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RELIGIOUS EXERCISES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Material for this summary has been received from Mr. Harold J. Sheridan who reports for the province of Ontario, and from Mr. L. W. Kibler whose study included the states of Oklahoma and Arkansas. An effort was made to supplement this material with recent studies already published, but diligent search in the proceedings of both the R. E. A. and the N. E. A. revealed the dearth of literature on this subject.

IN ONTARIO, CANADA

The report on Religious Exercises in the Public Schools of Ontario may be summarized as follows:

1. *Legal provisions.* (a) Every public school must be opened with the reading of the Scriptures and the repeating of the Lord's prayer, and be closed with the Lord's prayer or the prayer authorized by the Board of Education.

(b) The parts of the Scriptures to be read may be taken from the book of selections adopted by the Department of Education for that purpose, or from the Bible, or from the list of the Selected Scripture Readings of the International Bible Reading Association, as the local Board by resolution may direct.

(c) The Board may also order the reading of the Scriptures by pupils and teachers daily at the closing of the schools, and, in addition the repeating of the Ten Commandments at least once a week and the memorization of passages selected by the Principal from the Bible.

In the administration of the above legal provisions the Department of Education distributes the selected Scripture readings of the International Bible Readers Association, supplies a book of selections for teachers who care to use it, and requires an official report from each teacher stating whether or not the schools have been opened and closed with prayer, and whether the Bible or the Scripture selections were used.

The most recent report of the Minister of Education shows that 45.87 per cent of the schools used the authorized Scripture selections; 70.94 per cent used the Bible, and 94.61 per cent were opened and closed with prayer.

2. *Method of Conducting Exercises.* The method of conducting the required religious exercises varies with different schools and

with different teachers. Most of the teachers value the exercises very highly and conduct them in such a manner as to produce a favorable response from the pupils; other teachers conduct the exercises in a perfunctory and lifeless manner with a harmful reaction upon the pupils.

Many of the teachers encourage the pupils to bring their own Bibles to school. In such cases the reading is usually in concert or alternately. To avoid sectarian differences teachers are expected to refrain from comment upon the passages read. Some teachers add singing to the opening exercises and for this purpose use is often made of a hymn. A fair average of the amount of time given to the religious exercises in an Ontario school room would probably be not less than ten minutes each day.

The conditions in Ontario, where the law demands definite religious exercises daily, are in sharp contrast with the conditions in Oklahoma and Arkansas where the statutes providing against sectarian teaching are most easily complied with by ignoring religious instruction altogether.

IN OKLAHOMA AND ARKANSAS

Acting under the direction of the department of education of the University of Oklahoma, Mr. Kibler sent a question circular dealing with the problems of this report to 475 Oklahoma schools and 300 Arkansas schools. No blanks were sent to schools employing fewer than five teachers in addition to the principal or superintendent. No attempt was made to investigate the one-room village and rural schools.

Replies were received from 160 of the 475 Oklahoma schools, and 45 of the 300 Arkansas schools. The replies are territorially representative in that they came from nearly every county of both states. It is safe to assume that schools making no response had little interest in the subject under discussion. The conditions in the two states are so nearly alike that no attempt will be made to distinguish between them in this summary. The following are the significant facts.

1. Two hundred five out of 775 schools reported.
2. Of the 205 schools reporting, 182 have religious exercises and 23 do not have such exercises. The reasons assigned for holding religious exercises are as follows: for religious training, 80; for moral training, 65; to give variation to the day's program, 2; to provide unity of program, 3; to provide a place for general an-

nouncements, 2; for general influence upon the school, 2. Reasons assigned for not holding religious exercises were as follows: It is the business of the church, 1; religious prejudice, 14; no auditorium, 4; not customary, 1; mixed community, 1; no special value in such services, 3.

3. The amount of time devoted to religious exercises was not clearly revealed by the reports. A very few schools report daily exercises; eight schools hold semi-weekly exercises, and seventeen schools report weekly sessions. Thirty-eight schools report services of less than fifteen minutes in length; forty-nine hold services from fifteen to twenty minutes; eighty-four from twenty to thirty minutes, and twenty from thirty minutes to one hour. When sessions are held but once or twice a week a longer period is used, special speakers, and special music consuming the greater portion of the time.

4. The contents of the program of worship include music, Bible reading, talks, prayer, short stories, etc. The singing is a combination of concert, solos, duets and quartettes. In schools having a special teacher or department of music the exercises are more varied than in the smaller schools. One hundred sixty-two schools have Bible reading; 150 have prayer; 22 have prayer and benediction; 160 have talks by clergymen, business or professional men, and teachers; 6 have short stories; 9 orchestra or victrola music, and 8 use the time for debates, drills or readings.

