

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

ART. II.—THOUGHTS ON NATIONAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

“THE MODES IN WHICH CHILDREN MAY BE ESTABLISHED IN SOUND RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES, AND THE CAUSES OF THEIR FREQUENT DEFECTION THEREFROM.”

THIS subject is of vast importance at the present time. We and our children are surrounded by great dangers. Those professing Christians who have embraced the strange, not to say monstrous idea—an idea such as neither their forefathers nor the Christian Church in any previous age entertained—that religion and politics must be divorced, find themselves on the same platform with secularists and unbelievers in an unbecoming and unholy effort to banish the Bible from National Schools. A secular system of education would not only be dishonouring to us as a Christian nation, but it would also undoubtedly be a grievous wrong, fraught with terrible consequences, to our children. It is easy to relegate religious instruction to parents, pastors, and Sunday-school teachers theoretically; the broad, unmistakable fact remains that with many good influences at work, and with much excellent machinery in motion, we are not able to keep pace with the religious requirements of our children, nor to retain them, to any adequate extent, in the paths of virtue, rectitude, and piety. Dangerous times are the times for increasing, not diminishing, sound, Scriptural instruction, and for retaining, not destroying or decreasing, the fortresses which the wisdom of our fathers and the principles of our faith erected for the moral and spiritual welfare of the children of our Church and of our land.

The members of the Church of Rome, and the agents of a conspiracy within the walls of our beloved Zion, are wise in their generation. No effort do they spare to obtain a firm hold of the young by careful instruction in their peculiar tenets, and by the formation of numerous guilds and sisterhoods, the members of which act upon each other, and as far as possible prevent unfaithfulness or defection. They are one with us in opposition to a purely secular system of education. It would be as fatal to their purposes in propagating what, in certain aspects, we are persuaded is downright heresy, as it would be to us in endeavouring to disseminate the pure gospel of the grace of God. While we abhor many of their principles and practices, we may learn some lessons from their organizations, their zeal and their unwearied vigilance. Certain it is that as there is defection from sound religious principles too pain-

fully and clearly manifested, in various quarters, in the direction of infidelity, worldliness, immorality, or heresy, no pains should be spared to establish our children in the faith, and to watch over and help them in their Christian walk and conversation. As so many of the working-classes neglect places of worship; as immense political power is now placed in their hands which may seriously affect the National Church; as every effort is put forth to influence them in the direction of secularism, it is beyond all question a solemn duty to store their minds with religious truth and to adopt such measures as are conducive to retain them as consistent and loyal members of our Church, and as steadfast upholders of sound Protestant and Evangelical religion.

This subject, as has been said, is most important, but it is not new; and for my part, I have nothing fresh to advance in connection with it. Yet it is well, from time to time, to be reminded of our duty towards the children of our Church and country, and to seek to realize afresh the dangers which beset them.

At the outset, then, it may be observed that, on this as on all other religious questions, any cause of failure arises from a neglect of the principles laid down in the Word of God. The inculcation of sound religious principles ought to begin at home and in the nursery. God Himself marks out as a distinctive characteristic of the father of the faithful and the friend of God that he would teach his children the way of the Lord. In the Old Testament, parents are instructed to train up their children for God, to tell them of God's judgments and miraculous works, to teach them the Scriptures, to pity, correct, bless, and pray for them. In the time of our Lord, if these duties were not fully carried out, great care was undoubtedly taken to teach children the traditions of the elders and portions of the Scriptures, though the interpretation of the same was of a defective and legal, rather than of a spiritual character. We should expect that He who came to fulfil all righteousness would have something to say about children, illustrating and expanding the principles laid down in the existing Scriptures; nor are we disappointed. Little children gathered around Him. He held them in His arms and blessed them, and He taught that those members of His kingdom were the greatest who were childlike in their characteristics. And after His resurrection from the dead, in those apparently brief interviews He had with His Apostles, there is one incident and one conversation of vast importance in relation to children. Simon Peter, after his fall and repentance, is of a very lowly spirit. He is now, as he never was before, in a frame of mind to feed and tend the flock of Christ, the sheep and the lambs. The

