

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

ART. VI.—RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN BOARD SCHOOLS.

I WISH to say a few words at the outset, in order to explain the origin and object of the meeting held at Sion College on June 18th for the discussion of the religious difficulty at the London School Board. I had myself all along intended to call a meeting of the kind, my original idea being to give those clergy of my archdeaconry who, like myself, are distressed at the prolonged religious dissension on the London School Board an opportunity of expressing their opinions. Many clergymen have written or spoken to me on the subject, and wished to take counsel together as to the wisest thing to be done. I have even been asked by a rural deanery not in my own archdeaconry to stand again as a candidate for the London School Board. That is impossible; but, as a former member of the Board, I have watched the religious controversy from the beginning, and have never concealed my opinion as to the way in which it has been conducted.

But, besides this desire of myself and of some of the clergy of my acquaintance, I found that the members of the National Club, a large body of men of strong Evangelical opinions, were deeply impressed with the view that if these dissensions are continued (and there seems at present no prospect of their ending), then will occur the opportunity of the Secularist. He will stir up the opinion of the men of the world, and especially of politicians, to the tune of "A plague on both your houses." He will say: "We have given you twenty-three years in which to make your experiment of united Biblical instruction. From the beginning we told Mr. Forster that it was an impossible task; but he was strongly in earnest, was himself a religious man, and he carried the House of Commons against us. At the end of twenty-three years you are farther from a solution than ever. It is high time to put a stop to all this bickering, and to resort to the plan which we always recommended: secular education pure and simple." That is the language of the Secularist at these unseemly sights, and it is that prospect that is very justly dreaded by the members of the National Club.

Again, I found to my great satisfaction that a large number of earnest and religious Nonconformists, acting with Dr. Lunn, who is always to the front in anything that can promote unity in the Christian faith, were anxious to record their solemn determination "that all attempts to rob elementary School Board education of its Christian character should be firmly resisted," as well as to express their protest against any departure from the compromise of 1871.

It had appeared to me, therefore, that the three meetings

contemplated might well be held together, and I applied to the president and librarian of Sion College for leave to invite those interested in them to a united conference in that hospitable hall, which is always available for purposes of this important character.

I must add that it was agreed that members of the existing School Board should not be invited to attend. It was a meeting neither on the one side nor the other. It was neither called in the interests of the Progressives, nor of the existing majority. It was intended for an independent and unbiased expression of opinion. Our hope was that both sides would listen to our appeal, lay down their arms, and revert to the system which, though not at all in itself ideal, worked happily for twenty years. It is obvious, therefore, that if we were to invite members of one side of the School Board we should have to invite those of the other, and the result would have been only a repetition or a continuation of those debates on the London School Board which we had already had the advantage of reading. On the other hand, if we only invited one side we should be merely prolonging the existing struggle. In consequence of lists for invitation being sent in by various people, some members of the School Board were invited. They would kindly see that these invitations were issued inadvertently, and understand that they were not members of the conference. If we were to do any good at all we must be entirely disconnected from either side.

One disadvantage of attempting to interfere between combatants in religious matters is this: you are sure to disoblige both sides, and to be labelled with opprobrious and misrepresenting epithets. I observe that all who prefer to adhere to the compromise of 1871 are now styled promoters of Unitarianism. Such an absurd accusation could only be thrown out in the heat of religious controversy. I believe the Bishop of London, the Bishop of Rochester, the Bishop of Brisbane, Archdeacon Farrar, Prebendary Webb-Peploe, Dr. Rigg, and others, besides myself, prefer the compromise of 1871. It would be ludicrous to connect these names with Unitarianism, and the same must be said in the fullest degree of the rank and file of those who support the compromise. But I was happy to observe that, at a meeting of the English Church Union to be held in Marylebone a few days later, it was to be moved by a very distinguished High Churchman: "That in the present emergency, in view of the recent unhappy agitations, and until some other workable scheme be propounded, there is no wiser policy for Churchmen than that they should insist upon the honourable observance of what is known as the compromise of 1871." I have also been told that I and Arch-

deacon Farrar, Prebendary Webb-Peploe, and others are being made cats-paws by Radical politicians. Let me assert distinctly that we are acting with entire independence in the matter. If we mix up politics with this effort we shall achieve absolutely nothing at all, but do more harm than good. We are united to try and proclaim the truce of God between the combatants.

