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Modern Educational Trends: A Christian Perspective[1]

Synopsis

THE essay begins with an analysis of the causes of current uncertainty in education. Today the generally accepted objective is individual self-fulfilment. The relationship of this to Christianity is discussed and it is shown both that only Christian education can achieve this aim and that religious education cannot justly be condemned as a conditioning process. A discussion of the problems of discipline and the education of the whole child makes it clear that, while seeking individual fulfilment has had beneficial results, it involves a danger that other Christian values may be overlooked. The tripartite system of secondary education is condemned as wrong and also undesirable, for grammar school as well as modern school pupils. Finally, it is suggested that the Christian's duty is to accept truth, whoever speaks it, but to supplement human incompleteness in the light of God's self revelation.

Society in Doubt

'The mind of a nation,' writes Spencer Leeson, *Christian Education* (p. 83), 'is reflected in its schools.' This is too often forgotten, both by the nation and by those concerned with education. The nation demands that the schools maintain standards which have implicitly been rejected by the community as a whole, as if the playground wall were a bastion against the divisive and destructive forces of the twentieth century. Educators are prone to plan for an ideal society,

[1] *The Langhorne Orchard prize-winning Essay for 1964*

ignoring that in which they must work. This means that it is useless to demand some sort of 'clear lead' from our schools in 1965. They are as gravely afflicted as the rest of society with the 'sick hurry and divided aims' deplored by Matthew Arnold a century ago. The teacher facing his class is himself a prey to the uncertainties and doubts of the mid-twentieth century; he cannot communicate a certainty that he does not feel.

For centuries education proceeded on the strength of certain basic assumptions. Thus it was assumed that society was stable, and that children must be trained to play their part in that station of life to which it had pleased God to call them, whether as leaders or led. The existing social order was underpinned by divine sanctions. Authority was exercised and accepted in an unquestioning way impossible to us who live in a post-Nazi age. Children had duties rather than rights and the adult's prerogative to impose his views and wishes was self-evident. Awkward questions about the subjects taught were answered with confidence in the theory that aptitudes might be transferred, so that the moral and intellectual stamina needed to learn to recite the rivers of Britain might later be applied to the business of living.

Three important factors largely account for the current uncertainty of those concerned with education. First, the mere scale and speed of social change. We have the impossible task of discerning trends, and extrapolating from these, in an attempt to predict what sort of society we are training our children for. Over and beyond the uncertainties implicit in this, we are faced by the question: assuming that we know the nature of the new society, how can we best train its future members? New conditions demand new measures, but how can we be sure what new measures are needed? Here the Christian has no special light to guide him. It is none the less true for being a cliché that his faith may show him what ends he should work for, but has nothing to say about what means are best adapted to secure those ends. Thus his religion will lead him to agree with the colleague who asserts on grounds of national self-interest, that we must remove the barriers that divide society, but he can give no easy 'Christian' answer to the question of what measures should be adopted to achieve this.

Yet it would be wrong to under-estimate the significance of a robust Christian faith in an age of uncertainty. A second important factor in the climate of opinion is the study of psychology. Here far-reaching and debatable conclusions are too often drawn from the limited and objective findings of research. An outstanding example may be seen in the current tendency to regard wrong-doing as the symptom of psychic disorder rather than evidence of a misdirected will. The wrong-doer needs sympathy, not condemnation; treatment, not punishment. Now the sincere Christian did not need Freud to tell him that the heart is deceitful and desperately sick; and he has good precedent for showing sympathy to the wrong-doer. But he cannot countenance any attempt to evade human responsibility, nor, if he accepts the teaching of Jesus as recorded in the gospels, may he reject retributive punishment.

Another example of the impact of psychology on education is the greater importance now attached to the emotional factor. Traditionally, teachers have been concerned to develop the minds of their pupils. True, the great teachers have always protested that education involves more than the intellect, but in practice (and even since Arnold of Rugby) it has been generally accepted that training the mind must be the first priority and that this, if rightly done, would entail development of the whole personality. The psychologist insists on the importance of emotional development, not only alongside intellectual training, but even as a pre-requisite to it. The Christian, who knows that in God's wisdom it was not by wisdom that men came to know God (1 Cor. i. 21), readily accepts the implications of this for the curriculum and organisation of the school.

