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TRAINING FOR ETERNITY

A LEAF or twig, tossing hither and thither on the surface of a stream, may seem the most helpless thing on earth; yet it contains within itself immeasurable potency. Whirling eddy may draw it aside, waving grass or trailing willow may hold it captive; and thus it may become a barrier to the passage of other leaves and twigs, until at length there is formed a dam strong enough to turn the whole course of the brook. Thus may the turbulent stream become a placid lake. Thus may its pebbled waters lose their brightness in the mud and clay.

In like manner some trivial incident of every-day life may change the whole course of a man's destiny. A slight impression received in his school days may develop gradually, perhaps unknowingly; and in time it may grow strong enough to make or mar his soul's eternity. Thus may the turbulent stream of life change to the placid lake of death; thus may the spotless heart and soul be darkened with the mire of sin.

Youth is essentially a period of imitation and receptiveness. The young mind, waxlike, is ever ready to receive impressions. In our present fallen state it is only too much inclined towards the lower things of life. In childhood and youth it is further handicapped by immature reason, and almost inevitably does it prefer the apparent good to the real. The task which lies before parents and educa-

tors, therefore, is to curb the wild and foolish tendencies of children, to keep their youthful life-stream free from the debris of error and wrong, to see that nothing shall muddy the purity of its waters or divert it from its rightful course. At the same time they must develop to the highest degree all the faculties of soul and body. For true education is not the mere acquisition of knowledge; it is complete mental and moral development. Development, indeed, is the essence of education, and according as it is complete or incomplete, so is the education good or bad. If, for example, the mind be highly trained and the body at the same time neglected, the result will be an intellectual giant, perhaps, but a physical weakling whose undeveloped body ever impedes the activity of the mind. Inversely, if the body be trained to a high degree and the mind starved, the final product will be animal perfection only. In like manner, if either mind or body — or both — does not receive sufficient training; if, in other words, all the faculties are not developed, that education is faulty. When any system of education neglects or ignores the highest aspirations of the human heart, it is more than faulty. It is dangerous.

The question, then, is: Must religious training be considered essential for complete education, or shall religion have no part in schooling? The aim and purpose of education is to fit the child for the future; to make him successful; to enable him to acquire

the most happiness. Outside of Catholic schools the "future" means only the short span of this life; the "success" is worldly praise and advancement; the "happiness" as a rule, may be summed up in a word—Dollars. Non-Catholic educators, as a class, do not look beyond the grave. In place of divine religion in their schools they would teach a natural religion; instead of Christ crucified they would teach Nature. Sad and bitter experience has shown the worth of such ideas. Rome held them, and she fell. Carthage taught them, and she decayed. Egypt, their best exponent, degenerated, and lives but on the merciful pages of history. Non-religious education must inevitably become irreligious education, unless curbed and guided from other sources. Its code of ethics—if it teach any—can place no restraint upon the unruly passions of youth; for it has no sanction, no reward to guide, no punishment to curb them. It prepares a man for this life only. It believes that religion, while good or even necessary for right living, has no part in education.

The Catholic Church, however, declares that religion is a part of education—that it is the essential part, without which all other education is worthless. Just as it shall profit a man nothing if he gain the whole world, yet lose his soul, so does he know nothing who learns all the laws and sciences of nature and remains ignorant of its Creator. How can he know how to live if he knows not why he lives? How can he direct his life towards the best end if he does not learn the true goal of life? The Church has always held that true education must include religion; that any system which excludes it is gravely dangerous. Holding that life is but a preparation for death, she has ever denounced any theory that made

our ultimate destiny a worldly one. She teaches, furthermore, that preparation for the life to come is not only compatible with worldly happiness, but also that it will produce the highest contentment in our present state. Some foolish Catholics endanger their children's eternal welfare by giving them a non-religious schooling. Attracted by the apparent advantages of such institutions, they confide in their own intuitions rather than in the word of the Church. Experience has shown how often too many advantages may become a disadvantage, and non-Catholic education offers numerous sad examples.

The religious impulse is an essential part of man. He who would deny it would impugn a universal belief and tradition, based on the inmost nature of the human race. In no way, therefore, is non-religious education satisfactory or complete, neglecting, as it does, the most important desire of the human heart. Such education must open a way to evil, while closing the path of right. Generations ago learned educators, non-Catholics as well as Catholics, protested that our public school system must inevitably lead to gross immorality. They foresaw that without the restraint of religion, it could produce nothing but highly intelligent atheists or nihilists—most apt subjects for crime. To-day some of our most prominent men warn us against such a system. President Wilson, himself a life-long student and educator, declares that the object of education is not only intellectual discipline, but moral enlightenment. Thomas Marshall, the Vice-president, agrees with Mr. Wilson, but goes farther. He avers solemnly that knowledge of God, of Jesus Christ, is most necessary, and it should be taught in all educational institutions.

Almost daily we are shocked by glaring crimes, due to lack of religious training. Is it not astounding that so many men, prominent and apparently successful in various walks of life, suddenly destroy all their joys, hopes and sorrows with a pistol shot? Psychologists to-day are trying to discover why child suicide is becoming more and more frequent. Certainly there is something wrong with our educational system. Men are being trained for this life only. When ambition is destroyed, when failure rewards their efforts, or when they cannot find that peace which the world does not give, then they turn to the one thing that they can do successfully—self-destruction. Their schooling has not taught them to look beyond the things of life, to curb pride, to acquire meekness and to bow to the will of God. When Theodore Roosevelt says, "We must educate the soul as well as the mind," he voices a thought which is proof that Catholic education alone is productive of best results.

The Church's viewpoint needs no explanation. Ever obeying the precept of her Founder, "Teach all nations," she points to a glorious past, a magnificent proof of her ability. All that was noble and great during the past twenty centuries, owed its origin to her. The world's most finished scholars, its bravest heroes in the cause of truth, were products of her teaching. When truth and enlightenment were assailed by crude barbarism or by effeminate paganism, she was ever the champion of right. Even her bitterest enemies admit this. They acknowledge especially the work of her religious Orders, and rightly thank them for this: that learning still lives and the world is not once more steeped in ignorance. Justly do they attribute the greatest fruits of the Catholic system

to the religious Orders. Again and again history glows with what they have accomplished, just as the history of to-day and to-morrow shall shine with their future work. The immaculate Sisterhood of the Church compels the admiration and respect of the whole world. Quietly, regardless of all but the precepts of their Master, they live as He lived, that they may die as He. Unsurpassed in ability, inimitable in that sterling quality of pedagogy—self-sacrifice, they labor on as only they can do who have Christ for their example and salvation for their goal. Incomparable are they, but they shrink from all fame and publicity; for their name shall be glorified, not in this short existence, but in the bright annals of eternity. And the men of the Church! Who shall voice the praises of the Brothers and priests who have carried the light of truth to the farthest ends of the earth, who preserve it to-day in the hearts of men? Only on the Day of Judgment shall their record of glory shine with its due effulgence. Knighthood scoffed at monks in days of martial splendor; knighthood is dead, and monasticism lives perennial.

The Catholic Church teaches men how to live, that they may know how to die. Her system of education develops every faculty of soul and body, perfecting the individual. It strengthens the bond of family life; it leads to the perfection of the civil State. Using as its only code the ten commandments, it carries men beyond the petty limits of the present life and shows them the glories of the life to come. The Catholic Church teaches men how to live that they may know how to die. And the products of Catholic education, living that they may die, die that they may live—forever!

—Bartholomew Reilly, O. P.