

RELIGION

Bulletin of Kansas School of Religion at The University of Kansas

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A Defect in our Educational System*

Sunday School had started when I arrived at the white frame church building. Since the class for adults was large, I was able to slip into a seat near the rear without attracting attention. The class, made up of solid citizens of a small town and the surrounding farm area, was a familiar enough scene—pleasingly familiar, for who could respond so warmly to the friendly, wholesome, earthy qualities of a group of rural Midwesterners? The teacher, too, at first seemed to be typical: a little better dressed and groomed than the others and more articulate than farmers and townspeople generally. Listening attentively, I soon became aware that he was a good deal different. His grammar and vocabulary were beyond reproach. He moved with freedom in the fields of literature and history and psychology. I later learned that he was the principal of the local high school and was by far the leading citizen of the community. In fact he was very much the respected and influential village teacher type that Oliver Goldsmith described:

“For even though vanquished he could argue still;
While words of learned length and thundering sound
Amazed the gazing rustics ranging around;
And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew
That one small head could carry all he knew.”

Not many minutes of the class lecture passed before I became aware of a glaring incongruity. Well equipped in many fields of knowledge, the pedagogue betrayed an abysmal ignorance of the field of religion. To be sure, he was familiar with the words of the Bible, but he did not handle the Bible like a scholar, and in general he appeared to be unaffected by the vast theological learning, including Biblical scholarship, associated with the universities of Europe and Great Britain, and, to a lesser degree, the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Facility with English and wisdom in other areas cannot make amends for lack of theological awareness. My criticism has nothing to do with the man's personal piety—he might have been as saintly as St. Francis—or with that practical dedication to the service of God and men that the Judeo-Christian religion at its best demands. He simply had

an inexcusable deficiency in knowledge—doubly inexcusable in that he was the community's symbol of learning. It is easy to associate a pre-critical view of the Bible and barbarous theological concepts with a worker in bluejeans who chews tobacco and uses the handy verb “ain't” with monotonous frequency, but theological illiteracy seems incongruous and especially objectionable in a man with a graduate university degree who expresses his ignorance in good English forms. In the case to which I refer a man of influence in a favorable position to raise the community's standards of religious literacy was really an instance of the blind leading the blind, to which one of the greatest teachers of antiquity referred.

This man was a representative—an extreme example, to be sure—of a large class in our society, those who have a college-level training in most other areas, but in religion, something equivalent to a grade school education. Actually he and his kind are victims of a system. In the United States we have developed a public educational system which, though in some respects the best in the world, is ailing in that it does not provide for the study of one of the most important aspects of life, namely, the religious. It is possible for one like the high school principal to travel the long academic road from kindergarten to a graduate university degree without having a course in religion anywhere in his varied educational career. And this deplorable condition exists in a country whose democratic idealism is intimately enmeshed with the basic concepts of high religion.

This republic was not created like Athena, who sprang full-panoplied from the head of Zeus. It had immediate cultural antecedents in Great Britain and western Europe. The Romans and the Greeks helped to make it what it is, as, in even more remote times, did the ancient Hebrews. The motto on our coins “In God we trust” is a reference to

* This article by the dean of Kansas School of Religion appeared in almost the same form in the *Lawrence Journal-World*, December 23, 1963.

God as interpreted in the Jewish-Christian tradition, the Creator and Judge and Redeemer of men. The so-called self-evident truths of the Declaration of Independence, "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," imply a Biblical doctrine of man. They may not be self-evident to people unenlightened by the Biblical tradition. In Judeo-Christian thought the human creature has dignity and value not because of race or class or color but by reason of his inherent worth as one created in the image of God, capable of thinking God's thoughts after him and ordering his life under the guidance of an ideal. The ethic our forefathers visualized as the pattern for life in this new land is the Judeo-Christian ideal for personal life and social relations, at the core of which are the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount.

In this land where there is government of the people by the people, it is necessary for the citizens to be informed about, and committed to the country's ideals. To be sure that its citizens are enlightened, the state requires all in their youth to have a formal elementary education and provides for their further training at the secondary and higher educational levels—but this is a secular system with inadequate attention to the religious factor in our culture. Not only has this education experienced an emptying-out of religious content, but there has also come in modern times a weakening of the ethical emphasis, as a comparison between the old McGuffey readers and their counterparts in today's schools plainly indicates.

It has been assumed that as the state furnished its citizens a secular education, their religious and moral training would be provided satisfactorily on weekends by churches and synagogues on an elective basis. This is a gratuitous assumption. The fact that religion is elective while secular education is required bears an implication to students of what is important and what is not. The teaching of religion suffers, too, when it takes place away from the public school building which symbolizes serious study interests. Even if all the youth were on hand for the religious instruction in Sunday Schools, they would receive on an average less than a half-hour of teaching a week.

