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One Coin in Three Fountains: The Educational Role of Church, State and Family¹

JAMES J. McMAHON

I

EVERY man who is born into the world is either actually or potentially by that fortunate fact initiated into three societies. No consent of his is required. Save at one, no induction ceremonies are necessary. His title to membership in each of them is simple and sole, birth. In the gentle custody of his mother's arms he is ushered into domestic society. The state stamps the day of his birth on its civil register, officializing thereby his civil status and granting him the dubious privilege of one day paying his income tax. Lastly, the mysteriously symbolic water of baptism, flowing perchance into his tear-filled eyes, thrusts him with dramatic promptitude into the society of the Church.

Like three rings on his fingers or three crowns on his head, this threefold membership makes him at once son of the household, citizen of the commonwealth and member of the Church.

Because these three societies give shape and substance to our lives, it will do us no harm for the purposes of this paper to scrutinize each of them for a moment. We can search out

¹ Paper read at the Seminar on Home and Community Education conducted under the auspices of the Ateneo de Cagayan at Cagayan de Oro City, 23-25 November 1956.

their origin, determine the purpose of each association and evaluate their relative capacities to realize the magnificent potentialities of their new member.

II

Primary in the order of time and of nature is the family. When Juan and Maria with palpitating hearts pledge fidelity to each other until death, they are (understandably) oblivious to the fact that they are thereby inaugurating conjugal society. "The alchemy of love" they well might say if one would rashly inquire into the reason for this eagerness to perpetuate their mutual bliss: but that answer would be only half correct. It explains why *this* Juan marries *this* Maria. But if *this* Maria had not been available and willing, would it not have been in normal conditions another Maria or Fe or Dulce or Luz? Would not the same assumption be true for Juan?

The fact is that there is a greater and deeper alchemy operative in human nature; an alchemy which is instinctive, urgent, imperative even (though not universally so) and co-extensive with mankind. It is radicated within the very structure of humanity, fabricated, "built in" as it were, when his compound of clay and spirit was united. This insistent voice which is resident in the tissue of his being urges him without conscious reflex deliberation on his part to mate with his own kind.

When this instinct is actualized in two specific individuals a double human objective is on the way to accomplishment. First, the personal and subjective aspirations of a man and woman for self-completion and integration of personality on a warm human level are realized. Second, in the very flowering of personal and highly individualized ambitions, nature unobtrusively consummates its own intention: the prolongation and multiplication of the human race and the foundation of the human family. The history of man testifies that through all the highly colored realm of romance in all races and civilizations, the golden thread of nature is continually renewing itself in family life. It is aptly epitomized in the mother's reflection to her curious daughter: *que será, será*.

The family then is the primary social cell, and not only in time and nature but much more so in stature. It outranks all other natural social units because it is more effectively equipped to satisfy the deepest needs of man. Although individually free, it is socially compelling with a necessity not originated by man but only discovered by him as part of his human constitution.

The purpose of the family then is threefold. First, to be the biological and moral cell of human society; second, to educate the children; third, to provide its members with the necessities of mind and body for an ordered life. To achieve these purposes suitably and effectively the family unit has the necessary efficacious equipment, namely love and authority.

III

The little that is known of the ancient *barangay* of the Philippines reveals that it had all the characteristics of a political community. It consisted of many families united together under the supreme authority of the *datu*. They sought to supplement by their common activity their individual deficiencies and limitations. They were willing to yield some of their personal rights for the greater good of the *barangay*: not merely for defense against external aggression (itself a very potent motive) but for the greater share in the economic, cultural and recreational aspects of the good life which their organization would bring. It was quite natural for them to do so, for all men have an instinctive dislike for too much solitude. Solitude ties the tongue and generally leaves the mind to feed upon itself in a species of mental suicide.

There is evidence in Panay of the beginnings of confederation among the *barangays* of that settlement. Such development seems quite natural—an even greater good would come to them from such association even though the particular chief must yield some of his authority in favor of a greater authority so that the advantages would be mutually greater. This too they did quite naturally, realizing that they must not be a

confused and confusing mass of people laboring at cross-purposes but that the principle of order finding expression in the law would unite, direct and discipline their common endeavor and reap for all of them the reward of peace and prosperity.

The state has then, like the family, a natural birth. It is generated by the deep and fundamental need of man to give fuller expression to all his abilities. And no matter how large it may become and how complex its machinery and how distant from the individual, it must not forget its end. It is still a confederation of many families giving it authority and assistance to help them. It is true that with the organization of the state, there is a distinct and separate entity with its own purpose and inner laws of development, but the roots are in the family and thus they make the state supplementary, subsidiary to the needs of the family and through the family to the needs of man. Do we not say "the state is made for man. not man for the state"? In the ultimate core of its own being the state is bonded to the service of man.

