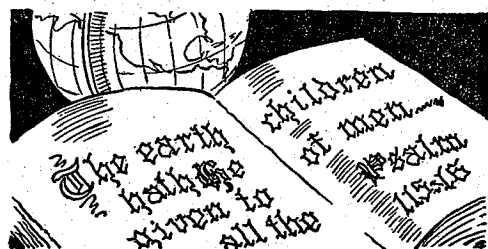


## Wanted: A Religious Text Book

AMERICAN CHURCHMEN who have been plugging for "released time" to let children out of school for instruction in their own churches will derive comfort from a recent act of Parliament making religious instruction and daily worship a statutory requirement in every school in the United Kingdom.

There is sound argument for adding the discipline of religion to our curricula, in both lower and higher schools. The controversy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which ended in the separation of church and state arose from political rather than intellectual considerations, although religion per se also came in for attack.



Perhaps this was largely due to the stultifying character which education in spiritual ideas had acquired. When religion becomes a meaningless mass of mythology it has no educational value; when it is identified with hoary rules and regulations of behavior it is merely restrictive, and ceases to lend the mental uplift which is the proper purpose of education.

The case of those who urge religious teaching would be much stronger if they more clearly defined their subject matter. Sectarianism is what many of them propose, and sectarianism is not religion. Neither is the story of Jonah and the whale, nor the committing to memory of prayers the meaning of which is obscured and minimized. Formalism, rote and the insinuation that those who do not practice a certain ritual are wicked and hopeless have given religion a black eye. If, on the other hand, it were defined as a way of life and offered as a guide to thinking, religion would be a worth-while subject for study.

What we need first for such a study would be a text-book. The Bible cannot be improved upon as a source book; there are parts of the King James version that ought to be required reading in the study of the English language. But, like all source books, the Bible is a compendium of facts and ideas which require interpretation; its authors were par-

ticularly gifted in the art of condensation, in the use of suggestion and in the statement of broad moral principles. How many grownups comprehend the parables of Jesus?

If we were permitted to suggest some ideas for an interpretive textbook for a course in religion we would humbly rush forward with a few Biblical quotations which, with their analyses, should make a thought-provoking chapter; and the provocation of thought is the first purpose of education. For instance:

"Cursed be he that removeth his neighbor's landmark." This in Deuteronomy, is a clear injunction against foreclosures, and in that light would help the student appreciate the moral and the economic principle enunciated.

And when the Prophet Ezekiel says, "And ye shall inherit it (the land), one as well another," it ought to be pointed out that this is an injunction against any land tenure system which disinherits some; that is, makes for a landless people. In corroboration thereof one might quote from the First Book of Kings: "Thy land which Thou hast given to Thy people for an inheritance."

The validity of exclusive titles to the earth might come in for consideration in the analysis of the first sentence of the Pentateuch: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." It is not on record that any title deed to the latter stems from the Creator. If not, then from whom? And to throw further light on this thought there are these passages from the Psalms: "The sea is His, and He made it; and His hands formed the dry land." "The Earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." "The World is Mine, and the fulness thereof." Notice, the Earth is the Lord's—not the landlords'.

Now the Lord might have made Adam a landlord; but He didn't. Adam was instructed to till the land, not to own it or to sell it. For, in Leviticus, we are told that "the land shall not be sold for ever; for the land is Mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with Me." No question here where the original title lay.

But, of what good is the earth if one cannot own and sell it? There's an answer to that in Ecclesiastes: "The profit of the earth is for all; the king himself is served by the field." Definitely then the earth's function in the scheme of things is to provide all men with what they need. As for "profit," does this include rent?

"Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit

thereof" seems to mean that the worker shall enjoy the product of his labor. Which also appears to be the meaning of "they shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth for trouble." Nowhere do we find justification for exacting part of one's labor for the privilege of laboring on the earth.

And so, we humbly submit, integration of the teachings of the Bible with the realities of life, rather than the presentation of theological abstractions, should be the guiding principle of a religious textbook. Religion taught along such lines would become a vital discipline.

F. C.