

EDUCATION

AND

LIFE

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EDUCATION, DEMOCRACY, AND CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLE

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It is necessary to define one's terms.

What we call "education" is the process of preparing human beings for human life—as distinct from the rearing of animals, whether by animals or by man; but its relation to that is not to be ignored. In the widest sense of the term, education lasts "from the cradle to the grave." In its narrower sense, education begins after the initial stage of complete dependence—a stage with some analogues in the animal world—and ends when the individual is launched upon an independent career. It is important to note that education cannot be separated from life—as, for instance, the making of a machine, or the building of a structure, is separate from its use. It is a commonplace that the best education is life itself; and, conversely, all life is education—the more so, the better its quality. This accounts for much anomaly, in terms of "education." A man who has had no "education" to speak of may strike one as peculiarly well educated. Another who has had every educational opportunity may seem "nothing bettered, but rather worse" (like the woman with "the issue of blood," who "had suffered many things of many physicians"!). A man's education may be blamed for what is due to failure in his own personal life; or may, on the other hand, be credited (a possibly pardonable practice of educational institutions) with success it has had little or nothing to do with. Most people get the main part of their real education from their everyday life of work and recreation—just by living, and working for their living. Much "education"—especially

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under "examination" influence—is actually detrimental. But the positive gain to those who get educational opportunity and take full advantage of it, is certainly worth far more to the community than all that is spent upon "education."

The business of educating turns primarily on what there is to educate—on the raw material of the process. You can't train a cat successfully to muster sheep; nor is it much use trying to train one breed of dog to do the kind of work another breed is adapted for; still less would one send cat or dog to school to learn "the three R's"! Inmate capacity is the first consideration. But capacity for what? That is a comparatively easy question (though with difficulties of its own) in the case of plants or animals—from which we breed wheat or wool or mutton, or sheep-dogs, or performing troupes—but it is not at all an easy question about human beings; and no very great advance has yet been made, by educational systems, in answering it.

Much, of course, is known. The semi-biological psychology of human being, in relation to animal life, has been thoroughly studied and analyzed. Man, as a super-animal, is well understood. But it is his peculiarly human characteristics, in their complete transcendence of the animal substructure, that are all-important; and these are not nearly so well understood, in relation to educational principle: his powers of thought and of language (so closely interwoven); his powers of will and purpose, issuing in reasoned action; all that can be best summed up in the phrase **powers of the spirit**. The task of education is, in its lowest terms, that of putting human beings in possession of their common human heritage, by teaching them to speak, to think consecutively, to read, to write, and to act rationally. In its highest terms, it comes face to face with the ultimate problem of human destiny. This is where the problem of education is one with the problem of religion. Much controversy has raged round the relation of these two fields of human activity—mainly because of false or inadequate

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conceptions of religion—but it is demonstrably disastrous to ignore this relationship (as is so commonly done to-day).

Religion may best be defined in terms of man's quest for ultimate meanings and values: the quest not so much of the philosopher, or even of the theologian (who is a species of philosopher), as of the ordinary man—provided we read into the word "ordinary" the richness of meaning it ought to convey in this context: a quest born of the hunger and thirst of the spirit—of reflection and curiosity and wonder and aspiration. As so defined, Religion is in no conflict with science. Man's thirst for knowledge is essentially religious. All search for truth is search for "God;" but search—or "research"—in a special field may lose much of its meaning for lack of right relation to the whole; just as the religious quest, of the whole, may fail for lack of true perspective of the parts. The discords and conflicts between Science and Religion have been mainly due to the failure of Religion to be sufficiently true to its own essential spirit. It is well that those of us who believe profoundly in religion should keep that fact prominently before our minds.

