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People

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1925

## The Place of Religion in our Educational Program, 1925

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### Recommended Citation

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## THE PLACE OF RELIGION IN OUR EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

By -- Levi T. Pennington.

(For the program of the Association of Independent Colleges, 1925.)

As I was about to say, with so vast a subject and one of such tremendous importance I shall be like the man who was given five minutes to talk on the Mississippi Valley, and ~~who~~ remarked that he did not expect fully to cover his subject.

Permit three preliminary remarks.

First, religion is normal. We do not all mean the same thing when we say, "Man is incurably religious." ~~And~~ <sup>But</sup> though some seem to have discovered the chaulmoogra oil to cure the incurable, yet it is ~~through~~ <sup>true</sup> that every normal man, woman and child has certain religious instincts which are as normal as those supposedly basic ones of feeding, fearing and fighting.

We do not all have the same theories, but theories are after all not the most important things in the world. Ether or no ether, radio works. A man ~~may~~ <sup>might</sup> have no knowledge of the kinetic theory of gases, and might even deny that theory, but might still be able to run an automobile. Some of us may hold that by religion man climbs back to the place from which he fell; others of us may hold that by religion man in his ascent is aided toward the place where he ought to be; but in either case religion is normal in the very best sense.

A second preliminary remark. Religion is youthful. There is a time in life for dolls and make-believe. There is a time in life for hero-worship. There is a time for that awkward ungainly period when the boy is becoming a man, and when his voice is likely at any moment to miss-cue and slip without warning from a growling, lion-like bass to a squeaky, piping treble (story). And just as truly there is a time in life for religion, and youth is the time.

A third preliminary remark. Religion is necessary. "Knowledge is power", says the old proverb. Yes, and so is dynamite, and both are dangerous. "Knowledge is virtue," says Socrates. But we must have a very unusual definition of knowledge to accept his statement without a grain of salt, for we all realize that often we know the better end do the worse. All their knowledge, if knowledge is their all, does not restrain ~~the~~ medical students from vice.

We who have come to maturity, or may even have passed the meridian of life, know that an anchorage is necessary even though the storms of passion may be largely stilled. And if it is easier than it once was to stay in the right paths, let us not deceive ourselves by mistaking ~~weakness~~ <sup>weariness</sup> for virtue. The man of 40 or 50 or 60 needs the anchorage of a religious life.

How much more, then, does the youth need religion, with appetites, desires, temptations at their maximum, with discretion in its infancy, wisdom but partly developed, strength of character only half-grown?

If middle age needs religion, and it does, there is no safety for youth without it. *P*If then religion is normal and youthful and necessary, no program of education which omits religion can with reason

claim to be even reasonably adequate.

One recognizes, of course, the fact that the educational institution proper can have only a part of the great work of developing the religious life. The first of this work, and the best of it, should have been done in the home before even the kindergarten and the primary school have their chance to make or mar the character of the child. From cradle-roll to the classes where senile age looks through the sunset of life and sees the gates ajar, the bible school should be doing its work of religious teaching and religious training -- indeed it should be doing a vastly better work than it has ever yet done. *through* The Christian Endeavor or other similar young people's societies, and in various other ways the church should be ministering directly to the religious education of its own young people and of those young people who are not within the pales of the church, but for whom in so-called Christian America the church should certainly be responsible. Even in its regular meetings for worship that church which is not through pulpit and choir and every other part of its service ministering to genuine religious education is falling short of its privilege and its duty. But our discussion has to do with the place of religion in our educational program as educational institutions.

There is not time in the presentation of this subject for the discussion of religion in connection with the public schools, high schools, state colleges and state universities. The difficulty of the maintenance of an adequate program of religious education in schools of this sort will readily be recognized. Our public educational institutions, maintained by the taxation alike of Jew and Gentile, Protestant and Catholic, Liberal and Conservative, Quaker and KKK, Modernist and Fundamentalist -- these public schools of ours present great difficulties for the carrying out of any adequate religious program. It seems to be conceded by many, if not by most educators, that in our public school system religion is, if it finds a place, must find it as an extra, a side-issue, a thing carried on, if it is carried on, by a splendid group of men and women in the Y.M. and Y.W., in church, in Sunday School, etc., in the town where the educational institution is located, and by other means not under direct control of the educational institution itself. All honor to the splendid men and women, older and younger, who are in so many places doing their great work for religion in the face of such difficulties and under such handicaps.

But I am speaking from the standpoint of the independent college, which is usually a denominational college, and whose chief reason for existence I take to be the religious reason. The small denominational college has many disadvantages and serious limitations, but it has some great advantages which the great school cannot have, and is free of some of the handicaps which are inevitably incident to the great school.

What should be, then, the place of religion in the small college, the independent college, the denominational college, *the Christian college?*

First of all it seems to me that religion should be all ~~personal~~ *persuasive* in schools such as those ~~for~~ which most of us have come. The teaching of science, the teaching of history, the teaching of mathematics, and of all the other things in our curriculum, should be religious in the best sense. The man who teaches science irreverently and ~~irreverent~~ and so as to wreck the faith of his students is as

*definitely and positively and  
reverently Christian,*

criminal as the man who rocks the boat, <sup>or the one</sup> who throws children overboard to make them good swimmers. It may make good swimmers of some, but it drowns others. There is a better way to teach swimming without so large a percentage of fatality. The man who cannot teach science reverently ought never to be allowed on the faculty of a Christian college. The man who cannot see God in history belongs in the home for the blind, not in the faculty of a Christian college.

