

Catholic Historical Review
V. 46 (January 1961)

The Political Reason of Edmund Burke. By Francis P. Canavan, S.J. (Durham: Duke University Press, for the Lilly Endowment Research Program in Christianity and Politics. 1960. Pp. xvi, 222. \$5.00.)

Like most great writers in the history of political ideas, Burke has been the object of many changing and extreme interpretations, and especially so because he set little store by clear and distinct ideas. On the one hand, Leslie Stephen, John Morley, Harold Laski, and others have traced Burke's philosophical pedigree to David Hume, or to the Utilitarians, or to a standard of pragmatism and convenience. In response, Father Canavan has presented a powerful argument for the prudential judgment as a reasonable judgment, and as the expression in practical reason of an intelligible order in the universe. Such an order has signified the existence of an eternal law, an enlarged morality, and the defense of the natural rights of men grounded in a social order that is conventional. Order is itself the work of reason.

Father Canavan's contribution is precisely as his title indicates: the Burkean uses of reason. For Burke focused on the practical and prudential reason rather than the abstract, situationless, doctrinaire, and speculative reason; he repudiated especially the ideas of Price, Priestly, and Paine (pp. 106 ff.), and their ilk, the metaphysicians of the French Revolution. The author explores Burke's early education in philosophy and moral theory, and he shows the connections between Burke's ideas and those rooted in the Christian and western tradition. He uses new materials and letters, which are now becoming known in the contemporary revival of Burkean studies. The volume is published as part of the Lilly Foundation Research Program in Christianity and Politics, under the distinguished direction of Professor John H. Hallowell.

This volume, like most discussions of Burke, centers finally on his use of history and historical institutions, his attitudes toward reform and revolution, his classic but all but inescapable theories of representation and public opinion, and the controverted assertion of natural rights. Burke was no adulator of mere history, but of a social order made in history under divine Providence, which conforms with the prudential principles of practical reason. A final notation: there are few members of Congress who would not agree with Burke in his address to the fortunate electors of Bristol that their primary duty is to give their voters suitable attention, the benefit of their knowledge, and their informed judgment concerning the general welfare. Likewise, there are few who would deny that our natural rights are embedded in our prescriptive and conventional constitutional order (pp. 118, 134, 148).

University of Illinois
FRANCIS G. WILSON

The Religious Problem in English Education: The Crucial Experiment. By James Murphy. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. 1959. Pp. 287. 35s.)

The experiment treated by Mr. Murphy was to determine whether children of all religious faiths might be educated together in publicly owned elementary schools and was carried on in Liverpool from 1836 to 1842. It began when the Liberals took over the Liverpool town council in the municipal elections of 1835 and its education committee, dominated eleven to one by the victors, set out in the following year to modify its restrictive educational policy. Motivated by the desire to provide an education at public expense for all children unable to attend private schools, and equally determined that this education should include as an integral part of the school day, elements of religious instruction and prayer, the committee adopted a modified version of the Irish national education system. By this arrangement, which had been inaugurated in Ireland in 1831, all children received moral instruction in common each day, and were separated on one or two days of the week to study their particular doctrinal tenets under the supervision of their own ministers or persons appointed by them. The unique feature of this plan, one which was intended by its originators to break down ill feeling between Protestants and Catholics, was what later came to be called the "Irish Scripture Lessons." These were readings excerpted from the Douay and Authorized Versions of the Bible accompanied by notes and commentaries, all of this with the full approval of the Catholic and Protestant authorities. The "Irish Scriptures" were used by all the children each day, while the versions particular to their creeds were read during the hours of separate doctrinal teaching. As put into use in 1836 at the two Liverpool corporation schools, the modified plan provided all the children with moral instruction, hymns, prayers, and the "Irish Scriptures," and set apart one hour each day within the regular schedule to be devoted to separate dogmatic lessons offered by priests and ministers. Professor Murphy shows that Catholics, although they were not extensively consulted about the plan, approved it, their children being the chief beneficiaries, and that they even continued to attend the schools after a Roman rescript of 1841 had described such accommodations as "very dangerous."

The Established Church, however, was very much in opposition. By twisting phrases, quoting out of context, promoting massive "The Bible and Nothing But the Bible" campaigns, and carrying on wide debate in the public forum and the politically sensitive press of the day, the Conservatives, ably led by several energetic clergymen such as the Reverend Hugh McNeile, nearly upset the arrangement in its first months. But the plan weathered these initial blasts, and was roundly accepted. In 1838,