Perhaps the strongest factor producing doubt and hesitation is the spirit of enquiry that characterizes modern man. The condition of scientific advance is unceasing questioning of all presuppositions, and the attitude that has proved fruitful in science has extended to all aspects of life. Whereas, formerly, prejudice favoured what was established and accepted, today the reverse is the case and change tends to be valued for its own sake. The onus of proof lies with those who defend the old ways. This questioning is not limited even to such important matters

as the nature of the teacher's authority, the subjects in the curriculum and the organization of secondary education. It is a commonplace to say that we have been living upon our spiritual capital. For some time it was accepted that although the Christian foundations of English education were crumbling, yet some good might result from religious teaching and that right thinking people were in any case agreed about the superstructure, whatever the state of the foundations. Today such agreement can no longer be taken for granted, and the child's right to Christian teaching is vociferously denied.

The Importance of the Individual

In all this uncertainty, educators have agreed in one absolute affirmation. Uncertain about society, uncertain about God, they insist on the supreme importance of the individual. Thus, *Education: its Data and First Principles* Nunn (p. 13): 'Educational efforts must... be limited to securing for everyone the conditions under which individuality is most completely developed – that is to enabling him to make his original contribution to the variegated whole of human life as full and truly characteristic as his nature permits; the form of the contribution being left to the individual as something which each must, in living and by living, forge out for himself.' Similarly, Jacks (*Modern Trends in Education* p. 113): 'Human perfection must be (education's) first objective.' It is not clear how this attribution of ultimate value to the individual can be justified on rational grounds. Nunn indeed writes (p. 25): 'There is more than physics and chemistry in even the humblest animal... the history of life (is) a striving towards the individuality which is expressed most clearly and richly in man's conscious nature.' It is assumed here that man *ought* to direct his efforts along the lines laid down by 'the history of life'; but such an assumption is open to the same objections as invalidate all attempts to move from "is" to "ought".'

Whatever the grounds for this affirmation, it is widely accepted and of fundamental importance. We shall see that it is closely linked with such diverse issues as religious education,

discipline in schools, the decreasing importance of the parents' rôle, and the spread of comprehensive education.

Christianity and the Individual

At first sight, a philosophy of education based on individual fulfilment seems to have little to commend itself to the Christian. Human depravity is not only asserted by Paul; it is assumed by Jesus (Matt. vii. 11; Mark vii. 20–23), who calls upon His disciples to take up the cross of death to their self-centred way of life. Again, we remember the note of demand, of uncompromising authority, sounded throughout the Bible. Man's role must be one of creaturely obedience to the revealed 'Thus saith the Lord.' The Baptist's words concerning Jesus express the ideal relationship between God and man, master and disciple: 'He must increase but I must decrease' (John iii. 30). In the light of this, much recent educational theory stands condemned. The Christian cannot accept that human nature is like a beautiful plant which, given the right environment (and here alone, on this view, lies the teacher's duty), will grow to exquisite maturity. Such a view owes more to Rousseau and romanticism than to observation and common sense, let alone revelation. But it is fair to say that few educationists would defend the position that the way to achieve individual fulfilment is to aim directly for it. Man is a social animal and cannot reach maturity apart from social influences. If individual excellence exists it can be appreciated only against the background of such a norm, indeed it can only be achieved against such a background. Jesus said that the man who wishes to save his life must lose it, and this statement is related to (though by no means identical with) the truth that the only way to self-realisation lies through self-forgetfulness and absorption in some cause or group transcending the individual.

