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Religious Education as a Part of General Education

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The modern conception of religious education takes the form of an argument. True education, it says, must develop all the normal capacities of the mind; religion is one of these normal capacities; therefore true education includes education in religion. If, for any reason, the state does not impart religious training, then the home and the church must assume the whole task. This task is no mere appendix to general education, but an essential part thereof. It is not a special or professional matter, which, like training in the fine arts, may be left to individual taste or ambition. Religious education must be provided for all children, and institutions that provide it for any children are organs of the general educational system.

This view is modern in the sense that a new awakening to it is upon us; it is modern in the sense that the exclusion of religious instruction from the public schools has given it peculiar emphasis and peculiar form; yet, in one form or another, it is as old as civilization. The theory that there can be any education that does not include religion; the theory that looks upon our so-called secular schools as a scheme of general education, leaving religious training as a mere side issue is so new as to be almost bizarre. If, therefore, any new idea is before us for our judgment, the question should be formulated as follows: What shall we think of the strange notion that men can be truly educated without reference to the development of their religious nature?

It is well, however, to think through the old idea in order to see whether it is, in any full sense, a modern idea also. In the present state of educational philosophy and of religious thought, can we make good the assertion that sound general education must include religion? If so, what shall we think of the education, commonly called general, that leaves religion out? What follows, also, with respect to the present relative isolation of religious education from our school system and our school methods?

The central fact of the modern educational movement is recognition of the child as a determining factor in the whole educational scheme. The child is a living organism, a being that grows from within by assimilation, not from without by accretion. Therefore the laws of the child-mind yield laws for educating the child, laws as to method, and laws as to material. Education is not to press the child into any prearranged mold, but to bring out his normal powers in their own natural order.

Religious education has commonly proceeded from the opposite point of view, namely, from a fixed system of religion to which the child is to be shaped. If, then, religion is to find any place in a general scheme of education under modern conditions, some kind of settlement must be effected between these opposing points of view. If we start from the modern philosophy of education, our question is this: Is the human being essentially religious, or only adventitiously so? Does religious nurture develop something already there in the child, or does it merely attach religion to the child, or the child to religion? On the other hand, if we start from the standpoint

of religion, our question is: Does not all education aim to fit the child for some goal or destiny; and, if so, how does religious education differ from any other except through its definition of the goal?

That the child has a religious nature can be asserted with a degree of scientific positiveness that was never possible before the present day. First, every theory that makes religion a mere by-product of history has been almost universally abandoned. Religion has come up out of the mind of man as a natural response to universal experience. There is a debate as to the content, the utility, and the significance of this response, but none as to its naturalness. The psychology of the day finds that religion is as deeply rooted in human nature as any of the higher instincts or impulses that distinguish man from lower orders of life.

The idea that religion belongs to man as such has been reinforced in recent years by accumulating evidence that the development of the human individual runs parallel, in a general way, to the evolution of man. The individual is said to recapitulate the history of his race. It follows that the mighty power and pervasiveness of religion in general history are to be looked for in miniature in child-life.

Observation confirms this presumption. The kindergarten, the highest outward expression of our knowledge of child-nature, is squarely built upon the religiousness of the child. Froebel's whole plan of education revolved around the thought that God is a present reality within us and within nature about us, and that the end of education is to make us conscious of his presence. This was a philosophical idea, of course, but to Froebel's eye, and according to the experience of kindergartners, the child freely, joyously responds to it.

The same observation has been made within the home circle. What is that wondrous reverence and sense of dependence with which children look up to their parents, sometimes actually believing that the father is God, but the first stage of the feeling of absolute dependence which Schleiermacher declared to be the essence of religion? The appetite of children for fairy-tales, wonder-stories, and heroic legends reveals the very same impulse that once peopled the woodlands, the mountains, and the sea with supernatural beings, heard in the thunder the voice of the storm-god, beheld in the rising sun the very face of divinity, and traced our human pedigree back to demigods.

The evidence becomes piercingly luminous in the period of adolescence, when childhood culminates and pauses before settling into the fixed forms of manhood. Adolescence reveals in the blossom the seeds that were germinating through infancy and childhood. What distinctly human quality—one not shared with the brutes—is more characteristic of adolescence than susceptibility to the ideal longings that culminate in religion? Interfused with the hero-worship, the romanticism, the truth- and beauty-seeking, the self-consciousness of youth, is a reaching out after something more satisfying than all that our eyes see and our hands handle.

The philosophy of religion goes one step farther, and declares that analysis of human consciousness in its three phases—the true, the good, and the beautiful—reveals the idea of god as implicit in the whole of our conscious life.

Here religious education takes its stand. It declares, with all the authority of the history of the race, with all the authority of sound observation and analysis, that religion is an essential factor of the human personality, and that, therefore, a place must be found for religious education within general education.

We reach this conclusion from the pedagogical point of view. But there is also a religious point of view. The pedagogue says: "Bring out what is already in the child." Religion

says: "Bring the child into obedience to the will of God." Apparently education is guided by what the child already is, where as religion prescribes what he must become. Can we unite these two points of view?