The aim of education is necessarily determined by that practical philosophy of life which is our actual religion—whatever we may profess to believe (or not to believe): the body of principle, explicit or implicit, by which we live. Could it conceivably have been kept to its humbler task, of developing the common elements of human being, education could have been made highly efficient at that task, as it certainly is not to-day; and there would have been great gain in that—up to a point. But the educator, if at all qualified for his (or her) vocation, must inevitably reach out to meet the larger demands of the human spirit, differing in some measure—greater or less—from individual to individual; and, so, education has necessarily been faced with the problem of the balance between efficiency and expansion. A system of education expanding efficiently, in response to spiritual need, from initial efficiency, would, of course, be a thoroughly sound system. Examples of such

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development of education are not altogether unknown. But in education as we know it to-day, efficiency has been sacrificed to expansion; and, naturally, therefore, the expansion itself has not been well-conceived. True education must necessarily be determined by the potentialities of the human "raw material," in relation to the whole scheme of things. A comprehensive practical philosophy of life—that is to say, true religion—is its essential basis. And that is where our chief difficulty lies to-day. For, no such comprehensive practical philosophy is characteristic of present-day civilisation. Short range ambitions of comfort and pleasure for the individual, in a social order mutually agreed upon for such ends—these are the only recognisable general principles of our civilisation; and they are principles of super-animal, rather than of truly human (i.e., of spiritual), life. Subject to this elementary pagan type of religion, individuals and groups are at liberty to take what measures they please for the realisation of nobler aspirations; and that is, of course, what saves the situation; but it is not enough. Mankind has never achieved true greatness, in any age, except in response to some high common purpose and ideal. Yet man—obviously—had never within his grasp such possibilities of greatness as beckon him to-day, if he would but rise to the level of that spirit which actually informs all his amazing practical and scientific achievements (but does not save them from vulgarisation and degradation).

The writer believes that in Christian principle alone is to be found the necessary "comprehensive practical philosophy of life." If this be not agreed, it will serve at least as a challenge to produce some other "philosophy" which is more practical, more comprehensive, more vital—and equally plain in its meaning: some alternative scheme of things which puts first what matters most, and gets all the rest into right proportion and perspective. But nothing is more in need of definition than "Christian principle," seeing that it has been overlaid to such an extent with dogmatic theology and doctrinal teaching, much of

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which has little claim to the title "Christian" when that term is accurately used. By Christian principles will here be meant the simple essentials sifted from the Gospels of the New Testament (with their Old Testament background)—simple, but incomparably profound.

The most fundamental of these principles is that the key to the universe is "spirit"—meaning that which is characteristically human. It is a commonsense principle, which mankind has been in quest of—intuitively—right from the earliest beginnings of which we have any knowledge. If this is not the key, then there is no key for us: for, every other line of approach brings us, inevitably, back to this. But mankind, even at its greatest—except in prophetic Israel—merely groped after this truth, as we can see in India to-day a people of exceptional religious genius still groping after it. Israel alone formulated this principle with the conviction of certainty. Her prophetic soul was not content to rest in the quite inadequate idea of a glorified human being—or group of such beings—in some fanciful way behind the external order; but leapt to the Infinite, in terms of spirit, as the ultimate secret of the universe—to the conception of Creative Spirit, in and through all things, in which we "live and move and have our being." The human spirit is the route to Ultimate Reality—the only possible route for us, but actually a possible route. Should that Reality be found in experience, all else must necessarily be viewed in relation thereto. Man is explicable in terms of God—not God in terms of man. That was the great contribution of Israel to the practical philosophy which we call religion.

This principle implies that the universe is to be thought of in terms of Knowledge and Thought and Will and Purpose—and of Action based upon these; but not in terms of these merely as we know them in ourselves. We have to cultivate a sense of something infinitely greater, of which the human spirit is a finite adumbration—or "image." Scientific achievement powerfully supports the idea expressed in this principle. The finding of rationality in the external world—the re-construction, in scientific theory,

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of external order—implies an existent construction, or "erection," which is not less than rational, however much more. It is the infinitely more, to which the genius of Israel leapt, that we are apt to forget—and the baffling mystery of the Infinite, which of necessity remains, however far man may penetrate its depths.

