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WEEK-DAY RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN NEW YORK CITY

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In New York City there are in round numbers 831,000 children enrolled in the public schools. Of these, 340,000, in round numbers, are known to be enrolled in church classes for instruction; approximately 190,000 in Protestant Sunday schools; 108,000 in Roman Catholic Sunday schools and week-day catechism classes; and 41,000 in Jewish religious schools. Of the children unaccounted for, not a few, undoubtedly, receive religious instruction at home; but their number is probably negligible in the thousands to be reckoned with in a city where family life has changed to such an extent that formal home instruction is not common. That there are many parents who feel strongly the need of systematic religious instruction is evidenced by an enrollment of approximately 150,000 or more in parochial schools under the supervision of various religious bodies in the city. To summarize the situation roughly, out of about 1,000,000 children of school age in New York, approximately 500,000 are receiving no religious instruction whatsoever, so far as can be ascertained at present.

The problem before the church, then, is how the door of religious instruction is to be opened to the half million or so children in New York to whom it is at present closed. That religious bodies are not able to furnish figures which they are willing to call accurate is a commentary on the absence of a sense of responsibility on the part of the average city church toward the welfare of the whole community, and a commentary on the lack of aggressive missionary spirit and method in the home field. The discrepancy in the enrollment for academic instruction and religious instruction is also a commentary on the so-called efficiency of modern Sunday school methods which fail to attract the unchurched child, when, under the best conditions, the church must always rely on its winsomeness and power of attraction. But that the churches are at last awakening alike to the magnitude of the problem and the need of concerted action, and are beginning to work toward a solution, is hopeful of a better day.

In the past, several inter-denominational committees have

been in existence in New York, which have done splendid pioneer work in blazing the way; many conferences have been held, and various methods have been suggested. None, however, has been found practicable till this spring. Then a partial change in the public school system of New York, through the introduction of some schools of the Gary type, created an entirely new situation. This situation, when analyzed, revealed a fact much more important from the standpoint of the churches; namely, that, for the last year and a half, through the Ettinger plan, and for a long time through the part-time schedules of public school children, there had been presented to the church an opportunity to instruct large numbers of children on weekdays—an opportunity which they had overlooked. To this situation the church in New York is now awakening, and this new opportunity it is embracing with zeal.

Before discussing the public school situation with its new solution, it will, perhaps, clarify matters to state briefly the difficulties which have prevented previous committees from offering any constructive solution acceptable to the public school. Aside from the constitutional principles, zealously to be guarded by every American, namely the separation of church and state, involving the principle of no public funds for sectarian teaching, the rightful liberty of every individual to his own belief or non-belief, and the neutrality of the school building, there is an educational principle with which the church must also square its practice. The school needs not less than five hours a day for five days of the week for the academic training of the child. Very rightly, therefore, the school authorities reject any proposition by church authorities to curtail that time, so that to ask for the whole of Wednesday or Friday afternoon, or even the half of either of them, would be sure to meet with a just refusal in the future as in the past. Nor can the church afford to stand for the principle of inadequate academic training for the child. Rather, because of its historical relation to education, it ought to be the first to safeguard the child's intellectual rights. An equally firm position needs to be taken in regard to the recreational time of the child, and any encroachment upon his rightful share of sunshine and fresh air avoided. And again, the recent agitation in New York state for the reading of the Bible in the public schools has served to cloud the issue. Whatever ends the reading of the Bible, usually perfunctory, may serve, such reading can in no sense of the word be termed "educational." It

cannot take the place of the systematic training by the church in all the intellectual content of religion, nor train in worship, service, and the spiritual content of religion. Such an agitation can tend but to separate on a question of method, acknowledged by all to be inadequate, those who alike work for the principle of the religious training of the child.

Such have been some of the difficulties, well-founded and weighty, which have made a practicable program for religious instruction seem impossible in New York. But with the introduction of the Gary type of school, and the spread of the Ettinger Plan, the radically changed situation obviated some of these difficulties, and offered a practical solution for complying with others.

