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Crisis in Religious Education

by H. HOLMES

THE phrase "Christian-National", so widely current in South Africa today, is more than a century old. It arose in the days of the Dutch Calvinists' struggle for "free" schools as distinct from the state "neutral" school, which taught a Christianity which Groen van Prinsterer, the Calvinist politician, said could not be distinguished from humanism. Financial parity with the state schools was not attained by the "byzondere schoolen" before 1917. The Calvinists had won their victory, but, in the peculiar make-up of the Dutch population with forty per cent Roman Catholic, it was equally a Roman Catholic victory. Today in Holland, 27% of the school-going population is in Christian Protestant (i.e. Calvinist) schools, 44% in Roman Catholic schools, and the balance in the "neutral" state schools.

Local Calvinists, with only a small threat from the Roman Catholics, would like to see a similar pattern in S. Africa, i.e. two types of pupils: 1. For Afrikaans-speaking pupils, schools with the broad religious pattern of the Dutch Reformed Churches, all of which are basically Calvinist in theology and philosophy; and 2. For English-speaking pupils, schools „met 'n geloofsverdeelde godsdiensonderwys", lacking a unifying theological principle, but suited to the ragtag and bobtail who populate the English schools.

Over the last century and a half, the Cape, and, for a slightly shorter period, Natal, have been more influenced by English thinking than by Dutch in the matter of religious instruction. It was rather different north of the Orange River and very different beyond the Vaal. The young republic in the Transvaal looked back on "mountain ranges overpast" and saw the hand of the Almighty in everything. What better thanks could be given Him than making the state a Christian state? It was only a step to making the local church the state church and the school a Reformed state school staffed with teachers of the right confession.

It is not possible in this short survey to trace the whole history of religious education in the northern areas of S. Africa, but reference may be made to the unsuccessful liberalizing efforts of President Burgers. Modern writers see in the Burgers period „die afwyking van die ou historiese koers in die onderwys" which led to „'n onsektariese en in sekere opsigte godsdienslose skoolstelsel". Here we have the S. African counterpart of Horace Mann's godless schools in America.

The du Toit-Mansvelt period (1882-1902) is noteworthy for the measures which were taken against the threatening erosion of the religious foundations of the Republic and for the emphasis on the state-aided school as against the state (free) school on the Dutch pattern. These schools were Christian-National in a sense that S. African schools have never been since. The population of the S.A. Republic was homogeneous in a way that it was never to be again: religion was still the most fundamental thing in life — the worldly delights brought by the English had not yet set themselves up as rivals to a solemn-faced Calvinism; the term "Christian" was exclusive rather than inclusive, as was the blessed word "national".

The end of the Anglo-Boer War in 1902, the "Second War of Freedom", saw "a determined policy of denationalizing and anglicization" by the arch-fiend Milner and the zealous band of Kipling missionaries. There could be only one reply—the setting up of "free" Christian-National schools. This was the Afrikaner's one great venture into private schools. The two hundred Christian-National schools enthusiastically offered an education „wat wou voortbou op die verlede, op die godsdiens, die taal, die geskiedenis en die kultuur van die oorwonne Boerenasie". But subscribing to fine ideals does not always pay the bills, and this system of schools soon collapsed because of lack of financial support.

Smuts' 1907 Education Act in the Transvaal followed the pattern in religious education of other acts in S. Africa and in Britain, and the Christian-National supporter had to be content with an education that was neutral in religion and only half-national in outlook. But Christian-National Education was not dead, and forty years later, after a number of ineffective sorties, and by chance coinciding with the return of the Nationalist (the suffix -ist is an English addition) Party to power, there appeared the now "notorious"

pamphlet on Christian-National Education under the protective wing of the Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge.

The pamphlet was attacked on all sides. It was asserted that the policy outlined by the Institute for Christian-National Education was an outright attack on the freedom of thought of all teachers in every branch of education. A logical consequence of the policy would be the elimination of the "conscience clause" which has been called the "corner-stone of religious freedom." (The conscience clause has already gone from the university which is at the heart of Christian-National Education). The policy goes further. The very content of education must be selected and presented in a particular way — even if it does lead, in geography, to a statement like this: „Ons glo dat elke volk en nasie gewortel is in 'n eie landsbodem deur die Skepper vir hom bepaal," or in arithmetic, to a search for the Christian (i.e. Calvinist) principles underlying the subject. It is not surprising that this policy, so illiberal and so divisive, was not acceptable to thinking people.

