "attention away from the natural sciences and from the study of social conditions." They cite for example the much abused Middle Ages. The example, however, does not prove the point. In the first place, it is hardly fair to the Middle Ages as a whole to say that they neglected the study of the natural sciences and of sociology. Natural sciences were the object of most extensive study in the thirteenth century and the principles of sociology must have been well grasped by teachers who civilized barbarian hordes, instituted the guild system, and created the many charitable organizations of that day. Again history seems to show that the decline of these studies during certain parts of the Middle Ages was due not to a growth of the spirit of other-worldism but rather to its decline or misapplication by individuals.

Properly understood, the spirit of other-worldism does not detract from a zeal for the natural sciences and from a sympathy with human needs and interests. It is not necessary for one to oppose the other, they can work together. The spirit of other-worldliness represents the ultimate aim; it stands for the end to be attained last of all; it is realized by leading a supernatural life while making progress in the realm of the natural sciences and arts. In this progress there is nothing which essentially prevents each little success from being not only a proximate end achieved but a stepping-stone towards the final goal.

Devotion to the ultimate aim does not lessen interest in those proximate aims; indeed, it rather increases interest, for the more earnestly we desire our last end, the more eager we will strive for the proximate ends leading to it. Now in Cath-

olic schools, at least, the spirit of other-worldliness is the expression of their effort to further the ultimate aim of education. But with all their preoccupation in this higher aim they do not fail to provide for the more material things because they do not forget that their pupils are also made of flesh and blood, that each pupil has his own work in life, that the second great commandment shares the importance of the first, and that to win heaven one must have works as well as faith.

It is an old Catholic principle that grace perfects without destroying nature. In order that grace may operate harmoniously in man he must dispose, develop and perfect his natural talent, physical, sensible, and intellectual, giving to each the care and attention it deserves. The Catholic school recognizes this, and her very eagerness to measure up to the real reason for her existence leads her to provide for the acquisition of all the natural sciences and the sociological information and sympathy recommended by moderns. Her pupils prompt her to provide as broad a curriculum as possible; and the great laws of love for neighbor, of obedience to authority and of love for country inspire her to instill all the sociological virtues.

Enough has been said, it would seem, to show that the other-worldliness of Catholic schools, that this insistence on cultivating growth heavenward as the ultimate aim of education does not of itself hamper a study of the sciences or cramp the human touch and interest. Certainly it does not make the human aspect predominant—this would be a more serious mistake than the other—but it promotes a reasonable development of appreciation for all the good in nature and man as a means of winning a way towards heaven.

Whatever may have been lacking in due consideration for nature and humanity must not be checked against the spirit of other-worldliness; it should be attributed to a lack of facilities, an inability to provide all the educational advantages, and especially to the natural limitations of man himself. Although he can grow indefinitely in the knowledge and appreciation of things, he can not compass them all. Man is finite by nature, and it will prove fruitless to attempt to put any one man or group of men in possession of all the mental and social acquirements. The course of the Catholic school is the wiser, to give what she can of the goods of this world, but not to be engrossed in the spirit of this-worldliness to the detriment of that which is nobler and more precious.