

Religion in America

Inadequate Sunday School Time Of Concern to Church Leaders

By LOUIS CASSELS
UPI Correspondent

You can't expect a child to learn much about the Christian faith in a class which meets for half an hour a week.

This hard truth is slowly impressing itself on the millions of families who rely on Sunday school to provide all or most of the religious training which their children receive.

The traditional Sunday school session is one hour long. But at least half of the time is taken up with a worship assembly, shuffling through hallways to classrooms, taking the roll, making announcements and other things that have little to do with systematic instruction.

What this means is stated succinctly by the Rev. Robert F. Parker of Philadelphia, a Christian education specialist of the Lutheran Church in America.

"A young person spends more time in one year studying arithmetic than he spends in five years of Sunday school

classes," says the Rev. Mr. Parker.

Not Important Enough

Under these circumstances, he finds it hardly surprising that "Christian training and experience gradually retire to a dusty corner of the child's thinking."

A variety of efforts are under way in major Protestant denominations to provide more time for religious education.

One possibility is to lengthen the Sunday morning session. The Episcopal Church has recommended a minimum of 90 minutes, and the United Presbyterian Church is urging all of its congregations to allocate at least 75 minutes for Sunday school.

But religious educators see little hope for a major breakthrough in this direction. Pastors find it difficult to fit a Sunday school session into a morning schedule which is already complicated, in many cases, by the necessity of holding two adult worship services. And parents — especially those

who regard Sunday school as an intrusion on their "morning to sleep" — are often unenthusiastic about longer sessions.

More Promising Trend

A more promising trend, which has been developing in recent years, is to supplement Sunday school with one or two hours of "church school" on a week day.

Sometimes this is done through an arrangement with public schools whereby children are released early at their parents' request. This is called "released time" and the Supreme Court has ruled that there is

nothing unconstitutional about public schools cooperating with churches in this way.

No one has any reliable statistics on the number of children now attending week day religious classes. The National Council of Churches guesses that of the 30 million school age children enrolled in Protestant Sunday schools, perhaps 4 million receive some week day religious instruction. The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, which provides religious classes for Catholic children attending public schools, estimates that about 3.5 million are under in-

struction in its classes, which usually meet either on a week day or on Saturday morning.

Additional Summer Training

Still another way to supplement the inadequate time span of Sunday school is to provide intensive religious educational experiences during the summer. This year more than 100,000 Protestant churches conducted "vacation church schools" or "vacation Bible schools." These summer schools usually are in session for three hours a day, five days a week, for two to four weeks. They provide more time for systematic religious

training than is available during a whole year of Sunday school classes. The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine also conducts "summer schools of religion" for Catholic children.

The consensus of Protestant and Catholic officials who are working with the problem is that adequate time for religious education of public school children can be found — if their parents really want it enough to give it at least as high a priority as music and dancing lessons, dental appointments and their own Saturday morning golf games.



FILM FIGURES IN COURT — Three members of the Hollywood film colony are shown as they had their day in a Los Angeles court. At left, Mrs. Marjorie Chandler, former wife of late screen actor Jeff Chandler, demanded that the actor's estate be held liable for 1959 community property income taxes. Bronwyn Bridget Price, center, 19 year old daughter of Maureen

O'Hara, assumed her mother's maiden name as she had her name changed to Bronwyn Bridget FitzSimons. Actress Dinah Shore is shown at right as she testified in the case of Weber Von Rosenberg, accused of swindling over \$14,000 by representing he had several stars, including Miss Shore, under contract. (UPI)

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