It is important that Jesus spoke in favourable terms of this desire to "save" one's life. In spite of all that has already been said, human perfection is an important objective of the Christian faith. 'I am come that they might have life and might

have it more abundantly' (John x. 10). Paul's metaphor of the body is based on the principle of differentiation and the place of the unique individual in the common life. Individual selfhood is deeply engrained in the Christian revelation. The Bible claims that in man God has chosen to create a being capable of defying Him. This act of defiance has not been followed by a violent repudiation of man's self-hood; on the contrary, God condescends to appeal: 'Come, let us reason together' (Isa. i. 18). His purpose is that man should respond as a person in the encounter of two individuals, and that ultimately the world should be peopled with individual men and women who have freely chosen to live in fellowship with their Creator and with one another, and thus to attain true human dignity as members of the new Creation made in the likeness of the Last Adam. It is this divine concern for the individual that leads Paul to describe his fellow as 'one for whom Christ died' (Rom. xiv. 15).

This is why freedom to follow the dictates of conscience matters so much to Christians. Compulsion or legal prohibition in the religious sphere offend against the principle that man must be free to accept or reject the love of God. To demand external obedience is worse than useless. God does not want it. He is not deceived by it. If the man who offers it believes that he is pleasing God then he is deceiving himself in a matter of grave urgency. This concern for a genuine, free, individual response is strikingly similar to the existentialist attitude to life. Sartre is an atheist, but the Christian will share his horror of *mauvaise foi*. Secondhand attitudes and conventional responses could be instilled into our pupils, and this might seem, to a superficial glance, very convenient to society, but such a policy ignores the way in which God has made man and chosen to deal with him. In the long run to stifle spontaneity means death to society. The Christian can no longer be content to train a child for 'that station in life to which it has pleased God to call him.' He has a duty to society which can be fulfilled only as the children in his charge achieve full development and are thus able to make their distinctive contribution to the common life. He dare not presume upon his status as adult or teacher in order to lay down the lines along which development must take place. Only God knows the potentialities of each individual He has

formed, and the teacher is answerable to God for his share in frustrating or fostering these unique gifts.

The danger is plain that the educational process, thus understood, may produce 'genuine' and 'spontaneous' individuals who will recognise no law above their own whim. There is much common ground between Christian and secularist in meeting this danger. Negatively they will insist that the freedom of other members of society to achieve fulfilment must be safeguarded; whatever might theoretically be the case, the individual must in fact live with others whose rights are to be respected. On the positive side it will be pointed out that 'it is not good that . . . man should be alone' (Gen. ii. 18), or, to put it in other terms, that he is a social animal who can develop as a human being only through involvement with others. Not only (to speak as a Christian) must I refrain from harming my neighbour; I must actively seek his good. Thus far we can expect agreement, but the Christian will wish to go further and to enter a region where the secularist cannot follow. Jesus laid down two conditions of human development; one we have mentioned – love to the neighbour. But He also spoke of love to God. Basic to the human condition must be reverence, humility, creatureliness. If God exists, then an outlook on life that sees man as self-sufficient is radically unbalanced and will result in a distorted individualism. Perhaps the secularist will admit the value of such an element. He may seek to foster a sense of mystery and depth in experience; but there is always a danger of narcissism when a man who does not acknowledge God clothes some other entity – even truth, humanity or beauty – with the divine majesty.

Undoubtedly the current tendency to see the ultimate aim of education in personal development corresponds to an important element in the Christian faith. Such a secularist view may even allow for the need to curb and control man's sinful nature. It may admit that a sentiment of reverence is desirable and seek to establish it. But all this would be described by the theologian as belonging to the realm of common, not saving grace. Man's chief end, the Christian believes, is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever. Thus full selfhood, complete personal fulfilment, can be achieved only through a

personal relationship with God. Nothing less than this will suffice to destroy all that hinders self-realization. Only in serving God can perfect freedom be found. The Christian teacher sees in this relationship, which transcends the educational process, the sole hope of achieving the end for which the process exists.

