

Many reasons are urged to show that it would be improper to expect or allow all teachers to conduct religious services in schools. Two of these seem to be sufficiently conclusive. First, the children of the same Public School belong to different denominations, and their parents would naturally object to have one set of religious opinions laid down for all. Second, the teachers are not all members of the church. It is true that every teacher has to show that he is a person of good moral character before he receives his certificate; but this does not guarantee him to be qualified to give instruction in doctrinal matters to the pupils entrusted to his care.

Honourable Adam Crooks, Minister of Education, issued two circulars during the month of April, which clearly explain the law and regulations relating to the use of the Bible in the Public Schools of Ontario. These circulars were called forth by a deputation from the Synod of the Presbytery of Hamilton and London, who waited upon Mr. Crooks and submitted to him the following questions:

1. May the local Trustees, without contravening the School Law, require teachers to use the Bible, in whole or in part, as a text book, giving such instruction as is needed for the proper understanding of what is read?

2. Is there anything in the regulations and programme at present in force to prevent the introduction of such reading of the Holy Scriptures as part of the regular course of instruction and work of the school, when the Trustees desire this to be done?

In reply Mr. Crooks, after giving the Law and Regulations relating to the subject, explains their design and the mode of carrying them out, as follows:—

“The management of the Public Schools in their several localities rests, under the Act, with the Trustees or School Boards (as the case may be), who are constituted corporations for this purpose, and possess all powers expressed or implied which are necessary for efficiency, subject in the exercise of them to the General Regulations of the Department.

“Recognizing this duty and responsibility on the part of Trustees and School Boards, the Education Department, in May, 1877, adopted a new Programme, or Course of Study, for the Public Schools, which took effect on the 15th August, 1877, in lieu of the Limit Table and Programme under the General Regulations of the former Council of Public Instruction. By the new Regulations no ‘time’ or ‘limit’ table is prescribed, except so far as the Trustees or School Board and Teacher may choose to regulate this, and the Course of Study is to be followed so far only as the circumstances of the particular school will allow. The attention of Trustees, School Board and Teachers is also expressly called to the special provisions with respect to Religious Instruction contained in the General Regulations of 1874.

“As our political system is founded upon Christianity, and all our laws are in subordination to its principles, the Public School Act and Regulations have thus consistently recognized Religious Instruction as part of the ordinary exercises of the Public School, and have been carefully framed so as to secure to parents generally the training of their children in the truths of our common Christianity.

“It will be seen that these Regulations are recommendatory and not mandatory, and leave the authority and duty with the Trustees or School Board of requiring their Teachers to use the Bible in whole or in part as one of the subjects of the ordinary exercises of the school, with such explanations (not of a denominational character) as may be requisite for the proper understanding of the language read.

“This authority is, however, always subject to any objection on the part of the parent or guardian of any pupil to his or her joining in such religious instruction. According to my interpretation, therefore, of the Law and Regulations applicable to Public Schools in Ontario, I beg to reply to your two questions in the affirmative, and to advise your Synod that, *firstly*, School Boards and Trustees can lawfully require their Teachers to use the Bible or portions thereof as part of the ordinary exercises of the school, giving, however, such explanations only as are needed for a proper understanding of what is read; and *secondly*, there is nothing in the Regulations or Programme respecting the Public Schools now in force which can prevent the introduction of such reading of the Holy Scriptures as part of the regular course of instruction and work of the School when the Trustees or School Boards require this to be done. But, on the contrary, the Law permits, and the Regulations strongly recommend, the daily practice of such religious exercises.

“It will thus be seen that it is open to parents generally, whatever may be their different churches, to cordially unite with Trustees, School Boards and Teachers, in promoting such religious exercises in the Schools, and thus to improve the character of our youth, and so form a community distinguished not only for its intelligence, but for its fair dealing and law-abiding and moral qualities.”

Mr. Crooks subsequently issued the following supplementary memorandum on religious instruction:

“Referring to my memorandum on Religious Instruction in the Public Schools, there seems to be a misunderstanding with reference to my interpretation of the Law and Regulations as to the reading of portions of the Holy Scriptures as part of the ordinary exercises of the School. This arises in part from the form of expression used in my summary of the Law and Regulations. They, when properly considered with the text of the Law and of the Regulations, will be found to go no further than the Regulations themselves recommended, namely, that the daily exercises of each Public School be opened and closed by the reading of portions of Scripture, and by prayer. This is repeated amongst the powers and duties of teachers, who are directed to see that these Regulations shall be observed. It will, however, be noticed that this is entirely recommendatory to Trustees, and my opinion on the Sombra case clearly expresses that these Regulations were not imperative, so that they *must* be carried out by the Trustees, but recommendatory only.

“My reference to the two questions put by the Deputation should be read by these considerations, which were explicitly put forward in order that the grounds for coinciding to the limited extent mentioned, might be understood by all parties with whom any responsibility in this matter rests.