

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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EIGHTY-FIRST LEGISLATURE

SENATE

NO. 314

Senate Chamber, March 30, 1923.

Ordered, That 500 copies of the Governor's communication in relation to the Bible in the Public Schools be printed for use of the Legislature.

Read and ordered placed on file, sent down for concurrence. Presented by Senator Brewster of Cumberland.

L. ERNEST THORNTON, Secretary.

STATE OF MAINE

IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD ONE THOUSAND NINE
HUNDRED AND TWENTY-THREE

STATE OF MAINE
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Augusta, March 30, 1923.

*To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the
81st Legislature:*

At my suggestion our State Commissioner of Education, Dr. Augustus O. Thomas, drafted a bill providing for the reading of the Bible in the public schools of the state, and through the courtesy of Senator Spencer of York County the bill was introduced into the Legislature. This is a subject matter in which

I take a deep interest. A hearing was held upon this bill before the Committee on Education on Thursday, March 15th last, and at that time Dr. Thomas, without any solicitation on my part, appeared before the Committee in support of the bill.

I have secured a copy of the statement made by Dr. Thomas at the Committee Hearing and am so deeply impressed by it that I desire to have it incorporated in the official records of the state. Dr. Thomas' statement is as follows:

"The bill before the Committee for consideration is in many respects one of the most important measures which the present Legislature has to consider. I have not been asked by anyone to speak in its favor but there is a world emergency which makes it necessary that we return to the source of the faith of our fathers for wisdom and inspiration necessary to the solution of the gigantic problems which confront the world today. Calvin Coolidge, Vice President of the United States, has said repeatedly that 'the thing which the world needs most is a proper spiritual conception of human relationships.' Our great anxiety and desire to avoid religious confusion, animosity and hatred has driven us away from the source of harmony itself. This bill calls for the reading of certain portions of the Bible at such intervals as seem to be most expedient in the schools of the state. It especially emphasizes the Ten Commandments, the Psalms and the Lord's Prayer.

"The Bible Itself, outside of paganism, is non-sectarian and non-denominational. All faiths, all religion and Christianity Itself are founded thereon. It is in the Christian's belief the

only well-spring of spiritual values known to the human race.

“The great question is—Is American Christianity of sufficient temper to include as does the Bible various types of personality and modes of thinking which underlie society, or is it necessary to go into the future over the single track of a still more intolerant future?”

“Only a few years ago when, under the most gigantic human struggle of the ages, social and democratic ideals were endangered, our peoples were brought together. It was then that Catholic and Protestant and Jew joined forces and fought shoulder to shoulder under the hazard of annihilation. They were held together by a greater fear and so imminent danger that it was said on every occasion that if the Great War brought nothing other than a better understanding and greater sympathy and a larger measure of tolerance, it had not been in vain. From the pulpit and the rostrum came the congratulations over the greater union of the souls of mankind which fought together, but scarcely had the Four Horsemen retired from the field ere we began to fall apart. The crisis being over, men and nations fell farther apart, all because of the artificial unity of sudden and alarming danger. Today we see the new and determined struggle of socialism and capitalism, the widening of the line between the Cross and the Crescent, the recrudescence of suspicion and unrest between Catholic and Protestant, Jew and Gentile, between alien and native. The strange revival of the old intolerance is today far too evident. By emphasis on inevitable diversities of formulae and temperament, we are in danger of neglecting, if not forgetting entirely,

those fundamental underlying principles upon which depend the safety of both Church and State. Liberalism versus fundamentalism seems to be the rock upon which the Protestant Church may split and the lack of the spiritual in the administration of governmental affairs the rock of disaster for the State.

“Possibly sometime we shall appreciate the fact that the Bible is the book of faith for those with hope; that it is the instrument of progress of all western civilization, for those nations which have rested upon it have made greater progress in all lines of human endeavor than those which have not known it. The Bible is the greatest production and the greatest force in the world. It has come down to us through generations, centuries, almost without changing a jot. It has withstood the onslaughts of the atheist and the pagan and the idolator. It has withstood the changing creeds of men. Its very mystery has been its strength and has allowed each individual to read into it that which most satisfies the hunger of his own soul for immortality. Strange that we cannot see that religion is individual, personal; that I may read the Bible my way and you may read it yours; that we may not agree possibly on the way of salvation but it cannot be said by intelligent men that any one man or any set of men or any company of human beings, organization or association, has the only royal road to the soul’s triumph. The Bible, therefore, is a personal instrument and every man must be allowed to interpret the Bible according to his own reason, his investigation and the

best light he can obtain. It is the wonder of wonders, a master of English, perfection of diction, the height of inspiration, complete in history, absorbing in romance, rhythmic in poetry, brilliant in philosophy and proverb, and startling in its revelations. It is the inspiration of law and as our Constitution is the fundamental law of a land, so the Ten Commandments form the basis of all civil and statutory law,—“Thou shalt not steal,” “Thou shalt not kill,” “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” “Thou shalt not bear false witness,” “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself”. Any human law which conflicts with the tenets of the Ten Commandments could scarcely stand upon the statute books of a state or nation.

