

THE ARCHBISHOP vs. SECULAR EDUCATION

WITHIN THE PAST DECADE or so, American Catholics have been caught in a whirl of intense self-examination and criticism. The impetus for much of this community introspection has come from within the Church itself: a sign, many say, of growing pains in the gradually maturing American Church. At the same time, outside stimuli have not been lacking. Suspicious and occasionally vicious appraisals of things Catholic by some of our fellow citizens have been part of the American religious scene from earliest colonial days. For obvious reasons, election year 1960 has witnessed an intensification of something that has always been with us.

This Church in America controversy is a complex item. There is no simple issue involved but a series of inter-related questions each of which, like a set of Chinese firecrackers, flares up suddenly, makes itself heard, and then quickly dies out—but not before setting off another report of equal noise and fuss. Such is the question of Catholics and education. One week it will be the parochial school in the American way of life that is under debate; the next will see an equally dramatic discussion of Catholics in secular institutes of learning. All this makes wonderful copy for our national news magazines which thrive on such controversy. It also helps keep alive the process of self-scrutiny. So, in the June 20th issue *Time* magazine focused its brightest lights on a problem that can profitably bear further analysis: Catholic attendance at non-Catholic colleges and universities.

The article was entitled "The Letter"; the occasion and content was a pastoral letter issued by Archbishop Joseph E. Ritter of St. Louis. "In our solicitude for our young graduates," wrote Archbishop Ritter, "we must remind them and their parents that they must always be far more concerned about nurturing and protecting their Faith than they are about pursuing higher studies." Consequently, the Archbishop stated that no Catholic may attend a non-Catholic college without written permission from the Archdiocese and, furthermore, this permission will be given only for "just and serious reasons." Significantly in these months of equal time for all candidates, *Time* devoted a good third of the article to a rebuttal

supplied from the statements of the Very Rev. Dom Aelred Graham, O.S.B., prior of Portsmouth Priory in Rhode Island which conducts the Portsmouth Priory School. Dom Aelred was quoted as unequivocally in favor of Catholic attendance at secular institutions. He feels that even in the atmosphere of secular colleges, a Catholic student can at least always rely on the "simplicities of faith he learned in childhood."

For several weeks after, the Letters column bristled with indignant reactions and readers lined themselves up behind the Archbishop or the Prior. The debate fizzled out only when a new aspect of the birth control issue exploded on the scene.

To put this particular controversy in its proper perspective, several points need to be underlined. The most basic one is that Archbishop Ritter was not speaking for the universal Church nor did he intend to be so interpreted. He was speaking as the head of a local Church or diocese, the Church of St. Louis. The bishop is the shepherd of the flock assigned to him. By reason of his power of order, the properly episcopal order, his role is to attend to the preservation and propagation of the spiritual life of his flock. Thus he is the ordinary minister of the sacrament of Confirmation, the sacrament of Christian maturity; he alone ordains priests through whom every day souls are reborn and nourished in Christ. But besides this power of episcopal order, the bishop of a diocese possesses the episcopal power of jurisdiction. It is this jurisdiction over his local Church that is involved in the pastoral of Archbishop Ritter.

Just as the episcopacy involves a participation of the fullness of the Priesthood of Christ, so also it is a sharing of Christ's Kingship. The former we called the power of order; the latter is this power of jurisdiction. As King, Christ is the Doctor, Teacher and Master of all men; as pastor of a particular flock, the bishop has from Christ the authority to teach and rule in His name. He has authority to teach in Christ's name the speculative truth to be believed. "For a bishop must be blameless as being the steward of God . . . holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to confute opponents" (Tit. 1:7-9). Moreover, he has the power from Christ to rule or prescribe the practical truth to be observed. In fuller outline, the bishop's authority embraces the instruction of his people in the primary message of the universal Church: the revealed doctrines of the Christian faith and the revealed imperatives of Christian morals. It embraces also the secondary message which includes the general prudential measures promulgated for the universal Church (e.g. the prescriptions

laid down by the Holy See regulating attendance at inter-faith meetings). Finally the bishop can, in order to safeguard the primary and secondary message of Catholic truth in his diocese, prescribe certain prudential measures on his own responsibility. This latter is the area in which Archbishop Ritter took action.

