

THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY.

VOL. XX.

APRIL, 1916.

No. 2.

THE CONTROVERSY ABOUT THE BIBLE IN OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

Active efforts are being made at the present time in various quarters for the reintroduction of the Bible into our public schools. This movement gives rise to a controversy very similar to the one which raged on the occasion of the elimination of the Bible as a text-book from the American public school system. The following brief historical consideration of that earlier struggle, therefore, seems appropriate at the present time.

The opposition to the Bible as a text-book began about 1840, especially in the large cities,¹⁾ and at the instigation of the Roman Catholic Church. According to Goodrich,²⁾ the Catholics at this time numbered 800,000, out of a total of about 10,000,000 church-members in the United States. The Roman Catholics favored legal exclusion of the Bible from the public schools; Daniel Webster opposed legal exclusion.³⁾

The controversy was really due to the rise of state-supported public schools. Denominational schools wanted state support; but it became the established policy of the State not to give such support. The controversy involves the interpretation of the Constitution and the question whether the Bible is a sectarian book.

1) Monroe's *Cyc. of Ed.*, I, p. 373.

2) Peter Parley's *Tales about the U. S.* (1883), p. 227.

3) Cheever, *Right of the Bible in Our Public Schools.* (New York, 1854.)

THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION ASSOCIATION.

The Religious Education Association is launching out into a field of church activity which materially affects our interests. . . . I believe that the proceedings of their convention in Chicago will be exceedingly interesting to you, and that, after it is all over, you will be convinced that you did not waste a moment of time, though you may have to repudiate in your mind nearly all of what you heard spoken and saw done.

Prof. Dau to the writer.

“The Religious Education Association is the federation, in a comprehensive organization, without creedal conditions, of those who seek to promote and improve moral and religious education. The membership includes ministers of religion, college presidents and professors, teachers and officers in

public schools and Sunday-schools, students, parents, educational officials, and social workers. Membership offers the advantages of fellowship, conference, cooperative effort, counsel, and aid. . . . The Association's primary purpose is to stimulate, inspire, and assist. It serves as a center for leaders, a forum, a clearing-house, a unifying, coordinating agency. It has about 3,000 members in this and other countries."

This Association came together in Chicago, Ill., on February 28, 1916, and held meetings until the 1st of March, 1916, in the morning, afternoon, and evening of each day. The meetings were all open to the public, though the discussion of the papers was restricted to the members of the Association. A multitude of literature for free distribution was laid out on a table in the office, and the public was invited to help itself. We had expected to see the convention hall filled with an eager and attentive throng of Religious Education Association people, but must record our surprise at the small attendance and comparative lack of attention given to the reading and discussion of the papers by this body.

The program prepared for the convention seemed to be of a harmonious character, keeping for its central object the week-day religious instruction of the child and youth. By various authors, papers had been promised on

A. Primary Considerations on the Relation of Instruction in Religion to Public Education.

1. Some data on the relation of the public school and religious education.
2. Do present plans endanger our religious liberties?
3. Attitude of the Jews toward week-day religious instruction.

B. Practical Problems.

1. Upon what conditions can Churches of different denominations combine in giving week-day instruction?
2. Are the Churches competent for week-day religious instruction?

3. Worship in connection with week-day religious instruction. How is such worship related to religious exercises in the public schools?

4. Religion as an element in the education of an American child.

5. In actual practise, what is the relation of a Gary public school to religion and the Churches?

C. Curricula and Teachers.

1. The problem of curriculum for week-day religious instruction (scope and material):—

- a. From the Roman Catholic view-point;
- b. From the Protestant view-point;
- c. From the Jewish view-point.

2. Teachers for the week-day religious school.

- a. What qualifications should be regarded as standard?
- b. Where is a supply of teachers to be found?
- c. How can training for this work be secured?

D. The Question of Credits. (Given by the State schools. — ED.)

1. What view of the relation of Church and State is involved in the plan for State school credits for instruction in religion?

2. What are the reasons for asking the State to give school credits for religious instruction?

3. Possible problems from the educational point of view.

Many preliminary investigations and studies were cataloged in the program. They cover a wide field: recent experiments in week-day instruction in religion in Gary, New York City, Virginia, Austin (Texas), Chicago, North Dakota High Schools, Colorado High Schools, Lakewood (Ohio); the week-day religious instruction in the Lutheran parochial schools; German Evangelical parochial schools; Roman Catholic parochial schools; the Jewish day-schools; the religious exercises in public schools in Texas, Oklahoma, and Ontario (Canada).

Aside from the meetings of the general body, provisions

were made for meetings of departments. The program showed these papers:—

A. Bible Teachers in Colleges.

1. On the present work of Bible-teaching in colleges.
2. Standardization of the department in colleges.
3. Correlation of the work in colleges and secondary schools.

