

# RELIGION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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## A P A P E R

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BY E. C. BENEDICT.

In accepting the invitation to prepare and read a paper before this Association, "On the modes in which it can best promote the interests of education in common or public schools;" I am greatly encouraged by what the name of the Association suggests.

It is *American*—and I assume that the word American is not used in a merely local sense, but to show that the Institution is American in its character, its purposes, and its tendencies—that it is imbued with the spirit of our Institutions, seeks to go on in harmony with them, and to strengthen them, in all that here constitutes a State, and to fit the universal people for the duties of daily life and citizenship.—It is an *Association*. It brings together from our various localities, those who feel a deep interest in a common purpose. Men of all creeds in religion, of all parties and stripes in politics, and of all diversities of gifts meet here on a common platform for a good to the commonwealth—to listen to each other, to learn wisdom, to gain strength, and by mutual and reciprocal influences—often diverse and conflicting—to unite in some compound line of influence, where all these separate forces combined, may move in steadiness and strength, to great and useful results. It is this combination of diversities, to some extent antagonistic, which is the strength of American institutions.—It is for the *Advancement* of education. It does not seek simply to reproduce and strengthen an old system. It sees plainly that no past, anywhere, has known any-

thing of our circumstances, our wants, our sympathies, or our destinies, and therefore can but imperfectly minister to our needs. This society looks to progress. It looks forward, and onward, to see the want, and the means to meet it, and it looks to the past and the present, to get wisdom, not precedent—to learn, if possible, why it is that the old does not meet the wants of the new.—It is for the advancement of *Education*. With our political and social institutions, it is not those alone who fill official stations, that here govern, but those who vote. Those who read the newspapers, and those who rock the cradle, as well as those who are in it, all belong to the royal family, and are connected with the sovereignty of the nation. Nothing, therefore, can be more important than the best means of fitting us for our possible as well as our inevitable destinies.

I consider, then, this Association as asking, *Where is that compound line of action, on which men of all diversities, by union and concert of influence, can advance a system of education best suited to qualify the American people for their political, social and religious duties?*

This subject I consider much the most important one now before the American people. And it seems to me necessary to the view which I take of it to repeat many well known and familiar truths, and I shall not apologize therefore, even on such an occasion as this, for inviting attention to what is not new, and may indeed, seem common-place.

Professor Maurice in his lectures on National Education—always forcible, but sometimes fallacious and delusive—properly divides systems of education into three classes :

1st. Those which make education consist in cultivating the intellect.

2d. Those which make it consist in giving information.

3d. Those which make it consist entirely in restraint.

Each of these systems is plainly made with a microscopic and narrow view of the subject, and an unphilosophical view of the nature of man. For no system of education can be at all perfect which does not unite all these purposes—cultivation, information, restraint—as cardinal purposes. The intellectual faculties, and the moral and religious sentiments, must be cultivated, trained, and



strengthened. The mind must be stored with useful knowledge of facts, principles, and conclusions, and the selfish and sensual animal propensities must be restrained.

Man is the creature of education. Of all animals, he alone is born to be taught. The wonderful instincts of the most sagacious lower animals have, indeed, been the admiration of all ages. Wisdom has pointed to them for lessons of instruction to superior man, but they themselves have been taught no wisdom. They have taken no lessons from experience, study, or observation. The ant and the beaver of to-day build their first habitation as well as the first of their races, and no better. The birds sang in the groves of Paradise the same songs which they now sing, and the little busy bee gathered honey from the opening flowers of Eden, and built her cell, and spread her wax, and governed her little monarchy, precisely as she does in the clover fields of our Republic. And they will go on so forever. But not so, we—our grosser animal propensities unrestrained, are baser than those of the brutes; our selfish sentiments unrestrained, will make us but predatory animals—men of prey. Reason uncultivated, is a blind guide, and her light untrimmed and unfed, is properly called the *dim* light of nature. Religion, uninstructed and unguided, is a most debasing idolatry, and a cruel superstition. Philosophy and theology sometimes call the untaught and undisciplined human animal, the natural man, and the brutalized and savage state, the state of nature—meaning, thereby, that such is man without education. But, by education we really seek only to make a more complete and perfect man—a more natural one. We seek to draw him out, not to reorganize him; to develop, not to create; to perfect him in the fullness of his balanced and cultivated nature. If we would give the world assurance of a man, his physical nature must be cared for and educated, lest it impair and distort the more precious instincts to which it furnishes a frame and support, and is to give expression. His animal nature must be restrained, regulated, moderated, and utilized. His intellectual nature must be trained to power and dexterity. His moral nature must be cultivated to be a law unto the whole, and his religious nature must be opened, informed, and taught to recognize and follow that true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

It seems to me that the characteristic defects of American primary education are :

*First*—Its failure properly and harmoniously to cultivate the whole intellectual nature. *We teach, but we do not always educate.* We give a little knowledge and a little skill, but we do not enough develop and train the whole mind.

*Second*—The neglect of proper moral instruction and training, in the law of our duty to each other—the law of right and wrong in daily affairs.

*Third*—The neglect of the proper, thorough, systematic, religious instruction and training in the law of our duty to ourselves and to God.

It is quite apparent that the same means which cultivate the physical man, are not the most appropriate for the cultivation of the intellectual powers or the moral sentiments, or the religious feelings, nor to inform the mind, and *vice versa*. As each department of man's nature has its appropriate function to perform ; so it has its best and most appropriate means of cultivation. A game of ball or cricket, in hours of relaxation, or the active and various pastimes of a live-long holiday, away from the schoolmaster, will give strength and elasticity to the muscles, and the glow of health to the face, but how different these from intellectual exercises—from the wrapt and converging attention of profound study, and lucid demonstration—the severe and exclusive abstraction of physical analysis and generalization. And who would think of recommending them as means of religious cultivation—who would think of mixing with them the contemplation of the mysteries of our holy religion, or the ritual of our Churches.

