

THE TEACHING OF RELIGION

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The teaching of religion by Roderick MacEachen

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RODERICK MACEACHEN

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THE TEACHING OF RELIGION

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WITH A PREFACE
BY
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PREFACE

BY

HIS EMINENCE, JAMES CARDINAL GIBBONS

Archbishop of Baltimore

WHEN we look about us to-day we are appalled at the evils that have crept into human society. The world is just passing through a crisis brought on by materialistic thought. These post-bellum times are called the reconstruction period. The great moral forces of the day are seeking a remedy for the ills of society.

Thoughtful men are beginning to realize that religion is the only cure for those ills. Now more than ever, perhaps, they are convinced that human society must be guided by a higher principle than mere human statutes. This principle must be divine law expressed in terms of religion that operates in men's lives.

Unfortunately many have come to look upon religion as a mere creed, a system of forms, a cold intellectual code. This faulty conception is due, at least in part, to our emphasis of theological

conclusions, our zeal to propagate the dogmas of Faith, thus making it appear that the intellectual is the all-important phase of religion.

The Apostle St. James (Ep. 1, 27) says: "Religion clean and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and the widows in their tribulation: and to keep one's self unspotted from this world." In this the Apostle wishes to say simply that charity is the soul of religion. In the same manner our divine Saviour Himself reduces religion to the single principle of love: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind . . . Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets." (St. Matt. 22, 37-40.)

It is for this reason that the author of this volume says: "Love is the essence of religion." This is his fundamental thesis. The dogmas of Faith, the truths, the practices, the Church, the Commandments, the Sacraments, all are but means of engendering love for God in the hearts of men.

"God placed man upon the earth for the sole purpose of learning to love Him," says the author; "the love of God is man's mission upon earth. But to love God we must know Him; the more

we understand God's love and bounty toward us the more we are impelled to love Him."

When we love God we are prompted to serve Him; for love moves us almost violently to do services for those whom we love. In revealed religion God has furnished us the means of serving Him and thus manifesting our love for Him. When we believe in Him we are serving Him. In the same manner we manifest our love for Him when we worship Him and keep His Commandments. But since God is our common Father we are all children united in one brotherhood. Hence we can show our love for God by our love and kindness for our fellow men. God permits some of His children to be poor, afflicted, distressed so that we can show our love for Him by caring for them.

This is the true concept of religion when viewed in its relation to men's lives. It is the newness of life of which St. Paul speaks. It elevates man above his own natural sphere and enables him to live according to the mind and heart of God. In the principles which the author here expounds for the teaching of religion these ideals are clearly set forth. He shows always the relation of religion to human life. He outlines the rules and principles by which zealous teachers may effectually

engender religion in the lives of God's little ones.

This work is undoubtedly destined to open up a new field of thought for religious teachers. Indeed it almost seems providential coming as it does in this critical epoch of the world's history. At a time when materialistic science has arrogated to itself the created world around us, this work so interweaves nature study with religious teaching as to make nature the open book that tells the secrets of God's love and bounty. In this it leads us back to the great works on nature such as the *Hexameron*, written by St. Ambrose in the fifth century. But it also takes us back to the *Canticles* of Azarias and his companions in the fiery furnace (*Daniel 3, 52 ss.*): "All ye works of the Lord, bless the Lord: praise and exalt Him above all forever. . . . O ye heavens . . . O all ye waters . . . O ye sun and moon . . . O ye stars of heaven . . . O every shower and dew bless the Lord: praise and exalt Him above all forever."

It was this kind of religion that made St. Francis a lover of nature. In the flowers and trees he saw the bounty and the glory of God depicted. He spoke to the little birds as his little brothers. All creatures were his fellow creatures of God.

But, besides nature study, the author's method