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EDUCATION LEAGUE

(OPVOEDINGSBOND)

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I. DUNCAN HALL SYMPOSIUM ON CHRISTIAN-NATIONAL EDUCATION.

At this symposium, held on June 9th., the F.A.K. was represented by Prof. J. Chris. Coetzee (P.U.C.), Ds. G.D. Worst (Chairman of the Nederduits Herv. of Geref. Kerk) and Mnr. A.F. Weich (General Sec. of the F.A.K.). The Education League was represented by Mr Guy Butler (W.U.), Rev. W.H. Kinsey (Presbyterian Church) and Dr A.E.H. Bleksley (W.U.). Chairman: Prof. Wagner (W.U.).

The main speech of the evening was made by Prof. Coetzee. For the information of members, we quote from a verbatim report the chief points raised, adding a critical commentary:

I.i.) "This educational policy has been developed from a particular point of view — that of the Calvinists. That is not the only point of view in life: there are many points of view in life of equal validity with Calvinism."

We doubt whether Prof. Coetzee realised the implications of this concession: for if other philosophies are of equal validity with Calvinism, why does the I.C.N.O. pamphlet claim (Art. 9.) that non-Christian teachers are a "deadly danger" to the Afrikaner? This seems to us merely a debating point, for the proposition that mutually exclusive philosophies are of equal validity is untenable in theory and inapplicable in practice (see also 3i. below).

I.ii) "I know that people have said that science studied from a Calvinistic point of view is poor, antiquated, dishonest, medieval. I contend that this is not the case. The science that we study is closely related to our point of view in life. There are many points of view; I will just mention a few." Prof. Coetzee then mentioned Plato's idealism, Aristotle's realism and Dewey's pragmatism, and asked, regarding each, "Is his philosophy of education (sic) poor, dishonest, antiquated or medieval because it is based on his view of life?"

This disguised tautology, with its shift from "science" to "education", begs the more fruitful question as to what will result from the practical application of particular details of a given plan for education. This is the question which concerns us as parents and teachers.

I.iii) "This policy is intended for Calvinists and for nobody else."

We would remind our readers that nowhere in the I.C.N.O. pamphlet is the phrase "Afrikaans-speaking children" qualified or restricted. Further, Prof. Coetzee had before him at the symposium his own clear statement made in Common Sense in September, 1941: "Speaking only for the Afrikaans section, there will be only two types of schools: one for the Afrikaans children and one for the English children. Practically all Afrikaans children belong to one of the three Dutch Reformed Churches, with the same confession; thus for us only one type of school: Afrikaans-medium, Dutch Reformed Confession. For the English section there may be more." (Our emphasis).

Second, even were this policy intended only for Calvinists we should reject it, since, in the words of Mr Weich, it is still intended that "the State must bear the major part of the costs" of maintaining these schools. As the Rev. Kinsey observed, "Under this arrangement the racial stream will be fed with public money which we will supply".

...../Finally

Finally, this apparent contraction of F.A.K. aims would have been more reassuring if Prof. Coetzee had at the same time repudiated their ambition to impose C.N.E. on the non-Europeans. Cf. Articles 14 & 15, e.g. "We believe that the teaching and education of the native must be grounded in the life-and-world-view of the whites, more especially that of the Boer nation as the senior white trustee of the native".

2.i) "I will be the first person to applaud any other philosophy of education developed by sincere persons, by believers or non-believers... because what I ask for myself I must be willing to grant to other men."

How does this blanket tolerance accord with the sentiments expressed in Articles 14 & 15, mentioned above? And what Bureau of Standards can take the measure of "sincerity"? These queries apart, if Prof. Coetzee is here advocating a system of state-financed schools for all — Catholics, Jews, Protestants and unbelievers — we should resist that also: Mr Butler said at the symposium that "we object to apartheid imposed as a matter of principle between English and Afrikaans children, as though each carried a germ deadly to the other"; we should like to add that we object even more strongly to the denominational apartheid proposed by Prof. Coetzee, on the grounds that such a system would have the effect of projecting the schisms of the Church upon every other aspect of our communal life.

2.ii) "If there were any Government in South Africa or in the world that were to make this policy compulsory, I would be the first to fight that Government because (it) would not fulfil my idea of a democracy. A democracy has in it people of many philosophies of life, and no single philosophy must be made compulsory or a State philosophy!"

Again, we reject any atomisation of our Government School system, for we believe that it would the more securely entrench those smaller group barriers which it is the business of the democratic State to break down. Racial and national prejudices are not inherited: it would be tragic indeed if these were now not only to be perpetuated in our homes, but even fostered in our State schools — and this in the name of an all-tolerant Democracy. We cannot accept a "tolerance" whose consequence must be mutual antagonisms and aggressions based on mutual ignorance. In any case, neither State nor parents should allow the teaching of history, civics, geography and science to degenerate into the handing down of "philosophies".

3. ) "The scientific character of a .. philosophy of education does not follow from the starting point of the thinker. It does not matter from what point of view you start. That is your right as a ... freedom-loving human being: you have the right in democratic society to start from your own point of view. That does not make you unscientific. But what does make you unscientific is that when you have started you do not apply the art of thought in developing the system."

By the "art of thought" Prof. Coetzee apparently means untested ratiocination — untested, i.e., by constant checking and re-checking against all available facts. On his assumption it would be "scientific" to build up a complex body of "thought" on the "point of view" that the microscope was invented by the Devil. That Prof. Coetzee is indeed unaware of the techniques and disciplines of the scientific method (of the difference between deduction and induction) is further suggested by his exposition of Calvinist science: "One of our anthropologists discovered at Sterkfontein the remains of some living being of hundreds of thousands of years ago. He got the parts: the only thing he can do with these things is to apply the art of thought to (them) and then try to construct a living being, which he calls either an ape-man or a man-ape —

...../that is

that is his right because he sees things like that, because it is his standpoint. But I claim that I can explain these remains in an equally exact way by stating that (they) are the remains of a being either man or animal, and if I accept that these remains are of a human being I say that this is an illustration... of degeneration after the Fall: and that is just as scientific as the other one, because he has no proof and I have no proof. We deduce from what we find, in the light of our standpoints, certain things.... It is not the starting-point but the method employed on research that matters."