In all these things, we are to look to the useful and the practical. But I would not be misunderstood in the use of these words. The useful is not always what we have the most occasion to use, nor the practical that which we have the most frequent occasion to practice, but that which most increases our practical ability, and tends to make us most useful. We do not study chemistry because we expect to devote our lives to retorts, and crucibles, and gases, and acids. We do not rack our brains with conic sections and the higher calculus, because we expect to have frequent occasion to



use them, any more than we study mechanics that we may devote ourselves to splitting with wedges, toiling at the windlass, or moving weights with the lever.—The main purpose of our study is to give the means of selecting, acquiring and using knowledge through life, in the various circumstances in which we may be placed. It is to expand, to strengthen, to cultivate the powers of the mind; to adjust and to set in motion the intellectual machinery of the human constitution, so that without friction or jar, all its parts may go on in harmonious and easy action, accomplishing the greatest amount of good and securing the greatest amount of happiness. What we desire to obtain by educating the intellect is the power—the internal impulse—the intelligence—the wisdom to devise and to direct, and the dexterity to do what may properly belong to the individual to do. This is *intellectual training*.

In the matter of morals and conduct, men act either from impulse or from a sense of duty; crimes and vices come from unrestrained impulses. To the man whose moral nature is properly cultivated the first consideration which presents itself in any matter of conduct, is, what he ought to do. At home, abroad, in public and in private life, in business and in amusement, the law of right and wrong—duty—is constantly before him, and when he is properly instructed in the law of morals, he learns as the simplest and clearest truth, that he should do unto others as he would that they should do unto him, and his rights and duties are found to move in perfect harmony with the rights and duties of those with whom he is socially and politically in contact or association. This law of our duty to each other is one which can be taught with the greatest advantage to the very young. It must however be inculcated. It does not come by instinct, nor by mere command, still they immediately perceive it when it is pointed out, and feel its influence when its truths are applied; yet the legitimate opening of the mind to morals as a system, or branch of knowledge is nowhere practised on the very young as it should be, and in our country where every temptation is in favor of individual and selfish activity, the young American is too often sent forth into the walks of life, able to read the newspapers, to study the markets, and keep accounts, and to get his moral training in those pursuits whose maxims are—“*There is no friendship*

in trade"—"A thing is worth what it will fetch"—"Let the buyer look out for himself"—"Am I my brother's keeper?" Who can fail to see the great change which would be wrought in the character if all children were early and systematically and thoroughly instructed in morals—in the simple elements, indeed—but still the same subject that is deferred till the student enters the higher classes of the higher seminaries where it is called *Moral Philosophy*.

So too of early religious instruction and cultivation. Is there anything that can compensate for its loss? Those parents that neglect it, do their children an injury which cannot be repaired in after life, after opinions are imbibed and habits formed. It must be taught them in their early years, if you would give it an active, habitual, abiding influence. It must be habitually, constantly, systematically, and ably given. That part of man's nature will no more grow to its perfect character, untutored and untrained, than his intellectual and moral nature, nor so much. Buying and selling—the selfish pursuits of business—the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, are quite consistent with a true religious character, but miserable cultivators of it. As the chosen people of God, with the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night, with the Tabernacle and the Urim and the Thummim, constantly relapsed into idolatry when restraints were withdrawn; so the powers of the intellect without the proper restraints of moral and religious cultivation, bow down to the godless idols of the lower propensities. But cultivate the intellect and subject it to the influences of refined moral and religious sentiments—how they chasten and control, and utilize the grosser nature! The excitements of the reason and the blood, become a steady stimulus to that true selfishness which seeks its own interest in virtue and usefulness. Then the glorious growth of our true nature covers up the coarser soil in which it has sprung.

The great characteristic instincts of man are society, government and law. These are not inventions or discoveries. They are the natural habits of the human being. They are more or less perfect, as he devotes to them more or less of his reason—his power to perceive and to apply political, moral, and religious truth—which is the highest and most exclusively characteristic of his natural instincts. This with his sympathetic and gregarious instincts, divides the race



into nations, each having its peculiarity of national life. No truth is more clear or more important than that it is vain to fight against the spirit—the proper idiosyncrasy—of national life except with a view to revolution—to an entire overthrow or regeneration of that life, and our system of education must be in harmony with our institutions, and the spirit that pervades them. If we attack what is implanted in our national nature, if we seek to make headway against that powerful current which carries forward the nation with constantly increasing velocity in the direction of its instinctive sympathies, we demonstrate nothing but our own weakness and folly.

The peculiarities of our government are—the sovereignty of the people—trial by jury—popular suffrage—freedom of speech, and of the press—The people at large are at the same time the source and the subjects of political sovereignty; they are the ministers of law, justice, and authority; they select, and they judge the legislators, the judges, and the administrators of the law, and they must work out their own political and social position. It is therefore our first duty to see that all the people are educated. It is the great political necessity of our national life that the nerves of its intelligence, its power, and its productiveness, should everywhere interpenetrate the whole body, and should be everywhere brought to the surface and spread over it in a tissue of the quickest sensibility, carrying the animating spirit and the performing power, to every muscle of our action. This being a necessity of our nature, how can it be asked whether the government have the right to provide for the education of the people? The power of self protection and of self-defence—the power to cultivate and to strengthen the powers of its own being, and improve its nature belongs as much to every government as to every man. The people are the real sovereigns. Should not the sovereigns be educated at the public expense?

