

# **CHURCH, STATE AND SCHOOLS IN BRITAIN, 1800 - 1970**

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James Murphy

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*By*

JAMES MURPHY

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# **Church, State and Schools in Britain, 1800-1970**

**James Murphy**

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THE STUDENTS LIBRARY OF EDUCATION has been designed to meet the needs of students of Education at Colleges of Education and at University Institutes and Departments. It will also be valuable for practising teachers and educationists. The series takes full account of the latest developments in teacher-training and of new methods and approaches in education. Separate volumes will provide authoritative and up-to-date accounts of the topics within the major fields of sociology, philosophy and history of education, educational psychology and method. Care has been taken that specialist topics are treated lucidly and usefully for the non-specialist reader. Altogether, the Students Library of Education will provide a comprehensive introduction and guide to anyone concerned with the study of education, and with educational theory and practice.

J. W. Tibble

*Church, State and Schools in Britain, 1800 to 1970*, in the history section of the series, sets out to unravel the complicated history of the religious question in British education. In his *The Religious Problem in English Education: the Crucial Experiment* (1959), the author has already published a fascinating case study on this issue, but one concentrating specifically on the situation in one city – Liverpool – in the mid-nineteenth century. Here he goes fully into the background of the key Acts of Parliament which established the 'dual' system – of Church and Local Authority (or Council) schools. Particular attention is devoted to the formative period before the 1870 Education Act, and, of course, to that of 1902 which for the first time allowed Church schools to be financed out of the rates. The changing policies of different religious groupings are analysed, and their outcome in legislation brought out.

If the religious issue is no longer as important a feature of educational debate as it used to be, nevertheless the battles of the past must be understood before the complex forces which have moulded the existing educational system can be fully realized. In addition, many of the problems fought over in the past are still with us, and await resolution. Dr Murphy's book is a scholarly and authoritative study of this question, and will be of value to students and others who wish to understand its relevance and complexity.

Brian Simon



*For*  
*A.-B.M.*

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J.M.



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## Introduction

The simple terms 'church' and 'state' obviously stand for complex realities. Sometimes the first may refer only to the clergy; at others to the great mass of believers, including or excluding these; sometimes, in effect, to those churchmen influential in political life, whether clergy or laymen. When one speaks, for example, of the financial contributions made by this or that church for the erection and support of schools, one needs to remember that more than clerical support was usually involved (though in fact many of the clergy made great sacrifices of time and money); when there is talk of church control of education, one needs to know precisely whose control is meant; and one must not be surprised when sincere supporters of a church vote in parliament for measures deeply resented by its clergy. The writer hopes, without great confidence, that, where confusion might arise (and he is not himself in doubt), he has always made the position clear. Again, it would be wrong to think of the state as consisting only of the governments and the parties which produced them. In Britain governments, as we shall see, are often glad to allow the permanent and experienced administrative officers to persist with, or even to initiate, arrangements which it would be highly inconvenient to have debated; and incoming governments are quite commonly relieved when civil servants demonstrate to them the difficulty of changing policies inaugurated by their opponents and therefore recently denounced in the heat of party strife.

It would be extremely wrong to think of the state as continually straining to establish an admirable system of education, but being thwarted by the churches. It is true that the disputes between the churches weakened the influence of those who strove to set up a national system of education, and delayed its establishment by presenting apparently insoluble problems; but the enthusiasm for popular education among political leaders throughout the period was not remarkable. Many reasons, from economic theories to the cost of wars, were in all periods advanced to restrain or restrict



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## INTRODUCTION

action; the prime ministers (Gladstone and Balfour) connected with two of the three major Education Acts were astonished and appalled at their eventual cost.

Since what follows is largely a history of conflict one can hardly expect the parties engaged to appear at their best, and it may be necessary, in justice, to point out that many of those who, in effect, did most to hinder the establishment of a national system of elementary education (Lord Ashley and the Rev. G. A. Denison are examples) were very generous in their support of schools for the poor.

Further, this is not a study of church and state angrily disputing for the right to foist divergent views upon the people. In the earlier part of the century, indeed, fears of the political theorists that the state might use the schools for its own ends appeared a little unreal in the face of its very moderate interest in elementary education and its reluctance to assume greater responsibility than was required to ensure value for money. There was even some apprehension lest schooling might lead to disaffection. When the state committed itself to the support of elementary education almost all thinking men of both of the major political parties would readily have echoed the routine declaration of the first secretary to the first government committee concerned with education, that it was 'essential that the Government should avoid every form of interference which could discourage individual enterprise [and] the freedom of opinion' (Kay-Shuttleworth, 1853, 292). But two observations need to be made. The first is that it was taken for granted that both church and state were in duty bound to inculcate, as undoubted facts, social, economic (and sometimes religious) views which many now would regard as highly debatable justifications of the existing order. The second is that the state could rely with complete assurance on the willingness of almost all who conducted schools to encourage the political attitude which mattered most of all – one which the Rev. John Keble so lucidly described as 'a cheerful submission to authority, a desire to find one's superiors in the right'.

Lastly it is well to note, as the author has tried to do, that much that has happened in schools, especially since 1870, has had little to do with what church or state intended – more with what school boards, managers, teachers, sometimes parents, and occasionally even children, were prepared to give, or to take.

## Abbreviations used in the text

(Extended titles are given in the Bibliography.)

C.C. Cross Commission

M.C.C. *Minutes of the Committee of Council*

N.C. Newcastle Commission

N.S.R. *Annual Reports* of the National Society

R.B.E. *Reports of the Board of Education*

R.C.C. *Reports of the Committee of Council*

R.S.P.C. *Return ... schools for the poorer classes ...*, 1870

R.R.T. *Returns ... respecting the religious teaching ...*, 1888

T.E.S. *The Times Educational Supplement*