B. Theological Seminaries, Churches, and Pastors.

The curriculum of the seminary in view of the needs of the modern church:—

1. From the point of view of the pastor;
2. From the point of view of the rural needs.
3. In what way does the modern Church have an educational function?

C. Sunday-schools.

The relation of week-day instruction to the Sunday-school:—

- a. As to curriculum;
- b. As to teachers;
- c. As to the accredited Bible-study plan.

D. Program of Religious Education in a Church.

1. What material will prove most effective in realizing the purpose of religious education?
2. What is the necessary, and what is the desirable equipment for religious education in the church?
3. The correlation of the religious educational work in the church under one committee and of all activities of the young people in one organization, the Sunday-school.

There was also a conference of church-workers in State Universities, with an elaborate program. But we will pass over this. It is needless to say that this lengthy program was not completely carried out. The lack of time and the absence of such as were to read papers prevented it.

No papers read were adopted by the convention. They were only read and then briefly discussed. It is therefore hard

to say whether or not the Association stands for what was read and said. In fact, it was emphatically stated that the convention does not stand sponsor for any opinion voiced in any paper, and that the convention might hold as many opinions as there were members in the Association. Though this is a very unsatisfactory method of procedure according to our mode of thinking and acting, and differs from the custom followed at our conferences and synods, yet it is in keeping with the purpose of this organization. It is a forum, a clearing-house.

As it was a religious congress, religion was the chief topic. Yet it was emphasized that religion in our day could not be of the type of the older theologies, nor of the differing and opposing Churches, nor that taught in theological seminaries. But religion is a necessity, something indispensable. It was made a part of the common law of England, and was taken over into our common law. It is a fundamental of our civilization. It is something that must be taught. People must have, ought to have, a religion. In showing the importance of religion, Jew, Protestant, and Catholic joined. But one thing nobody said, and that was,—what religion really is.

As a means of producing and promoting religion, the Bible was urged, though it was by no means thought to be the only source of religious knowledge and influence. It was not spoken of as the written revelation of God's eternal wisdom. But it was admitted that it is an important book for religious instruction. Yet fables and moral tales might also do. The great question before the convention was how to create more interest in Bible-study, how to introduce it into the schools of the State, and how to make it better studied in church-schools and Sunday-schools. The convention seemed to feel the insufficiency of the customary Sunday-school training, and wished to substitute something better. For this reason credits were asked for it in State-schools, and the Gary Plan, North Dakota Plan, and Colorado Plan evolved. Bible-study was further urged as a part of a liberal education, and one speaker pointed out that

a course of Bible-study might be the equal of a course in English, and even better. Still some lifted up their voices also in protest against bringing the Bible into the scheme of public education. Many dangers were pointed out. It was said that the State could no more teach Christianity than it could teach Judaism or any other form of religion. It would lead to a mingling of Church and State, and offend against the basic principle of our United States Constitution—religious liberty. If the Churches should furnish the religious instruction in the public schools, then the State ought rightfully to reimburse them for services rendered. Then would follow State-control of religious instruction, and the right to worship according to the dictates of conscience would be lost. It would be a pity to yoke religious education to State education, and would seem to indicate that religion were so weak that it could not well exist alone, and must be propped up by State influence and authority. According to its principle, the convention took no stand on this question, but the writer feels that the opinion of the majority thought it good and fine to inflict religion and the Bible upon the State.

The Church was not once mentioned as the communion of saints. Its importance in the community and its influence were admitted. It was hoped, however, that the old Church, which followed theologies, might soon pass away, and that in its place would come the modern Church, which had religion, but no theology.

This word was used only with apologies. The speakers seemed to detest it. They blamed it for the division of Christianity, the failure of the Churches, and the lack of religion.

The Catholic view of religious education was given in a masterly manner by a priest of this Church. A paper on the Lutheran schools had been compiled by a Methodist professor from material sent him by Norwegian Lutherans. It was a pity that this paper could not be presented by a Missouri Lutheran. The Jewish view was also presented. They have their own problems and difficulties. But they want their

children taught in their sacred books. It is especially the poor class that seeks this instruction. They want to pay for their education, and fear the influence of philanthropy and charity on education. They think what is worth having at all is worth paying for. They insist on religious instruction in their mother-tongue.

The convention plainly showed what religion must come to when Churches leave divine revelation, and enter the field of speculation. It brings them into utter confusion.

It is true, we do not regret the time we spent at this meeting, but must repudiate nearly all we heard. However, we all thank God most fervently that He has kept us from doubt and confusion, and taught us to acknowledge: *Quod non est biblicum, non est theologicum.*

Chicago, Ill.

ARTHUR H. C. BOTH.