It is in another point of view peculiar. Hundreds of thousands of immigrants are pouring in upon us. Gen. Washington, in announcing to his army the peace of 1783, congratulated his fellow soldiers that the humblest of them “had assisted in protecting the rights of human nature, and establishing an asylum for the poor and oppressed of all nations and religions.” The lapse of time has shown that none foresaw the depth and strength of that current of



population which was to set to our shores, and which now brings hither a quarter of a million of persons annually, to be taken up and assimilated by the greater bulk of the nation, and healthily wrought into the composition of our people. Our institutions are regarded by almost all other governments as in nature and tendency hostile to them; yet our ports are open, and we wisely invite every man to come with us, and be of us. We do not trouble ourselves about his antecedents. We do not ask him for a passport. If he be the minion of a tyrant, we have no fear of him or his master. Unheralded, unwatched, unintroduced, without any impropriety, he is at the levee of the President, and goes where he will. If he be a political refugee, we stand between him and his pursuers. If he have fled from unequal laws, and seeks for a shelter and a home, then our hearts open to him—if he be an escaped martyr of liberty, then no matter in what disastrous battle his liberties may have been cloven down—no matter who sent him to prison, or who has put a price upon his head, his name echoes to the shouts of our people as they meet him in their midst. Almost without exception, these immigrants come with the desire to take the nature as well as the name of American citizens, and if the parents are sometimes a little awkward in their new home, the children born here take to American institutions as naturally as to their mother's milk.

But in nothing are our institutions more peculiar than in their relations to religion. In this as in popular government we stepped forward in advance of all nations. No law can be made by the *National Government respecting an establishment of religion*, and the free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, without discrimination or preference, are here by our organic laws secured to all mankind within our jurisdiction. This liberty of religion, while it was founded in the true nature of religion, and was from its own nature a necessity, was even more so for us when we threw open our gates of welcome to all that chose to come and take part in our great American Association, and assume the allegiance of freedom and mutuality. It could not fail to be foreseen that the inflowing streams from other nations must always be of various religious faith and worship, and often deeply hostile, and always impossible to be united in any course of religious instruct-

ion. This diversity must always continue ; the people of all sects would take up arms to prevent the establishment of a Government religion. Every step toward it, and every tendency to it, must surely fail. There existed in many of the original States while Colonies, and in some of the most powerful of them, after their independence, a sort of religious establishment, protected by laws more or less exclusive and stringent, and by a great unity of belief, but now not a vestige of it remains. That same American influence which has carried our flag over twenty-three degrees of latitude and sixty degrees of longitude, has secured to that great territory of freedom entire religious liberty. It is an instinct of the nation.

But the character of this liberty is often misunderstood. It is not a right to demand from the Government an equal support for all religions, as some seem to think, but the right to be entirely free from Government regulation. It is the law of liberty only—not the law of equality ; not that the Government is bound to patronize all alike, but that it has no right to patronize any. Religion being the tie which connects the individual with God, is acknowledged and expressed in such acts of real worship and obedience as are acceptable to Him. It is personal in man ; it must be personal to God. It must be voluntary and sincere, or it cannot be religion. We cannot compel, or control, or prohibit, or direct it, and it is our conscientious duty to resist all attempts to compel one to observe or to propagate a system of religion which he believes to be false, and the highest oppression is that which compels us to support every form of religion. The state has no means of ascertaining the true religion, or the most acceptable acts of worship—pure matters of the heart and the conscience alone—and is guilty of as great a usurpation and does as great a violence to religious liberty by supporting all, as it would by prohibiting all sects of religion.

I shall be called a latitudinarian, perhaps, when I say that sectarian distinctions are no part of true religion, while they are at the same time a necessary and not undesirable result of various intellectual activity, moral culture, and intensity of religious feeling. They are entirely consistent with mutual respect, mutual confidence and generous co-operation in the great purposes of religion. According to my faith, the Captain of our salvation has lifted up a



glorious flag, which waves its ample folds of light in the purer skies and steadier breezes of the upper heaven, bearing the motto—"Glory to God in the highest—peace on earth and good will to men," the guide of all his followers, and if the various captains of fifties, the leaders of the zealous squads of sectarian troops, choose to adopt a peculiar uniform, and march under a little banner of their own, fluttering in the cross currents and baffling winds of the earth, let them do so; but why should they quarrel about the white or red of their uniform, or mutually denounce each other because the one marches to the spirit-stirring quick step of aggressive propagandism, and the other to the statelier march, and with the more solemn step of historical forms and conservative respectability. The first time that this proscriptive and exclusive spirit showed itself among Christians, it spoke with the natural tone of authority, and in the instinctive language of peremptory intolerance, and it received a rebuke which should have silenced it forever; "And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and we forbade him, because he followeth not us—and Jesus said, Forbid him not, for he that is not against us is for us." This rebuke seems to have died with its divine author, and paltry ambition and petty jealousies have ever since kept alive the strife of who should be greatest; but it is still as true as it was in the beginning, that the test of religion is not so much to what denomination we belong, nor what band of disciples we follow, as whether we cast out devils in the name of the true God, and it is still true that sectarian exclusiveness will continue to exist, and cannot be overlooked, or disregarded, or suppressed.