We experience the state on the municipal, provincial and national levels of government. However in the range of history it has worn many vestments: the democratic city-states of the Greeks, the absolutism of the great Caesars, the oligarchies of the Renaissance, the imperialism of Bonaparte, democracy in America, monarchy in Cambodia, distributism in Portugal. All of these various forms are like the coat of many colors given to Joseph by his father, diverse facets of one deep-running reality, the insistent recurring requirement of man for self-perfection in the community.

The state and man then are united in a fruitful wedding in which the enormous power (and in our day the almost incredible organization) of the state is meant to minister to man. The state, like the family, has the equipment to achieve its purpose: the authority to impose order expressed in the laws and the effective sanction of the police. If it does its job faithfully and efficiently, it can approach Thomas More's Utopia. If it does not, you well might have the streets of Budapest.

IV

Writing to his Hebrew brethren at the dawn of Christianity, St. Paul said, "In other days and in diverse ways God spoke to us by the Prophets; in these latter days He has spoken to us by His Son." In the great circle of the world beyond the rim of theocratic Palestine, God spoke to our ancestors too. His voice was heard in the wind and the thunder of the sea and the storm. His vitality was present though hidden in the singing bird and flower-bright bush. His goodness overflowed in the harvest of the maternal earth and the bountiful river and lake. His beauty was glimpsed in the tranquil and majestic swing of the stars. His strength revealed itself in flood and famine, in earthquake and volcanic eruption.

And primitive man aware of all these omens bowed his head to adore and plead. He sacrificed his prized possessions to placate. Sometimes he made horrible mistakes and blasphemous errors, but the basic impulse rising from his humanity and interpreted by his dim and fragile knowledge was the voice of God.

To abolish the error, to purify and elevate the ritual and to mend the torn garment of humanity, God, as St. Paul said, sent His Son into the world of time. He sent Him not only to the Jews but to all humanity, for the saving of all men of all ages and all races. The errors are erased by His words preserved in the Gospels, and all the deepest wisdom of man is gathered there in its fountainhead. In the ritual of His Supper and Cross all the frantic offerings of grain and grape, of beast and human blood were cleansed of their imperfections and destroyed in their fulfillment. A supernatural focus, a religious society was built upon Peter and the other eleven Apostles.

The purpose of this society was to establish order amid the endless vagaries and religious aberrations of mankind. This it must do by uniting men into a visible community, the Catholic Church. The principle of order—and authority—in the Church was bestowed upon Peter and his successors. Theirs would be the task of using that authority to unite, direct and

discipline the members. To render the authority itself universal and impregnable in the field of doctrine and moral behavior, it was stamped and sealed with the quality of infallibility.

Order is to be established not for order's sake, as if the Church were but a colossal clerk, but because the order she wishes to impose is to insure man's eternal felicity. Her order then is an instrument, sure and efficacious.

Now, as Aristotle teaches, in all human activity the end in view or the purpose to be achieved is the primary principle of action. Since this is so, all other forms of human interest and activity must be sacrificed if necessary if they threaten the fruition of the end. This is only common sense and this is what the Church means when she says with her Founder, "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul?" And the end is worthy, the Church says, of such arduous renunciation. For eternal felicity consists not in the frustrations of the Grecian hades nor the melancholy gloom of Elysian fields nor in the sensual license of a Moorish paradise but an entrancing face-to-face communion with God.

How in this society do the members cooperate? By the submissive acceptance by faith of the teaching of Peter and his successors. The articles of faith—the Apostles' Creed—like glittering diamonds newly possessed, arouse joyful hope in the promises they make and, joyfully united, faith and hope go out in lavish and prodigal charity. "My brethren," said St. John, "love one another." This society then, like the family and the state, is well equipped to accomplish its purpose. It too has authority—not human only but divine. It has also not human love as the family, not human power as the state, but that awful ruthless, invincible charity of God: "As I have loved you, you also love one another." The symbol of brotherly love is the crucifix: that is why we attach it to the wall in a Catholic classroom.

V

From the foregoing I hope that a few conclusions are warranted.

First, though each society is independent in its own sphere, they intertwine about a common subject, man. They

form a trinity, as it were, deriving from a common unity in a way like three springs of water welling from one source.

A second conclusion: the most important of the three is the Church. First, because its direct and immediate author is God, whereas God, operating through the social nature of man is only indirectly the origin of family and civic community. Second, the concern of the Church is not only with time but much more with eternity, for which time is but a prelude transient but tremendous. Family and civic life on the other hand find their completion in this world and will gracefully give way in the eventual dissolution of time to the universal community of (to use a biblical metaphor) the blessed sheep in the bright green pastures of God. The family and state will yield to their own dissolution because the limitations of man which they were organized to supplement will cease to be.

A third conclusion (the most vital perhaps) is this: the Church is the most important not only extrinsically, as e.g. the top step on a triple-tiered ladder or the tallest and most expensive of three new skyscrapers, but intrinsically as (to use a limping example) the human eye is for the human body.

