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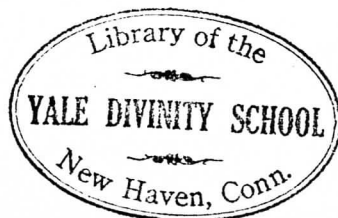
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BULLETIN
OF THE
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SCHOOLS
OF RELIGION

II

Filling the Gap in
Modern Education

By CHARLES FOSTER KENT



Sneath

FILLING THE GAP IN MODERN EDUCATION

By

Charles Foster Kent

The Painful Awakening

In that brilliant modern play "The World We Live in", a Czecho-slovakian genius has set us all to thinking. In a series of dramatic scenes he presents the trends of our modern civilization. First the butterflies appear—those who flit from flower to flower in pursuit of beauty and happiness. Then the stage is preempted by the drab, dour beetles, that grub in the earth and store away its treasures in dark, musty holes. Next, the ants, emblems of social and industrial efficiency, are seen at their task of developing the material resources of the earth. Soon they divide into two armies and quarrel as to which shall have the right to pass between two blades of grass. Immediately all their efficiency and vast stored up resources are converted into instruments of killing, and the suicidal war is on which leaves the stage a scene of slaughter and utter ruin.

Does this all too true picture of our present civilization also reflect certain dominant characteristics of our modern educational system? With marvelous skill have we not taught youth the habits of butterflies, beetles, and ants? Our chief emphasis has been placed on training super-insects that can effectively gather and store away material possessions; but of the things of the spirit which differentiate them from insects and brutes, we have taught them little. We must frankly confess that we have largely failed to give them what is most vital and in the true sense of the word practical. In fact the prevailing American definition of the sacred word "practical" is utilitarian and material. In popular thought it has little or no connection with moral character, with personal happiness, with intelligent and devoted parenthood, and with efficient citizenship. Yet from the point of view of the individual and of society these alone are of primary importance.

Does not this false emphasis in our modern system of education go far to explain the reason why so many thoughtful men are proclaiming that crime and corruption are rampant, thousands of homes wrecked by selfishness, democracy a partial

Sneath. Gift Nat'l Council on Religion in Higher Education

failure and human civilization tottering? If this explanation be true, the conclusion is equally obvious. If these evils are to be corrected modern education must be made truly practical. To make it so, requires a fundamental change in emphasis. Studies and disciplines that mould character and shape moral ideals and determine conduct must be given a central rather than a secondary place. Able teachers must be trained and given every encouragement to interpret the religious and moral heritages of the race, so that they may become guiding forces in the life of youth. The rising tide of public opinion, that is demanding popular instruction in religion, must sweep away all traditional barriers and give youth its spiritual birth-right.

How Our Education Became Impractical

Our early American colleges were founded to teach religion and thus to prepare men for citizenship and the active ministry. Harvard, for example, was founded in 1636 to save the churches from "an illiterate ministry"; Yale in 1701 to prepare young men "for public employment both in church and in state." At the founding of King's College (now Columbia University) in 1754 it was announced that "the chief thing that is arrived at, in this College is to teach and engage children to know God in Jesus Christ, to love and serve Him in all Sobriety, Godliness and Richness of life, with a pure Heart and a Willing Mind, and to train them up in all Virtuous Habits and all such useful Knowledge as may render them creditable to their Families and Friends, Ornaments to their Country, and useful to the Public Weal in their generation." At first the colleges largely realized these aims. Their graduates were the men who laid well the foundations of the American Commonwealth and built homes that were radiating centers of happiness and efficiency. Until a little after the middle of the last century religion continued to be one of the chief subjects taught in practically every higher institution of learning. Then, with the deeper study of Nature, came the sciences and scientific method. Ever since they have been regnant in our American colleges and universities. They have brought manifold blessings to mankind and have infinitely more to contribute, but they cannot fill the gap left when the study of religion was either quietly dropped from the college curriculum or relegated to a secondary place.

This silent but fatal transfer of emphasis in modern education has been due primarily to three causes: dogmatism, sectarianism and materialism. Unfortunately the teachers of religion at first refused to adopt the tested methods and to accept the positive results of scientific investigation. In clinging to its old dogmatic methods and to a philosophy formulated when the Ptolemaic system was still universally accepted, they committed a fatal crime against reason and the youth of America.