For what I have already said, and what further I shall say on the subject of religious education, I shall make no apology, for it is, just at this time, the subject of greatest importance in connection with Common Schools. It is to this subject, mainly, that I desired to invite the attention of this Association, and all that I have said has been intended to bear upon it with more or less importance. I look with the deepest regret upon the indications that two or three great and influential sects of Christians seemed disposed, if not to destroy, at least to frown or look coldly upon Common Schools, unless they can be made more positive and active seminaries of religious in-

struction. They seem to consider the secular school as the fittest agent for sectarian propagandism, and to fear that the tenets of their faith and the forms of their worship cannot be safe, unless they be intrusted to the keeping and instruction of the schoolmaster. They are sure that infidelity will come in with horn books and grammars, that heresy and schism will lurk in the multiplication table and the rules of arithmetic, unless they be exorcised with a mixture of sectarian teaching.

No one can fail to see that making the Common Schools positive religious agencies would be the first step—and a decided one—toward placing them under ecclesiastical guardianship and supremacy. If religious peculiarities must be taught in the schools, then the appointed ministers of religion should be connected with the sacred duty.—Prof. Maurice suggests that the teachers should be ordained by the church—and then how easy to insist that the sacred office should not be subject to secular control, and that the school officers must also belong to the sacred profession, and then must come religious tests and qualifications for office, and sectarian animosity would add its bitterness to primary and general elections, and the truths of God and duty and conscience would be settled by the popular majority of the ballot-box—and a strong and triumphant sect possessed of the power and patronage of the Government, what might they not do in the heat of sectarian victory? It must never begin to be. Religious freedom and equality is a part of our creed in politics, in morals and religion, and may be said to be a part of our nature. Those who seek to disregard it, and those who seek to do violence to it must sooner or later be overwhelmed. Common Schools, to which all may intrust their children, are its greatest safeguards and its never-failing protection.

Unfortunately, there are those who desire to destroy the Common Schools. It is our duty to beware of such, under whatever plausible pretence they may cover their design. There are others who have no such desire, but deceive themselves in urging a course quite as fatal to Common Schools as open hostility. It is our duty to distrust them all. Whether they denounce the Schools to-day, for being under the care of voluntary associations, or to-morrow, when a State system is fortifying itself, they exclaim, with well-



affected horror, "Who gave the State a right to meddle with the education of children?" Whether they denounce the schools at one time for teaching religion, or at another time, with deeper emphasis, denounce them as godless and infidel schools—or, at another day say that they only desire that parochial schools should be established, in which each sect may teach its peculiarities to the children of its own parishes.

It does not require more than ordinary intelligence to see that all these ideas strike at the very vitals of Common Schools. Take the most plausible one, that of parochial schools—what does it propose, in substance? Nothing less than to withdraw from the Common Schools the children of all religious parents, and to give them schools by themselves, thus practically denouncing the Common Schools by the united voice of the best citizens. We may be quite certain that it would not be long before these sects would insist that the parochial schools should participate in the public school funds, or that those who support parochial schools should be excused from paying school taxes, or be permitted to apply their taxes to their own schools. Then how long would the Common Schools—set apart for the poor and the wicked—stand? And if the school money is to be divided among the sects, how shall it be divided? Shall it be divided by the number of sects—or by the number of parents—or by the number of communicants—or by the number of general followers—or by the number of children—or by the number of those who attend school—or according to property or taxation? There are the elements of so many disputes and acrimonious quarrels in all this, that universal education must die under it.

And, the nature and character of our institutions being considered, it seems to me that there can be no greater evil, than to separate the children of the people from each other on the grounds of the religious faith and worship of their parents—to teach them practically, that Catholic and Protestant—Presbyterian and Methodist, and Baptist and Episcopalian children ought not to meet together for a common purpose of common good, in a matter having no necessary relation to religious peculiarity. And, on the other hand, nothing can be more interesting to contemplate than the beautiful fruits of bringing them all together in schools, to know each other

in the endearing relations, sports, studies, and sympathies of the school-room and the play-ground during the course of their early education. Can anything have a stronger effect in making and keeping us a united and happy community?

This is not a question of whether we shall please this or that sect, or yield to the demands of this party or that—whether we shall feel alarm at the cry of godless schools, or sectarian schools—but, what, under the circumstances of our case, is the best course to pursue to promote the success of Common Public Schools—to give them their proper American character, and free them from all rational objection in any quarter. To do this, the schools must be reasonably acceptable to all classes of the citizens, and this can be done in no way except by dispensing with sectarian instruction and the peculiarities of religious worship in the schools.

We can do right—we can do what ought to satisfy all, and then the unfounded complaints of a few will be but the expression of the weakness of their cause.

What should be our rational rule of conduct in other similar cases? There comes to us from abroad what an amount of industrial skill and of artistic taste, to increase our productiveness, to multiply our comforts, and to add to our luxuries! What throngs of intelligent travellers pass on the highways of our travel, and crowd the great points of observation! What should we say of our duty or our wisdom, if in the mills of Massachusetts—in the mines, and the factories, and the workshops of Pennsylvania—in the hotels of our cities, and watering places—the caravansaries of our travel, and the palaces of our fashionable resort—and among the laborers on the canals, railroads, and public works of our aggressive civilization—the reading the Bible, the repeating the Lord's prayer and the decalogue, should with Procrustean precision be enforced upon all these collections of persons of every faith and every worship? As a social measure, as a patriotic measure, or as a religious measure, is there one man of common intelligence to advocate it, even if it could be successful? Much less when it could not, but could only deprive us of what we want—their skill, and taste, and labor, and deprive them of what both we and they desire that they should have—the health-giving and invigorating atmosphere of our free institutions.