If you gather that I mean that the faculty of such an institution as yours and mine should be religious, you have understood exactly what I mean. A man cannot teach intellectual things best without some touch with Him who is Infinite Wisdom. Even the man who would teach physical training successfully is in desperate need of knowledge, not only of the physical organism of body and nerve and brain, but of intellect, emotion, will, character. The best teacher of the body and the best teacher of the mind needs also a knowledge of the soul. How much more does the teacher of religion need himself to be deeply religious. It is still true of religion as of character that it is far more frequently caught than taught.

In addition to this pervasive <sup>religious</sup> atmosphere which ought to be in every class room and on the athletic field as well as in the chapel service, there is a place for definite courses in religious education.

In the judgment of the speaker there should be some requirement in religious education as a requisite for graduation. Of course religion cannot be forced, but if a young man is not entitled to graduation without a certain knowledge of history, of science, of mathematics, of foreign language, it seems to the speaker that no student should graduate from a Christian college who has not taken some work in course in the line of religious education.

In addition to required work in course in which there should doubtless be room for a fairly wide selection there should <sup>be</sup> offered of a fairly extensive character. It would seem that even the smaller Christian college might well offer three courses of a predominately historical character, one dealing with Old Testament history, one with New Testament history, and one with the history of Christianity since New Testament times. In addition to this historical minimum there should be at least three other courses of a more definitely biblical and devotional type. One should deal with the religious literature of the Old Testament; one should be devoted to the teachings of Jesus; and one to the further development of the Christian ideals in the other New Testament writings.

There is of course no limit to the amount of work that might be offered if we had student bodies, faculties, and financial resources to justify it. We are working in colleges, however, rather than in theological seminaries or training schools for Christian workers, and with all the things that might be offered the suggested courses as a minimum would serve at least as a basis for expansion.

In addition to the courses in religious education and biblical work as such, the Christian college should make its various departments minister more or less directly to the Christian ideal. The relation of numerous other subjects to the religious life will readily be seen. Philosophy, ethics, and various other subjects lend themselves readily to the teaching of religion, not in a

forced but in a perfectly natural way. *Just as already stated, the Christian ideal and reverence therefor should permeate all our teaching.*

In the extra curricular activities of schools such as ours there is room for the definite advancement of Christian ideals. Most of these activities will probably <sup>be carried on</sup> in connection with the work of the Christian associations. In bible study classes, mission study class, discussion groups, etc., much can be done to stimulate and build up the Christian life of an institution. We might pause in passing to acknowledge the need of wise leadership in connection with the freedom of discussion in such groups. ~~Such groups~~ <sup>which</sup> often are tremendously powerful for good <sup>but</sup> under the wrong kind of leadership ~~they~~ sometimes do less good than they ought, and may even do more harm than good.

It is often necessary to emphasize among students the fact that college is not merely a place of preparation for life, but a place where life is actually being lived. It is therefore important not only that the student study religion, but that he practice it. The practice of <sup>religion</sup> ~~religious~~ life is as essential <sup>to</sup> ~~as~~ proper exercise and nutrition are to the physical life. *life*

And by the practice of religion I refer not primarily to the observance of the requirements of the church, important as they are. There is an ever-present danger of the divorce of religious <sup>practices</sup> from actual religious life. Only by the marriage of religion to life is the true religious life possible. On the negative side this will mean what Sam Jones called "quitting your meanness." On the positive side it will mean the doing of definite good.

And our program should lay emphasis not only on the study of religion and the practice of religion, but also definitely on the propagation of religion. He who looks upon Christianity merely as a spiritual fire-escape has not understood Christ, nor His religion. Every religious life should be propagating itself, and our students should constantly see the importance of the propagation of religion.

The most immediate opportunity is among their ~~own~~ schoolmates. It is hard for a man to believe that he has influence over another, but he has, and he ought to exercise it. (Story). The second place where every student should propagate Christianity <sup>in</sup> his own home community. Our colleges have been criticized, sometimes unjustly, but it is to be feared, sometimes justly, ~~that~~ <sup>that</sup> our students have gone back to their home communities and have not been able to fit into the work of the church from which they came. A genuine Christian college man or woman should be unusually adaptable.

And our religious program cannot be complete unless we emphasize the propagation of Christianity in other lands. Three-fourths of those who hear the call to sacrificial service hear it before the close of their high school years; the rest must get it during their college days or it is for ever too late.

In conclusion I should say that the aim of our religious program should be to aid our students to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord; to a dedication of life to the advancement of His Kingdom in the earth; to the development of spiritual knowledge and power as the body and mind develop, "till we all come to the perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

*It must continue to be true that the most of our missionaries and the best of our missionaries come from our Christian colleges, where they have seen the heavenly vision and learned and prepared to obediently turn to*

*and religious ritual*