

**WEEK-DAY RELIGIOUS
EDUCATION; A SURVEY
AND DISCUSSION OF
ACTIVITIES AND PROBLEMS**

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Week-day religious education; a survey and discussion of activities and problems by Henry F. Cope

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WEEK-DAY
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

A Survey and Discussion of Activities and Problems

EDITED BY

HENRY F. COPE

General Secretary of The Religious Education Association

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INTRODUCTION

This book contains a survey and a series of studies of a special type of activity in religious education. It treats of week-day religious education and, in doing so, it is purposely confined to the special types which have had a notable development and extension in the past few years. No one should be blind, however, to the fact that week-day religious instruction is by no means a modern innovation, nor should they lose sight of the fact that, in recent times, we have had other noteworthy adventures in this field beside those described in this book.

We are so accustomed to regard the Sunday school as the sole provision for religious instruction that it comes to many as a surprise to be told that in early Christianity and in Judaism week-day instruction was a normal method of training youth. What is now going forward may be regarded as restoration rather than innovation, restoration with new purposes and with adaptations to new conditions. The synagog schools were not confined to the first day of the week; very early in the third century Origen gathered children in Alexandria and taught them in classes; the catechetical schools met during the week, itinerant missionaries established classes; the monastic schools were every-day schools. But with the rise of popular education, the elementary schools supplanted the religious schools and soon it came to pass that, not only were the ragged and enslaved child-laborers of Gloucester and other English towns without religious training, but in the United States, since the public schools more and more completely found themselves separated from religion, there were millions of children without religious instruction. In the development of popular week-day schooling this particular field of instruction had been crowded out. And now appears the movement to restore it to its place, not a place in the school but a place in the life of childhood.

It might be very interesting to trace the many efforts to re-integrate religion in elementary education. Much could be learned by a study of different plans and of the difficulties they have met. That would take us far afield, into the parochial school history with its controversial aspects, into the long and involved struggle of the religion-in-the-schools question in England, into the notable experiments, under special conditions, in Australia, in pre-war Germany, in Queensland and in Ireland. But it will be much more profitable to study what is taking place under current conditions in the United States, growing out of our own civil life and meeting our special needs, and here to concentrate on a particular type, and to attempt a rather complete and exhaustive study of a single, recent enterprise.

In the United States, practically within a decade, there has been developed a new and distinct form of social activity, marked by a religious purpose and conducted on educational principles. It is distinguished not only by the fact that its time schedules run through the week days, but also by definite relationships particularly to children's school-experience, and, incidentally, by coordinations to the programs of public schools. The Survey conducted by The Religious Education Association purposely isolated schools having these characteristics: they were for school-children, conducted during the school term and more or less definitely related to the school program, but not conducted within nor as an integral part of full-time

schools. The parochial school is a problem all by itself. The Survey was planned deliberately to include only enterprises which were related to the week-day-school programs of children. In order to avoid confusion of thought it isolated one particular problem. That accounts for the omission of any treatment of the Daily Vacation Bible Schools, the Summer Religious Schools, and the week-day activities of various other organizations. It does not represent any judgment on the relative values of such enterprises as compared with the types of work here discussed.

It does seem, however, only fair to say that the present experiment cannot be separated wholly from its past. One remembers that pioneers have gone before; many courageous initiators and experimentors have anticipated what is now being generally realized. It would be fitting here to pay tribute—could we do so—to all who realizing obligation to childhood have sought to make more adequate provision for their religious needs. But the best we can do is to single out a few instances. We recognize the high motives and the splendid devotion with which certain religious groups have provided for their children, preferring the added costs of separate schools rather than the alternative of religionless education. We can only regret that these devoted energies were not directed toward such a solution of the problem as the week-day school now affords. We honor the fidelity of those churches which have always, at least through stated periods of the year, maintained classes for children through the week. We honor, also, certain individuals who advocated week-day extension long before the present movement. Dr. George U. Wenner, of New York rendered notable service, both by conducting week-day classes and by an impressive advocacy of this work in public addresses and through the printed page, especially in his book entitled "*Religious Education and the Public Schools.*" The Rev. Rufus W. Miller, Secretary of the Reformed Church, United States, also was an early advocate of week-day schools. His pamphlet, issued in 1908, attracted attention over a wide area and stimulated many experiments. Those who labored for schools in the summer—notably Dr. Howard R. Vaughn, who founded so many summer schools for children in different communities, and those whose efforts led to the Daily Vacation Bible Schools, all have helped to make possible the week-day school of religion.