At the risk of being repetitive, a few other criticisms may be added. The term "Christian" is defined as "based on Holy Scripture and expressed in the Articles of Faith of our three Afrikaans churches." The term "National" is defined as „liefde vir alles wat ons eie is" — country, language, history, culture. Many English-speaking people have remained undisturbed by such statements. "They refer to Afrikaans-speaking children," they say. "They have nothing to do with us." But this Beleid deals with a system of *state* schools — will the policy be confined to Afrikaans schools? Hardly likely. And what of the surviving parallel-medum schools? Or those minority classes of English-speaking children in predominantly Afrikaans-medium schools? The comment of the Christian Council in 1950 is pertinent: "We believe that the Christian faith is not inconsistent with 'love of our own', but that this must not be cultivated in any spirit of superiority or exclusiveness; it can only develop healthily in juxtaposition to the 'other' which must also be studied and appreciated."

The aim of education — and how often have aims been enunciated in different societies — is stated to be "the moulding of people in God's image so that they become fully equipped for every good work." Vague and harmless at first sight, but menacing when we read, "We believe that this process can only be carried out and this aim only achieved in schools which are Christian and National." Left right! Left right! It is the fear of the lock-step that led Professor M. V. C. Jeffreys of the University of Birmingham to define the special aim of education today as "nothing less than a double redemption — of the bewildered individual from depersonalization and of the planned society from tyranny." There seem to be signs of depersonalization and tyranny in our society today.

The policy with regard to the content of education has been touched on in an earlier paragraph. But what do we make of this sentence: "Every subject must be taught in the light of the Word of God, namely on the basis of the applicable principles of Scripture"? It is vague enough to be interpreted in a variety of ways — fundamentalism in religion, an index of prohibited reading, censorship of books. A recent school text-book has gone back to 4004 B.C. and all that; a university keeps books that may only be read by special permission; Russell's rather simple pamphlet, "Why I am not a Christian", has been banned. Can we keep this kind of thing out of the English-medium schools? Certainly not if the policy of Christian-National Education gets on top.

There are many other statements in the Beleid open to criticism: "Bilingualism cannot be made the aim of education"; "Every scholar must be moulded into a Christian and national citizen of our country"; "History must be taught in the light of God's revelation and must be viewed as the fulfilment of God's decreed plan for the world and the human race"; the Church "must exercise supervision over the spirit and trend of education . . . it must exercise supervision through the agency of the parents."

Criticism has, however, only made the supporters of a Christian and National education policy push on to more extreme positions. The setting up of a National Education Advisory Council, however good the idea may be in principle, is feared because it could easily prove a most effective weapon in making Christian-National Education the education of the whole country. English-speaking people are accused of not understanding what lies behind C.N.E. The unfortunate, but apparently inevitable, differences of opinion among the churches in S. Africa, are further evidence of this "lack of understanding." "Love me, love my dog" in religion has a frightening quality about it.

In C.N.E., then, we have an inflexible philosophy of religion which is supported by the overwhelming majority of teachers in S. African education, and which has a rosy future under a national government which may seek to impose a uniform policy in education. Natal must think as the Free State, and the Cape Peninsula as the Waterberg. The free play of ideas in education is threatened; the scientific spirit and the open mind are despised. Oddly enough, some of the most unexpected people in the education departments of S. Africa see in uniformity no evil, but an attractive easing of the administrative burden.

The Transvaal Education Department, challenged by a teachers' association on the introduction of Christian-National principles into the provincial education system, retorted that surely all S. Africans would be prepared to accept a "Christian and South African way of life." In this way, the English-speaking teacher who also professes to be a Christian is made to feel that he betrays his beliefs in his religion and his patriotism if he challenges the claims of the Calvinist groups to lay down a religious policy for the country as a whole. Now if we are not to earn Bunyan's epithets of Mr. Facing-both-ways or Mr. Any-thing, we must get our own ideas as Christians and as South Africans clear.

My Jewish colleagues will, I hope, forgive me if I leave them and the thousands of young Jewish fellow-citizens in our schools out of account in this controversy. I write, I hope, as an educationist, as a humanist, but also as a Christian. Many of us call ourselves Christians, perhaps especially when we volunteer to take the scripture lessons in high schools, but have forgotten the meaning of the word "Christian". There are others who profess to be Christians, but do not feel themselves called to give religious instruction in school, and take up a touch-line position. In the face of the advance of C.N.E., it is surely time for the Christian teacher (to make it inclusive, let us say also the 'religious' teacher) to redefine his Christianity (or religion) in terms of the present day, and for the touchline Christian to come on to the field of play.

