RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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RELIGION AND RACE IN EDUCATION

A Symposium

I

PROTESTANT-CATHOLIC GOOD-WILL EFFORT: THE QUESTION OF OBJECTIVES

MILDRED MOODY EAKIN*

A BASIC OBJECTIVE in all good-will effort, I think, should be better acquaintance, especially acquaintance with the better side of the other fellow's nature, his way of thinking and his way of doing things. This is clearly true as regards efforts to improve Protestant-Catholic relations by means of Protestant church schools. Our children in many cases have fallen heir to handed-down ideas about Catholics and Catholic religion which are false, even to a ridiculous degree, and which provide a fertile seed-bed for dangerous prejudice.

As a Protestant church-school leader, therefore, I consider it to be a primary job of mine to put my children in the way of experiences which will bring home to them certain facts. One fact is that Catholic Americans, by and large, are the same kind of people as Protestant Americans. Another fact is that back of the unfamiliar attire of Catholic priests and sisters are human individuals with familiar and likable qualities. A third fact is that strange objects to be seen in Catholic churches, and strange performances which go on in them, have meanings which can be explained, and which when explained cease to seem sinister.

To guide children into experiences which confront them with these facts is comparatively easy. At least I have found it so. Having established friendly relations with members of the local Catholic clergy years ago I have since found them unfailingly cooperative in arranging for visits of our Protestant children and their teachers to the Catholic church and unfailingly courteous and patient in showing us what we wanted to see and explaining to us what we wanted explained. These visits — along with studies and discussions about Catholic persons, ideas and practices — are a part of our annual program for fourth-grade boys and girls.

Readers of *Your Child's Religion* will remember about Alice,[1] who gripped my arm in near panic as we walked down the aisle to the altar of the Catholic church, but who, when everything had been seen and explained and we were leaving the church, held Father Semple's arm, not mine, her face registering something quite other than fear.

Russell's experience last year was somewhat similar. Russell is usually ready for anything but when trips to the Catholic church and parochial school were proposed he said, "Count me out." However, he took both trips. Curiosity had got the better of him. And he always managed to be in the front row, near the priest in the church and the sister in the schoolroom. "They're friendlier here than on the street," he was heard to remark. Then one day

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Russell's church-school teacher met his mother. They talked about the trips. "The priest seems to be a fine young fellow," Russell's mother said. "Oh, do you know Father Haas?" the teacher asked in surprise. "No, but Russell introduced me to him the other day when we were out walking and we had a chat."

In such ways the get-acquainted technique can operate. Such results it can achieve. I think they are important results. They tend to nip prejudice in the bud. They help children to acquire, in this area, a balanced and enlightened view of life.

A second objective also is needed. In the interest of an enlightened view of life, and in the interest of mutual respect between Catholics and Protestants, we should, I think, help our children to understand differences between Catholicism and Protestantism, not try to cover up those differences.

One year I had charge of an intermediate department in which "The World's Great Religions" were being studied. In the course of the study the planning committee worked up a panel discussion — with a girl from the Protestant group, a Catholic girl and a Jewish boy making up the panel. What comes to my mind now is a part of the discussion which involved only Catholic and Protestant views. It ran about as follows:

"Do you fear God?" the Catholic girl asked.

"No, I don't," the Protestant girl replied.

"But you have to. You can't love him until you've feared him." The Catholic girl sopke earnestly.

"I don't know exactly what I think about God," the Protestant girl said slowly, "but I know I'm not afraid of him. What do you think about him?"

"Wait a minute. I'll tell you." Taking a book from her lap the Catholic girl read from it.

"That's what somebody else thinks," the Protestant girl said.

"That's what I think. The church tells me."

"I'd rather make up my own mind."

A boy from the assembly — a Protestant — broke in. "Does your church tell you what to *do*, as well as what to think?"

"Yes," the Catholic girl replied. "I'll read you some." She read again from her book.

"I don't want that kind of a religion," the Protestant boy said. "It doesn't leave freedom of thought or action. I'll come to my own conclusions."

"I'd rather know what to believe and what to do," the Catholic girl retorted.