Religious Education

Personal commital to God in Christ and a consequent transformation of life, while they transcend the educational process, are not unconnected with it. 'How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?' (Rom. x. 14). If individual fulfilment is to be the goal of education, and if individual fulfilment in the deepest sense depends upon Christian discipleship, then Christianity must be taught in our schools. The teaching of Christianity was written into the 1944 Education Act and is obligatory in all maintained schools, a state of affairs that has aroused the hostility of a small but vocal minority, and gives uneasiness to some who are in general well disposed to Christianity and even to convinced Christians. A recent survey carried out by National Opinion Polls in March 1965, and reported in *New Society* on May 27th, has provided defenders of the provisions of the 1944 Act with a powerful argument. An overwhelming majority (over 90 per cent) of those questioned wished religious education to continue as at present. In a democracy there is presumably no more to be said. The nation wishes its children to be educated thus; if a minority of humanists object, let them found their own schools. The 1944 Act still represents the wishes of the nation as a whole.

On what grounds is the objection based? Why should this part of the curriculum alone attract so much attention? Plainly children should learn the facts about the Christian faith and, to a lesser extent, about other faiths, simply as part of their knowledge of the world and its inhabitants. Nobody can reasonably object to this. We may even go further and agree that children should be given some appreciation of what is meant by

religious experience. We do not consider a man educated unless he knows what it is to respond to beauty, for aesthetic experience is part of the human condition. It could be argued that, just as one function – some would say the most important – of a poetry or music lesson is to help the members of the class to *experience* poetry or music, so one function of religious education should be to enable pupils to experience what religion is about. As we have already seen, there are non-Christians who would to some extent agree with this, because of the value they would attach to feelings of reverence and wonder.

The fundamental objection, however, is not to the teaching of Christianity, but to its being taught *as true*. In other lessons, it is said, pupils are trained to collect and evaluate evidence and to reject what cannot be verified. Conclusions are reached which would be accepted by all, or almost all, rational beings. This is not the case with Christianity, which claims to be objectively true, but is indemonstrable. What makes the procedure even more disreputable is that it is children who are being taught thus. They are not yet capable of rational judgement, even if they possessed the data, and long before the age when they can make a decision they have been indoctrinated. This last accusation has carried weight with some Christians, who believe that respect for personality demands the end of religious education in schools, at any rate in its present form.

The word 'indoctrination' is certainly an ugly one. It suggests the sort of cynical conditioning practised by a totalitarian regime. Yet W. R. Niblett (*Education and the Modern Mind* pp. 54f.) does not scruple to write: 'Everyone has to be deeply and significantly indoctrinated from very early in life if he is going really to be a member of any community or nation.' He quotes from Coleridge's *Table Talk* 'I showed him my garden and told him that it was my botanical garden. "How so?" said he, "it is covered with weeds" – "Oh," I replied, "*that* is only because it has not yet come to its age of discretion and choice. The weeds, you see, have taken the liberty to grow, and I thought it unfair in me to prejudice the soil towards roses and strawberries!"' Today the secularist will not hesitate to inculcate respect for the individual. He will

train pupils to accept and to adopt democratic processes. Yet he would find it difficult to demonstrate their validity. Without doubt, the powerful support for religious education which we have noted derives largely from the realization, be it conscious or not, that the fundamental principles on which our society is based are Christian, and that without a Christian frame of reference they become at best weakened and at worst meaningless.

This does not mean that we may ignore the dangers implicit in the word 'indoctrination.' It is both wrong and unwise to treat people as if they were things. The cynical application of a near-Pavlovian conditioning process may arouse no scruples in the world of commerce, but the teacher – above all, the Christian teacher – will have nothing of it. If a man has been conditioned into a set of attitudes he may be conditioned out of them. The rational response of the whole man, not the conformism of an automaton, is the only sure foundation of social well-being. Over and above these claims of expediency, the Christian will remember that God calls men to choose freely whether they will acknowledge His claims or not; the Cross shows how real is the possibility of rejection.