Our educational system is gravely deficient in that it does not provide adequately for instruction in the religion that is at the core of our culture. Because this condition can have nothing but disastrous effects on the quality of American life, schoolmen, churchmen and legislators should pool their wisdom and their resources in an effort to eliminate this deficiency. Let me suggest to them:

(1) That they should work out a plan, putting it into effect as soon as possible, whereby sufficient time will be provided in the student's otherwise full schedule for the teaching of religion at both the elementary and secondary school levels. The National Council of Churches, representing about thirty-five million Americans, about ten years ago adopted a statement that includes the following sentence: "In some constitutional way provision should be made for the inculcation of the principles of religion, whether within or outside the precincts of the school, but always *within the regular schedule of the pupil's working day.*" Probably ministers, priests and rabbis would be used as teachers. I am suggesting that this be set up as a stop-gap program until a permanent, better system is created, such as the one I will now describe:

(2) That they work out constitutional ways to put a religious content into the regular curriculum of our grade schools and high schools. In this more permanent system, which would take a few years to implement, the teaching should be done not by visiting ministers and priests and rabbis, but by regular members of the school staff who would be required to have thorough preparation for this kind of teaching by taking courses in Bible and religion at the university level. The teaching should cover:

(a) The place of religion in the great cultures.

(b) A forthright, objective treatment of the facts about America's religious heritage.

(c) A scholarly study of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, which is common to the three major segments of American religion: Judaism, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism.

(d) An interpretation of the Biblical concept of God as the Creator, Judge and Father of men, the author and upholder of the moral order of the universe.

(e) The teaching of the Biblical view of man as a free-will agent accountable to his Maker for doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with his God.

The teaching that I have in mind would not be contrary to the First Amendment. (Recent Supreme Court decisions against the *practice* of religion in the schools ought not to be interpreted to mean that *teaching* about religion in scholarly, truly elective courses is unconstitutional.) It would not favor one religious body over another. It would not be aimed at persuading anybody to accept a particular religious point of view. It would be designed frankly to give our youth the full facts about the nation's religious heritage and the relation of religion to our culture. The end in view would be a level of literacy as high in religion as in the other subjects a youth studies as the public schools prepare him for life.

(3) That they see to it that all tax-supported, as well as the church-related, colleges and universities provide adequately for the teaching of religion, both undergraduate and graduate, in departments of religion, in schools of religion, or in other, comparable ways that give full weight to religion as an academic discipline in its own right. The interdenominational Kansas School of Religion at the University of Kansas is a venture of this sort, representing cooperation between religious bodies and cooperation between church and state in the scholarly teaching of religion to university students. In the resolution on Purpose adopted by the directors of Kansas School of Religion at the annual meeting in 1962 is this statement summarizing the role of the school:

"We believe man is incurably religious and that his religious idealism is an important part of life lived at its best. We believe that religion should be studied with as much thoroughness and by as high academic standards as economics, civics, science, and other disciplines that shape the mind and outlook of a cultured man. We believe that religion should penetrate the academic community and confront our culture with its claims. We believe that while the work of all of the academic disciplines should be examined in the light of the claims of religion, the Jewish-Christian tradition in particular, every form and expression of religion should itself be exposed to the critical inquiry that distinguishes the highest levels of education in a truly free society."

Another Partner

Since the October issue of RELIGION went to press, the Evangelical United Brethren Church has taken the final step that puts it into partnership with nine other religious bodies in the corporation of Kansas School of Religion. It has already paid its 1963-64 proportionate share of the cost of operating the school, and it has appointed its four representatives to the board that directs the program. Its participation strengthens the school and at the same time broadens the scope of the denomination's service to the world by making it a partner in the ministry of teaching credit courses in religion at a great state university. At Lawrence these ten religious bodies are practicing ecumenicity by doing together what they could not do separately.

In April, 1961, the board of Kansas School of Religion adopted a plan for an expansion that would make it a more efficient teaching institution and allow it to grow along with the rapidly expanding university with which it is related. The plan called for, among other things, an increase in the number of groups in the corporation of the school. The E.U.B. church is now the third religious body that has been added to the partnership since the Spring of 1961.

Faculty

The constitution of Kansas School of Religion specifies that a man's preparation to teach in the school must include at least a Bachelor of Divinity degree or its equivalent. The B.D. represents three years of graduate study in religion beyond the A.B. degree. The designation *Bachelor of Divinity* is misleading for it suggests a "bachelor" (undergraduate) level of education. For this reason in seminary accrediting circles there has been recurring agitation to change the nomenclature. Many want the three-year graduate seminary degree to be some kind of doctorate. Whatever terms are used, no teacher, part-time or full-time, in Kansas School of Religion has less than three years of graduate preparation in the area of his teaching.

