

# THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY.

---

VOL. II.

NOVEMBER, 1922.

No. 11.

---

## A Symposium on Religious Education.

PROF. J. H. C. FRITZ, St. Louis, Mo.

The religious education of children has, in the last few years, been given unusual attention by non-Lutheran Protestants. Books, pamphlets, and articles in church-papers have been written; schemes have been suggested and tried. We shall, first, quote some of the printed literature which is before us, and then, secondly, draw conclusions and offer some comment.

A folder, *Some Questions Frequently Asked upon Cooperation with the Public Schools for Week-day Religious Education*, gotten out by the Department of Religious Education of the Protestant Episcopal Church, says the following by way of introduction:—

It is generally conceded that the Sunday-school of the past has been a failure. Few will deny that it is totally unequal to the task of meeting the needs of the rising generation for religious training and instruction. But all must recognize with a shock that the statistics show the appalling number of public school children who have no relationship to any religious institution and are receiving no religious instruction.

There is a growing belief, expressed by earnest workers of all churches, who are vitally interested in child welfare, that some additional effort must be made to give the children of to-day, the citizens of to-morrow, an adequate life equipment. Religious education and training must be an integral and vital part of this equipment.

While welcoming all experiments and efforts of whatsoever kind that look forward to this end, we believe that if the ideals of Christian character are to be in any measure realized, more time must be secured for the child to live them, and the best time is school time.

From the same folder we quote the following questions and answers:—

What is meant by cooperation with the public schools for religious instruction? We mean that the public school authorities shall assign to the pupils, upon the definite request of the child's parents or guardian, a portion of his school time to be given up to religious instruction at such

time and place as shall be mutually agreed upon by parent and school authorities.

Does this cooperation mean that the school shall be responsible for or teach religion? No. Just the reverse. This cooperation makes the teaching of religion a thing entirely apart from the school. Upon the home must rest the responsibility for religious instruction and training.

Is this plan of cooperation a new idea of school relationships? Quite the contrary! It is a new appeal for our old friend, home cooperation. The school came into being to assist the home in the interests of the child. It was the definite answer to a definite need. When the home was swept along by the industrial revolution, it found itself unable to give the child the needed instruction and training to fit him for the changing conditions and added responsibilities of advancing civilization. This became the work of the school. Where possible, when the home failed, the school assumed the responsibility. The home surrenders the child to the school and supports the system by taxation. The surrender is not, however, entire and complete. The school cannot adequately deal with the entire development of the child. Therefore there are still obligations and responsibilities which the home cannot evade. The school has always recognized this. It is one of their most impressive slogans: "When the school and the home join hands, it is well with the child."

Are you asking the school to recognize religion in any way or to have any part in its teaching? Absolutely not! We are asking the school to cooperate with the home, in assigning, upon the definite request of the parent, a part of this time which the child looks upon as his "business time," to secure one of these extra school activities. The home considers this as necessary for the proper upbringing of the child, and since neither the home nor the school is competent to give this religious instruction, some other agency must.

Why do you consider religion as such a necessary part of the child's education? Without it our country is in grave peril! Our democracy was an experiment, brought forth by a people of strong religious convictions. These settled principles unconsciously colored their thoughts and actions. They entered into the solution of their life problems. They made certain things right and others wrong. After two generations from these forefathers we find that we have drifted away from this insistent and steadfast faith. Yet American liberty cannot long endure without this basic religious prepossession, for it is easy to see that spiritual illiteracy may become a social menace. Already we find that the absence of religious training explains many things that puzzle us in the reactions of the rising generations toward our modern problems. These problems are not in the last analysis merely and entirely economic. They are moral and religious issues. Why, for example, should not a man secure 500 per cent. for a common necessity? Why should he not profiteer as much as he pleases? The answer is, that as a moral and religious issue this is wrong! But unless the profiteer has such a religious prepossession, deep rooted and compelling, that will make him hear God's command in the Law "to do to all men as I would they should do unto me," he will do as he pleases. This duty to one's neighbor admits of no argument to one religiously trained, but it has no weight with one not so trained.

