

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
AND DEMOCRACY

BENJAMIN S. WINCHESTER

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BY

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PREFACE

THE present world situation compels a serious reexamination of the foundations of democracy. Especially does it necessitate a consideration of educational processes and materials. In the haste to achieve efficiency may it not be that some indispensable values have been sacrificed? The words of Jesus sound again with a new emphasis: "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" The same applies to a nation as well as to the individual. "Has democracy failed?" men are asking to-day. Has Christianity failed? These have not failed, but, as one recent writer has said, they have been found difficult and have not yet been fairly tried.

Under the conviction that a fresh study of the relation of religious education to democracy would just now be especially timely, the present writer prepared for the Commission on Christian Education of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America a Survey of Week-day Religious Instruction. In this task many valuable suggestions and criticisms were made by the members of the Commission. The writer would express his peculiar obligation to the chairman, Dean W. F. Tillet, D.D.; the secretary, the Rev. H. H. Meyer, D.D.; and to the chairman of the special subcommittee appointed for this purpose, Professor W. J. Thompson, D.D.

This Survey, which appeared as a part of the Quadrennial Report of the Commission, has been carefully revised and is now contained in Part I of the present volume.

For those who are contemplating a more adequate program of religious education there is provided in Part II

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a selection of documents drawn from a wide field of observation. Among these are typical curricula illustrative of systems of religious and moral education which are under state control, in Germany, France, and England; copies of legislative enactments from Australia and Canada; syllabi giving full requirements for voluntary instruction in the Bible for state credit, as in North Dakota and Colorado; supplementary programs, for situations such as exist at Gary, Indiana, and plans for vacation schools; suggested reconstruction of public school curricula to develop a sense of religious values; and plans of organization, denominational and interdenominational, community and national, to suit a variety of conditions, rural and urban.

It is hoped that the material thus assembled may be of some real service to those who in this critical moment of the world's history are striving to develop through educational methods a religion that shall be vital and genuine.

PART ONE

A SURVEY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN ITS RELATION TO DEMOCRACY

CHAPTER I

COMPULSORY EDUCATION AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Two principles seem to be firmly established in the life of the American people: the principle of compulsory education and the principle of religious freedom. We may regard it as a settled conviction that the nation is responsible for providing educational facilities for all its children, and for compelling them, if need be, to avail themselves of these advantages. It is also a settled conviction that any form of religious instruction which may be given under public auspices must not interfere with the religious freedom which is the birthright of every American citizen. The problem is, how to reconcile these two principles in practice. If the state undertakes to include religious instruction as an integral part of the educational system, it lays itself open to possible criticism from those who stand as the guardians of religious freedom. If, on the other hand, it refrains from offering religious instruction, it must then be admitted that the state system of education is defective at a vital point, for all will agree that any system of education which is designed to prepare youth for the responsibilities of citizenship in a democracy, but which fails to include religion, is an imperfect and incomplete system. Thus far the people of the United States have found it more expedient to follow the second course than the first, relying upon private agencies to supply the religious element in education which the state itself has omitted from its public school system.

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Three great types of faith are represented in the United States: Judaism, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism. Probably a majority¹ of the people in the United States would acknowledge at least a nominal connection with some religious body standing for one or the other of these faiths. Upon these adherents of religion rests the responsibility for providing religious instruction for the entire citizenship. None of these three faiths would repudiate this responsibility, at least in so far as its own constituency is concerned. All alike recognize the obligation to instruct the child in the essentials of religion. And while all these three types of faith have much in common, being based in part upon the same Scriptures, each has addressed itself to the problem of religious education in its own way, providing agencies and material and working out methods which are in harmony with its own peculiar point of view in religion and its conception of education.

In obedience to their ancient law,² the Jews, in home and in synagogue school, have been faithful in the discharge of their teaching responsibility, a fact which goes far to explain the remarkable persistence of the Jewish faith in its essential characteristics, in spite of long-continued opposition and oppression. In the United States, in many communities, the Jews require their children to attend week-day sessions of the religious schools. In New York city there is a Bureau of Education of the Jewish Community, which proposes to provide not less than five hours a week of religious instruction, in well-equipped buildings, under well-trained teachers who are paid salaries not less than those received by public school teachers. At the present time, there are over four hundred organized Jewish schools for week-day instruction, in

¹ The number of communicants for 1915 is reported by Dr. Carroll as 39,380,670. If children were also included the number might possibly reach a total of 47,000,000.