The case is not different for religious education from what it is for education universally. The reason why schools exist at all is threefold: because children cannot remain children; because what happens to them during childhood affects their maturity for good or ill; and because adults know which is the better life and can help children attain it. What adults know of the good life does and must preside over all education whatsoever. The material put before the child is always selected, and it should be adapted not only to the child's spontaneous interests, but also to producing the kind of man we wish him to be.

At this point the educational reform has been somewhat halting. Is the end of education knowledge, or culture, or power? Is it intellectual or ethical? Is it individual or social? Just at present there is a flood-tide of sentiment that asserts that the end is neither knowledge, nor culture, nor power as such, nor anything else that is merely individual, but rather social adjustment and efficiency. This is a favorable moment for religion to lift up her voice and proclaim that within her hand is the final meaning of life, and that to her belongs, not only a place, but the supreme place, in determining the end of education.

The point of view of the-child-that-is and the point of view of the-man-he-should-become are reconciled through the insight that the latter self is performed in the earlier. It is possible to make education ethical because the child's nature is ethical; social because it is social. The ethical authority to which the child is taught to bow is already the child within himself. It is the same with religious education; it is the same with specifically Christian education. God has formed us for himself, and there is a sense in which, as one of the Fathers said, the soul is naturally Christian.

At this point religious thought transfigures the whole idea of education. The chief factor in the process is no longer the text-book; it is no longer the teacher; it is God who performs the child for himself, plants within him the religious impulse, and grants to parents and teachers the privilege of co-operating to bring the child to a divine destiny. The time is not far behind us when men failed to connect the thought of childhood or the thought of education with the thought of God. They put education and religion in sharp antithesis, making one a human process, the other divine. Even today there is distrust of religious education lest it shall leave conversion and religious experience out of the account. But in reality infancy, childhood, and adolescence are themselves a divinely appointed school of personal religion, a school in which the divine Spirit is prime mover and chief factor. Religion does not flow from the teacher to the child; it is not given, or communicated, or impressed, merely from without; it is a vital impulse, and its source is the source of all light and life. In the normal unfolding of a child's soul we behold the work of the Logos who gives himself to every man coming into the world. When the Logos comes to a child, he comes to his own, and it is in the profoundest sense natural that the child should increasingly receive him as the powers of the personality enlarge.

The thought of God works a further transformation in our thought of education. For God's will compasses all the ends, his presence suffuses all the means, and his power works in all the processes of it. Accordingly, religious education is not a part of general education, it *is* general education. It is the whole of which our so-called secular education is only a part or a phase. Religious education alone takes account to the whole personality, of all its powers, all its duties, all its possibilities and of the ultimate reality of the environment. The special hours,

places, and material employed in religious training do not stand for any mere department; they represent the inner meaning of education and of life in their totality.

Our practical problem, therefore, is greater than that of organizing a good Sunday school and promoting religion in the home. The spirit of religion must be infused into the whole educational organism. Religion has not separated itself from general education, but public education has separated itself from general education, but public education has separated itself from the vine of which it is a branch. Yet not wholly, for there are leaders of public instruction who see that the end of education is one with the end of life, and that, though religious instruction be excluded from the schools, the spirit of religion should pervade the whole system. The time has not come, it is not very near, when the public school can resume the work of specific religious instruction. We must first learn more of Christian union. But we are needlessly squeamish regarding the limits of the moral and spiritual functions of our school system. The system exists as an expression of the ideals of our civilization. In the most democratic state there is no reason why ideals that are common to the people should not be expressed in the people's schools, even though some citizens should disapprove. We shall never secure an ideal school system by consulting the citizen who has the fewest ideals. Why not assume that some principles of the spiritual life are already settled, and that these principles are to control our schools? Why should not moral training be made to approach nearer and nearer to the fully unified ideal that is found in our religion?

On the other hand, it behooves the home and the church, realizing that they are members of the general educational organism, to relate their work more closely to that of the public school, the high school, and the college. Religious education is not peculiar in method, but only in its aim and in the material as determined by the aim. All the results of modern progress in educational philosophy, methods, and organization belong to the home and the church as much as to the state schools.

Existing organs and methods of religious training—the Sunday school; the young people's society, the junior and intermediate societies, the Young Men's Christian Associations, the catechism, the lesson systems and lesson helps—arose, for the most part, in response to special needs, and were adopted with no clear consciousness of their possible place in a general scheme of education. This is not a matter of reproach at all. On the contrary, these things have all pursued the normal course of development, which consists first of all in doing the thing that is immediately needed, the theory being left for later working out. But when the theory has been worked out, then the organ that arose in an incidental way may attain to higher usefulness through understanding of its nature, laws, and relations.

This self-conscious, fully reflective step must now be taken. There is a great body of pedagogical philosophy that must be assimilated. There are principles of teaching that must be observed. There is knowledge of the child-mind that must be utilized. There are riches of knowledge in many directions that are waiting to be consecrated to Christ in the service of children and young people.

We cannot longer neglect these things and remain guiltless. The light has dawned, and we must love light rather than darkness. Both the home and the church must rise to their privilege of being parts of the general organism of education. They must realize that they are under as much obligation as the principal or the teachers in a public school to study the child, to master the material and methods of education, and to acquire skill in the educational process. Vastly more time and vastly more money must be devoted to this service, and we must never

regard either home or church as normally successful until it is no longer the exception but the rule for children to 'grow up Christians, and never to know themselves as being otherwise.'