Let me remind you how that compromise used to work. The special branch of the machinery of the Board for religious instruction was called the Scripture Sub-committee. We prepared a syllabus every year, which, except that it could not teach any Catechism, was as good as anything in any voluntary school. It is said by authority that if any School Board desire it, they are permitted by the law to teach the Apostles' Creed, as well as the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments. The Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments, being the *ipsissima verba* of the Bible, can of course be taught without question wherever the Bible is adopted; and although it would probably be impossible in London ever formally to adopt the Apostles' Creed in a School Board syllabus, yet the provisions of the syllabus and the questions in the examination papers were, according to the wishes of the whole Scripture Sub-committee, drawn up in accordance with the general principles of the Apostles' Creed. No statement of the New Testament, however miraculous, was considered in the smallest degree out of place in syllabus and questions. Considering that London is the headquarters of Secularism, Agnosticism, and all kinds of religious difficulties, I used to wonder that we were able to teach the New Testament so fully and frankly, and so entirely without hindrance or complaint. Far from conceiving that any member of my Church or any religious Nonconformist had any ground whatever for grievance, I used to think that any reason for complaint might be expected, if at all, from the other side. We had eighteen members of the Church of England on that Scripture Sub-committee, of whom eleven were clergymen; the other members were earnest and devout Nonconformists.

For the conscientious carrying out of the system we depended on our teachers, most of them trained in religious colleges, either Church or Nonconformist, and on our own inspectors who examined each school in religious knowledge, and specially on the local managers, who might listen, if they pleased, to every Scripture lesson delivered. On every board of local managers there were one or more of the local clergy and Nonconformist ministers. Every day's session of every department was opened and closed with a prayer and a hymn. It seemed impossible under the circumstances that any system could be more complete. If any teacher should give improper Scripture teaching, he or she could be dealt with by the

Scripture Sub-committee. One teacher in my time was found to have given an agnostic lecture not in school. He was told that he was acting in an unseemly manner for one commissioned to teach the Bible, and the objectionable fact came to an end.

What has happened since to put an end to this state of things, which, under the circumstances, ought to be satisfactory to every true believing Christian? Certain new and inexperienced members of the Board find again one instance, or perhaps two, of improper teaching. Instead of dealing with it by the Scripture Sub-committee, they put a notice on the notice-paper, the issue of which must be the reopening of the whole controversy, settled with such difficulty and by such eminent men in 1871. The chairman made an attempt to come to an agreement with the Nonconformists by asking them to permit the insertion of the word "Christian" before the word "religion" in the old terms of the compromise. But the Nonconformists were aroused, and were in an attitude of distrust; they declined any departure from the compromise, even by a single word, for fear of further demands being made. In itself the word "Christian" could not have made the slightest difference, because in the sentence of the compromise immediately preceding the principles of the Bible are mentioned as the basis of all religious teaching; and nobody can for a moment assert either that the New Testament is not Christian, or that the word Christian does not imply the religion of the New Testament. Personally, I extremely regret that our Nonconformist friends did not accept the word Christian, believing, as I am told, that at that time it would have ended the controversy. But their attitude of not parting from the compromise was perfectly intelligible, and the real thing to be done was to take away the militant motion from the notice-paper, and to refer the cases of scandal to the Scripture Sub-committee. The word "Christian" has since been added to the compromise with the consent of the great majority of the Board.

But the controversy went on, and has resulted, besides the addition of the word "Christian" to the word "religion," in the circular which calls attention to the fundamental Christian doctrine of the Divinity of our Lord.

Now, there is nothing in the addition of the word "Christian" or in the circular itself to which any ordinary Christian could have any objection. What is objected to is the danger at this time of any departure from the compromise whatever.¹

¹ Our Committee have unanimously resolved that they would not vote for any candidate who should support the omission of the word "Christian."

Now I have no desire to blame the majority of the School Board. My friend, the chairman, was, I know, led most reluctantly into the controversy. We appreciate their zeal and faith and love in the highest degree, and give them credit for the highest and best motives. But what we say is, that we think they ought not to have allowed young and inexperienced members of the Board, members perhaps not wholly friendly to the School Board system, to bring them into a position which was unnecessary, and which was sure to lead to an indefinite religious dissension, the end of which could not be foreseen.

I say deliberately, "Unnecessary." It has been widely represented in the campaign that has already been begun that there has been an organized attempt on the part of the Unitarians to capture the Board. There has been no such attempt. These few cases of improper teaching, which are distinctly contrary to the law as attaching children to the denomination called Unitarianism, are like the men in buckram trotted backwards and forwards to produce an impression on Falstaff. They are few and far between. The 3,000 teachers who have asked to be relieved have done so, not from Unitarianism, but from *esprit de corps*, and because they have been disturbed and traduced. Mr. Copeland Bowie himself has admitted that Unitarian children are few, and that they are amply protected by the conscience clause. The representation of an attempt by Unitarians to capture the Board is an entire misunderstanding of the facts of the case.

