**“The Bible in the Public Schools” American Sentinel 2, 11.**

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In the June number of the SENTINEL there was an article in which the following sentence occurred: “To shut the Bible and religious instruction out of the public school seems, to some people, to be a sacrilegious proceeding; but to maintain them in the public schools is not only very difficult, but very hazardous.” To this statement a good friend of the SENTINEL, took exception, thinking that it argued a lack of appreciation of the Bible. Although our private explanation of the matter was satisfactory to him, we propose to consider the subject somewhat in detail, for the benefit of others who may think that loyalty to the word of God demands that its study be maintained in the public schools. {AMS November 1887, p. 83.1}

In the first place we will say that we yield to none in reverence for the Bible. We believe it to be the inspired word of God, and that it is “true from the beginning.” As an educator it is invaluable. We believe that if the Bible is rightly studied, a man can get a better education from it alone than from any other book that was ever printed. He would have a better disciplined mind and would be better fitted for society and business, that he could be by studying any other book ever written. Take all the eulogies of the Bible that have ever been written or spoken, and it may still be said that “the half has not been told.” And still we hold that it is a great mistake for Christians to insist upon the Bible being used as a text-book in the public schools. Our reasons are these:- {AMS November 1887, p. 83.2}

The Bible is not an ordinary text-book. It is not a book to be studied as an arithmetic, beginning at the first page and mastering it point by point until the end is reached. It is not a book of logic, nor a book of science, although it is logical, and is scientifically exact, and is the basis of all true science: But it is primarily and solely a book of morals. It is true that there is no other book in the world the study of which will so admirably discipline the mind as will the Bible; and it is for this reason that many think the Bible should be used as a text-book in the public schools. But such ones forget that the disciplinary effects of the Bible are not obtained when it is studied for that purpose alone, as people study geometry or read the orations of Cicero, but that the discipline of mind from the study of the Bible comes only when it is studied with a view of carrying out its precepts in the daily life. {AMS November 1887, p. 83.3}

Proof of this is found in the following texts: Psalm 111:10: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do his commandments.” Deuteronomy 4:5, 6: “Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. *Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations*, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” The Bible is like no other book that was ever written. Its language is simple and may be understood by the common people, yet it withholds its treasure from the most learned if they do not study it with reverent hearts. The one who studies it with no thought of its value as an educator of the mind, but solely to know what is the will of God, will find his mind expanded so that he can better comprehend affairs of every-day life; while the one who attempts to study it in the same manner and with the same spirit as he would study some secular author, will not derive any material benefit. {AMS November 1887, p. 83.4}

The sum of all this is, that the Bible is a book whose sole object is to teach men the true religion, the religion of Jesus Christ. Now what is the public school? It is an invitation of the State and all those connected with the public-school system are in the employ of the civil government. They are, if you please, officers of the State. Therefore if the Bible be taught in the public schools, it will be simply the State teaching religion. The State will have to determine what views of the Bible shall be taught; for, let it be remembered, the Bible is not like mathematics, which is a fixed science, and concerning which there cannot possibly be a difference of opinion; but it affords opportunity for much variety of opinion. This is not because the Bible is so obscure that people cannot see alike, but because God has ordained that man shall be a free agent in matters of morals. And here is where the danger comes in, for if the Bible be taught in the public schools, it must be taught in accordance with some system, and whatever theories may be taught, somebody’s conscience is sure to be outraged. {AMS November 1887, p. 84.1}

For example, there are many sincere Christians who believe that immersion is the only true baptism, while others conscientiously hold that sprinkling is baptism, and that infants should receive the ordinance. Most people believe that man has the principle of immortality by nature, while many believe that immortality is given only to those who believe in Christ, and they hold that any contrary teaching robs Christ of his chief glory. One person believes in the perpetuity and universal obligation of the ten commandments, while another believes that they were only for the Jews, and are now abolished. One man is a Unitarian and his neighbor is a Trinitarian, and so on. It is not within our province to say which of these views are right and which are wrong. It is sufficient that each one believes his own view to be the correct one, and does not wish to have his children taught a contrary view; neither does he wish to have the money which he pays as taxes to support the school, used in propagating doctrines which he holds to be vital errors. {AMS November 1887, p. 84.2}

