

II

SOUTHERN AFRICAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

PASTORAL LETTER

THE FUTURE OF OUR MISSION SCHOOLS

To be read in all Churches on Sunday, 12th December, 1954

Dearly beloved brethren in Christ,

The record of recent events concerning Bantu Education in our country makes it abundantly clear that the Catholic Church, manifesting her attitude through the voice of the Bishops, has not ceased to be the solicitous mother and the careful guardian of her children. In the midst of an atmosphere of bitter verbal strife, of misunderstanding and misinterpretation, of allegation and counter-allegation, the Catholic Church, with calm serenity and untiring charity, has striven by every means to reach a conclusion which would be satisfactory to the church, to the State and to the parents of our Bantu children. If the efforts of the Bishops have not as yet met with the desired results, this does not mean that Catholics will be less ready in the future than they have been in the past to strive, in a spirit of friendly co-operation, for good order in society and for the happy security of all the people. We may never allow ourselves to be less than Catholic in our thoughts and deeds. Even when our principles are misunderstood and we are deprived of what we consider due to us in the matter of education, such as the right to establish Catholic schools wherever they are required, and the right to a fair share in the public revenues allotted to education, we may never descend to hatred or recrimination or to any course of conduct which is not in accord with the spirit of Christ. That very spirit which urges charity and forbearance upon us forbids us, nevertheless, to yield on principle. The Catholic Church in South Africa, therefore, maintains its right to continue helping parents in the education of their children. "Catholic Education consists essentially in preparing man for what he must be and for what he must do here below in order to attain the sublime end for which he was created." (Pope Pius XI). Though the state has certain recognised rights and obligations in the sphere of education, it is the Church, and the Church alone, which possesses the competence to define the scope and guide the progress of Christian Education. The Catholic Church insists, moreover, that "parents have, by nature, the right to instruct their children; that they have also the duty to ensure that the child's education and training shall conform to the purpose for which God gave them their offspring, and they must energetically resist any invasion of their rights in this sphere. Their rights cannot be surrendered. They are prior to any right of civil society or of the State and, for that reason, they may not be infringed by any power on earth." (Pope Pius XI).

The mere fact that a school gives some religious instruction does not bring it into accord with the rights of the Church or of the Christian family, or make it a fit place

for the Christian education of our young people. **To satisfy the demands of the Catholic Church, it is necessary that all the teaching and the whole spirit of their teaching and the whole organisation of the school, its teachers and the whole spirit of teaching, be regulated by a truly Christian spirit, under the direction and supervision of the Church.** Religion must be foundation and the crown of youth's entire training. For this reason, in the words of Pope Leo XIII, "it is necessary not only that the religious instruction be given to the young at certain fixed times, but also that every other subject taught be permeated with Christian piety. If this is wanting, if this sacred atmosphere does not pervade and warm the hearts of masters and pupils alike, little good can be expected from any kind of learning, and considerable harm will often be the consequence."

It is with deep regret that we have noted the reluctance of the State to give our Catholic Mission schools any guarantee of continued financial support, though this could well be done in harmony with the provisions of the Bantu Education Act. The withdrawal of grants from our schools, whether wholly or in part, must inevitably result in hardships and a tremendous increase in calls for sacrifice on the part of parents and their children. Our hearts go out also to the devoted teachers who have given splendid service to the cause of Catholic Education and who find themselves now faced with the most painful choice. We know that whatever decision they will have to take in relation to their future livelihood, at heart they will remain one with us in our struggle for the Catholic schools.

In times of crisis and of special difficulty, it has always been the mark of true Catholics to unite their forces in a spirit of extraordinary mutual assistance and of generous self-sacrifice. Such a time has now come for the Catholics of South Africa. United as we are in one Faith and sharing together in the same Life of Christ, we cannot say that our Catholic mission schools are not our concern because we are not parents or because we are not Africans. On the contrary, we realise now more than before that our Catholic mission schools belong intimately to the Catholic life of the whole of South Africa.

We who have committed ourselves, by our very profession of Faith, to co-operate, under grace, in the consolidation and in the extension of Christ's Kingdom on earth, can have no doubt about the importance and the necessity of our mission schools. As South Africans, too, we can make no greater contribution to the moral prosperity of our country than by a concerted and continuous determination to bring the genuine teaching and the influence of Christ into the heart of African life through the length and breadth of land.

With unbounded confidence, therefore, in the genuine charity and apostolic zeal of our Catholics of all races, We the Bishops of South Africa, to whom the care and responsibility of the Church in this country has been committed by divine mandate, do now call on all our faithful sons and daughters everywhere to redouble their prayers for the success of our cause, invoking especially the aid of that Holy Mother, who, under the title of her glorious Assumption, has been given us as our special Patroness and Protector. We call upon all, to demonstrate their faith and loyalty by a generous and sustained response to the appeal that we launch for the support of our African schools.

In the first place we establish “The Catholic Mission Schools’ Fund,” which from this date until further notice will be open to receive contributions. These may be sent directly to the headquarters of the Fund, namely the General Secretariate of the Bishops’ Conference, Pretoria, or they may be made through your own parish Priest and Bishop.

Secondly, we decree that a special fund-raising effort be made each year to be known as “The Catholic Education Drive.” The proceeds of this Drive will be allocated both to the mission schools and to the regional seminaries according to their requirements.

We know that our Catholic people are generally not rich in this world’s goods, but we know also the strength of their faith and the dept of their charity. The present crisis of our African Schools is a challenge to our loyalty and self-sacrifice. The struggle may be long and arduous, the immediate results discouraging, but we know that with God’s help and the prayers of Mary, our heavenly Mother and Patroness, we will triumph in the end. We will come through the present difficulties, stronger in the faith of Christ, more fixed in hope and trust, more united than ever before in the life of grace and charity that flows from our crucified King and Saviour.

Given at Pretoria on the feast of St. Andrew the Apostle this thirtieth day of November, 1954, and signed on behalf of the Southern African Hierarchy by the members of the Administrative Board of the Bishops’ Conference.

Denis Eugene Hurley, O.M.I.,
ARCHBISHOP OF DURBAN.

Owen McCann,
ARCHBISHOP OF CAPE TOWN.

William Patrick Whelan, O.M.I.,
ARCHBISHOP OF BLOEMFONTEIN.

Johan Riegler, M.F.S.C.,
BISHOP OF LYDENBURG.

Gerard Norbert van Velsen, O.P.,
BISHOP OF KROONSTAD.