Will you give your idea more fully of the need of religious education? Do you mean to imply it is basic? I certainly do. Education means growth, unfolding, development of the entire child, mentally, physically, spiritually, and socially. Such a fourfold growth is suggested in that beautiful second chapter of St. Luke's gospel. Christ, then a child of 12, "went down with them and was subject unto them . . . and grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man." This fourfold development suggested is soundly psychological. These must not be considered as independent and entirely separated departments of life that have no intimate relation to each other. They must not be considered as air-tight compartments that can be given attention at different times and at any time. They suggest, on the other hand, departments that are closely knit up together, are mutually interdependent, and shade off the one into the other. . . . Upon the home rests the responsibility for this nurture and unfolding. . . . If the home cannot do this alone, it must seek outside agencies to assist it, and it can naturally look for cooperation with all these assisting agencies when a vital issue is at stake. It is, therefore, very really the province of the home to seek the cooperation of the school in giving the child this peculiarly necessary training. The school is asked to simply assign a portion of its time, during its business hours, so that the child may have the right opportunity and point of view, and further to see that this time, in fairness to the school, is not used for anything else.

What supervision or oversight does the school system exercise over this week-day type of schools? None! They cooperate by assigning certain time and are responsible to the parent to see that this time is not used for anything else. This necessitates a system of reports back to the school covering the attendance problems. Simple printed forms have reduced this to a minimum of trouble.

Do you receive or expect to receive credit from the public schools for this work? No!

What is to become of the Sunday-school; do you advise its being discontinued? This would be a great mistake. Instruction and worship are the Church's ideal for Sunday. Instead of discontinuing it, the Sunday church-school must be brought to a higher plane of efficiency and service.

From a letter written, January, 1920, by the Superintendent of Schools, Herbert S. Weet, of the Department of Public Instruction, Rochester, N. Y., we quote the following:—

TO THE PARENT:—

At a recent meeting of the Board of Education the following resolution was passed concerning religious instruction:—

The importance of religious instruction both to the individual and to the country is generally recognized. By common consent, however, the free public school system of this country cannot teach religion. The responsibility for such instruction must rest upon the home and the Church. But the public school can and should cooperate to the limit of its power with the home and the Church to the end that the greatest possible number of our boys and girls may receive effective religious instruction.

Under the single teacher plan of school organization that usually prevails in the elementary school it is necessary that all pupils should remain in school during the entire day. But under the subject departmental plan of the upper high school, the subject-group departmental plan of the junior high school, and the semidepartmental plan now operative in some of the elementary schools, it is practicable, under certain conditions, to allow pupils to leave the school for a period of religious instruction without thereby interfering with their normal school progress.

*Therefore Be It Resolved*, That upon an approved application from any established religious body or society incorporated under the laws of the State of New York, the Board of Education cooperate in this work of religious instruction by excusing pupils for such instruction subject to the following provisions:—

1. Pupils shall be excused for religious instruction upon the written request of parents or guardians only.
2. The religious body desiring to give such instruction shall file with the Board of Education a written application stating the length of the course, the name and qualifications of the instructor, and the location and nature of the facilities that have been provided for this instruction. It shall, furthermore, furnish such reports of attendance and progress of pupils as the Board of Education may require.

By way of explanation the following statements were made:—

The resolution implies more of an attempt on the part of school authorities to determine the nature of the work done by those giving the religious instruction than we perhaps would care to claim in case any question arose. It seemed to us perfectly clear, however, that the outcome of this plan would depend so largely upon the type of teacher selected that we felt warranted in asking that the qualifications of the teacher should be a matter of regard in the application. The object was more to enable us to counsel with the Church authorities than to determine qualifications. . . .

Of course, the whole movement is experimental with us, but we regard it as an exceedingly important subject. We believe that the Church itself not only should assume full responsibility for securing the interest and cooperation of parents, but must assume such responsibility if the work is really to succeed.

From a circular giving "The Toledo Plan of Week-day Religious Instruction in Cooperation with the Public Schools," we quote the following:—

How ineffectual and inadequate is the usual program of the churches for religious education has never been so fully appreciated as at the present time. The religious workers of the World War give ample testimony to the ignorance about Christianity, the Bible, and the Church. The churches of Toledo are touching in any way less than fifty per cent. of the children of school age. A very large number of children have never been in Sunday-school. A larger number never use the Bible, and in hundreds of homes there are no Bibles. Teachers of English and his-

tory in our high schools say that it is the exceptional pupil who shows any knowledge of Bible characters and Bible allusion. Many know more about Greek and Roman mythology than they do about the Bible.