Thus the objective of religious education will resemble that of training in the ideals and basic presuppositions of our society. Certain things will be presented as true and desirable and important. But the teacher will scrupulously avoid applying the sort of pressure which, used by an adult in authority, might induce a blind acceptance. He will be ready, indeed anxious, to discuss difficulties and to explore arguments against what he is teaching, and while freely admitting the impossibility of demonstrable proof will show the reasonableness of Christian positions. He hopes that the pupil will by an act of free choice commit himself to what he has been taught. Even should the choice be a negative one, it will at any rate have been made with a clear understanding of the issues involved. If this sort of teaching is wrong, then it is wrong not only in religious education but in a far wider context. But if this method is rightly followed in inculcating the convictions that nourish the roots of our society, then it is difficult to see how it is immoral when employed in teaching the Christian faith.

Discipline

There is much concern at what is felt to be a lack of discipline in our schools today. Standards of behaviour are said to have declined and teachers are accused of being unwilling to punish where punishment is needed. It is, of course, unreasonable to single out the schools in this connection. To repeat Spencer Leeson's words: 'The mind of a nation is reflected in its schools.' The same symptoms whose presence is deplored in the schools may equally be seen in the family, the factory and the office. Everywhere, standards once regarded as inflexible are yielding to pressure and persons in authority are unsure of how to exercise it.

Whatever the causes of this state of affairs, there can be no doubt that in the schools it is closely connected with the current concentration on the individual. Before seeing how this is so, we must rid our minds of the narrow, conventional idea of 'discipline.' By a sort of linguistic Gresham's law, the ideal of discipline as the attuning of a whole personality to the demands of a way of life or branch of study has degenerated into the stereotype of a sergeant-major or prison warder terrorizing the men in his charge. Whereas the teacher who is a 'good disciplinarian' should be the man through whom a class learns to experience and accept the demands made by a course of action or study he is usually thought of as the one who can most effectively impose his will on theirs.

In a school run on traditional lines, discipline derived from various sources. There was the discipline of academic achievement. Certain subjects were to be studied and if distinction – or even competence – in them were to be attained, then habits of order, diligence, control, must be established. This attitude was further sanctioned by the discipline of individual competition with the spur of public examination. The pupil who came top or who gained distinction was plainly superior to the one who came second or who gained only credit. Society accepted this, and so did the teacher, whose authority – another source of discipline – derives ultimately from society.

Today the study of a subject is thought of as a means rather than an end. It is the experience gained on the journey that

matters, rather than the destination reached. An examination pass in English Literature is in itself worthless; the important thing is the effect on the individual of his reading, that he should have enlarged his understanding of life and experienced the distinctive quality of this type of study. We have left far behind us the days when children were thought to derive some benefit from the mechanical learning of imperfectly understood and apparently irrelevant material. Everything studied must now be made interesting by being related to life and to the experience of the pupil. We learn mathematics by making a chicken coop, breeding hens and selling the eggs; and physics and mechanics by dismantling a motor car. Pupils may 'study' for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award in lessons and attend classes in make-up or rocket construction. Critics say that this is a false preparation for life, which demands that men give themselves to long spells of uninteresting and apparently unproductive work. It seems fair to reply that life provides some over-riding incentive; a man is not called upon to do dull and repetitive work for its own sake but always as a means to some end freely chosen; thus pupils learn to work hard in the context of some pursuit that has aroused their interest.

How can one assess the progress of a pupil in this case? Not, above all, by objective tests. Each individual is unique; how unjust and unreasonable to compare what is essentially different! The boy with an I.Q. of 100 has done well and deserves praise although his mark is only half that of his neighbour with an I.Q. of 150. The girl who has passed her Duke of Edinburgh test has worked as hard and developed herself as fully as the one who has gained an open scholarship. It is easy to jeer at this attitude and to say with the Dodo: 'Everybody has won and all must have prizes.' Yet the Christian will have much sympathy with these tendencies. 'Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required' (Luke xii. 48). God judges 'according to what a man has, not according to what he has not' (2 Cor. viii. 12). Similarly it is a good thing that the old tradition of ruthless competition, where it was a heinous sin to help your neighbour (shades of the Good Samaritan!) is being replaced by an atmosphere of friendly co-operation.

