

**THE ABINGDON RELIGIOUS  
EDUCATION TEXTS. WEEK-DAY  
SCHOOL SERIES. THE  
BEGINNER'S BOOK IN RELIGION**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649072293

The Abingdon Religious Education Texts. Week-Day School Series. The Beginner's Book in Religion by Edna Dean Baker & David G. Downey

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**EDNA DEAN BAKER & DAVID G. DOWNEY**

**THE ABINGDON RELIGIOUS  
EDUCATION TEXTS. WEEK-DAY  
SCHOOL SERIES. THE  
BEGINNER'S BOOK IN RELIGION**





CHRIST BLESSING LITTLE CHILDREN

**The Abingdon Religious Education Texts**

**David S. Dooney, General Editor**

**WEEK-DAY SCHOOL SERIES**

**GEORGE HERBERT BETTS, Editor**

---

**THE  
BEGINNERS BOOK  
IN RELIGION**

By

**EDNA DEAN BAKER**

**PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL KINDERGARTEN AND  
ELEMENTARY COLLEGE**



**THE ABINGDON PRESS**  
**NEW YORK      CINCINNATI**

## TO A LITTLE CHILD

Singing with the birds,  
Laughing with the showers,  
Shouting with the winds,  
Dancing with the flowers,  
Happy little child,  
While away the hours.

In thy joyous play,  
In every merry lay,  
Thou dost sing the praise  
Of the Lord above,  
Happy little child,  
Full of radiant love.

God, thy Father, knows :  
He who broods the chick,  
He who paints the rose,  
Gives thy daily crust,  
Happy little child,  
In his goodness trust.

## CHAPTER I

### EARLY RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

You may have heard the story of the little girl whose mother told her at the time of evening prayer that God was in the room with them. "O mother," said the child, overpowered by the thought of the great invisible Presence, "please open the door and let him out." The remark of this child suggests the chief problem of early religious education: how to bring the idea of God to the child in such a way that the thought of him will not frighten but comfort, will not separate but unite, will not be dreaded but welcome.

**The problem set forth**--H. G. Wells pictures his early religious experience thus: "I who write was so set against God, thus rendered. He and his hell were the nightmares of my childhood; I hated him while I still believed, and who could help but hate? I thought of him as a fantastic monster perpetually spying, perpetually listening, perpetually waiting to condemn and strike me dead; his flames as ready as a grill-room fire. He was over me and about my feebleness and silliness and forgetfulness as the sky and sea would be about a child drowning in mid-Atlantic." We believe that this experience is extreme, but on the other hand there are many testimonies to early religious misconceptions that have been difficult to eradicate in later years and that have rendered impossible a sane religious faith.

At the outset of an effort for the religious education of the child we must meet the people who, with some such experience in mind, do not think that the little child ought to have any distinctly religious or spiritual training. Some of these ob-



jectors say, in the words of a representative, that children have "no great capacity for an idea so subtle and mature as the idea of God." I know of no better answer than Dr. George A. Coe gives in his "Education in Religion and Morals." "The child," says Dr. Coe, "has more than a passive capacity for spiritual things. The successive phases in the growth of child personality may be, and normally are, so many phases of a growing consciousness of the divine meaning of life. Not for a single year does the mind remain neutral or blank with reference to the interpretation of life. Impressions are already leading to reactions of both an emotional and motor sort, and these reactions are already forming into habits. To such habits there is already an intellectual side or the meaning more or less articulate which the world and life are beginning to have. Very early too the child witnesses specific religious phenomena. We cannot hide from him our sacred books, our churches, our worship. The real question, then, is never when shall his religious training begin? for it really begins with the beginning of experience, and it goes forward with experience."

Our problem, then, resolves itself into how we shall interpret to the child these early experiences; or, better still, how we may guide him into such an interpretation as shall eventuate in a satisfying God-consciousness; how we may help him to grow in the knowledge of God so that desirable religious attitudes and habits will result. However, the scope of early religious education is broader than the establishing of a right relationship to God, for if, as we believe, religion is a mode of living, religious education must touch all the experiences of the child, must seek to interpret his relationship to his entire environment and to build right attitudes and influence right conduct according to the capacity of a little child. Religious education is, then, distinctly both moral and social.

**The suggested solution.**—The failure in the early reli-

gious education of Mr. Wells so forcefully stated in the passage which we quoted was a failure due to a lack of understanding of child nature. Little children are timid and dependent; they easily yield to fear; they are intensely emotional. They accept on faith what is told them, having little reasoning power. They live in a world of fancy, so that with very little suggestion from the adult, ogres and demons and dragons grow as if by magic. The power of God as the maker and ruler of the universe was evidently overemphasized in the case of Wells, while the idea of God as a loving Father, protecting and caring for all little children, was withheld or placed in the background; hence the disaster in making the connection between the child and his God.

It is imperative, then, for success in early religious training that the teacher understand the characteristics and needs of the child whom she is to teach and that the curriculum and methods of teaching be based upon this knowledge. Unless we know how to gain admission we shall knock in vain at the citadel of the child's mind; we shall not only fail to make any impression but to get any spontaneous expression from him. He will look blankly back of us; he will wiggle and twist and squirm; he may try in every way to distract us from the subject in hand by irrelevant remarks, or he may make a dash at any moment for freedom and a more interesting occupation.

On the other hand, we may be deceived with apparent success, for children are imitative little creatures, and it is quite possible to have them go through the forms of a religious service without the slightest idea of its meaning. True success comes only as the teacher understands the possibilities for religious education at this age and utilizes the dominant instincts and tendencies, the compelling interests; as she considers the physical basis, the mental grasp, the emotional response; in other words, she must work *with* the nature of the child, not contrary to it.

**The physical basis—from four to six.**—Therefore we would throw upon the screen, before we go farther, a picture of this little child from four to six years of age. He is growing rapidly. His body is very active. The fundamental muscles are developing in speed and accuracy of coordination. His senses are alert, sometimes termed "hungry." The body is plastic and habit-formation thrives. He is sensitive to changes of heat and cold and very susceptible to contagions. His endurance is slight and his fatigability is high. He has little power of inhibition, and therefore "sitting still" soon makes him and everybody in his vicinity nervous.

**Dominant instincts.**—The great tendency to play captures the life to such an extent at this period that it may probably be called "play life." Activity, like play, is very inclusive; the child tends immediately to respond to every stimulus by some form of activity. He is rhythmical; he notes repetition and responds to rhythm with the whole body, arms, legs, hands, or feet. He is curious, eager to see, hear, touch, taste, smell. He may be destructive in his testing of things. He begins to ask many questions.

This is the period when dramatic imitation flourishes. Now this child is a horse, then a fire engine, again a soldier and by-and-by an aeroplane. There is not much plot to his play and there are few characters, but for the time being the make-believe has become the real. This little child lives to the beat of horse's hoofs, the clang of the fire engine, the tum-ti-tum of the soldier's drum, the whiz of the plane. He likes to manipulate all kinds of materials and he delights to make things with his hands—albeit these things are very crude. It takes his imagination to see a cat in the wobbly lines or a man in the clay lump. He is easily frightened and prone to racial fears such as those of darkness, strangers, high places, animals. His lack of experience and of control over his environment aug-