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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN PENAL INSTITUTIONS

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fellow-worker, a playmate. "The world," says Chesterton, "is the fortress of our family; with the flag flying in the turret."

Therefore let us develop in each child the ardent love that will conquer faults, because it will set free the force and sweep of a compelling desire to make good.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN PENAL INSTITUTIONS

"HOWARD E. SMITH"

State Prison Tombs, Windsor, Vermont

The moral regeneration of persons confined in prison is one of the most pressing needs in penological and social reform. It is strictly the opportunity of the church, an opportunity which the church has, more or less, failed to grasp. The Protestant and Roman Catholic chaplains must be men who have vision to see the immediate needs, and are capable of relating those needs to the progressive movements of penal and social reform. Not only must they have consecration of a high order, devotion, and religious fervor, but an inclusive objective view which will enable them to determine the exact status and needs of their people in relation to God, society, and life as a whole. The "institutional" church minister must preach and teach a social morality. He must make the prisoner sensitive to the interests of those whom he does not see, as well as of those of his neighbor. The average prisoner clings tenaciously to the past. He needs education and guidance along social lines, both in order to do his duty and achieve his legitimate success while in prison, and as a preparation for life's battles after release. This can be best attained through religious education that does not stop at the mere perfunctoriness of reciting the Apostles' Creed, "God bless you, Amen."

The fact chiefly ignored in the "institutional" church is the cosmopolitan character of the racial and mixed population inhabiting penal institutions. The evident differences in men are so forgotten by Protestant authorities that what goes in one ear of the Roman Catholic or Hebrew from the mouth of a Protestant chaplain, minister, or layman, passes out of the other ear unheeded, while the prisoner is indulging in more or less audible or inward scoffing. The same may be said of the Protestant who is compelled to attend

Roman Catholic service. Not understanding the significance of the Romanist Creed and rituals, he is disposed to treat that service with amused contempt.

Inmates of prisons and reformatories should have their faith, beliefs, and religious convictions respected and encouraged, whether Protestant, Jewish, or Catholic, and this only can be done by having them stately gathered in separate groups. This could be under the same roof with rooms for a congregational church and one of the Roman Catholic order.

The Protestant chaplain and the Catholic priest should work together—and they only—for the good of their respective flocks. The Catholic priest should be put on an equal footing with the regular chaplain and permitted to enjoy the same privileges and emoluments of office. In many prisons the Catholics predominate, while in others the two faiths are about equally divided. Both Protestant and Catholic functionaries should be compelled by law to circulate more freely among the inmates to “watch over,” give “guidance,” and “instruction,” and to show a “sympathetic,” but not undue meddlesome interest in their charges’ welfare.

Furthermore: Sunday preaching in the “institutional” church does not, according to my observation, amount to much, no matter how well delivered, if it is not followed up by continuous religious education along other lines. By Monday morning it is all forgotten unless kept in mind by a regular course in Bible-class work under competent instructors, as well as by Sunday school work and studies in good literature. The law does not provide such a religious educational curriculum as here advocated, either in the State of Vermont or in two-thirds of the other states, and until it does, religious training, as now passed around in most institutions, will not amount to much in “soul-saving” or in preparing the prisoner for the fulfilling of the ordinary decencies of life. Religious education of the proper sort in prisons requires extra time, patience, and work on the part of guards, keepers, and instructors. They are not paid to do this class of work now, and many of them are incompetent anyway.

To make religious instruction worth while it should be given to the pupil under as nearly normal conditions as possible, and to effect this the respectable and religiously inclined free citizenship of the community in which the institution is located should be invited, and given free access—under proper restrictions—to the prison body in order to have a definite part in the religious services. For instance, every prison and reformatory management in the country will employ a “lady” organist to play the often worn-out prison

melodeon? Well, why not have women Sunday school teachers on the religious staff of the institution to act as instructors in Bible study, etc.? Are prison inmates so much worse than the horde of crooks in the outer world that go to church to cover their crookedness? Are we prisoners so much worse than the "dope" eating, and "dope" smoking, heathen Chinese that receives the religious attention of good women teachers connected with almost every Sunday school in the big cities, that we must be passed up as being beyond the pale in aspiring to the holy influence of pure womanhood in our search after righteousness? Can society understand the value of pure womanhood as a working force in the moral regeneration of mankind locked up in its beastly prison houses? If so, then the tongue, the pen, and the press, the exponent of religious education should sound the tocsin of such a reform at once.

Something worth while can be done in the matter of religious education even in prisons. You may be sure of one thing, prisoners will respect pure womanhood and give closer attention to their moral influence than they will to any "be-whiskered" or close-shaven disciple of Christianity of the male persuasion that ever graced a pulpit or adorned a Sunday school class.

The writer of this communication spent much of his youth within the confines of juvenile reformatories, and away from the influence of good women, just as thousands of mother's sons to-day are doing in many institutions of like character, and they, too, will in time come forth "hell-bent" for election to one or more state prisons because of it.

There is another viewpoint on religious education and training I will cite here and which is applicable to all "outcasts" of society, either in or out of prison, and one that is usually lost sight of by "institutional" church, and "settlement workers." You enquire, "What should be done for moral instruction in prisons?" I will reply that as no clean result can come from an unclean source, the primal remedy is to purify the sources themselves. This work is a double one. It must be applied both to the body and to the soul. The external man and the internal man should both be reformed. Each one of these processes is essential. The second is by far the most important; but in order to reach it the first one must not be neglected. For it is no easy task to Christianize a ragged outcast with a half dozen layers of filth all over his frame, and no bread in his mouth but what he gets by begging or stealing. It is no easy task to Christianize a woe-be-gone prisoner received into a prison house to serve out years of penal servitude amidst vermin-infested cells, and living

in close proximity to beastly immoralities and foul-mouthed utterances of degenerates that are herded together with the better prison element.

It is no easy matter to Christianize such a one after making a slave of him to enrich prison contractors, and add to the state treasury, while the man's family are in all likelihood starving, and he himself worried half to death. Reform prison conditions as they should be, then come with your religion. Otherwise keep away. It's only a stultified snare and delusion. It is no easy matter to Christianize a child that is free from restraint or one that is locked up in some pestiferous juvenile reformatory, by two hours or less of Sabbath school teaching, while the devil has undisputed control over that child through all the hours of all the other six days of the week.

It is no easy task to make a vagrant girl obey either the seventh or the eighth commandment, if absolute want is driving her to theft, or to the sale of her womanhood to buy her bread. The soul must be cared for and the physical condition too. The Bible and the pamphlet should be given these outcasts; but a preliminary step is to do all we can to provide for them a clean face and a clean dress, and a better chance to live without crime. Let society endeavor to give them employment—if in prison—of a kind that will remunerate them as a reward of merit toward honest endeavor; and if free, to help them into places of livelihood. Let them learn to be not paupers, but producers; not mendicants and plunderers, but self-respecting self-supporters. And then, with this care for the perishing body, let the votaries of Christianity give them the gospel as a plain, simple method of salvation, and as a practical rule of life. Let them have it free and warm and loving; just as it burst from Heaven in its fullness, just as it breathed from Calvary in its tenderness. Let it come to them in every possible channel. Through the chaplain, through the priest, through the teacher, through visiting laymen and evangelists, through the Salvation Army laddies and lassies, through the efforts of private Christians, through whatever means may be brought to bear; for all the disciples of Christ should covet a place in practical philanthropy, thereby lending their aid to the enthronement of a still more practical religious education to the "down" and "outs" within and without penal institutions.