On this fundamental hypothesis, human being takes on a new dignity. Its qualities and characteristics are no longer the accidents, or semi-accidents, of the materialist, but have eternal—absolute—value and significance. That is an immediate corollary of the hypothesis. Human "talent" is of the very structure of reality. And the function of Education is neither more nor less than the development and "production" of human talent. What is there "in" the human individual? What are his possibilities, and how can they be realised? What is his true relation to human society? What are the possibilities of human society, and how are they to be realised? What is the relation of human society to the whole spiritual order of the universe? These are the essential problems of education; and until some progress has been made with the solving of them, Education must remain what we know it, the Cinderella of the family of Learning. Human talent is a bedrock fact. Its functioning in human society, as we know it—a human society which prides itself on the discovery of "efficiency" as a human principle—is tragically inefficient. Everyone who thinks, knows that this is true. Hardly anyone seems to believe that the situation can be appreciably altered.

We are apt to think of human talent in individual terms, because of the bad habit of accepting as normal its use by the individual for his own ends. This is fundamentally unsocial; it is certainly un-Christian; and it strikes at the roots of human talent in ultimate reality. An isolated human unit is hardly human. The absolute necessity for upbringing—which is no such absolute necessity of the animal world—makes that clear. A human baby left to itself after birth simply dies, whatever potentialities of greatness we may imagine locked up in its soul. The whole

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history of mankind is the history of social organisation and of social inheritance. It is in a social order, of some sort, that human talent comes to fruition. If eternal meaning is to be found in human talent, that meaning is social, not merely individual. The ultimate meaning is to be found, not in the individual as such, but in the endowment of human society, as a whole, with the talents of all its members. We are, obviously, "members of one another;" A is necessary to B, C, D,, and B, C, D, to A; they have complementary talents; each is for all, and all for each. That is merely the elementary commonsense which is the basis of political economy.

This brings us to the second great Christian principle, viz. that the true meaning of life for the individual is to be found only in explicit relation to other individuals—and, ultimately, in relation to human society as a whole: a principle just beginning to emerge into practical world policies. There is in human nature a powerful animal strain of "self," which, when given rein, takes much uglier form in man than in the animal world. In the semi-paganism of our civilisation, we take it as a matter of course that men of exceptional talent should direct that talent to self-interest and self-advancement. The utmost we expect is that a man shall recognise obligations to society as well as to himself: to do more is to be a visionary idealist! Christian principle cuts right across this. It insists on denial of self—not in the negative sense of what is usually meant by "self-denial," but in the powerfully positive sense that one's simple duty is to find the meaning and use of one's "talents," be they great or small, in corporate social life. Conversely, it requires of society—functioning through education, and otherwise—that it provide opportunity for full development and proper use of the talents of its individual members. ("Each is for all, and all for each.") It may be noted in passing, as a significant fact, that the latter of these obligations is recognised, in principle, in public systems of education (primary, secondary, and university); and that political leaders are even ventur-

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ing to suggest that the individual who benefits by such a system has a duty to do something, in return, for the community!

It will probably be agreed that a system of education based uncompromisingly on this Christian principle, of unstinted obligation both ways, would be enormously more successful than anything we have yet seen—could we begin to imagine mankind capable of rising to such levels of altruism. No one believes very enthusiastically in our present systems of education. Is it not obvious that they could be raised at once to an altogether different level, by an appeal for educators with a vocation to train youths to lives of vocation, and by restoration of proper dignity and honour to this essentially most honourable of the professions? The principle of self-interest has been abundantly discredited by its fruits, writ large across the face of the earth. And all that is best, in us all, revolts against it, as essentially inhuman (or, at least, inhumane). What deters us from casting out the false principle, in favour of the true?