That the Archbishop had the right to curtail Catholic attendance at non-Catholic institutions is beyond dispute. It is a fact of experience that attendance at non-Catholic institutions generally involves dangers, more or less serious, to the faith of Catholics. Canon Law recognizes this explicitly regarding public schools and states that it pertains exclusively to the bishop of a diocese to decide, in accordance with instructions of the Holy See, under what circumstances and with what precautions attendance at such schools may be tolerated. Attendance is, at best, *tolerated* for the greater good of the education of the Catholic student. If attendance be *restricted* by the bishop, this restriction is not to be absolute but one which allows of exception, as is outlined in various instructions of the Holy See and by our own Council of Baltimore. Archbishop Ritter's letter accordingly allowed such considerations as financial hardship and the unavailability of certain courses in a Catholic college which might be essential for the education of a particular student as sufficient reasons for permission to attend a non-Catholic college.

Now, what of the wisdom of the Archbishop's ruling? This is quite obviously another question. The right to restrict attendance does not imply infallible wisdom in exercising this right. For all his power and responsibility, the bishop is not *ex officio* beyond error and misjudgment. Especially in this area of prudential measures where basic and general principles do not always fit neatly into the contingent setting of everyday reality there exists wide berth for mistaken judgment. Yet by his office the bishop is the person duly constituted and ordinarily qualified to make such a decision. Time may prove his course wrong and harmful to the progress of the Church in his diocese—thoughts which undoubtedly weighed heavily upon the Archbishop as he prepared his pastoral letter. But the course for the present for his own people of St. Louis is quite clear: to abide by his decision and trust in his wisdom and the divine assistance that accompanies his office.

The latitude of opinion regarding Archbishop Ritter's ruling, even within the Church itself, must be set against this background. Dom Aelred has every right to advocate free attendance, remembering the while that he is the prior of a Benedictine monastery school in New England and not

the Archbishop of St. Louis. Even the brother bishops of the St. Louis ordinary might disagree with the course he has taken. Yet they can authoritatively speak only for their own local Churches and not for Archbishop Ritter's. The conditions and customs of New England and the North differ from those of the Midwest and the South. These are over-riding factors in such a decision. When there is such a prudential ruling to be made, the bishop is usually well aware of the peculiar problems and best interests of his own people. He is, moreover, the sole judge of these circumstances and divinely delegated as such.

As for the cries of intellectual stagnation and "ostrich mentality," these are not quite to the point. The "ghetto movement," in or out, has no particular relevance. There is no patent attempt to stifle Catholic influence at every level of American life. There is only an obvious concern to safeguard the Catholicism of some students in the Archdiocese of St. Louis. All students and their parents are bound in conscience to look to the protection of their Faith. Only for a just and proportionate cause can it be jeopardized in any way. What Archbishop Ritter has added to this universal obligation is the reservation to himself of the right to judge in each case the seriousness of the causes.

—Justin M. Cunningham, O.P.

ALBERT CAMUS AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

DURING THE PAST FEW YEARS we have become accustomed to hearing critics, both European and American, proclaim Albert Camus the representative voice of youthful France; they have found in his writings the moral salvation of the post-war generation. When this undeniably great French author received the 1957 Nobel Prize for Literature, the honor was given for "his important literary production, which with clear-sighted earnestness illuminates the problems of the human conscience in our times." Despite the fact, however, that these accolades are in part deserved, Camus' tragic death in an automobile accident last January has left us with a body of work that is at best an incomplete appraisal of contemporary problems, and at worst, an appraisal founded upon principles shackled by the chains of bias. Nevertheless, his writings deserve investiga-