“The Bible has been the inspiration for the world’s masterpieces in music, in art and in literature. The world is richer for Handel’s “Messiah”, Meyerbeer’s “Phophet Elijah”, Hayden’s “Creation”; in sculpture, Angelo’s “Moses”; in art, DaVinci’s “Sistine Madonna”, portraying the mother’s love, the finest sentiment which springs from the human heart. You ask the mother what she expects of her boy and she will tell you that she hopes his heart may be so pure that it may be laid upon a pillow and not leave a stain; that his every act may be reviewed by his mother, his sister, his sweetheart, his wife without a blush of shame; that his innermost thought and hope and aspiration may be whispered in an angel’s ear. But you ask if she expects this perfection before she gives her love and she will tell you no, that mother love can never cease, it is perpetual. She watches the struggling footsteps of the infant

as he attempts to walk, she binds up the wounds of childhood and soothes the broken heart. She follows her boy even to the gallows and still makes excuses for him. She is there when his body is taken down and bears the sacred dust to his last resting place and cherishes within her bosom the love of her own flesh and blood.

“The Bible is the inspiration of literature. The great masterpieces have sprung from it,—Milton’s “Paradise Lost” and “Paradise Regained”, Bunyan’s “Pilgrim’s Progress” and even down to the later days of Lew Wallace’s “Ben Hur” and Ibanez’ “the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse”. It would not seem exactly right that this Book, vast in its storehouse of riches, tremendous in its influence upon human life, should be excluded from the learners of today.

“As it is the source of law and inspiration, it is also the only foundation for human ethics that has ever been created. No matter how you may interpret the Bible, you cannot get away from the fact of its moral religious significance. There are those who believe faithfully in the story of creation as found in Genesis—that man came instantly from the word of God. There are others who believe in the long, unfolding process of immutable and unchangeable laws. There are those who believe that Job was a real character and suffered pain and humiliation. Others believe that he was a character in Hebrew fiction and played on the stages of the old, old world. There are those who believe that Moses stretched forth his rod and parted the waters of the Red Sea. There are those who con-

tend that the monsoon blew steadily in one direction for a period and piled up the waters of the sea leaving dry sands over which Moses and the Children of Israel passed, but the monsoon changed instantly when its season was over and released the waters to deluge Pharaoh and his hosts. There are those who believe that God fed the Children of Israel in the wilderness by the daily dropping of manna. Others believe that they ate from the fruit of the wilderness which grew in a natural way. There are those who believe in the miracle of Christ, while others believe Him to be the natural son of Joseph and Mary. There are those who believe that John on the Isle of Patmos saw a vision of the new Jerusalem, while others contend that he may have been partaking too freely of the fruit of the vine. But no matter what you may believe, how diverse may be your conception of radicalism, of fundamentalism, of simple faith or higher criticism or your materialism, you may believe in the inspired word of God or that the Bible is the work of man, you cannot gainsay the fact that as a signboard for human destiny it can never be displaced.

“The Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount contain the essence of human relationships, and the embodiment of Christian life is given in the Golden Rule. The simplicity of religious acts and of Christian bearing are found in the words of Christ as He gathered about Him His disciples and they said, ‘When saw we Thee an hungered and fed Thee?’ and He replied, ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of

these, my brethern, ye have done it unto Me,' He set up the simple, tangible ideals of Christian service and the spiritual value which the world needs today. Whether Jew or Gentile, Catholic or Protestant, all must agree that the principles of the Man-Child are eternal, as broad as human interest, as high as justice and as deep as human hope.

“Daily reading of the Bible in public schools is required by law in six states—Massachusetts, Alabama, Georgia, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Tennessee. Except in Georgia and Alabama the law prescribes that the reading must be without comment. Both Old and New Testaments must be read from, according to the Georgia statute, while the New Jersey law specifies only the New. The other states do not require any special part of the Bible. Massachusetts and Alabama do not specify the amount to be read. In Georgia at least one chapter must be read each day, while in Pennsylvania and Tennessee the minimum requirement is ten verses and in New Jersey only five. At the written request of parent or guardian, a pupil may be excused from Bible reading in Georgia or Tennessee. In Massachusetts a pupil whose parent or guardian informs the teacher in writing that he has conscientious scruples against it is not required to take any personal part in the reading.

“This bill does not require; in fact, it would prohibit denominationalism, sectarian interpretation. A Methodist cannot read into it anything without interpretation which would not be read by a Baptist or a Congregationalist or a Presby-

terian, but if the Methodist and the Baptist and the Presbyterian and the Congregationalist would prefer a single track to the Kingdom rather than free open country, then the cause of humanity would seem hopeless and the world would roll back into the beast again. The Catholic teacher may read her Catholic Bible, the Protestant her Protestant Bible, but no child is called upon or required to change his form of worship or his ideas of religion because of this bill. It seems to me that inasmuch as we have a lack of understanding, as we have stored up some religious differences, the time has come for sober-minded people to realize that the world cannot be saved by commercialism, by political parties or by keeping away from the foundation of right living, of pure thinking and of square dealing.”

This statement is one that should be taken to heart by every citizen of the state and in my opinion it would be helpful if the Legislature should pass an order providing for the printing of a considerable number of copies of it for distribution by Senators and Representatives.

Respectfully submitted,

PERCIVAL P. BAXTER,

Governor of Maine.