So we say that Christians themselves should not merely refrain from insisting that the Bible be used in the public schools, but should rather insist that it be kept out. There is indeed danger in having it placed there, for when that is done somebody’s religious convictions are sure to be trampled upon. It is of the very essence of Church and State union to have the Bible taught in the public schools, for that would be nothing else but the State teaching religion; and the standard of the religion taught would be the opinions of the majority. Let each professed Christian who thinks that it is little less than sacrilege to say that the Bible ought not to be taught in the public schools, consider the matter seriously. He will find that what he wants and expects is that his views of the Bible shall be taught. But he has no warrant that this will be the case. It will not be the case unless he chances to be among the majority, and in that case he is helping to outrage the con-science of some other man. The simple fact is this: If the State adopts the Bible as a text-book in its schools, then it must decide how it shall be taught, or, in other words, must fix a standard of religion. {AMS November 1887, p. 84.3}

But suppose that all Christians were agreed concerning the principal points of Bible doctrines; they are not the ones who are to be considered. The public schools are for the public, and among the people there will be many who do not accept the Bible at all. What shall be done in their case? Here is the answer that Pastor Joshua Denovan gives in an article on, “The Bible in the Public Schools,” which appeared in the *Faithful Witness*, of Toronto, Canada:- {AMS November 1887, p. 84.4}

“Some advanced champions for freedom of conscience and the rights of man, in Britain and the United States, can’t be accommodated. In this category must be classed agnostics, atheists, and scientific infidels. For my part, without hesitation or apology, I deny such men any reasonable claim to conscientious convictions and privileges at all.” {AMS November 1887, p. 84.5}

And again, speaking of the consciences of such men, he says: “Such consciences are peculiar-abnormally unique-and their owners must suffer for conscience’ sake.” {AMS November 1887, p. 84.6}

The *Christian Statesman* of July 7, 1887, contains a reprint of the article in which these words occur, and the editor called special attention to it as a “masterly article.” Such sentiments are in keeping with National Reform ideas of the gospel, but they are as different from the gospel of Jesus Christ as night is from day. The gospel knows nothing of compulsion; “*Whosoever will*, let him come,” is its gracious call. The use of force in connection with matters of religion was conceived and is fostered only by the prince of darkness, “the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.” An infidel is a man, and, as such, he is entitled to the same rights and privileges in a human (“belonging to man or mankind”) government that his Christian neighbor is, who is only a man. He may be and should be invited and urged to accept the Bible as the revealed will of his Creator, but so long as it would be wrong to compel a Christian to help support schools which should teach views of the Bible which he cannot conscientiously adopt, so long will it be wrong to compel unbelievers to support schools for the teaching of religion. {AMS November 1887, p. 84.7}

How, then, can the youth of Christian parents receive the Biblical instruction which their parents desire them to have? Let their parents instruct them at home, as is their duty. To the parent, and to the parent alone, has God instructed the moral and religious instruction of children. The divine command is: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” Deuteronomy 6:5-7. {AMS November 1887, p. 84.8}

If any number of parents who are of the same faith wish to send their children to a school where they can study the Bible to better advantage than they can at home, they may combine and form a denominational school, which is independent of State patronage, and to the support of which none need contribute except those who believe in the principles taught. Such schools are on the same footing as the various religious denominations themselves. The religious instruction is private, because it is supported by the private, voluntary contributions of those who favor the views taught by any given denomination; it is public only in the sense that anybody who wishes is privileged to come. This is all that anybody should desire; whatsoever is more than this, cometh of evil. {AMS November 1887, p. 84.9}

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