² Deut. 6. 4-9.

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which more than three thousand paid teachers are employed, at a cost of approximately \$2,000,000 annually—a sum which is made possible only through great personal sacrifice. In addition to the week-day school, many synagogues also maintain Sunday schools, but, in spite of all effort, it is said that not more than one fourth of the children of Jewish parentage in this country receive regular religious instruction.¹

The Roman Catholic Church has always emphasized the importance of religious instruction, but has never looked kindly upon the American public school system, with its artificial distinction between secular and religious instruction. The Roman Church has refused to recognize this distinction, insisting that all education should be under the supervision of the church. It voices its protest against the public school in the parochial school, which it maintains wherever possible, submitting to what it regards as double taxation for this purpose, in order that Catholic youth may be taught in an atmosphere of religion and under the eye of the priest. But the Roman Catholic Church does not, on this account, neglect the public school; many of the priesthood are to be found upon school boards, and many Roman Catholics are teachers in the public schools; in one instance known to the writer, practically the entire teaching force in a school situated in the midst of a Roman Catholic section in one of our large cities is drawn from the adherents of this faith, and the school is, to all intents and purposes, a parochial school, supported by public funds, but practically, though not officially, under the control of the Roman Catholic Church. Effort has often been made in the United States to secure a division of school funds, a part being set aside as available for the parochial school, but the suggestion has never yet met with favor. Such

¹ Religious Education, XI, p. 227.

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a plan is held by many Catholics themselves to be fundamentally opposed to the genius of the public school as a democratic institution. It is not known how large a proportion of the children of Roman Catholics remain untouched by the church's efforts to supply religious instruction. Although many Catholic children attend the public schools, it is probable that the great majority even of these are for a considerable period brought under the church's teaching influence.

Protestants, no less than Roman Catholics and Jews, acknowledge their responsibility for providing religious instruction. It is generally admitted, however, that the instruction thus far provided has been less effective than it should be, and far from adequate. There are several reasons why this is so. In the first place, the members of Protestant churches have devoted themselves to the cause of freedom in its larger aspects, and to this end have been instrumental in the extension and development of the public school system and in the establishment of colleges, universities, and other institutions of higher learning. Jealous of their freedom in religion, they have been content to see the growth of general education, trusting that religious instruction would be supplied in some way by private agencies. From this element in the population has come also, in large measure, the initiative in the social-settlement movement and other democratizing agencies. Thus, both leadership and financial support have been required which otherwise might naturally have been available for the development of religious education.

Again, among Protestant bodies there is often uncertainty as to where the responsibility for religious instruction properly lies. In the Roman Catholic Church there is no such uncertainty; the priest has his duty clearly marked out for him. The Jewish rabbi also perceives his duty with equal clearness. But Protestant pastors some-

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times boast that "they do not meddle with the Sunday school," and many Protestant churches make no provision in their budget even for the cost of lesson material, leaving to devoted laymen and women the whole responsibility for the instruction of the church's children in religion.

Undoubtedly, the most serious obstacle to effective religious education has been the weakening of the Protestant forces through excessive division. This is a part of the price paid for religious liberty. The whole Protestant movement has been a movement toward freedom, and freedom in the church, as elsewhere, has too often been interpreted as being synonymous with individualism. The one hundred and fifty Protestant denominations in the United States to-day all testify to this spirit of independence in matters of religious faith and practice. But this very division of forces has so reduced the strength of any one denomination in most communities as to make it impossible to provide the essentials of effective religious instruction, such as proper lesson material, suitable classrooms and equipment, and trained teachers. On the other hand, such has been the divergence between denominations in their theory of education, some holding strongly to the principle of Christian nurture and emphasizing the catechism as a preparation for confirmation, others exalting conversion and looking with distrust and even disparagement upon all educational methods of developing the religious life, that it has been in many instances impossible to unite upon a practical program of cooperative religious instruction.