flock would ever have, to a greater or less extent, the silly and wayward characteristics of sheep. The lambs would require greater tenderness and care. Peter has been foolish and self-willed himself, but in the school of suffering he has become tender-hearted and childlike. Our Lord knows this, but before He gives him his commission He requires the development of another characteristic, viz., personal, devoted, whole-hearted love for Himself. "Simon, son of Jonas, hast thou some regard for Me?" "Regard, Lord—I have the deepest personal love for Thee." "Simon, hast thou really some regard for Me?" "Regard, Lord—ah! much more than that; I have the deepest personal love for Thee." "Is it so, Simon? hast thou the deepest personal love for Me?" Peter was grieved that Jesus asked him this question the third time. He ought not to have been grieved. Love delights in a response of love. The tale can never be too often told. Jesus wanted to hear the voice of Peter breathing out the affection of his heart. It is when there is the expression of personal love for Himself that the Good Shepherd entrusts His sheep and His lambs to the tender care of Peter—then, and not till then. "Lead My lambs to the pasture where good food is to be found. Shepherdize the full-grown sheep, and lead the full-grown sheep that are lamb-like and require tender treatment to the good and rich pastures. Remember, Simon, that the lambs and the full-grown sheep, and the sheep that are lamb-like, are *Mine*—the objects of My love: because of thy love for Me, love and care for them."

Principles similar to those already cited are to be found in the New Testament; and, whatever may have been the conduct of parents, it is evident that the early Church, by its deacons and catechists, did not neglect the younger members of Christ's flock. "The Lord's Day meetings of the Apostolic Church were not simply gatherings of men and women; the young were there as well, and the very young were not forgotten in the ministrations of the holy day."

In the darkest days of Church History the monks and nuns had charge of the instruction of children and young persons. The glorious Reformers recognised the importance of this duty, and not only composed the much-abused but most valuable Church Catechism, but also required that "the curate of every parish should diligently, upon Sundays and holy days, after the second lesson at evening prayer, openly in the church, instruct and examine so many children of his parish sent unto him as he should think convenient, in some part of their Catechism." For a time this injunction was generally observed. The vast increase of the population, however, and the consequent demands for services of various kinds, made it impossible to obey this injunction adequately;

and when real spiritual life was at a low ebb, if observed at all, it was in a cold, formal, perfunctory way.

One of the natural results of a real spiritual revival ever should be sincere interest in and care for the young; and such a result came from the blessed revival in our own Church and land. God put it into the heart of Robert Raikes to found Sunday-schools—which really were a return to primitive custom, having their counterpart in the synagogue and the assemblies of early Christians. Such schools some sacerdotalists would disparage or destroy, for they want all spiritual instruction to be in their own hands; but the people of England, inside and outside of the Church, know their value too well to allow them to be abolished. They are a grand institution, which must be maintained, and if possible increased and improved to the fullest extent. Because many parents neglect duties distinctly specified in the Word of God; because others who have the will, and make their best effort, which, though unpretentious, is most valuable, feel that more time than they can give, and greater ability than they possess, are required in these days of advanced education and of many dangers; because the Clergy in many parishes are overburdened with both secular and religious work, Sunday-schools and day-schools, in which the Bible is not only read, but definite instruction taken therefrom is given, are an absolute necessity.

Before specifying “the modes in which children may be established in sound religious principles,” or “the causes of their frequent defection therefrom,” it is essential to make a distinction between classes. The upper classes have advantages and disadvantages. They have the advantage of excellent books and of superior education, and, as a rule, they are early taught the habit of attending church, and are at the time of confirmation—a rite which they seldom neglect—under the direct influence and personal instruction of the Clergy. In some cases, pious governesses give the religious instruction, to which the parents, strange to say, are absolutely indifferent. But they have their disadvantages. In some of their schools there is no religious education whatever; in others it is merely nominal, and has rather to do with sacred historical events and criticism than with doctrine and the soul’s requirements in its relationship to God; while in not a few it is of an heretical and injurious character.