There had been in the city various groups which had watched the religious plan in Gary, Indiana, with much interest. Among them was "The Committee on the Demonstration School of the Commission on Religious Education" of the Episcopal Church, under the chairmanship of Dr. Abby Porter Leland. Consequently, when, through the efforts of the Mayor and other city officials, one school of this type was organized in the fall of 1914 in Brooklyn, and another in February, 1915, in the Bronx, it was felt that the time was strategic for making religious instruction a tradition of this type of school in New York, so that wherever the type might spread in the city religious instruction might go as part of the recognized co-ordinated activities. The committee also felt the necessity of concerted action on the part of all religious bodies that all children in these schools may have offered to them the benefit of religious instruction. The need for such concerted action will be apparent from the experience of the principal of P. S. 45, Bronx, organized on the Gary plan. Though last spring he acquainted the churches of the neighborhood of their opportunity for securing the children weekdays, only one church accepted at that time, the Roman Catholic, and that church taught 1600 of its children in groups of 200 three times a week, for one hour and twenty minutes at a time. For the sake of all the children of the schools of New York, it was felt that no individual local church should feel that it must for any reason neglect this opportunity, or be left to struggle locally with what is part of a big city problem. Clearly an inter-denominational committee was needed to direct the whole movement in New York.

The church had no time to lose. Where there were 3000

children in one Gary school in the Bronx in February, 1915, there will be 35,000 children in 12 Gary schools in the Bronx, by vote of the Board of Education, as soon as the buildings can be reconstructed. The situation was enough to sober the most optimistic advocates of weekday religious instruction. Even in the history of foreign missions it would be difficult to find 35,000 children so suddenly accessible to the teaching care of the church.

In the face of this emergency, there was called at Columbia University on May 20, 1915, at the initiative of the Demonstration School Committee, a conference attended by about 100 representatives from the various religious bodies of the city, many delegates being officially appointed. The meeting was addressed by Mr. William Wirt, Superintendent of schools at Gary, who explained the possibility of religious instruction as part of the child's program. As a result of the discussion, a temporary committee was appointed to organize a permanent inter-denominational committee, officially appointed where possible, to take advantage of any opportunity offered by any school for weekday religious instruction. Bishop Courtney, of the Episcopal Church, was elected Chairman of the permanent committee, and Commissioner Whalen, of the Roman Catholic Church, Secretary. The members of the religious bodies so far affiliated are: Baptists, The Rev. Albert G. Lawson, the Rev. Robert G. Boville, the Rev. Charles H. Sears; Congregationalists, the Rev. C. E. Jefferson, the Rev. L. T. Reed; Disciples of Christ, the Rev. J. M. Philputt; Dutch Reformed, the Rev. H. E. Cobb, the Rev. P. S. Leinbach; Jews, the Rev. H. P. Mendez, the Rev. M. H. Harris, Mr. L. W. Goldrich; Lutherans, the Rev. G. U. Wenner; Methodists, Bishop Luther B. Wilson, the Rev. A. MacRossie, the Rev. D. G. Downey; Moravians, the Rt. Rev. Morris W. Leibert; Presbyterians, the Rev. Maitland Bartlett, the Rev. Walter Laidlaw, the Rev. A. H. Evans; Roman Catholics, The Rev. Fr. J. Caffuzzi, the Hon. John Whalen, Miss M. L. Brady, Miss Catherine McCann; Unitarians, Mr. O. E. Edwards, Jr.; Universalists, the Rev. F. O. Hall; United Presbyterians, the Rev. J. P. Lytle, the Rev. T. A. Stewart; Episcopalians, the Rt. Rev. Frederick Courtney, the Ven. W. H. Pott, the Rev. W. B. Stevens, Miss Abby Porter Leland.

This inter-denominational committee has, as yet, had opportunity to hold few meetings, because of its recent organization, and its plan of action is still not definitely formulated. So important is the problem that it desires to collect as much

information as possible before outlining definite modes of adjustment, procedure, and administration, which needs must vary somewhat according to the type of public school concerned.

Briefly it may be stated that it purposes to utilize any school program to secure weekday religious instruction for children who have none, through teachers and places being provided by the various denominations for those belonging to each, either in separate denominational classes or union classes as the local congregations desire. This, it is believed, can be done without any infringement upon religious liberty, and without the possibility of proselytizing. This general plan, too, contemplates no such thing as compulsory religious education; rather, it relies upon the co-operation of the parents, and an aggressive missionary spirit within the church itself. Its aim is to inculcate matters of faith and morals rather than of sectarianism—a policy which must be determined by each religious body for itself, like other internal policies. It is hardly necessary to point out that there will be no direct connection established between the church and the public school, inasmuch as the hours to be utilized, whenever they occur, are not used by the school for academic instruction, and are not under the control of the Board of Education. By this plan, a religious instruction is not injected into the school system: it is kept outside of the school, within the church's province. In short, the Inter-denominational Committee makes but one condition: that the time used by the church is not needed by the school for academic training. In this spirit of fairness, it can later ask with more justice that the school authorities recognize the necessity and right of the child to religious instruction, and so arrange the program of academic instruction as to offer to the churches a fair opportunity to discharge their duty to the child efficiently.

