January 11, 1950

The Honorable Herbert H. Lehman
The United States Senate
Washington, D. C.

My dear Senator Lehman:

I believe you are eager to know the thinking of your constituents upon vital issues. The question of public support for parochial or private education will soon be before the Congress. At a recent meeting of the Council of Bishops of The Methodist Church, unanimous action was taken in opposition to the use of public funds for sectarian education. Each Bishop is writing to his own Senators and Congressmen. We regard the public school system as a fundamental bulwark of democracy. We wish it maintained, extended and improved. We believe in the liberty that gives to churches and private bodies the privilege of maintaining schools under their direction, if they see fit; but we believe that such schools should be supported by private funds. The Methodist Church has 126 colleges and universities. We do not ask the State to support them. On the contrary, we believe that the State should support the public school system. We, as citizens, count it a privilege to pay taxes to that end. We do not wish a score of competing sectarian systems, publicly supported. We believe that such diversion of public funds for parochial or private purposes is a clear violation of the principle of separation of church and state.

There are deeper reasons that have to do with the very culture of our nation. It is our belief that a system in which children are educated in our elementary and secondary schools where Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Jew sit side by side and learn to know each other as friends is better than the separation of these children at the elementary and secondary levels. We must live together in the community subsequently. It is wise to learn to live together during the educational process. The Methodist Church, therefore, has left the field of elementary education, maintains but a few schools in the secondary field, but has felt it can make a significant contribution in the realm of higher education.

We believe that to drain off vast sums from public education for the support of parochial education is so to weaken public education as eventually to destroy it.
The Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America has suggested that the issue, as far as the Federal Government is concerned, be divided so that the question of Federal aid to public education may be considered on its own merits and the other issue involving auxiliary services, so-called, such as bus transportation, public health services, and school lunches may be considered on its merits. We are opposed to funds for auxiliary services, unless they be under public supervision. But the larger issue of Federal aid for the purpose of equalizing educational opportunity is one that, if separated from the lesser issue of auxiliary services, can be considered in the light of the fundamental principle that public funds should be used solely for public purposes.

We sincerely trust that your study of this issue will lead you, first, to the support of the principle that public funds shall be used solely for the support of public education, and, secondly, that, if necessary, the two subjects be divided, so that there may be a clear-cut vote upon the first.

It is a little surprising to us to hear some Roman Catholic authorities stating that all they are interested in is auxiliary services. Examination of the positions taken in the diocesan press of the Roman Catholic Church and the official request made to the President's Commission on Higher Education, would indicate that this is not true, and that the Roman Catholic Church is really seeking public support, not only for auxiliary services but for current operation of its schools, and even for capital expenditures involved in their extension.

Very respectfully yours,

G. Bromley Oxnam

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