In spite of this, the trend is not without danger, as H. Wolff points out (*New Trends in English Education* pp. 184f.): 'The weakness . . . lies in . . . failure to provide any objective standards of progress . . . To place before the child the task of learning; of mastering something not easy; to foresee its difficulties and smooth its path, to persuade it of the value of honestly "having a go"; this is education . . . Any other approach leads to a "laissez-faire" attitude, and to a steady drop in standards of attainment.' Of course, the Christian as a citizen is not unconcerned about this risk, but beyond it he will discern another, more insidious and even more serious. It is what Wolff calls 'the failure to provide any objective standards.' We are in danger of making the individual the measure of all things. The aim of the artist is self-expression; in the ethical sphere, no action is wrong at all times and in all circumstances – it is the situation that counts; for the theologian, God is the name the individual gives to his own deepest concern. There is a grave possibility that the existence of an absolute will cease to be affirmed in any context. Certainly absolutes are in danger of departing from our schools; aims and achievements tend to be judged simply in terms of the capacity and needs of the individual.

At the same time, less respect is paid to the teacher in virtue of his position. This is just one example of the general decline in respect for authority, mentioned above. But it would be a mistake to imagine that teachers are in this respect helpless victims of a trend that they would resist if resistance were possible. Robin Pedley: (*The Comprehensive School* p. 174) refers to the way in which teachers today agree that 'a child's first need is love, and with love respect for the free growth of his personality: free, that is, from the arbitrary compulsion of elders, and disciplined instead by social experience.' Here we find a number of current educational commonplaces: the stress on individual development; the value assigned to "social experience" in the educative process; and the repugnance for external discipline. It should be noted that the ideal is not lack of discipline but a discipline freely chosen and self-imposed. This is not an unworthy ideal, and it has an important place in Christian ethics, as may be seen not only in the New Testament

distinction between the obedience of slaves and sons but also in the doggerel of 'Tis not do right because I must, But right because 'tis right.' The teacher's authority, on this view, does not proceed so much from his readiness to punish any infringement of the rules, as from the personal qualities he displays which evoke respect in his pupils. Pedley believes (p. 175) that 'today's friendliness between pupil and teacher is probably the greatest difference between the classrooms of 1963 and those of 1923.' This corresponds far more closely than does the traditional concept to the Christian view of divine authority as not arbitrary but grounded in God as the source of all goodness and value. This kind of mature and personally accepted self-discipline must surely be what we wish our children to learn.

Yet here too we encounter the danger of subjectivism. It is only a step from saying that authority should be personally and voluntarily accepted to saying that authority does not exist unless it is recognised. There is a risk that children trained in this way will grow up believing that God has no authority over them unless they allow it and that they may with impunity flout His will. For it is through human experience that we begin to learn about God and while there is an important element of truth in the viewpoint outlined above – and truth which must be affirmed – yet those who do not correct it by God's self-revelation are in danger of obscuring the existence of objective authority and of confusing the rule of law with tyranny. The divine imperative must be heard in our schools.

The Rôle of the Family

In general, education has been regarded as a matter of training the mind. This is certainly implicit in any system of examinations, which are designed to test how much candidates know. Arnold of Rugby set himself a larger task, and sought to strengthen body and character also. Although the maintained grammar schools claimed to imitate the 'public' schools in this, elementary education was largely concerned with the 'three R's.'

Increasingly we have come to see that education affects the whole man and cannot be restricted to the intellect. The brilliant mathematician or linguist who is emotionally immature is to this extent not a whole man. Manual skill, powers of imagination, a feeling for beauty – all these must be developed and take their place in a harmonious whole. Education must be a training for life, and life is not lived with the intellect only. We have already mentioned this tendency which transcends the sterile intellectualism that represents an undesirable part of our inheritance from Greece. The biblical idea of man as being a body-soul rather than being indwelt by some immaterial principle is more faithfully reflected in the current concern to educate the whole man.

