

The Presbyterian **GUARDIAN**

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Whither Religious Education?

THE Supreme Court decision in the Champaign School case, reported and evaluated in our March 25th number, raises urgent questions as to the future of religious education in America.

If the decision had been restricted to the narrow question of the constitutionality of the form of released-time religious education which has been practised in Champaign, Illinois, the matter would not be one of deep practical concern to us who believe that free Christian schools supply the only satisfactory answer to the problem. As THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN has stated in the past, the released-time program at its best fails distressingly to reckon with the claims of Christ upon the whole of our life; and at its worst, and perhaps all too commonly, it has served to propagate Modernism or a vague conception of religion broad enough to embrace the varying viewpoints of the entire community.

Even sponsors of the released-time approach may be encouraged by some language employed in the opinions to believe that this system may be conserved if only certain features are eliminated. At any rate, allowance is made for a "dismissed time" plan, where the element of compulsion is unmistakably absent. The decision bears most pointedly against any plan where it may be judged that "the state's compulsory education system . . . assists and is integrated with the program of religious instruction carried on by separate religious sects", and on this point we do

not see how the decision may fairly be challenged.

In the opinions that support the decision, however, there are elements which are to be deplored. The opinion of Mr. Justice Black, in affirming that "the First Amendment has erected a wall between Church and State which must be kept high and impregnable", applies this principle so drastically as to suggest that out-and-out secularism must be maintained in the public schools. The appellant in the case, Mrs. Vashti McCollum, an avowed atheist, petitioned not only an end to released-time education, but also a ban on every form of teaching which suggests or recognizes that there is a God. She also demanded that all teaching of the Scriptures be prohibited. Mr. Justice Jackson, concurring with the decision of the court, but making various reservations in a separate opinion, observed pointedly that "this Court is directing the Illinois courts generally to sustain plaintiff's complaint without exception of any of these grounds of complaint, without discriminating between them and without laying down any standards to define the limits of the effect of our decision". The Court may be understood widely, accordingly, as implying that the separation of Church and State demands the enthronement of atheism in public education.

The opinion of Mr. Justice Frankfurter lends further support to the ascendancy of secularism by developing the theory that the public school is to be regarded as necessary to secure and maintain a democratic society. The public school is said to be "designed to serve as perhaps the most powerful agency for promoting cohesion among a heterogeneous democratic people", and to be "at once the symbol of our democracy and the most pervasive means of promoting our common destiny". On this view, the public school appears to be conceived of as an agency existing for the sake of the state, and designed to achieve a common pattern of life. This evaluation of the public school is dangerous. In stressing state control, it allows insufficiently for a proper influence of the separate communities upon local institutions. And in emphasizing cohesion, it does not guard a proper diversity and liberty. Of perhaps even greater moment, the question arises how, on this conception of the mission of the public school, men will not ultimately draw the conclusion

that private and parochial schools are to be condemned as undemocratic and divisive. Socialized education, wholly subservient to state control, rather than being an agency of democracy, will thus become an instrument of tyranny.

These tendencies to sanction a wholly secularistic, and even atheistic, socialized public education are to be vigorously opposed. They are to be opposed because of their anti-Christian character, and not less so because the learned justices may not be aware of the full thrust of their own positions. They are also to be opposed as destructive of justice and liberty as these are guaranteed under the Constitution.

To sum up the provisions of the Constitution as establishing the separation of Church and State, and to make this formula a rule of thumb for deciding broad issues of policy affecting religion, oversimplifies the situation and opens the door to serious abuses. This over-simplification appears particularly when the religious sphere is identified with the Church and the secular is regarded as that of the State. The religious sphere, in the nature of the case, is more embracing than the ecclesiastical. Religion worthy of the name is interwoven with secular affairs, and will demand recognition as a ruling and integrating principle. The Constitution guarantees religious liberty, and prohibits the establishment of religion, but we believe that these provisions are far from supporting the proposition that public education must be godless, secularized education.

In this situation it is fitting that the State should recognize its own limited role in the sphere of education. It should constantly keep in view the fact that this activity does not belong to the State as an absolute right. In providing education for the community, when this responsibility is not undertaken by parents, the State may not favor or support any particular religious organization or faith. But it must also avoid the establishment of the religion of atheism and secularism.

N. B. S.

The Marshall Plan

THE new approach to foreign relations, marked by the passage of the Marshall Plan cannot but have a far-reaching effect upon religious liberty throughout the world.