

Education of Children

James McGaughey '40

After the fall of Adam, man was deprived of the pre-natural privilege of bodily immortality, infused knowledge of natural things, and the perfect control of appetite. Through the Redemption, however, mankind was restored to the supernatural condition of adopted sons of God, but not to the former harmonious integrity of Adam's nature. Human nature manifested certain defects, the chief of which were darkness of the understanding, weakness of will, and disorderly inclinations. Man could not now attain to the perfection proper to his nature without some means by which his intellect would be enlightened, his will strengthened, and his appetites regulated. The answer to this need was, and is, education, which should be provided for all, and especially for the child while he is still in his formative years. This all-important work, according to the Angelic Doctor, is the natural right and obligation of parents who, before all others, must take these steps necessary for the promotion of the child to the perfect state of man, which is the state of virtue.

Never has there been so much discussion about education as at the present time, and never has it been so necessary that youth be protected against the irreligion and immorality so prevalent in our present-day society. At a time such as the present, when impious and profane books are finding their way into countless homes, when the cinema and radio are controlling the minds and actions of so many, when, in so many cases, material gain has become the one great objective in life, there is great need for a return to true Christian principles, and especially for recognition and realization of parents' natural rights in the saving work of the education of their children. With much wisdom, then, did Pope Pius XII, in his encyclical, "Summi Pontificatus", in which he outlined the cure for many of our social ills, expressly state: "The charge laid by God on parents to provide for the material and spiritual good of their off-spring, and to procure for them a suitable training saturated with the true spirit of religion, cannot be wrested from them without grave violation of their rights."

The quotation from our Holy Father's encyclical may be briefly paraphrased as follows: Parents have a natural right and a duty to provide for the physical, intellectual, and moral education of their children; and the State cannot justly violate this right. This does not mean that the State cannot, in any way, assist in the education of children; but it does mean that the part taken by the civil power in this matter must be in accordance with Christian principles.

Besides the family and the State, which belong to the natural order, and in which every man becomes a member at the time of his birth into this world, the Church, which belongs to the Supernatural order, and which enrolls its members at the time of Baptism, has the inalienable right and the mission to educate. In carrying out this work, the Church follows certain fixed principles which she deems necessary for the proper education of the child. And since education belongs preeminently to her by the express mission and supreme authority given her by God, she has the right, as well as the duty, to determine in what education must consist and the principles by which it must be directed, so that by it, man may attain that goal for which he was created. The family and the State, in the education of children, must be guided by these principles always and everywhere; otherwise they are seeking their own destruction.

Very great, indeed, is the obligation which the parents have to provide for the material and spiritual welfare of their off-spring. As parents, they are responsible for having placed the child in a state of extreme helplessness, and are therefore bound by the natural law to promote the child from such a state to one which enables him to provide for his own corporal and spiritual welfare. This can be done only through the physical, moral, intellectual, and civil education of the child.

Since the family has priority of nature over the state, the family's right to educate is anterior to that of the State, and cannot be violated by it without grave injustice. Contrary to those who hold that the right to educate belongs to the State alone, Pope Pius XI, in the memorable encyclical, "Divine Illius Magistri", wisely states: Untenable is the reason they adduce, namely, that man is born a citizen and hence belongs primarily to the State, not bearing in mind that before being a citizen man must exist,

and existence does not come from the State, but from the parents."

Since parents are the cause of the child's existence insofar as they dispose prime matter for the reception of the human soul, they must provide for its well-being, both materially and spiritually. Materially, they must provide nutrition for the proper development of the body and its faculties, so that when the child becomes an adult, he may be able to take his place among his fellow-men as one strong of body; and of still greater importance, he must have a sound mind. Hence arises the grave obligation of parents to provide for the intellectual, moral, and civil education of the child.

Parents, therefore, have from nature the right and inescapable duty of preparing their off-spring, not only for adult, but especially for immortal life. They must instruct the child, not only in religion and Christian morals, but also must provide for him that physical and civil education which is consonant with Christian principles. In addition to this, parents must show good example in their manner of living, particularly in those things which pertain to the morals of the family.

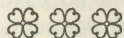
Very often in the work of education parents, when left to themselves, are inadequate for the task. Their education may not be sufficient that they may give their children a knowledge of the arts and sciences. And since a man is not truly educated unless instructed in these things, schools must be established in which these subjects are taught, and to which parents may send their children for the completion of their education. It must always be borne in mind, however, that religion and Christian morals must be given primary consideration in the schools, and must provide the guiding principles according to which a knowledge in the arts and sciences is acquired. Schools which do not conform to these principles, v. g., lay schools, fail to give a true education, and, for this reason, parents must not be obliged by the State to send their children to such institutions. When they are forced to do so, it can be rightly said that the State is exercising a monopoly over education, and is thereby violating the principles of distributive justice and the parents' right to provide for the education of their children.

In providing for the material and spiritual welfare of the family, the rights of the parents must be respected

by the State. The relations which should exist among the family, Church, and the State in this regard is stated by Pope Pius XI. in "Divini Illius Magistri", as follows: "Since the State is chiefly intended to promote temporal welfare, education cannot pertain to it in the same way as it does to the Church and family, but in a way which pertains to its end, the common good, and consists in that peace and security in which families and individuals have the free exercise of their rights, and at the same time enjoy the greatest spiritual and temporal prosperity possible in this life by the mutual union and co-ordination of all".

The State has the duty to protect, foster, and assist the family in the education of its members by providing schools, institutions, etc., whenever and wherever they are deemed necessary. Moreover, if parents fail in any way in their obligations towards their children, it becomes the duty of the State to make provision for the children's material and spiritual well-being. Hence the parents' right to educate, although inviolable, is not absolute because it is necessarily subordinated to the last end and to natural and divine law.

The true education of children consists in developing a sound mind in a strong body, and parents are bound by the natural law to provide such an education for their children. In fulfilling their duty in this respect they always receive the friendly assistance and the willing co-operation of the Church, and should receive the same from the State. There should be no conflict in the respective rights of Church, family and State. The family, as well as the State, should be guided by Christian principles in the upbringing of children. The State must not deny parents the right to choose the schools in which the children will be educated, or the right to choose such teachers as they consider capable of carrying out properly the work of education. The family should, at all times, be protected by the State, and not until such a condition exists will there be peace and order in the world.



Everything that is mine, even to my life, I may give to one I love, but the secret of my friend is not mine to give.

—Philip Sidney