Let us be quite fair to these people and admit humbly that in their lives they are Christians, in the best sense, concerned with the things which are true, and lovely, and of good report. They are an inspiring example to the boys and girls in their care. But in this are they any different from the non-Christian humanist, who after all, and in spite of himself, is the inheritor of the Christian tradition? Is there positive commitment in the classroom? Put at its lowest terms, there seems to be an unhappy hiatus between the Christian teacher on the one hand and the statutory requirements for religious instruction on the other. If the English-speaking Christian teacher nurtured in the liberal Christianity of his people refuses to undertake to bridge the gap, somebody else will do it — somebody incandescent with the narrow teaching of C.N.E.

The weak-kneed and the materialistic may plead for the "safe" policy of keeping religion out of the state school. America has shown us that such a policy may lead to endless subterfuges like released time, and to a "Christian" nation juggling to keep everything Christian out of the schools and yet at the same time trying to preserve the "moral" benefits of the Christian ethic. One American writer has gone so far as to say, "As the American school system is now conducted, there is no such thing as religious liberty in American education. There is liberty only to be unreligious." It seemed that many of our English-medium schools were going the same way. The scripture period was being used for everything but scripture teaching, and a variety of reasons was given for this misuse — lack of specialist teachers in the high school; lack of conviction in the teacher; the impossibility of teaching without "dogma"; scientific agnosticism; etc. More recently there seems to have been an awakened interest in up-to-date, enlightened, scripture teaching, but there is still too much emphasis on Bible history, Bible literature, Bible philosophy, etc., leading, as Professor Macmurray has pointed out, to the unwarranted assumption that there is a part of history which is not history, etc., and to the more lasting consequence that the Bible has nothing to do with a faith.

English-speaking teachers have a horror of the words "faith" and "dogma". In their often uncritically accepted scientific approach to life, they say that the "Christian faith has been discredited intellectually by such things as science, historical criticism, comparative religion, and psychology," and that religious dogmas merely land people in trouble. This is no place to reopen the controversy so-called between science and religion, but we can remind ourselves, as Prof. Coulson (formerly Rouse Ball Professor of Mathematics at the University of Oxford) points out, that science too has its presupposi-

tions, though they are often unrecognised; that science is not based on facts alone, since we have no unfailing criteria for what is either a fact or a proof; and that scientific laws develop because there is a considerable personal element inextricably involved even in their formulation. "Science is not to be regarded merely as a storehouse of facts to be used for material purposes," said Sir Richard Gregory, "but as one of the great human endeavours to be ranked with art and religion as the guide and expression of man's fearless quest for truth." A reading of Mascall's "Christian Theology and Natural Science", in which the writer, a mathematician turned churchman, grapples with the old, and new problems, will help to dispel some of the misapprehensions. Modern scholarship accepts the historical approach to the Bible and the value of a comparative study of religions, and, as Prof. Jeffreys says, modern psychology has revealed nothing that contradicts Christian doctrine. The basic teachings of the English churches in S. Africa (the dogmas, if you like) are not contradictory — they are the teachings of historic Christianity. There is a Christianity of the Church which may not necessarily be that of the churches. Anyway, it is not possible to avoid dogma in education, but "between the dogma that man is a child of God and the dogma that he is a chance assemblage of physical forces without freedom or responsibility there can be no accommodation at all, and no progress can be made until that is clear." Spencer Leeson's words, which echo similar thoughts by Martin Buber and Jacques Maritain, are a challenge to all of us. Victor Frankl, the Viennese psychiatrist, points a further danger: "When we present man as an automaton of reflexes, as a mind-machine, as a bundle of instincts, as a pawn of drives and reactions, as a mere product of instinct, heredity and environment, we feed the nihilism to which modern man is so prone." Christianity is no more for nihilism than psychology is, and, to quote Jeffreys again, "If we are to educate people to be persons and not only technical and executive instruments, we must produce people not only who do their own thinking, but who do the kind of thinking that springs from deep convictions and also constantly illuminates those convictions. A system of education through which people can reach deep and strong convictions must itself spring from convictions about the nature and destiny of man." The Christian believes he has the answer to the last, but there must never be any limitations to free enquiry. Truth must be free to set men free.

This is not a question of doctrines and creeds, peculiar or not to any particular sect. The Christian teacher does well to remember that all the law and the prophets are contained in the two great commandments: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and mind, and Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There may be other aims in our religious education — knowledge of the Bible; acceptance of Christian values; faith in God and Christ; discovery of personal beliefs; giving Christianity intellectual respect; to name but a few. But the two commandments tower over all the rest, calling the teacher to accept all the implications contained in them. They are positive commands which forbid the Christian's taking refuge in indifferentism on the deeper matters of life or querulously asking, as though he did not know the answer, "Who is my neighbour?"

