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Christianity and Education: A Call to Churchmen

BY A. F. WALLIS.

THE Bishop of Rochester has stated that since 1918 we have, as a nation, failed to cultivate our spiritual resources or transmit them to our children, and that we have been content to rely upon religious experiences of the past. It is a fair criticism. The causes are varied, but one in particular can be laid at the door of our Educational system for which public opinion cannot escape its own share of the responsibility. No apologist for the present methods employed in our Junior and Senior State Schools could maintain that the religious training of the young receives attention commensurate with that given to mental development. It is also true to add that the public generally is indifferent, being, on the whole, well satisfied with the material benefits accruing from Education. So long as a boy or girl is equipped with a stock of knowledge sufficient to make a material success of life, without regard to moral and spiritual issues, the general attitude is to leave such matters for organized Christianity to deal with, although the Churches receive scant support from the majority who shirk their individual obligations. Most parents desire that their children should become good citizens, forgetting that one of the most important foundations is Religion. Neither has the body of Church opinion been fully alive to the seriousness of the situation, with the result that there has grown up in this generation a vast army of young men and women who care little, if anything at all, for the things of God and His Laws.

Can we, therefore, as Churchmen view with equanimity the type of public opinion which the next generation may produce, if it is not founded upon a more Christian basis? The existing world situation gives proof of the folly in believing that Education alone can shed much light upon its

intricate problems. Whilst it has made great strides in mental training and in specialization, there is an appalling lack of knowledge as to how personalities can be trained to live as Living Souls. Honest and upright citizens are not produced on the application of mass production principles because it is impossible to mechanize human beings which God has made in His own image, and the sooner the experts in the educational realm realise this, so much the better for everybody.

The cure, of course, is in the hands of the people of England, but it is the duty of professing Christians to show them how that cure can be effected. Applied Christianity to every department of human relationships is the cure. We have heard that said many times already, but all too often it is overlooked that Christianity is authenticated by the Holy Scriptures, wherein we learn that their main theme has less to do with maintenance of institutional religion than with the revelation of "God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." It is, therefore, the next logical step in our reasoning to say that any satisfactory system of national education must include Bible teaching in such a manner, and with such thoroughness, as will leave an indelible mark upon the children whose privilege and obligation it will be to determine British policy in domestic or international affairs of the future. "Government of the People, by the People, for the People" are merely high-sounding empty words unless democracy rests upon Christian truths. Neither is it stretching a point to suggest that as the machinery of government will increase in proportion to the growing magnitude of the demands of the masses, just so do we expose ourselves to the danger of having to choose a Dictatorship in preference to a godless Democracy.

It is high time that members of the Church of England should appropriate their special privileges and mobilise their existing machinery whereby this question of a more intensive Religious Education in the schools may be brought within the realm of reasonable politics. Public opinion and the ruling authorities must be aroused to the danger of the future spiritual life of Britain standing in jeopardy, and that the failure to put it right is to court the disaster of succumbing to those very forces we are now out to eliminate. We Churchmen can make full use of the Parochial Church

Councils, and it ought not to be impossible to utilise them as channels whereby the Church Assembly be called upon to bring the matter before the Board of Education or, if necessary, Parliament itself. Because the question is a national one, the fullest possible co-operation of Nonconformity should be assured by seeking for a similar move from the National Free Church Council. Here lies a grand opportunity for the united voice of Protestantism to be heard upon a matter affecting the inner life of the people and one which touches every individual. Only let us avoid unnecessary controversy by clearly stating that in using the term Religious Education we mean the reading and understanding of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, leaving denominational teaching to the individual Churches themselves.

It is urged that early action be taken. To leave the matter over until the end of the War is to let the opportunity slip away. Statesmen will be too pre-occupied with other affairs, and moreover, at the moment the subject of reconstruction is in the air. There is nothing like striking whilst the iron is hot and when men are in a questioning mood. Let us, therefore, arise and be doing, never failing to remember the promise in Daniel xi. 32, "the people who know their God shall be strong, and do exploits."

Since the above lines were penned the Archbishops' Statement, entitled "Christian Education" has appeared in *The Times* for February 13th. Whilst the Statement is of a general character it nevertheless makes reference to an "Agreed Syllabus" of Religious Teaching drawn up by representatives of Christian Communities, the Teachers and Local Education Authorities. According to the *Surrey County Herald*, the Education Committee of that County has already approved a syllabus for use in Church and Council Schools in Surrey, intended for all children between the ages of 3 and 15, and provides for *daily* instruction in every school by teachers willing to give it, whilst those who are unwilling can be relieved of the obligation. This particular syllabus has the approval of the Bishops of Guildford and Southwark.

It is to be hoped that other counties have acted in a similar manner, but if not, Church members would be doing a national service in ventilating the matter through their Parochial Councils. The writer has not seen details of the

“Agreed Syllabus” appertaining to Surrey, but judging from recent utterances, Evangelicals would do well to be on the alert lest a Christian Education be turned into a medium whereby doctrines and practices alien to our Reformed Church of England are presented to the future generation as the proper interpretation of Christianity.

THE ACTIVITY OF GOD

By A. A. David, D.D., Bishop of Liverpool. 3s. 6d. net.

In this volume of the Christian Challenge Series the Bishop of Liverpool essays to meet the perplexities of those who are troubled by the apparent inactivity of God in the world to-day.

The keynote of the Bishop's argument is Human Freedom. God made man a Free Being. He cannot intervene to rescue man from the consequences of his wilfulness and folly by some dramatic stroke. Rather will He patiently and lovingly work out His purpose for man by Himself accepting in the person of His Son humiliation, pain and death. “If mankind is to be free to grow with God's help to its best, it must be free also to sink to its worst.” So far as it goes this is surely right, but is full justice done to the teaching of Scripture as a whole?

Does God never intervene decisively in human affairs? He did intervene decisively in the coming of Christ into the world. What of His Second Coming?

Will that not be a decisive and final intervention? At chapter 8 the Bishop reaches the War and he discusses the many difficulties arising out of it.

His treatment of them is sane and helpful. War is an “ever recurring fruit of sinfulness.”

“Is it ever right to fight.” Christ did not give us precise instructions upon specific difficulties of this kind. He gives us principles which we are to apply. He gives us ideals which we are to seek earnestly to live up to. We have to supply the answer to many of our questionings ourselves. It is pointed out that again and again our Lord did not answer directly questions addressed to Him. But He went beneath the surface to the root of the matter. In dealing with Pacifism a very telling quotation is introduced from Prof. Raven's “War and the Christian.” Some parts of the Bishop's argument seem to fall below the level of others, but he offers serious considerations which go to show that God is exercising control over the world that He has made. But that control is, in a way, indirect, and not to be gauged by our limited and finite understanding.

May a further question be put? How can a Bishop find time to write books?

H. D.