The compromise was one between Churchmen and Non-conformists, and not between 'these on the one hand and Unitarians on the other. We do not criticise Unitarians, but Mr. Bowie's representation of their position is sufficient; they are few enough in number not to affect the general question, and are well protected by the conscience clause. It may be true that Professor Huxley signed the compromise in a special sense of his own, that Mr. Stanley claims that sense, and that various eminent Nonconformist ministers were led into strong statements of the rights of conscience by hostile cross-examination before the School Board. But there is no doubt whatever as to what the great majority of Christians mean by the teaching of the New Testament. They are represented by the majority of the Scripture Sub-committee. If they will act fairly and conscientiously, with them we are content to leave the matter; whatever is lacking we can fill up in our Sunday-schools and churches. If anyone asks me for my policy, it is contained in one single sentence, an ancient Greek proverb: *Μὴ κίνει Καμαρίναν, ἀκίνητον γὰρ ἀμείνων*: Do not disturb the town of Camarina; for it is much better left undisturbed.

There were unwholesome conditions in that town, which only became serious when stirred up. There are unwholesome conditions in popular religious dissension amongst a city containing five millions of people; they are always ready to burst forth; you do not know where they will land you; in God's name leave them alone if you can.

Let me remind you of an eloquent passage on the possibility of wholesome results from Scriptural teaching, even without formulated definition, from the celebrated biographer of the Evangelical movement, Sir James Stephen. "Biblical knowledge, like the manna rained on the wilderness, ever tends to dissolve into a warm, and generous, and healthful nutriment. From ecclesiastical lore we learn how to be subtle in distinction, exact in the analysis of particular doctrines, and clear-sighted in the synthesis of them all. But from the Bible, and from the Bible alone, we may derive, though with no scientific accuracy, and by no logical process, the one great prolific and all-embracing idea—even the idea of Him in Whom we live and move and have our being. There also and there only we learn all that is to be known, or rather all that is to be felt and experienced of our relations to Him, how they have been impaired by sin, and how they have been restored by an adorable though utterly inscrutable Atonement. There, also, we discover what are the spiritual agencies employed for the restoration of our nature to its primæval image. There, too, is lifted the veil which interposes between our present and future state, so far as to disclose to us that this mortal is to put on immortality. There, in no recondite learning, no abstruse speculation, nor in any abstract creed, but in the very Person of Christ Himself, is exhibited to us the Way, the Truth, and the Life. There we may contemplate and listen to Him who is the Word, or communicative energy of God. There is set before us the very image of Deity, so far as it can be projected on the dark and contracted mirror of our feeble humanity. There we become cognizant of a spiritual relationship—a consanguinity of the soul of man with Him who assumed man's nature—an alliance which, though human words can but ill express it, the Gospels reveal to us as not less real, and as far more intimate and enduring than those which bind us to each other in domestic life. These, and such as these, are the disclosures which day by day dawn with still-increasing brightness on him who continually refers to the revealed Word of God for light, and day by day examines by that light every theological opinion which he has gathered from any other source."

It is because I believe that the vast majority of the teachers are conscientiously performing this process, and because I

know that they have been trained in religious colleges to a high sense of duty, that, in the midst of vast divergences of opinion, I am content with their work. I have made inquiries in all directions from clergymen who are on local boards of management, and I have received but one opinion. Under the Board School system you cannot expect much knowledge of doctrine; that has to be supplied in Sunday-school and church. But nothing improper is taught, and you get the Christian belief in God and in His Son Jesus Christ. The Bishop of Rochester tells us that large numbers of Board School teachers are the best teachers in his Sunday-schools. The gracious ladies who are going about saying that if we go back to the compromise there will be no Christian teaching at all, are acting wholly under a misapprehension. Even if the word Christian were dropped, the word Bible, which is in the compromise, covers precisely the same ground.¹ And as to circulars, it is better to trust to the constitutional method of the Scripture Sub-committee than to rouse opposition by attempts at definition. What I venture to recommend to those clergy who ask my opinion is, that without reflecting on the members of the present Board, they should ask the candidates for the November election to go back to the compromise of 1871. And, on the other hand, we count on our Nonconformist friends firmly to stand by the declaration of our meeting, "that all attempts to rob the education of its Christian character should be uniformly resisted." As long as members of the Established Church are firmly persuaded that their Nonconformist brethren agree to that Christian character, not in strict terms of definition, but in that general sense which I have quoted from Sir James Stephen, they will assure them, on the other hand, that they desire nothing more for the united general Board School teaching, and that any thought of the thin edge of the wedge of Sacerdotalism is as impossible under the law, and as far from their thoughts, as the definite Unitarianism, of which in the few notorious instances complaint has been made. So peace will be restored, a disastrous conflict avoided, the opportunity taken away from that absolute Secularism which we all dread; and the education of our children will proceed on those simple Christian lines which the vast majority of the parents desire and welcome.