So with the schools—whenever we can find a few children together shall we compel them to lay aside their occupation for the time, and read the Bible, or say their prayers, or perform some other religious duty? Will it be sure to make them better? Is it the best mode of giving religious instruction? Shall we require it at the dancing school, the riding school, the music school, the visiting party, and the play-ground—shall studies, and sports, and plays, and prayers, and Bible, and creed, and catechism, be all placed on the same level? Shall we insist that secular learning cannot be well taught unless it is mixed with sacred forms? Shall Algebra and Geometry be always interspersed with religion? Instead of *quod erat demonstrandum* shall we say *selah* and *amen*? Shall we bow at the sign *plus*? Can we not learn the multiplication table without saying grace over it?—So of religious instruction, will it be improved by a mixture of profane learning? Shall the child be taught to mix his spelling lessons with his prayers, and his table-book with his catechism?—If there were any necessary relation between religious and secular instruction, which required that they should be kept together, the subject would have another aspect. But no one has ever maintained that the religious teacher—the ministers of religion, and the office-bearers in the church—should mix secular instruction with their more solemn and sacred *inculcations*. I should be almost charged with profanity, if I should attempt to exhibit the sacrilegious folly of mixing these earthly alloys with the precious and virgin gold of divine truth; if I should exhibit the preacher as pointing to the grammatical construction, the rhetorical finish, the oratorical display of his discourse, as a necessary part of his teaching in the sacred desk; if I should show you the ritual of the church prescribing mathematics and metaphysics for fast days, and Belles Lettres for festivals, and subjecting the mysterious and life-giving elements of the holy eucharist to the analysis of a chemical lecture. No, no, these sacred matters are set apart; they are themselves alone; they are by divine appointment entrusted to appropriate keeping, and let those who fear that their religion will be destroyed by good Common School secular instruction doubt the favor of God, and the truth of their religion. And let those who throw upon the schoolmaster the protection of their religion beware

that they be not struck down, if by extending their profane aid to the ark of God, they doubt the sufficiency of the divine protection.

No one can doubt that the best results must flow from employing arithmeticians and grammarians to teach arithmetic and grammar, and pious and godly persons, deeply imbued with the spirit of religion and the love of God, to teach religion, and fitly plant the seeds of divine truth in infant minds. These can be well taught only by kind and gentle and sympathising personal inculcation. I know that it will be asked with the most earnest emphasis "But you would not banish the Bible, and creeds, and prayers, from the schools? Do we not all believe the Bible, and who cannot repeat the Lord's Prayer? Are God and the Bible sectarian? Is it not unreasonable to require us to lay aside the Apostles' Creed and the Ten Commandments?"

Now, the reading of the Bible, the repeating of the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, and the Ten Commandments, in school is more ritualistic than educational. It is not for improvement in secular learning nor in sacred learning. It is intended rather as a religious ceremony, and, if it give offence, is it not an unnecessary offence? What if we say that no one has a right to be offended, still we have no right to offend them, and deprive them of an inestimable blessing by mixing with it what to them is not only unpleasant and repulsive, but, in their opinion, unwholesome. Turn the tables—substitute for the reading of the Scriptures at the opening of the schools the simplest and least offensive of the religious ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church—reading from the missal some portions of it, to which in itself there would be no objection; insist that the school shall bow at the name of Jesus; shall always speak of the Virgin Mary as the Blessed Virgin, or the Holy Mother of God, and see if all of us would be willing to send our children there day by day. See if the pulpits and the Ecclesiastical Conventions throughout the land would not re-echo the word of alarm—And why should we compel the Jews, who are numerous in our cities, to listen to the New Testament; to repeat the Lord's Prayer, or the Apostles' Creed, or be taught the mysteries of redemption, or leave the schools?

Shall the people be left in ignorance, and the course of popular



education be stayed? Shall the doors of the school-house be shut to thousands by our insisting that a heterogeneous community shall conform to a ritual to which there may be no objection in a homogeneous one? No one would think that for a mere form or ceremony the great system of Common Schools should be overthrown. We can silently dispense with what would be offensive to any in the matter of religion without injury to the schools, and so far as we can do so surely it is our duty to do it.

If there were no place but the school for religious instruction it would be another thing. But every sect has its religious instructors—its priesthood and clerical guardians. These everywhere hold a position of power, respectability, and influence. Every worship holds its peculiar doctrines and rites to be of the most necessary and sacred character. Whether they be Christian or Pagan, they all hold that there should be a sacred profession, fitted with peculiar care for its sacred duties, and holding, as it were, a more intimate and confidential intercourse with the Deity, that they may more efficaciously instruct the people.

But what sect of worshippers of the true God have ever found in the ministers of their religion, the actual religious tutors of their children? The clergy perform the ministration of the sanctuary with fidelity and zeal, and the little child is permitted to sit beside its parents and fold its little hands and kneel as others do. The preacher, with all the persuasives of eloquence, discusses the great truths of religion and the sanctions of duty, and the little child is permitted to listen in the starch and restraint of enforced deportment; but how much does this teach him what his little opening mind needs—how ineffectually does this cultivate his religious nature, and form his soul to expand in purity and moral beauty, and to grow in favor with God? The preacher always preaches to the comparatively adult—to those whose minds are mature and whose habits are formed. What should we think of a system of secular education for children which exhausted itself in labored essays, learned lectures on science and art, and profound and elegant harangues, reviews and criticisms to adult men and women?