"But," the cautious teacher observes, "assuming we accept the challenge and agree that we must make religious education positive, what are we going to do about the many sects and denominations found in every English-medium classroom? Perhaps it's better, after all, to do a bit of Bible history, or collect school feees, or talk about the most recent international sports tour."

It is time that this pusillanimous attitude was roundly attacked, and the attack may be launched along two lines. The first denies the alleged disunity in doctrine of the churches. The English churches in the Transvaal some years ago produced a statement of agreed belief in which it was clear that on the fundamental teachings of Christianity, the English churches stand together. As over eighty percent of the English-speaking population in the Union belong to the churches concerned (or, at any rate, say so in the census returns), the Christian teacher may be emboldened to go ahead without fear of denominationalism. Incidentally, the churches which drew up the statement all accept a modern critical approach to Bible studies, and so remove another anxiety from the scripture teacher's mind.

There is thus unity in diversity, but there is also diversity in unity, and this is the second line of attack—on soul-destroying uniformity. This point of view runs counter to both Roman Catholic and Calvinist teaching but is essentially English. English-speaking people do not want to be uniform. They are the great protestors and non-

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conformers of the world, and this diversity in unity is a heritage we must not lightly cast aside, least of all in religion. There is no desire for all to get into one kraal or laager — it's so dull, besides being fatal to man's search for truth.

Jt is fashionable to attack Christian National Education in a negative way — they shouldn't do this, and they shouldn't say that. Mere diagnosis of an illness does not automatically bring about a cure. Wherever possible, there must be positive treatment. We say we know what is wrong with C.N.E. It is possible that we can take preventive measures — isolate ourselves, or gargle meaninglessly with words. This may serve our own ends, but what about the children in our care? Surely they are worth some positive effort? Or do we feel that if we all thought the same way, then wrong would obviously be right, and we could live happily ever after? That, at any rate, is how the political arm of C.N.E. thinks. It is hardly likely that the English-speaking teacher will bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's image, however sweet the music of the sackbut and psaltery. The danger is there all the same.

EDUCATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

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should help to co-ordinate and prevent unnecessary duplication, that the state should act in full publicity in these matters, etc. It is, however, also true that private initiative may fall short of its task, that the state will have to take over where stimulation fails to elicit a satisfactory result, that the state has a right to know what is done with subventions, how it is done and to what extent the general interest has been served.

A nation in so intricate a situation as the South African knows this. Yet we must help to develop an all pervading sense of educational responsibility in all its citizens as individuals, as citizens of their country and as representatives of Western culture. Just like charity, education begins at home and educational responsibility begins with those who produced the child. There is no apology for parents — and for those who are loyal to them — to confine their educational responsibility to the home (or: the school). Educational responsibility *begins* at home but then it appears to be one of the most fundamental responsibilities of the citizen as a member of a community which finally embraces a whole world.

EDUCATION AND A CENTRALIZATION POLICY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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cation. Grants to cover at least 60%—70% of total expenditure would come from a properly-constituted central government. Each region would raise the rest of the money by taxation, but an equalisation formula would ensure that less privileged areas would not suffer.

Under this system, as is the case in England today, a number of National Advisory Councils could be established e.g. for "The Training of Teachers" and "Technical Education and Industry" and so on.

There is a need for reform in the organisation and administration of education in South Africa. Rather, however, than have unacceptable ideas and patterns of organisation foisted upon the country, it is obvious that those who fear further domination through education will cling to what they already have and will resist any change. It is clear, therefore, that the present is not the time to attempt any such change which can only result in deeper division than is unfortunately the case.

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE MORAL QUANDARY OF 1960 AFRICA

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may be accomplished sooner than the pessimist might imagine. The second disaster that has fallen on Africa is the state of neurosis into which people of all races have been led. This shows itself in an inability to choose: somewhat like the induced neurosis that modern Conditioning has produced in dogs. Indeed, the formula that neurosis was basically an inability to make a choice could hardly be gainsaid by any modern psychologist. Presented with pairs of alternatives both of which are disagreeable, the ordinary person abstains from choice and produces ultimately a conflict of indecision that can only be seen at a community level as a massive maladjustment. The tragedy lies in the fact that the choices are really manifold, and that the two offered seldom operate at an immediate and functional level at all.

This whole problem would make the theme for a national or even international conference of educationists, a departure that might well mark the beginning of new adjustments throughout African society. To the intelligent person of whole mind, Africa offers unlimited opportunities.