Special and peculiar temptations assail the wealthy, and it is evident from some defections to the apostate Church of Rome that the subtle influences of Jesuitism are at work to captivate the heirs to great properties and the children of those who possess titles or are in high and important posi-

tions. It must be boldly stated that in too many quarters sound religious principles have not been adequately instilled into the minds of the upper and middle classes, and it is a reproach to the Evangelical section of the Church that they have not established more generally and on a greater scale, middle-class schools.¹ It is, however, pleasing to notice that special efforts are being made for the benefit of the children of the upper classes, that Bible-classes and religious meetings are held in drawing-rooms, that services are conducted not only in churches, but also in the open air, on lawns, or on the seashore at fashionable bathing-places.

As regards the children of the working-classes, taken as a whole, little can be expected from parents, whose time is fully occupied with household duties and daily toils, in the way of religious education. They are now divided into two sections—one attending board-schools, where sound religious principles are not instilled at all except by the formal reading of the Scriptures, or instilled according to the ideas of a teacher who may happen to hold them, or may have none at all. Of many of this section it may be said, that except in church, chapel, or Sunday-school, they have no chance whatever of knowing anything of religious principles. The other section is in denominational schools, the major part of course being in Church schools. For a time, at least, those young persons who compose this section are under the influence of the Clergy, both on week-days and Sundays, in our schools and in our churches.

From what has already been advanced it will be obvious—and it is important that this fact should be remembered—that, with reference to vast numbers of the children of our land, there is no defection from sound religious principles, simply because there have been no sound religious principles inculcated from which defection could take place.²

Amongst the causes of defection from sound religious

¹ I have watched with much interest the progress of the South Eastern College, Ramsgate, an excellent school in connection with the South Eastern Lay and Clerical Society, of which the Dean of Canterbury is the President. Such an institution ought to have much more financial support than, so far as I know, it has yet received.

² Amongst the children who come under the influence of the Clergy and Church teachers, there are, alas! only too many who are established in religious principles which I cannot in honesty designate "sound religious principles." Thank God the leaven of Evangelical truth penetrates often into unexpected quarters; and persons sound in the faith are found teaching in parishes and schools which are under the management of those whose doctrines are neither loyal to the Church of these realms nor to the Scriptures of truth. Men and women holding Evangelical principles quietly do their work in the old places and on the lines of the old paths.

principles there must stand in the forefront, and as the basis of all other causes, the natural enmity of the human heart. Until the heart is really changed by the Holy Spirit of God, defection from sound religious principles ought to cause no surprise. Even when the mind has grasped a considerable portion of truth, and can detect mistaken views of the Gospel, it does not follow that there is any real love for the same.

My readers are all aware how careful some of those who have adopted unscriptural views are to inform the public that they were brought up in the strictest Evangelical school; and it has been insinuated that the complement of Evangelicalism is the specialism they have embraced. But Evangelicalism has no complement, it deals in extremes—on the one hand, with the utter ruin of man; and on the other, with a perfect Saviour, a perfect justification, a perfect salvation. “Ye are complete in Him.” If there has been defection from sound religious principles it is, as St. Paul teaches us, because the truth was not loved.

Considering, then, what the natural disposition is, the following causes are calculated to produce defection from sound religious principles—the influence of worldly and wicked companions; the prevailing scepticism; the spirit of disobedience and lawless independence, which is a feature of the times; the increasing opposition to clearly marked and definite doctrinal truth; divided opinion in the Church, and the citation of great names in favour of lax and erroneous views; the tone of certain novels, periodicals, reviews, newspapers, etc. Let it not be said that these are dangers which scarcely affect children; the air is so full of them that they reach, to a greater or less extent, every class of the community. The discussions of the playground are a proof that the conversations relating to the political and religious events of the day, whether held in overcrowded and poor dwelling-houses, or in gilded saloons, are not always listened to carelessly or inattentively; and there can be no question that these dangers have their influence at the most critical period of life, when the school bonds are unfastened, and the first step is taken in the path of personal freedom and independence.

There are, however, some special causes of defection from sound religious principles, which it may be well to mention. In our large towns there is a considerable amount of proselytizing on the part of (1) Secularists, (2) Ritualists, and (3) Dissenters.