If the minister of religion habitually devoted half his time and labor to direct and suitable instruction to the young, in religious

matters, he would do more good to all than he does now. His impressions upon the young would be perpetual sermons to the older. The mind is almost lost in admiration at the good which he would do to his congregation, old as well as young. For this I hold him responsible. I do not admit *his excuse, nor do I believe it will be* admitted hereafter that he passed the duty over to the teachers of Common Schools, and left it in their unconsecrated hands. Their Great Master did not send the little children to the schoolmaster, but he said, "Suffer little children to come unto me." He took them in his hands and blessed them. Close hand to hand instruction, with the kindness of religious sympathy and blessing, was the example he gave us.

A few years ago was opened the first Sunday School. It began in rags and wretchedness, and on the day consecrated to religious duties, it did fitting deeds of charity, by teaching the alphabet to the poor and the forsaken. It was something more than lifting the ox out of the pit on the Sabbath day. It was lifting heirs of immortality out of a more horrible pit. What fitter purpose for the Sabbath than to give religious instruction to the young, and who so fit to give it direct superintendence as the ministers of religion—the office-bearers in the Church? *Who can doubt that the amount of* good would be greatly increased by devoting half the Sabbath to careful schooling of children in religious matters, under the direction of their proper religious teachers?

In our cities there are numerous so-called parochial schools, and Schools for the poor, where they are separately taught at a large expense. I know many such, having each about 100 pupils, and supported at a cost of about \$3,000 each per annum—and just at this time parochial schools are said to be the great want. If those children of the poor were sent to the *Free Common Schools*, where instead of learning lessons of humiliation, they would stand on the level of our republican equality, and be taught at no expense to charity, and if the money applied to charity and parochial schools, were wisely applied to giving a small compensation to proper Sunday School teachers, and proper missionaries to go into the highways and hedges of vice and irreligion; to seek the dwellings of the ignorant, and induce them to send their children to the *Common School* for secular instruction, and into the Sunday School for reli-



gious instruction, who can doubt that those few thousands of dollars would do incalculably more good than now.\*

The Sunday School is now a most important agency of good in the matter of religious instruction, but it has not passed on in its course of development to its final and highest stage of usefulness and excellence. It must become a regular ecclesiastical agency, under the formal care of the Church, and the superintendence of its office-bearers. Many of its teachers and agents must be paid for their services, and receive a salary in proportion to the actual average attendance on the School. It must be made the interest of the teachers to seek out, and persuade to come into the school, the poor as well as the rich, and to keep them punctual and steady in their attendance. Its influence then on the rising generation cannot be over-estimated. And when we look at the change which would be wrought on the face of society, when a generation of children thus reared shall constitute the adult community, the mind is almost lost in the attempt to measure it.

There is another point in which it will meet a great religious want of the community. There is in every direction, and among all the denominations of religion, a complaint of a great want of candidates for the sacred ministry. The love of gain, the fondness for that extraordinary activity which characterizes the movement of business and public affairs, leads our people to direct their ambition to the walks of active life, and there is little to invite them to the sacred calling. That calling requires education, secular and theological, which cannot be obtained without considerable expense—even where schools are free. The clerical profession in all ages and in all religions receives large accessions from the poorer class of the community—those who are elevated by it to a desirable position in the community. The state of society and church organization in this country does not favor the discovery or bringing forward of those who would gladly be led forward to that position of usefulness, and those who are without means are compelled at the earliest moment to seek for a small compensation in some industrial employment as a means of support. Now if there was a path of religious industry, so to speak, in which the truths of religion, the art of inculcation and the power of applying religious truth, and of acquiring over others the influence of kindness and religious suasion, came as a natural result

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\* See Appendix A.

of that occupation as the arts and appliances of the trades, professions and pursuits of business life are acquired in clerkships and apprenticeships, what an agency we should have for good. If this was in the power and under the control and management of each sect or denomination, it would be free from all objection, and would have also the spur of devoted zeal and religious propagandism to give and sustain that impulse which the love of gain and wordly ambition supplies in secular pursuits. This cannot be done to so great an extent as may be desirable, but if every ecclesiastical organization in the land would make Sunday Schools as much a part of their system as the priesthood and the services and ordinances of the sanctuary—with regular schools, where those who serve the church are paid as regularly as those who serve in the desk or the choir, what seminaries they would be for rearing those who might minister at the altar. What normal schools to keep up the supply of religious instructors.

There are those who seek to resist the spread of Common Schools, and are constantly misled by their own practical misrepresentation and transparent fallacies. They often repeat that the family and the church are the agencies appointed by Divine Providence to train the youthful mind in a proper, moral and religious course, as though the friends of Common Schools sought to subvert or undervalue either of these agencies. It is they, the objectors themselves, that depreciate those sacred and divinely appointed influences by insisting that the dogmatical and unconsecrated schoolmaster shall take the place of the parent and the church as spiritual teacher. They insist, as though it were denied, that religion is the only true foundation for moral training and that without morals, merely intellectual dexterity is a curse instead of a blessing, as if we discarded morals and religion from our system of education, and sought to rear up a one-sided, acute and unconscientious race of men—when it is we alone who insist that a systematic and thorough religious education be given to all by teachers of their own faith. We do not make a question whether religious instruction be necessary for the young, but whether it be of necessity mixed with the Common School secular instructions. Not whether it shall be given at all, but when, and how, and where, and by whom, and at whose expense it shall be given. Must it be given by the schoolmaster? Shall his imperfect,



occasional and diluted, perfunctory, instructions be, as they too often have been, the apology for neglecting regular and thorough religious instruction, or shall the proper religious instruction of the young be demanded of the proper religious teachers of the people?\*

What, then, can this Association do to advance education in Common Schools?