The Toledo Plan made the following provisions for the elementary grades:—

The Board of Education permits all children of the elementary grades whose parents make written application to the principal of the school to be dismissed one hour a week for the purpose of religious instruction.

The children of the first and second public school grades, when proper request has been filed, shall be dismissed on Mondays at 2.15; children of the third and fourth grades, on Tuesdays at 2.15; fifth and sixth grades, Thursdays at 2.15; seventh and eighth grades, Fridays at 2.15. This schedule applies to all the public schools of the city.

With reference to Sunday-school work, another circular says:

Religious instruction of any sort is given to less than half of the Protestant children of Toledo. The average attendance in the Sunday-schools is less than fifty per cent. The inadequate and often indifferent instruction given to the children in the Sunday-school half hour has made so little an impression on the children that the results are conspicuous in the lack of moral restraint, in the unwillingness to do Christian service, and in the lack of reverence for God and the Church on the part of the present generation. The Toledo plan of week-day religious instruction seeks to help the churches to overcome this neglect.

The President of the Hartford Seminary Foundation, William Douglas MacKenzie, in a booklet on *The Church and Religious Education*, writes:—

Where, as in this country and in France, the public school system, extending from the primary department even to the State university, has been divorced completely from religious education, efforts have been made of many different kinds, and on the whole with very indifferent success, to provide for the Christian education of the children and young men and women by means of special institutions. These include the Sunday-schools of the Church, the Y. M. C. A. and Y. W. C. A. work in the cities and colleges, the Biblical chairs attached to many institutions of higher learning. In these cases the effort has arisen from sincerity, and it is often carried on with great devotion. But it has not succeeded in reaching that measure of power which is necessary for the thorough Christian education of the children and youth of the land. . . .

It is one of the most common complaints made by those interested in religious education that, while it is comparatively easy to gather the large majority of the younger children of the land for work in the Sunday-schools, it is increasingly difficult to retain them during the stages of adolescence and young manhood and womanhood. At these stages of their development the young people tend to pass beyond the reach of religious education. Consequently, the knowledge and impressions received when they were children fade away. Misunderstandings and prejudice occupy

their minds, and an appalling proportion of them become separated in interest from the Christian faith.

Manifestly, the Church will never be able to saturate national life with Christian principles, and bring an entire people into living fellowship with God so long as this drift of the boys and girls away from the educational influence of the Church continues unchecked.

In his book *The Week-day Church-School*, Walter Albion Squires, B. D., writes:—

If we count the whole Sunday-school hour as possessing educational value, the maximum time provided for Protestant children through this agency would be only fifty hours a year. It is doubtful whether the average Sunday-school secures more than a half hour of really educational work each Sunday. This would make the total time for a year twenty-five hours for each child making a perfect record of attendance, summer and winter. As a matter of fact, most Sunday-school children do not attend Sunday-school more than half of the time. Thus we see that the time allowance for Protestant religious education is meager, at best. . . .

Moreover, our meager time allowance for religious instruction is so unpedagogically distributed over the year as to render any valuable results doubly difficult of attainment. Half-hour lessons a week apart is a poor teaching arrangement. Continuity of instruction under such a system is well-nigh impossible. Many educators believe that a few weeks of continuous and intensive training is far more fruitful than fifty-two weeks of Sunday-school instruction. . . .

Twenty-five hours a year for religious education and one thousand hours a year for secular education is not a just ratio.

Mr. Squires mentions the following attempts to supplement the educational agencies of the Church: Vacation Bible-schools, summer schools of religion, community training-schools, occasional classes, parochial schools, pastor's communicant classes, preschool chapel services, Y. M. C. A. and Y. W. C. A. classes, public school credits for outside Bible-study, and week-day church-schools.