It is also generally accepted that these educational benefits should not be reserved for children whose parents are both able and willing to pay for them. Enlightened self-interest alone would demand that the nation develop to the full its human assets. The Christian will approve of this for another reason also; the value set by God on each soul that He has created, each individual for whom Christ has died, makes it intolerable that children should be deprived of the chance to develop their gifts to the full. It is this concern that lies behind the free milk, subsidised school meal service and medical inspections, all concerned with the child's body and thus not at first sight touching his education. Today the physical health of our children is excellent; unfortunately the same cannot be said for their mental and emotional health. Teachers now realise that a child cannot do himself justice until psychological problems have been dealt with; this may involve trying to help the whole family, for it is rare to find an unstable individual coming from healthy environment. Part of the problem is the growing complexity of modern life, some of it inevitable (for example, increasing mechanization with its attendant strain) and some by contrast wholly unnecessary (for example, the incessant appeal of much advertising to our sexual and competitive tendencies.) Thus the schools feel they must help children to adjust to society by teaching both implicit and explicit on personal relationships, at home, at work, and between the sexes. All this is necessary, and too often if the schools do not take the respon-

sibility then nothing is done. But it cannot be denied that much of what is now being done by the schools has in the past been the responsibility of parents, whether or not that responsibility was effectively discharged.

The reluctance of parents to fulfil these responsibilities may in part be explained as due to the complexity of modern life and a national 'failure of nerve.' Whatever the reasons, the fact remains that parents are playing a decreasing part in the training of their children. This is happening at a time when the importance of the family is being stressed by psychologists as never before. Teachers also are realising that they can do little to mitigate the influence of a home whose standards are opposed to those of the school. The need for partnership between home and school is clearer than ever; but the school is taking over more and more of the parents' functions. The Roman Church deserves full credit for the way in which it has consistently asserted the priority of the family in God's plan for the child. All Christians must be concerned that parents should be encouraged to play a full part in the education of their children, not over against, but alongside the school. Yet there are still schools which will not tolerate a parent-teacher association; where, if one exists, its function is fund-raising; where no parent may speak to a teacher without making an appointment; where – incredible but true – there are notices in the playground marking the point beyond which parents may not go. The 1944 Act indeed pays lip-service to the ideal of parental choice in education, but this has proved a dead letter, and it sometimes appears as if the ideal parent (from the teacher's point of view) is the one who sends absence notes punctiliously and remains in all other respects incognito. Christian parents and teachers have a battle to fight on this front.

Selection and Rejection

Another provision of the 1944 Act which has attracted an increasing volume of criticism is the tripartite division of

secondary education. From the start there were some who felt this was wrong, but lately their numbers have been growing and it is plain that the tripartite system is doomed. In its simple form it is open to one overwhelming criticism: that human beings do not divide neatly and without residue into three categories at ten-plus (the age at which selection in fact occurs) or at any other age. To believe that they did was an administrator's pipe dream, and an outstanding exception to the generally accepted principle of studying the needs of the individual. It should be pointed out that the comprehensive system may also make an appeal on grounds of tidiness and administrative convenience. In a bureaucratic age there is a temptation to treat human beings as units not people and to accept solutions, in education and elsewhere, because they are convenient. This strikes at the roots of the Christian view of man and must always and everywhere be resisted.

To do them justice, those responsible for the 1944 Act were not simply concerned to make administration tidier. They inherited a situation where secondary education was the privilege of a minority, the rest being left to finish their school life in their old 'elementary' school. The Act was meant to remedy this and to provide secondary education for all, with age, ability and aptitude as the only criteria. But the system is open to criticism, in spite of recent modifications, first because it is unfair to those not selected for grammar school education, and secondly because it is unhealthy for those who are.

