

Speaking Out

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GREAT RELIGIONS IN OUR SCHOOLS

I agree with an esteemed contemporary of mine who writes:

"The United States has been a pioneer among nations in providing education for all its people. The public school system is designed, at least theoretically, to give every child a basic education and to offer higher learning on easy terms to those who desire it."

Some such system is corollary to democratic government, for the people cannot govern unless the citizens are able to read and think for themselves. Another fundamental principle on which this nation was founded is that of freedom of worship, which is guaranteed by the Constitution to all people. No system of religious belief is to be forced on any of the people by individuals or by any agency of the government. The necessary result of the working out of these two principles is a widespread public school system from which all religious teaching is prohibited.

In earlier times this divorce between education and religion mattered less than it does now. Institutions of worship were strong, children were sent to Sunday Schools, and in most families some religious training was provided in the home. But recently certain tendencies have been at work to upset the original balance between mental and spiritual education.

On the one hand, the school is absorbing more and more of the children's time. Social and athletic activities fill the hours outside the regular curriculum to such an extent that much of the time when formerly the child was at home is now spent under the auspices of the school.

On the other hand, the influence of the religious institutions is generally weaker. Faith has declined. In few homes is religion ever mentioned. The parents themselves do not attend church regularly and the children are not sent to the Sunday Schools. The Sunday Schools themselves, in an effort to hold the young people, dilute religious training and often replace a serious study of the basic religious scriptures with social attractions. The result of this situation is a vast ignorance on the part of most young people of their own or of any other religion. A literature class at one of our state universities, not long ago, asked to explain an allu-

sion to Sinai, produced only blank bewilderment. Perhaps it is not surprising that the Ten Commandments have lost some of their force.

SOMETHING IS WRONG

The public as a whole is beginning to be aware that something is wrong. There is a demand in many places that ethics be taught in the schools, a demand that, in itself is an admission of the inability of the home and the church to provide sufficient moral background for the children. Because it is hard to find a powerful system of ethics unconnected with religion, some schools have made provision for a period of religious instruction to be given by ministers and rabbis of the faith to which the children belong. School time is used and the authority of the school is exercised to insure attendance.

Our young people feel an acute need of such orientation, but it cannot be given them in the schools until the religions have become united. The rift in the education of children is a symptom of the illness of the world, which Baha'u'llah proclaimed could be healed only by one common Faith, a Faith which He promised would soon prevail on the earth. We can anticipate, then, a time when educators will have a spiritual renaissance, when teaching will be illumined by the love of God and study will become an act of devotion.

MIRE OF MATERIALISM

Ruling the teaching of religion out of our schools is, in my opinion, the first step toward becoming totally bogged down in the mire of materialism. If, on the other hand, religion was made the chief plank in our courses of study in our schools, we would inevitably bog down in confusion, frustration and worst of all, superstition.

Our schools should objectively teach the fundamentals of at least the Nine Great Religions including the Baha'i World Faith which Dorothy Thompson referred to in one of her Town Hall forum talks as "The Purest Forms of Christianity."

All children should be given the opportunity to know as much as possible about the various religions—the founders, exemplars, guardians, administrative procedures and should be encouraged to investigate and decide for themselves what their Faith shall be.