To this crime and especially to the intense sectarianism of the period are largely due the prohibitions found in the constitutions and laws of most of our states against teaching the sectarian interpretation of religion in tax-supported institutions. These prohibitions were just, but in popular thought, and therefore in the minds of legislators, religion was identified with divergent creeds and belligerent denominationalism. It was inevitable that this perversion of religion should be placed under the ban in all but the strongly denominational colleges. So extreme was the reaction against the dogmatic, sectarian interpretation of religion and of the religious classics, that by the end of the third quarter of the last century, even Biblical history and literature had ceased to be taught in the leading privately endowed colleges. Then it was that the impractical trend in education began of which we are now reaping the fruits.

Deprived of the inspiration of sane religious instruction, education became increasingly utilitarian and materialistic. The rich contributions of science, which at first were largely physical, and the quick mastery of the vast natural resources of America fostered these materialistic tendencies. The air was saturated with materialism. Following the example of their elders, students naturally elected the courses that promised material success. In college and university circles religion and ethics were largely neglected or despised.

It was not until the close of the last century that the consequence of this wrong emphasis in education began to be generally recognized. The Intercollegiate Christian Associations made a valiant attempt by means of voluntary Bible courses offered by college instructors and upper-classmen, to restore the balance. The undergraduates availed themselves of this opportunity by the tens of thousands; but irregular, voluntary work could not supply the deeper need for the sys-

tematic, thorough study of religion under trained instructors. Hence the movement collapsed.

The Turn of the Tide

The real turn of the tide came when exact scientific methods began to be applied to the study of the history, literature and philosophy of religion. This movement appeared in the more liberal colleges during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. At first it was bitterly opposed by sectarianism and by the champions of the old dogmatic theology, but gradually its reasonableness and its practical results began to be appreciated. Today it is heartily approved and supported by most of the leading churches of America.

The privately supported colleges and universities were the first to respond, for they were fettered by no educational traditions. As a result, during the last forty years between two and three hundred departments of Biblical history and literature have been established in our American colleges, and others are being added each year. The history, literature and philosophy of religion are beginning to receive attention, and courses in religious education are being given for undergraduates. The one serious handicap to this significant movement has been the lack of efficient, well trained teachers of religion.

The leading private preparatory schools are also making provision for Biblical and other religious instruction. The unfortunate practice of farming out these courses to willing instructors, however inadequate be their equipment for this most important work, is gradually being abandoned, and men thoroughly trained are taking their places. More than two hundred and fifty American colleges and universities have, within the past three years, voted to accept Biblical History as a college entrance elective, so that an added incentive is given for stressing these courses during the impressionable age when most American youth lay the foundations for their religious thinking.

The responsibility for teaching religion to the youth of America rests the more heavily today upon the schools and colleges because the home is failing to do its part. It is failing in large measure because the parents do not have the required knowledge. We are beginning to realize that through the schools the future parents must be trained, if the home itself

is to be rehabilitated. Our problem carries us, therefore, to the very foundations of our modern civilization.

It is also a significant fact, as a keen interpreter of contemporary life has said, "that while the churches are complaining of emptiness, the schools, the colleges, the universities, are packed to overflowing." Whether we approve or not, we cannot ignore the fact that the youth of today turn more readily to the teacher than to the preacher. If we would help them most, we must meet them where their primary interests lie. Also, when they have been properly taught the fundamental realities of religion, they will be more appreciative of the preacher with a message and more ready and able to cooperate in the work of the church.

The Problem of the Tax-Supported Schools

If the education offered by the privately endowed schools and colleges is beginning to be made practical in the sense defined above, it is still sadly unpractical in the tax-supported institutions. These represent over twenty million pupils in the public schools and about a quarter of a million in the state colleges and universities. Their numbers also are rapidly increasing. In their keeping largely lies the future of modern civilization. Here dogmatism, sectarianism, and materialism have so influenced educational practice that it is difficult to give these future parents and citizens adequate instruction in the history and literature of religion and ethics.