1st. They can, by a harmonious, constant and consistent effort teach the people that education in secular learning is a matter of common concern of the highest character, and properly belongs to the State, whose duty it is to provide schools which shall be free to all and the right of all, and adapted to the wants of all through all the stages of a complete education.

2d. They can help to arrange a course of Common School studies which shall be fitted to cultivate all the powers of the mind, store it with useful knowledge, and restrain the prurient propensities of childhood and youth. This is now a most important want of Common Schools.

3d. They can demonstrate that the proper parochial school for the religious instruction of children is the Sunday School, where, under the supervision and influence of bishops, presbyters, and deacons—by whatever names they may be called—and devout men and women—on the day set apart for religious instruction and worship in the temples consecrated to the service of God and his Church—profane and secular learning and servile labor, and vain recreation, all laid aside—shall teach to the young regularly, constantly, and systematically, the great truths and duties of religion—the ecclesiastical organization of their Church, and its rituals and teachings, and the Bible, with the notes and comments so necessary to make its sacred truths intelligible and profitable to their tender minds.

I have detained you too long, and I close with the single remark, that I have indicated here a line in which all our forces act in the same direction, and instead of weakening each other by a partial antagonism, will all converge to the same result with a reduplication of their power. It seems to me to relieve the religious question connected with Common Schools of every difficulty. If there be any that doubt, let them reflect upon the subject with unprejudiced minds, in all its relations, and truth will prevail.

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\* See Appendix B.

## APPENDIX.

The publication of the foregoing paper having been delayed many months after the copy was furnished, I add in an appendix some matters only recently within my knowledge.

### A.

The history of the School of the Reformed Dutch Church in the city of New York, by Henry W. Dunshee, the Principal of the School, just published, induced me to compare that most excellent and successful School with the Sunday School of St. George's Church (Dr. Tyng's) New York.

The School of the Reformed Dutch Church is the oldest School in the State, having been in successful operation for the last two hundred and twenty years.

The School-house and site is worth \$10,000 at a very low estimate—  
The interest on that sum at six per cent is \$600

The other annual expenses of instruction are 2,400

Whole annual expenses of the School \$3,000

The number of pupils is limited to 150.

There are taught there the usual branches of a good English Education.

The School is opened and closed each day with prayer, or reading the Bible, or singing a hymn, or two of these exercises. "Scripture Lessons" is used as a reading book. Each pupil receives instruction in the Catechism of the Dutch Church two hours in each week, and is required to attend Church and Sunday School in one of the Dutch Churches. The influence of the School is of the very best kind.

The following letter from Mr. Winston, the Superintendent of Dr. Tyng's Sunday School, exhibits the state of that School.

MUTUAL LIFE INSURANCE Co. }  
New York, Feb'y 10, 1854. }

E. C. BENEDICT, Esq.,

Dear Sir,

In replying to your enquiries as to the Sunday School of St. George's Church, I take them up in the order in which you put them.

We have more than a thousand scholars in the School, varying in age from three to twenty-five years. The proportion who are children of members of the congregation, I do not know with certainty, but should say about two-thirds.

The time devoted to religious instruction is one and an half hours each Sunday—and one large infant class is taught also, constantly during the additional hour and a half of the church service.

The Pastor spends a short time with the school each Sunday, but takes



no part in the instruction given. He also meets the School one Sunday afternoon during each month, when he addresses them, and gives them instruction, and at all times he feels and manifests a strong interest in any thing that pertains to them. The afternoon service of every Sunday is uniformly devoted to the young, throughout the year, and with the most gratifying interest and profit. No part of his labors have so tended to the eminent prosperity and strength of the parish as those devoted to the young. *The parents crowd to hear these lectures to the children.*

The annual expense per scholar, is about twenty-five cents, which is appropriated to buying Bibles, hymn books, question books, &c., for the scholars. We have also libraries for the teachers and Bible classes, and also one for the Sunday Scholars, of over 2,000 volumes, which is an additional expense.

The School has grown from a very small beginning five years ago, to its present size, and with but little effort except on the part of the children, whose interest in their little companions and friends, induces them to solicit their attendance. Benefits, every way, physical, moral, and religious, have attended the School, and I know of no place where so much good has been so cheaply, cheerfully and happily done.

I believe our Sunday School is but a type of nearly all which are legitimately and properly conducted. It is the largest, so far as I know, here or elsewhere, and its results have forced upon my mind the conclusion, that no labor is so important and so blessed as this. It is noiseless, unexpensive, and unobtrusive, but it is working out stability and prosperity to our institutions, while it promotes personal religion and active benevolence in both the teachers and the taught.

With great respect, yours truly,

FREDERICK S. WINSTON.

We are thus, in illustration of the views of the foregoing paper, enabled to compare the oldest and most successful parochial school in the State of New York, with Sunday School and pastoral arrangements for giving religious instruction to the young, which are believed to be the best in the world. Both these Schools are in the neighborhood of the best Public Schools, where secular education is entirely free to all, and given at the expense of the State.

The Dutch Church, therefore, pay \$20 a year (for each pupil) for the religious instruction of their School. It would be cheap at five times the cost, if it could not be otherwise obtained.

In Dr. Tyng's church, the same expense gives to eighty times as many, the complete routine of religious instruction, from the earliest perceptions of religious truth, up to careful and various biblical and doctrinal learning.