The youngsters in this instance were being confronted with differences in their Catholic and Protestant points of view which are very important, far-reaching in their implications. It seems to me altogether desirable that they should be so confronted.

In our church school we have recently had an unusual kind of case — the case of a Protestant child who seemed about to become a convert to Catholicism. Doris, as I shall call her, is deeply sensitive to beauty, and this sensitiveness readily takes a religious turn. Catholic color, symbolism, pageantry fascinated her. Following her first visit to the Catholic church with her group she went back again and again with a Catholic playmate. She became a favorite with one of the priests and with his secretary. They gave her gifts — a beautiful necklace with crucifix attached, a hand-carved ivory rosary, a plush-covered prayer book. No doubt they were sincerely attached to her. She is a lovable child. Her parents, for some time dubious about the intimacy, interfered only when

1. Fictitious names are used instead of the real names of all persons referred to.

Doris announced that she was getting ready for her first communion. The priest had told her that her parents might object, she said, but he had added that if she prayed to the Lady their objections would be overcome.

It didn't work out quite that way. The father and mother went and talked to the priest. Doris's progress toward Catholicism came to an abrupt halt. The church school has since helped her to find expression within the framework of her parents' religion for her artistic impulse, her craving for beauty, her need for sympathetic adult companionship. The school's leaders, as well as the parents, had hesitated to interfere. It seemed possible that the child might undergo a serious psychic disturbance. But happily this did not occur. Now, after a few months, Doris seems to feel no inclination to change her religious allegiance. She said to me the other day that the priest had told her she would go to hell if she didn't become a Catholic. "Do you believe that?" she asked. I said no, I didn't. "Neither do I," she said, and laughed. I think Doris has had a valuable educative experience.

I have lately been spending a good deal of time, with other Protestant leaders, in work on a book of religious symbols — Protestant, Catholic and Jewish — to be used as an aid in good-will teaching in church schools. What will eventually come of the project is at this writing uncertain. The sponsors have felt it important to present in the book a united Christian front. This has meant that the Protestant materials had to be submitted to Catholic authorities and modified at every point where those authorities found them out of line with Catholic doctrines. As a result everything distinctively Protestant has of course been squeezed out of the presentation — a doubtful way, I think, of promoting good will.

I know that the current fashion in good-will effort is to emphasize that the two major Christian bodies have the same God, the same Christ, the same belief in prayer and in immortality, that they are therefore essentially at one. I wish here to register my dissent from this point of view. Certainly my Protestantism has no such close affinity with official Catholicism, notwithstanding that I find it easy to keep on good terms with Catholics. As I see the matter, the assumed identities of religious outlook are for the most part fallacious, or where they are real this means simply that Protestantism has failed to be itself. I believe that the thing most needed in Protestant-Catholic good-will effort today is the sort of realism which Eric Johnson has exemplified in furthering American-Russian good-will — a realism which faces the fact of fundamental differences, viewing such differences, however, if frankly faced, as in no way precluding good-will.

A third conviction of mine is that if the churches are to engage effectively in good-will effort church leaders must have in view objectives of a "good-life" character rather than religious objectives of the common institutional kind.

Perhaps I may illustrate by referring again to the use of religious symbols. I have found them exceedingly useful in good-will work with church-school children but I use them primarily as affording interesting points of contact. In our school we take them seriously and use them reverently, but their value in themselves as pictorial representations of inherited beliefs and practices is a quite secondary matter with us. We don't "teach symbols." Our focus in this kind of effort is not on the church but on humanity, more specifically on certain neighbors of ours who have customs and ideas different from ours. We want the children to discover that these unfamiliar customs and ideas are not evil in some mysterious way, or just crazy, that they are often beautiful, and are likely to have sane reasons back of them. When Chris-

tian children in our groups gain added appreciation of their religion, as a by-product of good-will studies, we are glad for that. It sometimes happens. When the occasional Jewish child meeting with us comes to feel through our study of Jewish symbols that his religion is more attractive than he had realized — and this also happens — we are at least equally glad. But our main concern is to forestall prejudice; we use symbols as an aid to sympathetic understanding of one group of people by another. My dissatisfaction with the plan for the proposed symbols book was due not only to its making Protestantism seem in no important way different from Catholicism, but also to its making immediate human needs subordinate to inherited church interests. That way, I think, lies futility.