5. Hymns, national airs and popular songs are combined in most schools. One hundred four schools use hymns, 154 use national airs, and 75 use popular songs. *One Hundred and One Best Songs* and *Songs We Like to Sing* are the two books most commonly used. Other books, listed in the order of their popularity are: *Assembly Hymn and Song Collection*, *The New Evangel*, *Revival Hymns* and *Pentacostal Hymns*.

The songs most commonly used, listed in the order of their popularity as indicated in the replies received, are: *America*; *Battle Hymn of the Republic*; *Tramp, Tramp, Tramp*; *Star Spangled Banner*; *Oklahoma*; *Dixie*; *Flow Gently Sweet Afton*; *Santa Lucia*; *Come Thou Almighty King*; *Lovely Night*; *O'er the Waters Gliding*; *Italia*; *Annie Laurie*; *The Anvil Chorus*; *Love's Old Sweet Song*; *My Old Kentucky Home*; *Old Black Joe*; *Juanita*; *Old Oaken Bucket*; *Face to Face*; *Holy, Holy, Holy*; *Lead Kindly Light*; *Bringing in the Sheaves*.

6. The Bible is most frequently used for the reading in the religious exercises of the two states, although historical, literary and

scientific material is frequently introduced. The 205 schools use the different types of material in the following proportion: Bible, 160; Scientific, 35; Literary, 93; Historical, 61. The parts of the Bible most frequently used are indicated by the following figures: Psalms and Proverbs, 35; New Testament, 42; Gospels, 14; Parables, 6; Old Testament stories, 2. It is customary for the teachers in a building to lead the devotional services in turn and each teacher is at liberty to make his own selection of material. This will explain the wide range of material used. The desire to avoid denominational criticism probably has a distinct influence in determining the particular portions selected from the Bible.

7. The response of the pupils to the religious exercises is uniformly satisfactory. Many teachers report that it aids in discipline, others note the attention, interest and behavior of the pupils during the exercises.

8. That sentiment is overwhelmingly in favor of religious exercises in the schools is shown by the following statistics: Superintendents, 180 favorable, 12 unfavorable; Principals, 180 favorable, 10 unfavorable; Teachers, 185 favorable, 8 unfavorable; School Board, 182 favorable, 9 unfavorable; Parents, 178 favorable, 12 unfavorable; Pupils, 178 favorable, 12 unfavorable.

From the foregoing reports which may be said to represent the territory in which religious exercises are compulsory and the territory where such services are left to the discretion of the individual teachers, we may perhaps draw the following conclusions:

1. Religious exercises in the public schools are a valuable and a practical source of religious training. It is possible to organize and plan such exercises so that they will have definite religious value and still be without offense to patrons of diversified religious convictions.

2. Where the content of the religious services is determined by law there is a tendency to formal and perfunctory services, which must be overcome by enriching and vitalizing the material prescribed by statute. Where the material is determined by custom, or by the whims or interests of pupils or teachers it often degenerates into mere entertainment valuable for relaxation from regular school duties, or into a mongrel combination of prayer, anthem, and athletic "pep" meeting with the brass band and school yells.

3. No conscious effort seems to have been made to build a graded, progressive series of devotional exercises, carefully planned to promote the religious and moral growth of public school pupils.

4. No effort seems to have been made to carry the curriculum

material over into the devotional period; and no effort is reported to relate the devotional period to the current character problems of the school. We seem to be failing to use a valuable opportunity to cultivate the positive and profound emotional factors that operate in the control of conduct.

5. It is evident from the report from Oklahoma and Arkansas that public school teachers are overcautious regarding religious services in their schools. When the material is properly selected teachers can introduce religious exercises into any community without fear of unfavorable reaction from patrons.

6. The chaotic state of opinion with reference to many aspects of this problem, and the evident fact that religion is letting one of its most valuable agencies go by default, justifies the writer in recommending that a commission be appointed by the Religious Education Association to prepare suggestive programs of worship for the public schools and to compile a bibliography of program material including music, art, literature, with general directions for its selection and use in the various departments of the public schools.

SIGNS OF GROWING DEMOCRACY IN EDUCATION

The report of the Bureau of Education indicates a real increase during the year in progress toward that equality of educational opportunity which is essential in a democracy. This is indicated, declares Commissioner Claxton, in his introduction to the Report, in "greater interest in the health and care of young children and in a better type of home education; in the revival of interest in the kindergarten as an integral part of the public school system; in increased appropriations for longer terms and better salaries for teachers, particularly in rural communities where school terms have been short and salaries of teachers have been small; in the enactment of school attendance laws in some of the States which have not until now had such laws; in the adoption of the larger unit of administration of rural schools in several States; in the raising of standards of required preparation for teachers in some States and in the extension of the means of preparing teachers in normal schools, in departments of education in colleges, and especially in teacher-training classes in high schools; in the increased attendance in high schools; and in the differentiation of work and the adjustment of courses of study in schools of all grades to meet the needs of children of varying ability and the vocational life of the communities."