This brings us to a third great Christian principle: the principle of "faith." The fact that the Christian practical philosophy is not generally accepted does not absolve the individual who believes in it from living by it. According to this philosophy, the forces of the universe are with the life of Christian principle. There are certainly mighty powers against—that is what we can plainly see—but "the powers that be", for us, are mightier far, they are infinitely mightier, than those that be against: that is, if the philosophy is actually true; it is a question, this, of "faith," not of "sight." ("The things that are seen are temporal; the things that are unseen are eternal.") "The stars in their courses fight" for what is fundamentally right. A man, who is worth calling a man, should "back his life" on the best he knows. Here is the principle of adventure, known to be so necessary to real living. Note the word "adventure," not foolhardiness, which is how the man-in-the-street would regard it. Adventure that makes men

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great needs more commonsense—much more—than ordinary humdrum living; and it needs more capacity to learn, and learn quickly, from experience. Is it not time we were saying to all our youth: Form your own judgment as to what is really best; and then get out on the adventure of living by, and for, these things—with open minds to learn from experience, both of the truth of your principles and of your own capacity to meet their demands? With the War still fresh in our memories, need we doubt that a sufficient body of men and women—the women marching shoulder to shoulder with the men—can be found to blaze out the trail to a nobler life? We make the great blunder of not asking big enough things from youth—that is, if we really want such things from them.

All this has an obvious bearing on the problem of modern democracy. For democracy means government of the people by themselves ("government of the people, by the people, for the people"); and government means just the ordering of human society for its functioning as an organic whole. If the Christian "practical philosophy" be actually the true philosophy of life, the democratic principle will clearly be fundamental: human society when functioning rightly will be an organic spiritual unity, in which each part shall have complete freedom of the spirit for its full share in the life of the whole—an organic social unity such as "eye hath not seen, nor hath ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive."

And it is indeed significant that, despite all its obvious defects and disadvantages in society as at present conceived, democracy has been found a safer and a sounder form of government than any other. Even under conditions which are quite adverse, its fundamental soundness as human principle gives it the advantage over forms which appear on the surface to be much better adapted to the conditions. The reaction, here and there in the world to-day, against democratic principle, is not to be wondered at. The misfit of democracy to present day civilisation is all too obvious; and yet the dictatorships and despotisms are confirming the

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more stable communities in their democratic convictions, while throwing a glare of light upon the deeper human failure to which the failures of democracy are due.

On the other hand, there is experience available* of bodies of men—or of men and women—on a Christian democratic basis, that is to say, on a basis on which appeal to Christian principle can demand to be heard. And the soundness and wisdom of the collective judgments of these bodies is simply amazing—not because their members are of exceptional ability, or even of very exceptional character, but simply because of sincerity, and a common will to do the right thing, and guidance of sound principle: judgments, on occasion, much sounder (as proved in subsequent experience) than those of their own ablest members, or of committees of their ablest. Not that this implies that leadership is either unnecessary or unimportant. On the contrary, it is an absolutely essential contributing factor to the remarkable results indicated. For, the supreme collective judgment of the many is dependent upon effective leadership of the few; not, however, in the bad old sense that these few impose their ideas or their will upon the many. The true function of leadership in such bodies is to prepare the ground thoroughly, and to clear the issues. Confused issues, presented to any democratic body, inevitably produce worse confusion, and may lead to any result but the right one. Leadership which does not seek to dominate, but to serve with ability—and with true humility—is of the very genius of true democracy. Under guidance of Christian principle, *vox populi* may justly claim to be *vox Dei*.

These are but suggestions of the possibilities inherent in the human spirit, on the basis of Christian principle—operating both in education and in life. Do they correspond to reality, or are they mere figments of abnormal imagination? Perhaps the answer may itself be put best

*—Here the writer is using definite experience of his own, over a considerable period, on public bodies in Australia.

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in the form of questions. Does not commonsense, if only directed to the essential (not the superficial) facts of life, demand some such practical philosophy as has been outlined? Does not everyone who thinks about his or her own life, in relation to the whole scheme of things, get driven back upon such a "philosophy"—or upon chaotic irrationality? Is there any other scientific hypothesis that fits all the facts so well as this Christian philosophy? Is it not time that we took to learning about life from the only Man whose life and thought command the reverence and allegiance of the true-hearted everywhere?

This is an essay in ideas and principles. No apology need be offered for that fact. Until these have been got right, nothing else is of much avail. If they can be got right, the rest will follow.

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