Public opinion, recognizing the fatal lack in the public school system, is making a valiant effort to supply it by means of the week-day religious courses offered individually or cooperatively by the local churches. The success of these courses depends upon their organization and support, but primarily upon the character and training of the instructors. If able teachers, thoroughly familiar with their subject, can be provided, there are no bounds to the far-reaching service this movement will perform. If such teachers are not found and thoroughly trained, it is doomed to failure.

The conviction is unavoidable that sooner or later, as in Canada and in many towns in Iowa, this instruction, especially in the history and literature of the Bible, must be given in the public schools by teachers especially trained by the state for the work. Already historical and literary methods of interpretation are gaining universal acceptance in kindred fields.

Thoughtful men of every faith are beginning to realize that real religion, the effective desire to live in harmony and cooperation with God and man, is something far deeper than the differences between the many creeds and sects. Today thousands of parents would welcome sane, constructive religious instruction for their children. Rare is the parent who would object. We have every reason to believe that when this instruction is placed on a thoroughly educational basis and that basis is fully understood, opposition will be transformed into hearty approval.

One of our western state legislatures has recently passed the following resolution:

"RESOLVED: That the people of South Dakota be enjoined to at once address themselves to renewed effort to restore the balance between the spiritual and the material that our children be reared up in the precepts of fundamental righteousness. . . .

"That the schools promptly reform their methods so that the rudimentary studies, as well as the sciences, be taught only as subordinate to righteousness. That the emphasis be placed upon morality, good conscience, respect for parents, reverence for age and experience, and that all learning is but the hand-maiden of eternal goodness.

"That in the judgment of the Legislature of South Dakota that only upon the lines herein suggested can the true balance be restored and the crime wave checked, and civilization preserved."

The State Schools of Religion

Parallel to the week-day religious school movement in connection with the public schools is the school of religion movement in connection with the state universities. The spontaneity of the movement is evidence of the pressing need for these schools. Ten such independent schools have sprung up at as many university centers. They represent the effort of the churches and the religious associations at these universities to fill the gap in modern education through the united services of their religious workers. They have been established largely under the wise direction of the broad-minded university secretaries of the Council of Church Boards of Education. In

these centers, confronted by the needs of youth, denominational differences largely disappear, and the work becomes thoroughly co-operative.

Even though the list of religious courses offered by these germinal schools of religion is not complete and many of the instructors have not had full graduate training, the state university authorities have been exceedingly generous in granting to their students credit for work done in them; but, if the schools are to measure up to their task, it is clear that they must have definite endowments, well-trained faculties and adequate equipment that will enable them to equal in every respect the strongest departments in the state universities. When this standard is achieved and the quality of the work is demonstrated, full credit will undoubtedly be given for the work.

President Kinley of the University of Illinois has said regarding the religious courses offered at the gates of the University:

"There is nothing new, novel, nor improper in the University's accepting for credit a subject of substantial educational value when pursued successfully in another institution, even though it be a subject which the University does not or cannot teach. The University constantly transfers credit for students from other colleges and universities. Every college and university does the same."

It is not impossible that many of these schools of religion will in time be made regular departments of the state colleges or universities. Already plans are being considered at two or three centers to make the school of religion from the first a regular department of the state university.

Meantime the first step toward making our modern education thoroughly practical is to develop these state schools of religion wisely and well, for in them and in the similar departments of religion in the privately supported higher institutions of learning must largely be trained the intelligent parents and the leaders required to rebuild the home and to supply the church and community with efficient workers.

The first and chief aim of a state school of religion is to provide instruction for what may be called the plain undergraduates. They are the students who will go forth to become engineers, physicians, clergymen, lawyers and business men. Upon them will largely devolve the responsibility of rebuilding our present civilization. Today these students are neither

religious nor irreligious, but simply non-religious. As a rule their ignorance regarding the history, literature and fundamental principles of religion is complete. Even though they are intensely interested and among themselves glibly discuss vital religious questions, our modern system of education has given them neither the facts nor the training necessary to reach valid conclusions in this most important field of human knowledge. Our first responsibility, therefore, in the school of religion is to offer broad, constructive courses that will give them the facts, inspire them to think, and enable them to work out for themselves a practical philosophy of life.