It is said, of course, that without the definition in the circular there will be no guarantee that the teaching will be on the basis of the Divinity of our Lord. But there will be

¹ The word "Christian," as now part of the amended circular, has been adopted by both sides of the Board, and our Committee, as noted before, have resolved not to support any who propose its omission.

the same guarantee that there has been for twenty years, the words of the Bible itself. From every page of the New Testament blazes forth the Divine Nature of Christ. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. . . . And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

It is said that if the circular is withdrawn, it will amount to withdrawing the doctrine which the circular asserts. But that depends on the way in which it is withdrawn. If the manner be simply something like this: "That without prejudice to any of the questions raised the circular of 1894 be not re-issued, and the religious teaching of the Board be on the basis of the compromise of 1871, as amended," matters will be as they were before; the Christian loyalty of the majority of the Board and the good faith of the teachers will prevail; the evident meaning of the Bible will impress itself; improper teaching, which would attach children to Agnosticism or Unitarianism, will be dealt with as contrary to the law that forbids children in the Board Schools to be influenced towards any particular denomination.

It is said that without tests you cannot be sure that the teachers will teach Christian truth. The reply is very simple: the security comes not by tests, but by testimonials. In appointing teachers in Voluntary Schools no tests are applied—testimonials are all that is required. The testimonials for Board School teachers would naturally vary somewhat from those given for Voluntary Schools, but they would be efficient.

It is said that those who ask candidates to discontinue the circular will be voting for the Progressives, or supporting them. We refuse to believe that there must necessarily be only two parties on the Board, those who follow Mr. Riley and those who follow Mr. Lyulph Stanley. We believe that the introduction of a few independent members, if they can be found, would have the happiest effect on the religious disputes. And whether we believe with the Progressives or not, there are very few of them who do not wish for sound Scriptural teaching. To describe them in a body as Secularists is absurdly untrue.

It is said that as the London Diocesan Conference and so many of the clergy, both High Church and Evangelical, support the circular, the best plan is for all Church people, whether they agree with its policy or not, to submit to it and accept it,

and that in the end the opposition will cease. But the circular was unlike the compromise in this particular respect, that the Board was nearly equally divided upon it, whereas the compromise was carried with almost unanimity. One of the leaders of the Nonconformist opposition was assured by one of the fuglemen of the circular that he intended to have more circulars. The opposition will plainly be continued, and without the agreement of the Nonconformists no permanent religious settlement at the Board is possible.

It is said that the teachers are to a large extent promulgating Unitarianism and Agnosticism, or at the least are doubtful what kind of Christianity they ought to teach. The facts are these. One class of infants was found saying that Joseph was the father of our Lord ("Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing"), and one headmistress dropped the doxology at the end of a hymn. To argue from single instances is one of the most fatal of the mistakes pointed out by Lord Bacon. These cases should have been quietly dealt with by the Committee at the Board. The great mass of the teachers teach the Christianity which all orthodox Christians believe. The head teachers of the whole vast Division of Greenwich have unanimously repudiated the insinuations of Lord Halifax. The imaginary Unitarian aggression is the wildest of fictions. The imaginary Unitarian Plot of 1894 is only fit to rank with the Popish Plot of Titus Oates.

WILLIAM SINCLAIR.

Short Notices.

Evening Communion: the Argument for the Practice stated, and the Objections against it answered. By the Ven. JOSHUA HUGHES-GAMES, D.C.L. Pp. 160. Price 2s. 6d. Nisbet and Co.

IN this interesting volume by the able and learned Archdeacon of Man the reader will find ample material to enable him to form a sound judgment on the important subject of which it treats. The arguments for and against the practice of evening Communion are fully and fairly stated; and after what even opponents must admit to be a temperate discussion of the subject, the practice itself is recommended as being Scriptural and primitive, as well as reasonable and right, under circumstances which happily obtain largely in our day. We refer to evening services being largely attended, especially by the working classes, including many who are practically hindered from attendance at Divine service at any other time of the day. Testimony is given (at p. 93)—which might be greatly increased—that the cessation of evening Communion where it has been established has driven many Church communicants and their families into Dissent. The supposed necessity that the Holy Communion should be partaken of fasting is shown to be the main objection to