1. Secularists have their organizations throughout the country. Even where they fail to win over open or secret disciples, they sometimes instil principles of pure worldliness. There came into my hands the other day a copy of the Rules

and Principles of the National Secular Society. I give one extract :

The members are either active or passive. The active list consists of those who do not object to the publication of their names as members of the National Secular Society. An active member's duty is to send as often as possible reliable reports to the president or the secretary of *the doings of the local Clergy*, of special events, sermons, lectures, or publications affecting Secular progress. He should also aid in the circulation of Secular literature, and generally in the freethought propaganda of his neighbourhood. The passive list consists of those whose position does not permit the publication of their names, except at risk of serious injury. The knowledge of these names is confined to the executive, and the members are only referred to by initials.

Here, then, are a set of men acting as spies upon the doings of the Clergy and reporting to a superior officer, "special events, sermons, lectures, or publications affecting secular progress." This superior officer, if so disposed, can send the information he receives on to the President, Mr. Bradlaugh, who may thus be in possession of the characters, doings, speeches of the Clergy in each and every centre.

"Extremes meet," and we have a Secularist propaganda on a thoroughly Jesuitical model. Secularism, like Jesuitism, is working hard to get hold, in this grand England of ours, of men, women, and children.

2. Ritualists directly aim at the subversion of what we hold to be "sound religious principles." They have secrets, mysteries, services, books, guilds, which are not without special attractions for the young. The members of their guilds might almost be called "professional proselytizers," and they leave no stone unturned to act on each other and to prevent defection. By promises, resolutions, or vows, the young are bound and enslaved to particular opinions, practices, and priests. The Ritualists are well organized and act together as a party. By sneers at what they call Puritanism; by vulgar and unscrupulous attacks upon the great leaders of the Reformation; by directing attention to what they designate "Church" or "Catholic" teaching rather than to the Scriptures; by excessive laudation of their partizans for preaching, work, or self-denial; by trying to make out, especially in their tracts relating to confession, that English divines in past ages agreed with their sentiments and practices, they seek to trade on a too widely-spread ignorance upon theological subjects, and to win to their side the young and unsuspecting. "They seek," says Mr. Askwith, "by every means to throw discredit on the Thirty-nine Articles. They induce publishers to issue Prayer Books which do not contain them. They teach that the Articles are to be explained by the Prayer Book and not the Prayer Book by the Articles. . . .

They throw every obstacle in the way of elucidating the Thirty-nine Articles by publishing manuals on the Prayer Book which do not treat of the Articles, and calling the study of them dry and unprofitable." At the time of Confirmation—that time of vast importance and when vital issues are often at stake—they spare no pains to stamp their influence on the inmost soul of those who come under their charge.

3. Dissenters by bitter attacks on the Church, by political action, and by proselytizing members of their chapels, not unfrequently influence our young people at the age when they leave the day and Sunday schools. In these days such an influence is to be most seriously deprecated, for there is a widespread opinion that amongst special sections there is a marked absence of the spirituality of the fathers of nonconformity, as there is an undoubted change of front with reference to an established religion and the public recognition of God; and, it must be added, that only too frequently very vague and unsatisfactory doctrines are taking the place of the old, well-defined, Evangelical system of religion, which was at once the strength and the glory of the greatest and best of Dissenting leaders and teachers.

Amongst the best means of establishing children in sound religious principles, I would specify the following:—

1. Distinctive teaching in the pulpit and in the schools.—There never was a time when such teaching was more essential. The very soul and life of sacerdotalism depend upon sharply defined dogma. Vague, general, Broad Church ideas will never, in my judgment, stand against it. Imperious, sacerdotal dogmatism demands implicit acceptance and submission. Too frequently the recoil from the demand, as it is in Italy and in France, is infidelity. The dogma of human invention must be met by the dogma of the Scriptures. The sneer of Broad Churchmen against systems of doctrine must be unheeded. I have had, as some of my readers may be aware, a certain measure of experience as regards Missions and Mission Preachers, and I venture to affirm that those Missions have been the most successful and permanent in which the Person of Christ and the doctrines which are connected with His history, character, and work have been most clearly defined.¹