The function, then of the family and polity is subsidiary to the Church. This does not deny to the two lesser communities their duties and privileges, but it does state (and it seems to us not merely dogmatically but reasonably so) that in the bonebare realities of human existence, the supreme and commanding voice is the Church because she and she alone is the substantial echo of the voice of God.

VI

Lastly, let us consider the individual himself whom hitherto we have assigned as a sharer of the family board, a future voter at the polls and a kneeler in the church pew.

After this neat division, is there anything left? Is His nature exhausted by this partition like Gaul by Caesar? The very opposite, of course, is the truth. For, from the first moment of his birth, nay even in his mother's womb, he is unique,

solely unto himself, a human person with inalienable rights which no power on earth may take from him without due process. He has a personality to develop and unfold apart from and yet within these three institutions. Each of them will mark him, mould him, imprint upon him their beliefs, their attitudes towards life, in a word their specific civilization. He is plastic, formless in a way, like wax. He is timeless, above and beyond his parents, his native land, his age in the Church, and this by reason of his spirit. Yet he is engaged in time through *these* parents and *this* state and *this* parish church because the spirit is housed in a temple of flesh. He is changeless in a way, yet each society wants to change him as much as it can. The family wants a loving son, the state wants a dutiful citizen, the Church wants a saint.

And so three pairs of hands go to work on the malleable wax. And the entire process, the planning, moulding (we might almost say the pushing and pulling) we call education.

Thus, like three fountains on one coin, three pairs of hands are at work on one unformed creature. May they make any figure they like? No, because this creature is not dead like wax or clay but possesses deep within himself a vital image of what he should eventually be; a living miniature which has in embryo all the attributes we normally attribute to a great and good man.

The functions, therefore, of the three societies are to encourage, to teach, to direct, to guide, to clarify, but only in accord with the image so that the great and good man because of their ministration will really come to be. The image is not only unique, it is also sacred because it comes from God. What is it in the concrete? It is the mind and the will—the light to know and the energy to love.

VII

Now, in the process of education, which pair of hands with due respect to the image shall plan what the man is to be, and which pair shall execute the plan. For here too there must be order even as within the societies themselves order is essential. For the functions of the societies will be themselves efficient

if well organized and will contribute to the efficiency of the societies by their own correct and active order.

Therefore who will determine what the final form will be, decide what is the purpose of education? The answer for Catholics is: The Church. Why? Because, as we previously stated, only the Church *knows* the reason for man's beginning, the meaning of his end; and only the Church possesses the means to the end. Moreover God Himself as Master of all creation directly and immediately imposed the obligation and bestowed the right when He said: "Go and teach all nations." The Number One Educator then is the Church.

VIII

Which pair of hands *execute* the plan? Who should *actually* draw out from the plasticity of the young the man and woman we want? The answer to this question is the family, mother and father, because the child belongs to them, is flesh of their flesh and bone of their bone. Incidentally the Constitution of the Philippines recognizes this fact and enshrines and perpetuates it in Article 2, Section 4: "*The natural right and duty of parents in the rearing of the youth for civic efficiency should receive the aid and support of the government.*" (Italics ours.)

Therefore, although the Church is the Supreme Educator, the family is the active energizing educator. What is the relation in education between the Church and the family? The Church is the Guide, the beacon light, illuminating the task the family must do. Like a true light, it uncovers dangers, dispels darkness, gives sure confidence to the educational vocation of the parents. The hands of the Church guide and direct the hands of the family.

IX

What then is the educational function of the state, our third pair of hands? Its function is just what the Constitution says it is, namely aid and support. It helps the family to bear the family's burden by giving the support of its large and

extensive organization to supply the means which a family by itself alone does not have.

Incidentally, the state by taxation takes from the family the capital to finance these instrumentalities.

Most modern governments are aware of the necessity and utility of this function. In the Philippines, it is significant that the second largest budgetary item is educational. It is also symbolic of our age of fear that the largest item is for the military.

Is the state, then an educator? Save in a few instances, (for example a military academy) the state is not, properly speaking, an educator. The state builds the school building, the state selects the teachers, the state supervises all phases of administration and instruction, but in the classroom the teacher does not represent the state but represents the family. The teacher is *in loco parentis*. The *conditio sine qua non* of authoritative teaching in the classroom of public schools is appointment by the state: but the right to teach in the classroom is delegation from the parent. To illustrate, the *conditio sine qua non* of voting at election time is registration. The right to vote is qualified citizenship.

X

We have tried to show, first, the origin, purpose and equipment to realize the purpose of each of our three societies. Second, we have tried to analyze their differing roles at their intersection in education, establishing function and priority therein. Our discussion has been of principles.

The descent from principle to practice however, can well be a journey from the clouds to the cockpit. No one denies, in republican government, the neatness and utility of the separation of powers: everyone affirms the difficulties attached to keeping the lines straight and true in actual practice.

In Catholic Philippines no one denies, I think, the validity of the above-enumerated principles. The reduction to practice however can be compared (if I may use a wild hyperbole) to drawing not one but three camels through the eye of one needle; or through the brain of one little boy.