For a long time the faculty consisted of one full-time and from five to eight part-time teachers. The plan for expansion calls for an increase from one to four full-time teachers by 1965. It is expected that each of the four will have a Ph.D. degree or at least have his class work for that degree finished with assurance that the degree will be granted soon after he begins to teach. Furthermore the selection of full-time



A K.R.S. class taught by Dr. John B. Graber

teachers is being made in such a way that the school would have a specialist in the Biblical field, one in the Theological, one in the Historical, and one in the Ethical (or Religion and Culture) field. Dean Moore, who has been with the school since 1960, has a Chicago University Ph.D. degree with specialization in Biblical studies. The second full-time teacher, who joined the faculty this school year, is a theologian. The third man, to come in September, 1964, is a historian. We look for a specialist in Christian Ethics to come in the Fall of 1965.

Paul H. Hasvold

Professor Hasvold came to us last September with an outstanding scholastic record. He took his A.B. degree at Luther College in 1955 and was Valedictorian for the graduating class. He was awarded a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship and a Danforth Fellowship in 1955, and that year his name was listed in "Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities." He earned a M.A. degree in philosophy at The University of Michigan in 1956. He taught religion and philosophy at Luther College in the year 1957-58 and in the summer of 1958. He was rated first in his class when he took the B.D. degree at Luther Theological Seminary in 1960. He studied at Oxford University for two years, 1960-61 and 1961-62, on a Fulbright Scholarship and concluded his

doctoral program at Oxford in 1963 "with great distinction." The Ph.D. degree will be conferred on him when he makes some adjustments in his thesis, probably in the summer of 1964.

In his education Professor Hasvold has specialized in the history of theology and philosophy of religion. In addition to his work in Kansas School of Religion he teaches a course in the department of philosophy in the university.

Procedure in the Academic Community

Financial support for Professor Hasvold will be provided by the Lutheran Church and he is a member of that church, a dedicated member, we believe. But he is not on our faculty to indoctrinate Lutheran students in the distinctive elements of the Lutheran faith. That is the task of Lutheran ministers in the university community. He is the Lutheran Church's contribution to scholarship in the specialized areas of theology and philosophy of religion, in which he has thorough preparation. In the field of his competence it is his business to teach all students of inquiring mind: Jews, Roman Catholics, Protestants, and even people of no faith who want to learn about an important area of life, namely, the religious. As a theologian he joins hands with scientists, historians, philosophers, and others in the common quest for truth carried on

by a community of scholars at a university.

A denomination appoints members to the board of Kansas School of Religion, but it does not put a teacher on the faculty though it may pay his salary. A teacher is appointed to the faculty by a procedure common in educational circles and certainly similar to that characteristic of the various departments in K.U. The dean of Kansas School of Religion, functioning like a department head, makes a recommendation and the dean of the College of Liberal Arts and the chancellor of the university must accept the recommendation before the appointment is made by the dean as the administrator of an educational institution.

A New Status for K.S.R. Courses

In the university program K.S.R. courses have occupied a very restricted area of electives and have, therefore, had a limited use for students as they have moved towards a degree. Beginning in September, 1964, our junior and senior courses will have a new status. The faculty of the College of Liberal Arts on December 17, 1963, adopted a proposal that K.S.R. junior-senior courses be put into the category of courses that may be used by students to satisfy their degree requirements in the Humanities field. The proposal was based on the fact that K.S.R. has a plan for expansion which will enable it to do a better job academically and that, in fact, the plan is rapidly being translated into reality. The "new look" in K.S.R. merits a new status for its courses, and the decision of the Liberal Arts faculty actually will give our school a larger role in the university than it has had.

Loan Funds

Through the K.U. Endowment Association the Plymouth Women's Group of the Plymouth Congregational Church in Lawrence has started a loan fund for pre-ministerial students. It will be administered by the Kansas School of Religion. Its benefits will not be limited to members of the Congregational Church. There may be other groups who would want to contribute to the fund and thus participate in a good work.

Prior to the action of the Plymouth Women's Group, Mr. and Mrs. Joe Williams of Decatur, Illinois made the initial contribution towards a growing fund in honor of Dean-emeritus Harold G. Barr. It is called the Harold G. Barr



**Dr. William J. Moore,
Dean of Kansas School of Religion**

Pre-ministerial Loan Fund. Mr. and Mrs. Williams are Disciples of Christ, but they do not want the fund to be used exclusively for Disciples. We are inviting the many friends of Dean Barr to contribute to this fund, thus honoring him and at the same time supporting a worthy cause.

Financial Support

No tax money is used to support K.S.R. The basis of its financial operation is the contributions from the religious bodies in the corporation. Beyond this it is dependent upon the gifts of individuals who want to see religion taught in our tax-supported universities. Gifts may be sent directly to our office or through the K.U. Endowment Association office. In that case they

should be designated for the support of the Kansas School of Religion.

The October Issue

Anyone desiring a copy of Vol. I, No. 1 of this periodical may have one upon request.

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1963-64**

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Editor: William J. Moore,
Dean of Kansas School of Religion

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