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Letter, 1956 November 21, Fritz Marti to Father Ryan

Fritz Marti

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Rt. Rev. Msgr. Carl J. Ryan,
Superintendent of Schools,
The Archdiocese of Cincinnati,
5418 Moeller Avenue, Norwood,
Cincinnati 12, Ohio.

Dear Father Ryan:

You wanted my reaction to the planned certification of teachers in private schools in Ohio. Here it is.

With thirty years of teaching in colleges and universities from Coast to Coast, three of which years spent in Virginia at a college where I was in charge of the courses in education and consequently well acquainted with all the schools in two counties, I am in a position thoroughly to appreciate the desirability of minimal standards for teachers in public schools. I agree that teachers in private schools should have at least the education of teachers in public schools. I do not believe it is a conceit of the private school man, if I opine that private schools must meet that minimal standard and surpass it, merely to stay in business. Consequently I believe the objective standards of learning will be easily and automatically met by private school teachers.

However there are standards which measure neither learning nor teaching ability nor anything like sound personality. These so-called standards are nothing but a requirement to pass certain courses in Education. I have sat through such courses at Teachers' College of Columbia University, I have had in my classes on philosophy of education at the University of Maryland scores of education students who have had such courses, and I have met with occasional teachers in service who could boast of having successfully passed such courses, and I have never found any very strong evidence that such courses improve a teacher's soundness nor even his teaching skill. I do not claim that they have no value at all. For all I know, they may help the beginning teacher in his adjustment to the classroom situation. I do not believe that such courses compare at all, in the making of a real teacher, with a thorough training in subject matter, nor with a truly philosophical estimate of the teaching situation. I readily understand that many enterprising young people object to such courses, and that the requirement of such courses for teacher certification keeps away from the teaching profession quite a number of highly desirable young people.

If the certification of teachers of private schools in Ohio were to depend on the possession of academic credits "earned" in such courses, it would become very difficult for our school either to obtain or to retain the kind of teachers we need.
This year, one of our teachers well represents the kind of personality without which our school is impossible. She is Mrs. Doris Strong Jackson, 23, from Strasbourg in Alsace. She speaks French, German, English, Spanish, Polish and Creole; she can teach Latin and Greek; she reads Russian. Outside of some of the natural sciences, we can assign her almost any class on any level of the twelve years our school covers. Mrs. Jackson, whose husband is a young geologist from Chicago, has her bachelor's degree from the Lycée Hélène Boucher in Paris, her "licence es sciences politiques" from the Sorbonne and, more for sport than for practical value, last year she made her B.A. at Antioch College.

I do not believe there are very many certified teachers in Ohio who could offer us services like those given by Mrs. Jackson who is of great equanimity, yet vivacious, almost never ruffled and always of good judgment, and having a keen sense of justice.

If I were to tell her that I could not keep her in our service unless she spent valuable time on the acquisition of such credits in education as I described above, I am sure she would seek a private school that was not hamstrung by such requirements.

Our preparatory school is set up for high average pupils who can go forward at a faster pace than the set-up of a big school permits. We must have very versatile teachers. I shall never hire a teacher who has not at least two languages besides English, who cannot give reasonable assistance in mathematics at least through the junior highschool grades, who is not fairly well acquainted with world history, who knows nothing of the fundamentals of science, and who is not a strong personality. In my opinion, these standards of mine are higher than those most public schools can afford. I am quite certain that, in matters of scholarship and personality, our teachers will always match the best in public schools. In teaching efficiency they must perform as well as or better than those in the State Board of Education has nothing to worry, if we private school people keep up such standards.

I am most heartily in favor of establishing similar standards in every school in the State. I doubt that they can be established by legislative decree. Only the enlightened demand persistently made by a sufficient number of parents can bring about such true teacher qualification. To write into the law a requirement of a certain number of education courses will not improve the quality of private school teachers. It will merely make it difficult or impossible for private schools to maintain their high standards.

Most sincerely yours,

Dr. Fritz Marti