There are indications, however, that this overemphasis upon superficial and often accidental differences between the various branches of Protestantism is giving place to a keener appreciation of those great fundamentals which underlie all types of Christian faith, and to a spirit of cooperation in the great common tasks of the kingdom of

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God. One evidence of this is seen in the association of the Sunday schools which are to be found in practically every Protestant church, binding them together for the achievement of a common task. Although the instruction in the individual school has been too brief and often desultory, its influence has been enhanced by the sense of mutual support which has come through association with other churches in the same community, and through such association the churches have been feeling their way toward closer cooperation along new lines, making for practical efficiency while preserving religious liberty. Organizations like the Federal Council, the Sunday School Council, the Missionary Education Movement, and other similar federated movements, are illustrations of the new spirit which is permeating the Protestant denominations, and through them the life of the nation.

Within the last few years great advance has been made in Protestant circles. With the perfecting of the means and methods of public school education, the disparity between this and Sunday school instruction became more apparent. The official societies and boards of the Protestant denominations began to concern themselves seriously with the production of graded lesson material, the improvement of equipment and the conditions of teaching, and with the preparation of teachers. All this has made only the more evident the impossibility of providing adequate instruction in religion within the space of thirty or forty minutes on one day a week, and that a rest day.

A comparison of the actual time devoted to instruction and training in the Christian faith with either the total school time or the recreation time of the average pupil, reveals an astonishing discrepancy and makes one wonder that so much is actually accomplished for religion in so brief a period. The same conclusion is reached upon com-

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parison of the time devoted to the study of the Bible with the time required for the study of any common subject like mathematics, or even penmanship, in the public schools. Already there are many among the Protestant forces who are turning their eyes toward the other days of the week in the hope of discovering somewhere an opportunity for inserting at least a limited program of religious instruction among the many studies and activities planned for children and young people.

The Sunday School Council minutes for January, 1917, give 18,601,103 as the number now enrolled in the Sunday schools of the twenty-eight constituent Protestant denominations. This number includes a considerable number of adults. According to the census reports of 1915, there are 22,000,000 children enrolled in the public schools. This, of course, does not include all of the children of school age; allowance must be made for the pupils in attendance upon private schools and parochial schools. All things considered, it is a large task confronting the Protestant churches, first, to provide a religious instruction which shall reach all who are entitled to it; and, second, to provide an instruction which shall be adequate.

It is a significant fact that just at the time when the officials of the Protestant denominations are turning their attention with a new solicitude to the task of making religious instruction more adequate, a new interest in this same problem is manifest in another quarter. At its convention in 1903, the National Education Association took the following action with reference to religious instruction:

We must conclude, therefore, that the prerogative of religious instruction is in the church, and that it must remain in the church, and that in the nature of things it cannot be farmed out to the secular school without degenerating into a mere deism

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without a living Providence, or else changing the school into a parochial school and destroying the efficiency of secular instruction.

Since then, however, the impression has been gaining ground that something is wrong with the educational situation. However successful the public schools may be as disseminators of information, the realization is being forced upon us that knowledge does not insure morality, much less religion. Many close students of education have been growing increasingly solicitous over the fact that dishonesty, a spirit of lawlessness, lack of loyalty and true patriotism—not to mention more serious lapses into immorality—are to be found in schools which otherwise seem to have conformed to requirements. Moreover, the popular ignorance of the Bible has been widely deplored, no less by teachers of literature and history than by zealous representatives of the church. It was also observed that boys and girls attending the public schools were drawing the altogether logical but fatal inference that, inasmuch as attendance upon the public school is required, while attendance upon Sunday school is optional, therefore, “secular education” is important, but religious instruction is a matter of indifference.

Several interesting experiments have recently been made in the field of general education, such as the North Dakota plan for securing a better knowledge of the Bible, the Colorado plan for increasing the effectiveness of Bible teaching, and the Gary plan, which offers to leave unoccupied a portion of the pupil's week-day program on condition that this be filled with appropriate religious instruction by the church, at the option of the parent.

The members of the Protestant churches have approached the task of education in general from the point of view of civic necessity; religious instruction they have regarded too often as a matter of denominational concern.