At present, the hours available for religious instruction in New York vary. Under the Gary plan, which will embrace 35,000 children shortly, the children may go to their respective churches, by direction of their parents, at the auditorium period, which occurs for various groups successively throughout the day. Under the Ettinger plan—which may be described as a device to secure full time for children in over-crowded schools by a schedule of inter-locking hours so that groups A and B will alternate at various periods between 8:30 and 4:30—90,000 children can be reached now, half up to 10:30 and half after 2:30. Besides these schedules, there are 47,000 children on part-

time programs, and over 100,000 children in first year classes on a four-hour daily schedule, who can be reached at various hours of the day. The rest of the 831,000 public school children are on a regular schedule between 9 and 3 o'clock. It will therefore be seen that in the majority of cases, as matters now stand, the churches will really be using the street time of children, since no school program, except the Gary, provides for the welfare of the children outside of the class-room and the play-ground. It is also evident that for some time churches have crowded their work for children, generally of a club nature, into the hours after 3:30 o'clock, when to a certain extent they could have reorganized their work for the morning hours with great advantage.

In order better to study the situation and suggest possible adjustments for weekday work in systematic instruction, the Inter-denominational Committee has arranged for sub-committees in each borough, of which the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Manhattan have already been organized.

The Bronx situation is of course the most critical. Here the church had scarcely two months warning before the vote of the Board of Education authorized the reorganization on the Gary plan of the 12 schools of the section with 35,000 children, as soon as the necessary changes could be made. The Bronx Sub-committee, under the Chairmanship of the Hon. John Whalen, with Episcopal, Roman Catholic, Baptist, Presbyterian, Jewish, and Methodist representation, has organized a local council for the district about P. S. 45, where the weekday work has already been begun, and will organize other councils in other school districts, as the work spreads.

In Brooklyn, the Borough Committee, under the chairmanship of the Rev. Albert G. Lawson, D.D. of the Baptist Church, with Baptist, Congregational, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal, Methodist, Moravian, Presbyterian, Reformed, and Roman Catholic representation, will center its work about the Gary-type P. S. 89, Flatbush, for the present. Among the first things the committee plans to do is to provide for a thorough canvass of the district which will have for object the location and attitude of the nearer churches; the number and character of the Sunday schools; the physical provisions or possibilities for the teaching of scholars from the public schools; and the feasibility of community effort, possibly by securing a building near the public school for the joint use of the various religious bodies.

In Manhattan, the work of the Borough Committee, under

the Chairmanship of Dr. Leland, of the Episcopal Church, has centered about P. S. 43, on the Ettinger Plan through 3B and the schools near. The first step taken was to organize in Manhattanville a district council now composed of 25 clergymen and school authorities responsible for the welfare of the children of the neighborhood, among them representatives of the Dutch Reformed, Episcopal, Jewish, Methodist, Lutheran, Reformed, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic churches. The next thing done was to authorize a census of the district from 116th Street to 137th Street, and the Hudson River to Eighth Avenue, in order to ascertain the exact number and location of the children not affiliated with any religious body. This census will be followed up by visitors of the churches with which the families report they have in the past been connected, so that their children may have the door of religious instruction open to them. As soon as weekday work is started with children already in attendance at Sunday-schools, the unchurched children, thus located, will be added. Since last spring weekday work has been conducted at the Episcopal church of the neighborhood, under the direction now of the Rev. John Wallace Suter, Jr., Director of Religious Education.

The movement is still in its infancy, with the future unknown. But already it has accomplished two things. In the first place, the churches in the neighborhoods affected have become more active and vital community forces, directly chargeable with the welfare of the children in the public schools near them. And lastly, all the religious bodies of New York have agreed, for the first time, on a program of religious instruction for every school child—all the churches standing shoulder to shoulder, laying aside all sectarian differences, united on a platform that advocates the right of every child to be taught the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man.