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Religious Education

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No. 1

Co-Ordination in Religious Education

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In order to pave the way to any healthful and helpful co-ordination of religious educational agencies in a community Christian people must open up their minds to some very vital and far reaching truths. One is that Religion is God's education of man, that the old time treatment of nature and the supernatural as two enemies striving for the mastery in the universe, is being cast out from both philosophy and theology, that there is not a blade of grass that could hold itself erect and green for half a minute were it not for an unseen and intangible power above it and beneath it, and that no miracle has ever been performed upon the face of the earth that was not the most natural thing in the world for Him who performed it. This gulf so long fixed but now being filled between the God of the heavens and the God of the earth, the God among His great stars and the God among His grape vines and corn fields, has created and sustained a conception of religion that has put but little emphasis upon its educational nature and covered it over with a series of decrees, covenants, transactions and satisfactions in the counsels of a far off heaven. Religious education is the core of the Old Testament. "Thus said the Lord" is not a proclamation shot down from the skies, but a "Thus saith the Lord" through the vital spiritual experiences of men, a personal, and growingly intimate, and growingly significant relationship between child and father. And the disciple-band of the New Testament means the same thing, a group of souls coming to a consciousness of their power, their potentiality, their predestination and their destiny with the gradual ascent and outward reach that characterize all forms of life, the steady upward march of vitalized and illuminated faculties, the slow-footed, sure-footed entrance of God into human life that has for its object and its glory the transformation of the common man into the divine man.

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We are coming to this. There is scripture and reason at the bottom of it, and there is in it a rational conception of humanity and a rational conception of the heavenly fatherhood that will give wings to all our efforts for Christian educational co-operation and confederation. For it will clothe our religion in terms of life and life is something we are all interested in.

And another prerequisite of such co-operation and confederation is a realization of the utter unwisdom of putting into the life of childhood the religious conceptions of manhood. Every great doctrine of the creeds of Christendom, the growing creeds of Christendom, the enlarged and liberalized creeds of Christendom, has something in it for the laughing souls of boys and girls, and it is poor religious teaching that would stop that laughter or turn it into a morbid emotionalism or an artificial trickle of tears. Our Bible Schools must remember that a child is a child, a growing thing, from little crumpled fingers running along the rainbows to the beauty and strength of manhood facing the world for toil and battle. We are told that the heavy doctrines will come up afterward through the child's consciousness and reach the surface by the time he becomes a man. Better put in something that will come up now and reach the surface while it is plastic and do some good in the present tense. I would not care much for any co-operation that would unite the Christian educational forces for the deeper reach and the wider spread of religious conceptions that must be gotten rid of with a better knowledge of the Bible, and as more of God's revealing light breaks in upon the minds and souls of men. A ten-year-old child weeping over Adam's sin or the lost condition of mankind would better be out in the yard jumping rope or swapping jackknives. It can be told of sin, but better leave Adam out. It can understand sin but it cannot get very close to Adam.

And another thing that will lead toward co-operation and co-ordination in religious education will be a trip hammer emphasis on the essentials of Christianity. If we are going to meet anywhere, this is where we must meet, and the horizon here is all lined with light. We are getting hold more and more of the vertebral column of Christianity. Our little old battle fields are budding, the flowers creeping over them and the blossoms of the trees of life falling down upon them. It is not a matter of sentiment, but

a huge bulk of sane and sensible conviction that is beginning to dominate the whole realm of religious thought with the persuasion that if we are going to win men to Christ, it must be by the Gospel of Christ and not by the gospels of the Councils. Some of these non-essentials are very beautiful, and some of them are dry as dust, some of them waft a little celestial perfume as they rustle by, and some of them are encrusted in glorious historic traditions of the militant church. But under them all and more important than them all are the ribs of the faith and it is the ribs and the ribs alone that are going to count in bringing in the millennium of our Christian union. There will be no co-ordination of anything worth anything among the little tangles of our ecclesiastical fringes. It must be in "the innermost rim of the heart's red center." It must be Christianity reduced to its common denominator. It must be its universal appeal to the universal man. There is such an appeal and there is such a man and they will come together if we will only let them. We do not know whether the Christian church shall ever fall into a single organization, but whether it does or not, it shall fall and it is falling into a single spirit and into a loyalty to its essential truth that shall open up pathways to a co-ordination in evangelism, in education, in mission work and in many ways that shall be like a veritable wind of God, blowing over its pulpits and down its aisles. We have no program. The program will come with the arrival of the men and the arrival of the spirit and with the arrival among other things of an intense realization that our religion must be put into terms of life, that a child religion must be taught to a child and that the basis of all our union must be found in the essential truths and principles of the Christian religion and the Christian ethics. It will start in the local church under the hands of the minister and go out into the larger field under the direction of the Spirit of God, and it will be encouraged, helped, inspired by such work as the Religious Education Association is doing, by the widening of Christian sympathy, by the finding of profound unities among manifold perplexities, and by such love for human souls and such watchful care over their development as shall strip away from us our little bigotries, and fill us with an enlightened enthusiasm for humanity and the Kingdom of God through which they cannot be seen, but only the Master's arms around the Galilean children.