With reference to parochial schools, Mr. Squires says:—

Practically the only Protestant denomination that depends on the parochial school for the religious instruction of its children is the Lutheran denomination. Among Lutheran people these schools are not uncommon. . . . The possibility of the Protestant denominations, as a whole, turning to the organization of parochial schools as a solution of their religious educational difficulties is so remote that it is hardly worth mentioning. The enrolment of a child in a parochial school means his elimination from the public school. Americans are well agreed that the public school is the bulwark of American democracy. The gathering of the children of the various denominations into parochial schools would mean that the churches would have to assume the burden of instructing them in secular studies as well as in religious subjects. The parochial school, for the reasons given, may as well be ruled out as a possible agency for the solution of Protestant educational problems.

From the book *The New Program of Religious Education*, by George Herbert Betts, we quote the following:—

The Protestant Church has never taken religious education seriously. This seems a strange, an ungracious, even a false thing to say of a church that has founded schools and colleges by the hundred, that, indeed, preceded the State in its support of general education. Nevertheless, it is true—the Church has never taken religious education seriously. It has been a great believer in, and promoter of, general education, but not of religious education. . . .

Throughout all its history it has been the policy of the Catholic Church to combine religious instruction with general education. In order to accomplish this purpose, as already indicated, Catholics in this country have quite generally desired to draw their children out from the public schools and send them to parochial schools run by the Church. In these schools religion has a regular part on each day's program, as much as arithmetic or geography. As was said earlier in the discussion, this thorough instruction in religion from childhood up is no doubt the chief factor in the ability of the Catholic Church to maintain itself.

The Jewish people in the United States have also carried on a more or less effective program of religious instruction for their children. This has differed from the policy of the Catholics, however, in that they have not taken their children out of the public schools in order to give them religious instruction on week-days. . . .

With the Protestant Church the problem has been somewhat different than in either of the two cases cited. In the earlier history of this country the curriculum of general education was distinctly religious. The old New England primer used for more than one hundred and fifty years as the child's sole introduction to reading and literature consisted almost wholly of distinctly religious material. The Bible was also regularly read and studied in the schools, as it was in the homes. Other religious books also formed a part of the school curriculum.

With the growth of the principle of the separation of Church and State, however, the curriculum of public education was naturally secularized, and religion dropped out of the public school course. Along with this change the church home seemed to lose much of its interest in instructing the child in religion. The result has been that the Protestant child has for the most part little or no religious instruction except that received in the Sunday-school and in occasional attendance at the general church sessions. This is to say that religion has been almost wholly lost out of his education and hence out of his general life equipment. . . .

The child in the average public school of the United States will, during most of the eight grades of the elementary school, have from fifty to sixty hours a year upon the subject of arithmetic. At the same time this child, even if he attends Sunday-school, is quite certain not to have more than six to ten hours of religious instruction during a year, and this under very unfavorable conditions. The result is that our children are not educated in religion as they are in the subjects of their public school course.

Upon such principles and reasoning the Church is recently coming

to ask for a division of public school time in order that the child may have a reasonable proportion of week-day time for instruction in religion. The time allowed on Sunday does not afford sufficient opportunity to give the basic instruction and training in religion which the child needs. . . .

Some have feared that the extending of instruction in religion over into week-day time will again introduce religion into the public schools, which is, of course, not the case. The principle of separation of Church and State is so thoroughly established in this country that it is no longer open to discussion. Those who are advocating week-day instruction in religion are not advising that this instruction be given in public schools, or by public school teachers, or under the supervision of public school authorities.

*The Week-day Church-School* is the name of a book written by Henry Frederick Cope, General Secretary of the Religious Education Association. The author, among other things, says in this book:—

The present agitation for week-day instruction means nothing less than the ultimate establishment of a new system of schools parallel to the public schools. It is well to foresee, as far as possible, the entire significance of this movement. It would be a mistake to suppose that such wide-spread planning and agitation are directed to nothing better than that Sunday-school teachers may add a week-day session to their present labors, or that children may meet during the week in order to listen to their pastors. Both these ends are quite desirable, as a rule, but they fall short of meeting the current pressing need. Such efforts cannot secure a worthy or adequate program of religious instruction. The week-day plans are much more serious, with purposes reaching farther and involving greater investments of persons and of money. . . .