It is not true that the only thing one can do with physical objects is to apply the "art of thought" to them, e.g. to rationalise them into one of two compartments ("ape" or "man"), when a third ("ape-man") is at least suggested by simple observation. Another weakness of Prof. Coetzee's argument is that, unlike the theory of Creation, the theory of evolution is not a starting-point but a turning point, a generalisation arrived at after a long series of observations. Certainly, it is "the method that matters" — and the empirical method is the only satisfactory method of determining the validity and predictive usefulness of "points of view" and "starting points", however consistent or sincere the rationalisations proceeding from them. Professor Coetzee might be less frequently driven to the defensive if he would agree, with Dr Bleksley, that the concept "God's Truth" is a tautology: for surely it is inconsistent to reject the empirical method in the wider domains of physics and biology, while trusting your daily security to its developing predictive powers in the dependent fields of engineering and medicine.

It might be altogether less confusing "to accept the revelations of science as the revelations of God" (Rev. Kinsey).

4.) "Our education has been called autocratic or doctrinaire. I think this arises from the fact that we hold a very clear-cut conception of discipline (...I am not speaking in a sense of haughtiness; I know there are other points of view and others have high views). In Calvinistic philosophy the problem of discipline amounts to this: we acknowledge only one ... absolute authority, and that is God. All authority on earth we call borrowed, delegated authority. That authority has been given to me by God... I must exercise that authority and if I do not, I disobey, according to my point of view, the Law of God..... A Calvinist can never be autocratic because he stands on the authority of God, and he has to confess... how he has exercised that authority given to him."

Mr Butler: "I am surprised that there is no admission here or in the pamphlet that such authority can be abused: is the Will of God an open book to the writers of this pamphlet?"

Prof. Coetzee: " Mr Butler has said that we think the Will of God has been specifically opened to us. That hurt me. If you cannot accept my sincerity you will never unite with me."

We cannot agree that sincerity is a sufficient guide to responsible conduct. In claiming responsibility to God "according to my point of view" Prof. Coetzee is repudiating other points of view as necessary checks upon that fallibility which is common to all men. Mr Butler reminded the I.C.N.O. that "the antithesis between the Kingdom of God and the Empire of Darkness (which according to their pamphlet must be made the basis of all history teaching) runs also through Nationalism, which is itself corruptible, human, and liable to error and exploitation". This seems to us an example of necessary and valuable criticism: the I.C.N.O. representatives ignored it.

5.) Mr Butler: "Is this policy fundamentalist, and are all Afrikans schools going to have the fundamentalist approach to the teaching of science and the Bible?"

...../ Prof. Coetzee:

Prof. Coetzee: "First, fundamentalists are all (sic) Baptists and we are not; secondly, fundamentalists are believers in the millennium, and we are not.... Their religion does not influence their science or their science their religion."

There are, certainly, many differences between the beliefs of Baptists and Calvinists. Here, however, is how our dictionary defines fundamentalism: "Strict adherence to what are regarded as fundamental principles, especially in religion; specifically, a firm belief in the Biblical account of the Creation and total rejection of evolution, and of the Darwinian theory of the origin of species".

6.) Mr Butler: "Prof. Coetzee has objected to the Conscience Clause, but such a safeguard is necessary because a teacher should never be forced to resort to hypocrisy in order to keep his post."

Ds. Worst: "If Mr Butler can tell me there are no hypocrites at present, I will agree with him."

We do not think it would be a good idea to increase the number of hypocrites.

7.) Mr Butler: "You say in your pamphlet, Article 6 (5): 'Every nation is rooted in its own soil which is allotted to it by the Creator'. Where in the Bible do we learn to whom South Africa was allotted?"

This question was not answered at the symposium, but the authority cited by a C.N.O. supporter at an earlier meeting was Acts 17. xxvi., which reads: "And (God) hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation". St. Paul, a Jew, was here claiming the right to preach among the Greeks, a people not his own, on the grounds that all nations of men are "of one blood". The selection of a subsidiary phrase ("the bounds of their habitation") to justify the 'point of view' that nations are to be forever separate ('ultimate diversities') seems to us an example of that eclecticism, that "choosing here and choosing there", specifically forbidden in the I.C.N.O. pamphlet.

We are not theologians, however, so must rest our case on the evidence of history: on the known facts of the migration of peoples, the mingling of cultures and of languages.

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## II. PRETORIA BRANCH FORMED.

A Pretoria Branch of the Education League was formed on 23rd. May. Chairman: Mr D.S. Prinsloo; Vice-Chairman: Mr Sapirstein; Hon. Sec: Miss R.G. Farley; Hon. Treas: Mr A.W. Stead.

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## III. FORTHCOMING MEETINGS.

Tuesday, 28th June at 8 p.m. in the Masonic Hall, Rosebank.

Tuesday, 19th July at 8 p.m. at Kimberley (arranged by the Kimberley N.C.W.) Main speaker: Miss C. van Heyningen.

Tuesday, 9th August at 8 p.m. at the Nobel Hall, Tramway St., Turffontein. Speakers to be announced later.

CORRECTION: The protest meeting held at Parkview was called by a group of parents of the Parkview Senior and Junior Schools, and not by the Parent-Teacher Association.

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