The schools of the types described in this book are a social and religious response to a newly realized need. In recent years attention has been more precisely focussed on the religious education of the young until we have come to see some of the facts sharply.

Without attempting precise arrays of figures we must realize a startling situation. Investigations disclose that probably three out of four children of school-age—6 to 18—are without any systematic religious training; for three-fourths of our population under education religion is an unrecognized factor; it has no real place in their lives. Again, for the one-fourth who are counted as having formal religious instruction only a pitifully inadequate provision is made; at the best they will average under one hour per week of both instruction and worship. Surely there is here an appalling need. The rights of children have been shamefully neglected. What was due them the state could not fully give, because of its civic limitations; and the church did not give, because of its adultmindedness. The week-day school of religious education is our first serious attempt to meet this situation, not only by increasing the time schedules for religious instruction but also, by integrating that instruction into the regular educational experiences of children.

In 1921, it became apparent that a very rapid development was taking place in week-day work; new schools were being organized in many places; the plans that had been under experiment for ten years were now being recognized and adopted. The tables in the Survey by Professor Shaver indicate that while some few schools were established as early as 1909, the past two years have witnessed the real popularization of the movement. During this later period the Bureau of Information in the office of the Religious Education Association has been daily in receipt of numerous inquiries as to steps to be taken in the organization of schools and as to other details of their local relationships and their support and management. It became evident that a new movement in religious education was already well under way. The Religious Education Association had called attention to this type of work at a special conference held in Chicago in 1916; since that time it had steadily fostered the development of experiments in this field; its publications had given encouragement to those who were at work, and its office had counselled with those who were seeking to initiate operations.

In 1921 the Council of Religious Education of the Association determined to turn from a theme already selected and to devote the next annual meeting to the problems of week-day religious education. Very early it was decided that the conference on this subject should be worthy of the name, especially in affording an ample basis of facts for discussion, in preparing the way by studies published in advance and in holding intact, at the conference, ample time for discussion. Two committees were appointed; one formed in New York to supervise a survey to the field, under the chairmanship of the President of The Council, Professor George A. Coe, and one formed in Chicago, to arrange the program, under the chairmanship of the President of the Association, Professor Theodore G. Scares.

Since the conference was to consider existing institutions and processes a thorough and careful survey was necessary. This was made possible through the generous coöperation of "The Committee on Social and Religious Surveys" which became responsible for this survey and committed its actual work to the Committee on Surveys of The Religious Education Association. Professor Erwin L. Shaver was immediately engaged and he began his work of personal visitation of a large number of schools and systems of schools while, coöperating with him, the office of the Association entered into correspondence with all known schools to secure the statistical data. Just how well all that work was done during the winter of 1921-2 the reader may judge from the complete Survey presented in this volume.

While the survey was under way the committee on program requested a number of persons to prepare the basic studies which follow the survey in this volume. It was planned that all this material should be in print before the conference and, except for a very small number of studies, this was accomplished, and the papers were published in the magazine "RELIGIOUS EDUCATION." The result was that when the conference assembled those present had had full opportunity to prepare their minds on the general aspects of the whole situation and to consider the special educational and religious problems and theories involved. Then, for seven crowded sessions, a large assemblage, numbering at times up to one thousand persons, related their experiences, discussed their problems and concentrated attention on this new movement.

This volume does not attempt to report the Conference; a stenographic report, somewhat condensed, is being published in "RELIGIOUS EDUCATION." So that one has here, not the report of a meeting, but a Survey