2. The careful training of day and Sunday-school teachers.—In some of our large parishes the Clergy must be to a great

¹ The Church recognises a system of doctrine in her Articles; and though some may esteem them the forty stripes save one, it will be our wisdom to make use of them in our pulpits and in our schools. Of the value of the Articles and of the Homilies I have a high sense.

extent dependent upon their teachers for the proper training of the young, but the teachers should impart that instruction which they themselves have received from their Clergy. Teachers and pupil-teachers should be helped in the preparation of the diocesan examination in religious knowledge; and the Sunday-school lesson should be carefully given to the teachers before the teachers give it to the scholars.

3. The importance of pressing upon parents the care they should take as to the churches and schools to which they allow their children to go.—Parents are often to blame for the defection of their children; and when it is too late, when their children have been to confession and have joined a guild, when they have become entangled in meshes from which it is almost impossible to get them free, they discover, to their bitter sorrow, the mistake they have made.¹

4. The organization of associations.—No pains should be spared to bring and weld together the younger members of our Church. Isolation is disastrous; union is strength. No church and no parish in populous districts should be without Bible-classes and associations for young men and for young women. To make such classes and associations successful, the members must be personally known to the Clergy, and they must be conscious of their loving sympathy and interest. If they are under the impression that they are brought together merely to be taught or to be enchained in cold, hard, fast laws, the result will undoubtedly be failure. The instruction of a spiritual character must partake of the nature of a joint search into the truths of revelation, and they must be convinced that they are themselves of importance and of use; and that they are really wanted to work and to help forward God's cause in the parish and in the world. A spirit of friendship ought to be cultivated in each class and association, and that friendship should occasionally find expression and a cementing bond in a special attendance at the Supper of the Lord.

5. Instruction in the principles of the Church of England.—The principles of our Church are sound, religious principles because they are agreeable to the Word of God. If our young people do not know why we have an Established Church, forms of prayer, recurring seasons, special offices—in other words, if they are not taught to love and value the Church and the Prayer Book, defection from sound religious principles, defection to Dissent or even Romanism, is not to be a

¹ Often is the home made miserable because a stranger has pushed himself into it—a priestly confessor has wormed out family secrets, and has come between the parents and their children, with a presumptuous and unlawful authority.

cause of wonder. At as early an age as possible children should be taught to use the Prayer Book readily and intelligently. It has been truly said, "The use of it does not come by the light of nature: it must be taught."

6. Letters of introduction.—Too great stress cannot be placed upon this point. It frequently happens that just when a boy or girl is leaving school a situation is obtained in a new parish. A letter of introduction may then be of inestimable value. Such letters, I rejoice to believe, are greatly on the increase.

7. I place last of all the personal holiness of all who have young children under their care. It cannot be too often repeated that "children may not understand the sermon of the lip, but they will always understand the sermon of the life." Let them have the impression that their teachers are not manly, straightforward, honest; that an effort is being secretly made, under the plea of private consultation, to discover their secrets, and so to exercise over them a despotic influence; that there is any doubting or unbelief, any hypocrisy or unreality, any inconsistency of life, and there will speedily be defection from Sunday-school, from Bible-class, from church, from principle. The late Bishop of Cork, who had great influence over the young, said: "Truth on the tongue, and holiness in the life, are mighty engines with which to work. 'Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.' You should know the truth, that you may teach it; you should be taught it, that you may know it; you should teach it, that others may know it; and walk in it, that they may receive it."

It is much easier to write a paper on this subject than to carry out the suggestions made. The Clergy have so many important duties to perform, which cannot be neglected; we have to deal with so many classes, each requiring special care; we have such huge populations, in some places rapidly increasing, which must be influenced, that there seems little likelihood of our fully discharging our duty to the young in any adequate sense. But we have a Throne of Grace at which we can obtain heavenly wisdom. What we can do personally or through others must be done. And it is no slight honour to be the means of establishing in the faith, and of guarding and shepherdizing the precious lambs of the flock of our beloved Lord.

JOSEPH McCORMICK.