The Undergraduate Courses in Religion

The character and content of these courses are being studied by a representative commission of the National Council of Schools of Religion. The problems involved in undergraduate religious instruction are also being fully discussed by the faculties of Yale, Columbia and other eastern universities.

This work is already under way at Yale and Columbia. The two general foundation courses to be offered at Yale next year are:

The Great Living Religions. Three hours a week throughout the year.

Study of the background, personality, methods, teaching and work of the founders of the eight living religions with a view to determining their influence on the life of the individual and society. The first semester will be devoted to the study of Animism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and Mohammedanism; the second to a more detailed investigation of the origin, distinctive teaching and later developments of Judaism and Christianity.

The Literature of the Bible. Two hours a week throughout the year.

A literary analysis and an interpretive study of the great masterpieces of the Old and New Testament in the light of their literary characteristics and their historical setting.

Both courses will be elective. The first will be open to Sophomores, Juniors and Seniors; the second to Juniors and Seniors.

A third foundation course is being planned, which will probably be known as the Fundamentals or Principles of Re-

ligion. It will deal with the approach to religion, the principles underlying all religions and the relation of science and religion. It will consider in detail the outstanding phenomena of religion, such as conversion, prayer, worship, sacrifice, mysticism and the relation between religion and morality.

At Columbia a somewhat similar course is being offered by four Union Seminary professors on the Fundamentals of Religion. Other comprehensive courses, which will find a place in the undergraduate curriculum of the schools of religion, will deal with Applied Religion and the method and principles of Religious Education. Specific courses adapted to the special interests of different groups of students are also being considered.

A second aim in the schools of religion is to meet the needs of the increasing body of students in our state institutions who enter college with the intention of preparing for leadership in the field of religious or social service or make such a decision while they are still undergraduates. Many of these students, during their four years in college lose their vision of future service. The wastage here is great. The school of religion aims to help them to appreciate the true value of their studies, and at the same time seeks to guide them in laying a broad foundation for their future graduate work.

A third aim is to provide graduate courses which will enable students having the required training and ability and with red blood in their veins and real religion in their hearts to qualify for effective leadership in certain fields of religious and social service for which adequate training facilities are not now available. By utilizing the rich resources offered by the university departments of Sociology, Journalism, Philosophy, Administration, Education and Medicine, it will be possible in certain centers to provide excellent courses for the training of religious and social secretaries, journalists, and university pastors. In co-operation with the universities and agricultural colleges, it will also be possible to train medical and agricultural missionaries, rural pastors and women, as their assistants, to equip the rural churches. The character and extent of the graduate work done by each state school of religion will of course be determined by local needs and resources.

The Training of Teachers of Religion

The Founder of Christianity, in his effort to save a sin-sick world, devoted the majority of his time to the thorough training of a little group of followers. Although these came from humble surroundings and none was signally gifted, in less than a century they changed the currents of human history.

Wycliff in a period of moral degeneracy, through his lay readers, whom he trained and sent forth with parts of the Bible in their hands, saved old England from moral and political collapse. Later the Wesleys, utilizing the resources of Oxford, carried England through a great moral crisis.

Today we again face a crisis that involves the life of humanity. World leadership in science, in the arts, in scholarship and in religion is rapidly passing from Europe to America. Will we be found equal to the vast responsibility? Will human civilization in America reach a height greater than any thus far attained or will the leadership soon pass to Japan and China? The answer largely depends upon how quickly we can make our educational system practical in the highest sense. The first step toward making it practical is to develop great teachers of religion.

For many years business and certain of the professions have been reaching down into the colleges and universities and enlisting the finest and most promising youth. The same must now be done in behalf of religion and a well rounded education. Steps must also be taken to make it possible for men and women who have spiritual experience, insight and sanity, attractive personalities and keen minds and have shown conspicuous evidence of teaching ability to go on and complete their training as teachers in the various fields of religion. To this end the National Council of Schools of Religion has secured a fund of between eighteen and twenty thousand dollars a year for a period of years, to establish fellowships in religion. It is also enlisting the co-operation of the educational leaders of America in selecting the ablest youth to be trained wherever conditions are most favorable. In this direct way it is hoped that the famine of great religious teachers may be averted and that religion may find many worthy interpreters.

