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THE CHURCH AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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THE CHURCH AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

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The institutions of religion called churches and the institutions of education called schools cannot coexist in the modern world without some sort of relation definitely recognized and expressed. In the mediæval age there was no need of defining or discussing that relation, because both education and religion were expressed through the one institution—the Church. The School and the Church were one, as Church and State were one.

But now, in that differentiation of function, that development of special organs for special tasks, which so clearly marks modern life, there has come about not only the momentous change which we crudely call the separation of Church and State, but another change hardly yet recognized but far more momentous—the separation of religion from education. The public schools, which once taught every child that in “Adam’s fall we sinned all,” now teaches nothing of Biblical history or of Christian truth, and the indispensable task of Christian education is falling between Church and State, to be undertaken by neither. The state has handed religion over to the Church, and the Church has handed education over to the State. Who, then, is henceforth responsible for religious education? The State saith, “It is not in me,” and the Church saith, “It is not in me.” Hence we have in America millions of children growing up without any religious training whatever—a situation which would have seemed inconceivable to ancient Athens or mediæval Florence, a situation such as no pagan nation ever tolerated, a situation today incomprehensible to Berlin or London, or even to Cairo or Constantinople, a situation more perilous than any other with which the Republic is now confronted. The rising generation is well versed in the history of Europe and America, but usually knows nothing of the story of Israel or of the origin of Christianity. It is familiar with Central Africa, but it is ignorant of Palestine. It can recount the achievements of Huxley and Pasteur, but cannot distinguish Simon Peter from Simon Magus, and has been known to imagine that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife. Thus the Christian vocabulary has become to millions a

foreign tongue, the circle of Christian ideas has become a cloud-land, and religion itself seems to great sections of our population a belated survival of oriental mysticism, an alien in the modern world.

Confronted by this problem the Church may attempt to re-establish its own schools in which to propagate its own faith, or it may, on the other hand, attempt to permeate the schools already established and maintained by civil society. What shall be its aim—the recovery of former powers and implements, or the permeation of the new implements and institutions with the Christian spirit? The attitude of the Roman Catholic Church is unequivocal. It seeks to recover control over all the apparatus of education, to have every teacher appointed by the Church, every school a means of religious propaganda, every pupil instructed in religious dogma and duty, and thus to return in essence to the educational method of the thirteenth century. What attitude shall our Protestant Churches assume?

1. Whether the Church is to develop its own organs of education or not, it has the obvious duty of utilizing the agencies which already exist. It must steadily seek to permeate our present school system with Christian ideals, with ethical passion, with the attitudes and standards of the New Testament. The real essentials in school are the essentials in life, since the school is a part of life. In school days our children are not getting ready to live, they are actually living, and the one essential in living is character. Back of all mastery of printed symbols, vastly more important than any manual skill, is the establishment of enduring character, i. e., the regular organized reaction upon sensations and ideas. The one essential in the making of men is the establishment of such inner association between reception of ideas and motor response that knowledge shall at once pass into action, and the student shall learn what is true simply in order that he may do what is right.

The translation of a Latin sentence is not primarily an intellectual task, it is a matter of will-attitude, a matter of self-mastery in the presence of the unknown, the difficult, the complicated. The examination of a flower under the microscope is not a matter of counting stamens to be followed by the chasing of

Latin names through a book—it is a matter of moral and aesthetic standards as well, of the pupil's power to wonder, to admire, to pursue the suggestions of nature until we reach the fundamental law. The study of civics, of the origin of social institutions, cannot be severed from our attitude toward humanity in general, and whatever facts we discover, the meaning of those facts will be one thing for the cynic and misanthrope, another for the man who believes that God is in his world as well as in his heaven. Hence the Church is vitally concerned with securing teachers of reverent mind and religious insight for our schools, with the maintenance of ethical standards in mental effort, with highmindedness in all who serve on boards of education, with the promotion of such an atmosphere that the spiritual nature of the pupil shall find nourishment and stimulus from day to day. Doubtless this nourishment can be afforded in some measure by direct ethical instruction. Codes of morals can be formulated, duties defined and enforced as in France and Japan. Cases of casuistry can be safely discussed with older pupils. But it would be unfortunate to have one teacher devoting his time to moral instruction and the rest neglecting it altogether. It would be unfortunate for forty minutes to be devoted to character building while all the periods before and after should neglect it.

Religion after all cannot be taught—it can simply be communicated. It comes not as a series of propositions, but as an atmosphere in which all propositions are seen in new light. It is not something added to home or school, like a new piece of furniture thrust into a room already crowded. It comes rather as the entering sunlight, showing the meaning and use of all the furniture we have long possessed. Hence an utterly secular education is a contradiction in terms. The little red schoolhouse of a former day has vanished, and the various organs through which society achieves its expression may be wholly changed. But the institutions now existing, whatever they may be, are to be permeated with Christian influence.

The State Universities are today opening a noble field of ministration to some of our more alert churches. The popular magazines are throbbing with ethical enthusiasm. The newspapers are swift to blame when wrong, but we are slow to encourage them when right. The public library should be a part of the

working capital of every pastor. All the implements and institutions of modern society are to be led into captivity to the spirit of Christ.

2. The Church must create certain implements of its own for the work of Christian education. I have no time to dwell on this—and it is not needful that I should. The Sunday school is peculiarly the creation of the Church, and is the institution where there is today the greatest gulf between possibility and performance. The private Christian boarding-school furnishes one of the finest opportunities of our generation. Such schools are now what the colleges were seventy-five years ago. In the small college the cure of souls is still the chief concern and the Church that founds colleges shall find through their reflex influence a vast change effected in its own temper and character.

3. Most important of all is it that the Church should conceive its entire task as an education rather than an exhortation. It must interpret its own mission in terms of process rather than in terms of crisis. This is the conception of the New Testament, although the New Testament has not always been so understood. But a religion which calls its followers "disciples," or learners, is a religion in which the teaching note is dominant. Such a religion includes the crisis indeed, as a stage in the education of the normal man; but it is vastly more than a hurried evangelism, however devoted and sincere. Primitive Christianity may have expected some sort of immediate catastrophe, but at the heart of it also lay the conviction that "this gospel should be preached in the whole world," that "the end is not yet," that only "after a long time" would the Lord of those servants come and reckon with them. Christianity taught all men to take the long view rather than the short view, and to see how through the ages one increasing purpose runs.

Here, then, is the ideal which is to govern the Church as it faces the heterogeneous problems of modern life. It must send its members, its tests, its standards, its ideals, into all the schools, associations, publications, organizations, social, civic and political, of the world around it. It must create certain Church-schools for the definite, and even dogmatic, religious teaching of youth. It must conceive its entire task as gradual, as educational,—as part of the fulfillment of that great summons to both energy and patience: "Go ye and make learners of all the nations."