There can be no doubt of the injustice suffered by a substantial minority of children whose classification at ten-plus has not fairly represented their potential. Easier transfer from the modern school is only a palliative, unsettling the child concerned and draining the school of talent. The ideal is for such children to be educated from the start in a school where their needs can be met. But this is admittedly an imperfect world where justice for all may be impossible; it is argued that the tripartite system provides satisfactorily for the needs of most children, if not of all, and is especially helpful to those at either end of the scale. It is doing no kindness to the least able children to force them into competition with others who are

immensely superior, whereas in the modern school they may achieve some distinction, be given some responsibility. A comprehensive system would condemn them to nonentity. Similarly it is argued that the more able child would be held back by the presence of the less intelligent; to turn a grammar school into a comprehensive would blunt its academic 'edge', depriving the nation of intellectual excellence and the individual of the chance to use his gifts to the full.

If these assertions could be validated they would deserve serious consideration, for it would be intolerable to secure justice for some by denying it to others. The available evidence, however, does not substantiate them; there are few schools which are truly comprehensive, with a full complement of academic 'high-flyers', so that dogmatism is not justified. What is certain is that nobody seriously believes the secondary modern school is in any sense equal to the grammar school. Protest meetings are not organised in the name of the modern school. It is the grammar school pupil who is most highly thought of, who has most money spent on his education, and who is most likely to enter an occupation respected by all. The 'parity of esteem' mentioned in the Act remains a pious hope. We are labelling the majority of our youth as failures before their eleventh birthday; we treat people like objects to be graded. This is utterly opposed to the respect and care for the individual found in the teaching of the Old Testament prophets and in the life of Jesus. We should not be surprised that we face adolescent alienation from society on a scale formerly unknown. To ignore the revealed will of God is likely to have unpleasant consequences.

It is too readily assumed that the system is wholly beneficial to the grammar school pupil, and that whatever injustice may exist is confined to those who 'fail the 11-plus'. Yet society will suffer if our future executives and administrators are brought up segregated from the great mass of those who will, as adults, be affected by their decisions. This division of society into 'us' and 'them' has harmful consequences everywhere, and it is a commonplace example of this that the Christian faith has become so identified with middle class *mores* that conversion takes on overtones of class betrayal.

Over and above this, if we are genuinely concerned for individual development and believe that in the will of God this is effected largely through group activity, then we cannot remain satisfied with an educational system which confines a child's experience to a group united by a common assumption of intellectual superiority. God may be no respecter of persons, but we are effectively conditioning our children to be precisely what we claim God is not. The glory of the Church is said to be its catholicity; Christians rejoice to belong to a community where Jew and Greek, bond and free, male and female, are united and accepted on no other ground but the love of God in Christ. It is strange that Christians should support an educational system which does so much to ensure that these values are confined to the religious sphere, where they are harmless and present no threat to our class-ridden society.

The arguments for comprehensive education are often dismissed as social rather than educational. If education concerns the intellect alone, then the criticism is valid. What passes understanding is that Christians should ever have imagined this to be the case. If, as is surely the case, education is concerned with the development of the whole child, then it has a vitally important social aspect. Advance in this field might be thought worth while even at the cost of some loss of intellectual quality. In fact, however, there is no reason to think that the end of the tripartite system would entail such a loss, and solid ground for expecting it to benefit both society and the individual.

The Christian Perspective

If we have rightly singled out a concern for the individual as the dominant factor in contemporary educational thought, then we ought as Christians to be thankful. 'My delight was in the sons of men' (Prov. viii. 31). Nowhere can we find a concern for the individual equal to that of God in Christ, and we should rejoice if unbelievers also feel this concern. Whatever views are propounded, we dare not assess principles according to

the men who enunciate them. Good things *can* come out of Nazareth, and God has ordained neither that truth should be heard only from the lips of those who honour Him, nor that His followers should be infallible. But a truth held in isolation becomes a heresy, and where men ignore God's revelation of Himself they will inevitably fall into the error of emphasizing one aspect of truth to the exclusion of others. Such is the case today. Our Christian duty is not at all to deny what is true and right in modern thought about education (however unpalatable we may find it) but rather, accepting it gladly, to assert also those values which we as Christians find in scripture, and which are today in danger of being overlooked.