As a concluding point let me try to make clear why the first of the objectives above listed, besides being the easiest to pursue, seems to me to be especially important at the present time.

If my impression is correct, Protestant leaders are likely to be Catholic-conscious just now in one or other of two ways. One group, with the attitude already referred to, of smoothing over differences, produces many a pleasant phrase and probably brings about change of heart in some individuals but is only scratching the surface of the problem of prejudice and is not likely to do more. If it were successful in any large way it would tend to emasculate Protestantism and in so doing to deprive Catholicism of the sturdy, enlightened alternative — not to say opposition — which, as Catholic history through the centuries in many countries shows, is so important for its healthy development.

The other group — angered by Catholic official aloofness from cooperative effort and real or fancied Catholic support of reactionary political measures and individuals, very likely moved in some degree also by envy of the power which the Catholic church's closely knit system enables it to wield — is in the mood for a show-down fight. To thoughtful Protestant leaders, however, it should be clear that only harm can come from such a contest. Only when the prevailing Protestant attitude is much more free from prejudice due to crass ignorance than it now is can such harm be avoided.

The aloofness is a fact in the situation which has to be reckoned with. In my experience it has always been encountered when cooperation beyond the kind referred to at the beginning of this article has been attempted. Items have been such as these: a high-school baccalaureate where the priest refused to sit on the platform; a dedication service for clothing collected by children to send to destitute people in which the priest could not participate; the refusal of a priest to allow one of his talented young women to take the lead in a community pageant of good will; the inability of a Catholic choir, for the same reason, to have a part in the same good-will program; the refusal of Catholic lay leaders to take part in a community interracial committee's deliberations.

These incidents and many like them have caused me annoyance. I know that such attitudes can be defended. Reasons can be given for them. Having heard the reasons I sympathize with priests and lay Catholics who have to abide by rules which may run counter to their own feelings, but I do not like the system which produces the rules. Nevertheless I do not see that Protestant leaders as such can do much about it. It is our task, rather, I imagine, to combat prejudice and other evils in our own household, work for enlightened attitudes in our own ranks.

So for Protestant good-will effort I would recommend, above all, get-acquainted activities and studies designed to reveal Catholics to Protestants as fellow-Americans and Catholic religion as

doing a vast amount of good, which it certainly does, much of it in helping less privileged people whom Protestant churches fail to reach, and in bringing religion and beauty together in notable ways. For activities and studies of this type Catholic cooperation can be had, and they can be the more fruitful on that account. On the other hand appreciation does not rule out criticism. When children in our school criticize things Catholic, as they often do, we try not to silence the criticism but to stimulate thinking as to whether it is or is not justified. Good-will based on sound information and balanced judgment is the goal toward which we strive.

As to needed changes in Catholicism, I think these will probably have to come through the initiative of Catholics, spurred by growing secular enlightenment.

II
INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN AND THROUGH THE NURSERY SCHOOL

SISTER MARY DE LOURDES*

SINCE Saint Joseph College was founded, one of its major interests as a liberal arts college has been that of intercultural education. To that end the staff and student body comprise representatives of all races and creeds. Faculty members and students participate in intercultural activities through conferences, assemblies, inter-collegiate and local community affairs and seek such opportunities as a means of aiding in the task of establishing and maintaining harmonious relations among various groups. The college was almost the first in the country to see the importance of better relations with the other Americas and to offer courses in pan-American affairs.

It has been necessary, however, to limit this article to one aspect of the work of Saint Joseph College, that of the part that the department of child study plays in intercultural education. This choice is made, not only because the writer is more familiar with the work done in this field, but also because the field itself is a most strategic one in the discovery of intercultural problems and the processes of their solution.

It has never been the policy of the Child Study Department (any more than it has been that of the College) to publicize its efforts for intercultural understanding. Rather it holds the belief that such efforts are to be understood as a major obligation of all agencies of education and that directly and indirectly the guidance of children and parents has to be pointed toward this goal. And so, the department offers to help parents in matters of child guidance, not only the parents of children enrolled in the nurs-

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