The Demands and Potentialities of Youth

The moment too has arrived, when, if the religious needs of our present civilization can be properly presented, the youth

of America can be depended upon to respond to the call to become apostles of the faith first proclaimed by the prophets and supplemented today by the findings of our great poets, clergymen, scientists, and men of action.

Youth today is beginning to demand a higher and more practical education. Their attitude is somewhat like that of the combative Irishman who does not know what he wants and is unhappy because he cannot get it. The present generation also represents an extreme reaction against the habits of our grandfathers who perhaps talked too much about the state of their souls. On the whole this reaction is wholesome, for it represents absolute sincerity.

There are many hopeful indications. The world is tired of sectarian squabbles, and cares little for metaphysical discussion; but never were the youth as interested as they are today in real religion. No other subject will hold them in earnest discussion long after midnight. Having stood for over a hundred hours during the last year, while state university students poured in a steady stream of questions, I know whereof I speak. At first the questions were asked hesitatingly, almost apologetically; but when the barriers were down, they came in like a flood and revealed unsuspected depths of thought and interest.

A man who has recently developed into a great teacher confided to me a few days ago the secret of his success: "Once I thought only of the subject I was teaching. Now I think chiefly of the man in the seat before me." What does the youth, in the seat before us want, that our modern educational system has failed to give him?

In the large, he wants a philosophy of life that will fit the world of reality revealed by the riper experience of the race and by the transforming discoveries of science. A creed formulated when everyone believed that the world was flat and that the sun revolved about the earth does not satisfy this normal craving. Hence the widespread revolt of youth against mediæval theology and its unnatural vernacular.

In a manifesto recently prepared and signed by four hundred and fifty of the four hundred and fifty-one students at one of our middle west denominational colleges is found this ringing challenge: "A new reformation is needed. We have passed through a modern period which parallels the Renaissance, marked by a succession of brilliant inventions, scien-



tific discoveries and the rise of social studies and modern Biblical criticism. These have been as influential in enlarging our conceptions, as were the discoveries of Columbus. A new humanism has arisen, in conflict with the scholasticism of our day. For many years there has been gathering a revolt against the incredible and inhuman assumption of theologians who can affirm the infallibility of the Bible and condemn the human race to hell without winking. A better, saner, truer conception of life and history, of human nature, or religion itself, must take the place of cruel creeds that have dominated and bullied our intelligence already too long. It is time for the religion of Jesus to get a chance."

With incontrovertible logic, the leaders in the Freshman class in one of our larger eastern universities have recently declared their opposition to required chapel, for they maintain that worship to be effective must be voluntary; but they suggest instead a required course in religion, "for it is the function of the Faculty to prescribe what shall be taught."

Youth feels today the need for definite instruction in religion. They are eager to know not merely about God but how to get into living touch with Him. They recognize vaguely that He is speaking to them through the beauty of the flower and the sunset, that His character is revealed in the boundless, orderly heavens and in the marvelous structure of the atom; that He greets them in their moments of deepest emotion and that He looks at them often through the eyes of those who love them. They crave for a faith that will explain all these experiences and embody the highest visions of truth and reality vouchsafed to the noblest prophets of the race, whether it be Confucius or Buddha or Plato or Isaiah or Jesus. They dimly realize that in the Hebrew prophets and Jesus that vision became fullest and simplest and most satisfying, but their knowledge is exceedingly vague. They desire, too, a philosophy of life that will carry them through the temptations and crises that confront them on every side. They demand a satisfactory explanation of that upward urge of life which science reveals, and they are seeking a worthy goal for all their endeavors.

Give them this sublimate of all that is richest in the religious and scientific heritage of the race, show them that faith and love and cooperation and service are the impelling forces in the religion of the prophets and of Jesus, and they will carry that religion into education, into the family, into the church, into

business and into life. Develop intelligent undergraduate opinion and the religious courses offered by teachers well qualified and trained for their task will be largely elected. Dramatize the needs of society and of the world, and a voluntary army of lay and professional teachers can readily be enlisted in our colleges and universities which will go forth to give mankind that education which alone will save it from ruin and enable it to attain its divine goal. Then, a new and very different scene may be added to the unfolding drama of "The World We Live In."