Public education is curtailed as to its curriculum. It is forced to omit an essential subject. Public education in the United States is thoroughly secularized.

Now, this does not involve secularization in any reprehensible sense; it need not and ought not to mean that public education is destructive of spiritual idealism. School people do not have to be materialists. The fact that the school cannot teach religion does not set it in opposition to religion. So far as the theory of freedom is concerned, it only means that religion as a definite subject of study is excluded from the curriculum of public schools.

But it must be evident to any one that a system of education that omits religion in its training for life tends to train for a life that omits religion.

In the book *Religion among American Men*, by the Committee on the War and the Religious Outlook, we read:—

It is upon the Sunday-school that the Protestant churches have mainly depended for any systematic religious education of the children and youth. It is found in practically every church in every community. Yet the ignorance of young men as to the vital meaning of Christianity,



so clearly disclosed in the cross section of youth that we had in the army, is an indication that the Sunday-school must have been seriously ineffective in its work.

We can briefly draw certain conclusions from the facts stated in the premises:—

1. It is admitted that the Sunday-school has in the past been insufficient for the religious education of children.

2. It is admitted that the Sunday-school, even where brought to its highest state of efficiency, cannot sufficiently provide for the religious education of children.

3. It is admitted that, unless the children of our country receive more religious education, a dire calamity will result for the home, the State, and the Church.

4. It is admitted that Church and State must remain separate, and that, therefore, religious instruction must not be given nor supervised by the public school or the State.

5. It is admitted that the home (the parent) is responsible for the religious education of the child.

6. It is admitted that the home, under present circumstances, must be given assistance in the religious education of a child, and that such assistance should be given by the Church.

7. Some are in favor of having the public school turn over the children to their churches for religious instruction during certain hours of the regular school time.

8. Some are in favor of giving religious instruction during the week, after the regular school-hours.

9. Some believe that each denomination should take care of its own children; others favor interdenominational religious community schools (but not parochial schools).

10. Protestants, outside of the Lutheran Church, are, as a rule, not willing to solve the problem of religious education by establishing the parochial school and thus are not willing to act in accordance with their own findings and suggestions.

Comment is hardly necessary as far as our readers are concerned. The whole situation of religious education as we have it before us speaks in favor of the parochial school. The problem which others are trying to solve our Synod has solved long ago. From the very beginning our Synod has used the parochial school as a means of assisting parents in giving their children a Christian education. We ought to thank God that we have the parochial school, and ask Him graciously to keep it for us. It is refreshing to find some one occasionally outside of our Lutheran circles who,

at least in a measure, understands and appreciates why we Lutherans establish and maintain our church-schools. The president of a Christian Endeavor academy, Walter M. Ellis, in an article on "What Is Christian Education?" in the *Congregationalist* of August 4, 1921, writes as follows:—

Again it appears necessary to insist that the education provided so liberally and so efficiently in our public school system is in no distinctive sense Christian education. True, it can but have in it Christian elements, for our people as a whole are at least nominally Christian, and our teachers are commonly consistent Christian men and women. But identically the same thing may truthfully be said of the greater number of corporate business and industrial institutions. . . .

Historically, the Christian Church has held that it could conquer, in the line of its great vision, only as it used the educational processes and institutions. At the same time, from the standpoint of desirable educational results, it has held that education is true, united, complete, vital, and sufficiently motivated only as it was Christian. This conception of the normal inseparability of essential, living Christianity from the body of education as a whole is still held bravely by the Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches, and, as many believe, will always be held by them. In this immediate connection, also, it may be observed that even the Protestant churches still hold to the historic view in all their foreign mission work, nowhere undertaking to push the conquest of heathendom without the old instrument of Christian education in their various schools.

There now exists in America a group of schools, a group relatively small as compared with the mighty and growing body of tax-supported schools, yet, taken all together, by no means despicable or without characteristic and beneficent influence, whose history and foundation is such that they are free to cherish and to seek to realize this distinctive, historic conception of a positive Christian education. Indeed this, and nothing less, is their unique function. Let us not fail to encourage their administrators in their high task. Let us not cease to call them proudly our Christian schools. Let our Christian parents be led to a keener appreciation of what these Christian schools may do for their children.

---