

Religious Obligations of Science Teachers in Our High Schools

By J.R. Tippetts, Superintendent of Schools, Morgan County

Surely, then, if this question of science and religion has so much of concern for the mature man or woman, the question of the child's science and religion, as it is presented daily to them in his classes, is of equal importance. Herein lies the responsibility of the science teacher. In his subjects he deals with the very fundamentals of the life processes, and for this reason there are no courses that offer a greater opportunity either for the promotion of faith or for its destruction. If the teacher is one who naturally lacks in the religious instincts and who has received only a superficial introduction to his subject, not knowing or caring for the deep and fundamental truths of that which he attempts to interpret, he stands in a most excellent position to nullify if not destroy a student's religious sentiment. If he has only the power to present the facts of scientific research in a cold and categorical fashion without a consciousness of his own limitations, and that of all human faculties, to fathom that which he has presented, the student, quick to arrive at conclusions, may be led to see rather gross discrepancies between that which has been taught and his religious ideas; so much so that he may banish his religious teachings as mere fairy tales founded upon superstition and man's erroneous attempt to explain that which he knows not of.

On the other hand if the instructor is a mature student of his subject and is also mature in his philosophy of life and social attitudes, he will ask for no greater opportunity to kindle the spark of faith than is offered in the sciences. He will go directly to his subject knowing full well that if God is to be found his evidences will appear in the great laws of life and matter. His dealings with scientific conclusions and postulates such as the molecule, atom and electron, all of which are beyond his power of physical sense, yet which his reason tells him must exist; the microscope which brings to the eye that which it could not guess, with a detail of minute structure not dreamed of with unaided faculties; the study of heredity which has revealed to him the mystery tied up in the germ cell, a tiny speck extremely small, yet holding within it not only potential life but all the determining characters of a complex society, all present mysteries which are forced upon him with a clearness that is staggering to his reason. The study of geological phenomena, with its marvelous lapse of time, its mountains which, with their immense strata and fossil forms, tell us of ages which no man has seen and of forces which be-little man's most stupendous accomplishments; these, without mentioning the problems of astronomy, wireless, radioactivity and chemistry, have brought clearly to him the fact that on every hand, when crowded for an ultimate explanation, his power fails him and he admits the inadequacy of his faculties.

This attitude he passes on to his students. He explains and demonstrates his subject with a lucidity and accuracy that grips the attention of his class and at the same time pictures clearly the limitations of mortal forces. He leads them to long for greater power to see, to hear, and to feel. They will be confronted, as never before, with the wonders of the universe and with their own limited powers when grappling with these great forces. With this attitude a student will retire to his closet and pray for enlightenment to aid him in his weakness.

This sort of science teaching will have laid a foundation for faith that cannot be destroyed. The world will have been glorified in his mind and magnified beyond his understanding. His faith will then be as pure as the most primitive and at the same time most rational and exalted.

From the foregoing it will be seen that the opportunity for science to contribute to faith is very great. The teacher who realizes that his students are sent to him at the most plastic age, and whose

vision is broad and sympathetic, will know that his opportunity for promoting genuine faith is unlimited, and that without indulging in any creed or whim he can implant an everlasting religious reverence that will fit in with the newer codes of thought and at the same time destroy nothing of fundamental value in the old.

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