Now, if the \$3,000 were applied to give \$100 a year each to thirty young men of the Dutch Reformed Church, who should devote so much of the Sabbath as might be necessary to performing the functions of Sunday School teacher and missionary—seeking out new scholars as well as delinquent ones, and, by words and acts of kindness, securing the interest of parents as well as children—would not much more be done than is now done in teaching one hundred and fifty children the Catechism? And let it be proposed to Dr. Tyng's congregation, to give up their Sunday School of one thousand children, costing only \$250 a year, and accept in place of it a \$3,000 School for teaching the secular branches and the Catechism to 150 children, what would they say?

## B.

Some emphatic statements of Rev. George B. Cheever, D. D. denouncing me in two or three sermons quite recently preached to his large congregation—subsequently recast and published in a volume called “The Right of the Bible in our public schools,” and portions of them again with variations presented to the readers of the Independent, one of the most widely circulated newspapers published in New York, should be placed side by side with the foregoing paper, whose spirit and purpose the Rev. Dr. professes to state and to criticize.

He says :

“The prejudice against the Bible and religion in our schools on the part of Romanism has been taken up and wrought into an argument and presented and urged in many ways, even with labored ridicule of the use of the scriptures, \* \* \* and the appeal to men’s prejudices and to their dread of ecclesiastical domination has been artfully made for the exclusion of the Bible and prayer, on the ground that any thing positively religious ‘would be the first step and a very decided one towards placing them ‘under ecclesiastical guardianship and supremacy,’ and yet this very appeal, with all the sophistry of the demagogue, is made at the instigation of a sect and for the very purpose of having the conscientious rights of all other sects to the Bible cut down, trampled on and destroyed.”—*The Right of the Bible, &c.*, p. 230.

“The President of the Board of Education of New York, no longer ago than last August, at a meeting of the American Educational Convention, denounced the reading of the Bible and all religious instruction, and even the use of the Lord’s prayer, as sectarian, oppressive and even ridiculous and irrational.”—*Ibid*, 232.

“The very first step, and a daring step it is too towards an ecclesiastical despotism in our Common Schools, is the curse and excommunication upon the scriptures and religious instruction as sectarian at the outcry of the priests and politicians of a religious hierarchy. And this is a deliberate argument (if such incongruous and contradictory assertions can be called argument) presented by the President of the Board of Education in New York to an American Educational Convention in Pittsburgh !” —*Ibid*, 234.

“Mr. Benedict speaks of overthrowing the great question of Common Schools by a mere form or ceremony.” What is meant by overthrowing a question it would be difficult to say. What is meant by the declaration “that the reading of the Bible is not for improvement, but is a mere ceremony and a profane aid to the ark of God,” may be more clear, and the assertion “that there is not only no necessary relation between religious and secular instruction but that the mingling of them is sacrilegious folly,” seems an extreme of combined shallowness and hardihood upon which no man in his senses could have stumbled. Yet here in this production it is deliberately presented to a Christian community.”—*Ibid*, 239, 240.

These statements are so entirely without foundation, that they can be characterized only as misrepresentations, mis-quotations and fabrications. One sees every day less and less reason to be surprised at the hasty assertion of the Psalmist. The Rev. Dr. doubtless desires to do good, and





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if he would war more against the law in his members—his natural tendency to vituperation—his friends would have less occasion to say that when he would do good, evil is present with him, and to add, as his poor and only apology, that it is not he that does it, but sin that dwelleth in him.

Dr. C. perhaps misunderstands the paper which he has criticised and denounced, as well as the school question in relation to Religion. He assumes, that an attempt has been made by the priests of the Catholic Church to exclude by law all religious instruction, and especially the use of the Bible from the Public Schools.

Now the Catholics priests do not urge the exclusion of the Bible and religious instruction from the schools, but on the other hand insist that religion should be taught in the schools, to a greater extent than Protestants, and they omit no opportunity to denounce with their characteristic zeal as "Godless Schools" those where religion is not taught by direct and careful inculcation. They of course, like Dr. Cheever, (who in this matter is their co-worker,) desire that it should be their own religion and their translation of the Bible, both of which, they insist, are not sectarian. What they ask of the State is, not that religion may be excluded from the schools, but that each denomination should take its share of the Public School money and establish schools where their own religion is taught by those who are competent to teach it. This is their request, and it is about to be granted, as is said, if it be not already done, by law, in the State of Louisiana, where the Catholics exist in great numbers.

It is known that in the Catholic system there are religious orders who, under vows of celibacy and poverty, devote themselves with ability and conscientious zeal to teaching children. They have no wants but the simple food and cheap dress of their orders, and no ambition but to perform their mission well. It is, therefore, not surprising that a denomination so zealous and exclusive as the Catholic, should desire to take a share of the school money in proportion to the number of their children (they only paying taxes in proportion to their property) and devote it to the spread of their religion under the direction of their priesthood and by the inexpensive services of such religious orders. The same money would give them five teachers, where it would give us one.

If the Sects should thus divide up the public funds, the powerful Sects would have large Schools, offensive to all but their own Sect, and the feeble ones none at all, except at their own expense. Common Schools would be destroyed, and the State would practically, most unequally, and, in case of the Catholics by the agency of their most devoted propagandists, teach denominational peculiarities by a general tax upon the people. Whenever Dr. Cheever and his few Protestant coadjutors shall have convinced us that our duty to God, and our religion, requires us to make the public Schools unacceptable to the Catholics, his Catholic coadjutors will have no difficulty in persuading the Legislature to aid in establishing religious public Schools acceptable to them.

It is not necessary to say to any person not wilfully blind that the purpose of the foregoing paper is to urge upon all, the importance of religious education, and to point out the best mode of securing both religious and secular education to all the people, without giving offence to the conscience of any.