

Nutrition Education

IN A RECENT DISCUSSION of the need for better nutrition education, one of the speakers compared the position of sin with that of nutrition. Everybody, he said, is against sin and everybody is for good nutrition. He might have carried the idea further. Surely a minister of the church would tell him that just about everyone may be against sin in principle, but action tends to be inversely proportional to the self-discipline or effort required. The big job is to convince the would-be sinner that it is worthwhile to refrain.

Nutrition is in a similar position. Health is universally agreed to be a good thing, and nutrition is important to health. But the practice of good nutritional principles sometimes requires a certain amount of active conviction as well as some self-discipline. As against sin, stimulation to action is needed.

At the same meeting of the Food Industries Advisory Committee of the Nutrition Foundation, a very significant question was presented: How are we to convince the adolescent girl that she should take a serious interest in nutrition for the sake of her health as a mother in future years? We doubt that many adolescent girls are taking so seriously the problems of motherhood that they will choose their diets with this in mind. But they do give some thought to being pretty and health is essential to beauty. Through such an appeal to immediate self-interest, the practice of good nutrition can be put into greater action. The same is true of the overweight executive or the diet-careless working girl—to get them to face the problem personally and immediately, there must be an appeal to self-interest. Nutrition education needs more than mere repetition of the idea that good health needs good food or the suggestion of ideal diets. It needs a skillful approach to a psychological matter. A nutrition education foundation has been suggested.

In some areas of the country today, only about one fourth of the people get adequate nutritional diets. Yet we are constantly struggling with the problems of handling a surplus of food. And there are few incomes too low to provide a nutritionally sound basic diet. The reason for inadequacy of nutrition in the United States appears obvious: people either don't know or haven't been stimulated to care. As a result our general welfare suffers. Education and stimulation of interest in nutrition could be the functions of a nutrition education foundation.

Writers in the public press welcome help from authoritative sources, as do sound ethical radio and television

speakers and program directors. The presentation of good nutrition education in the schools calls for good background and constant assistance to the teachers in keeping up-to-date. The public needs some authoritative source to consult or some guidance in choosing what to accept from the welter of information and misinformation it gets today on matters of what to eat. The complexity of present scientific nutritional information may baffle the average housewife; an impressively simple approach is needed to stand out in her mind when she visits the market.

Certainly the basic idea of a nutrition education foundation has merit. Any forward steps toward better national health are desirable. But careful thought and planning are important in the development of such a program. A clear definition of objectives and approach to those objectives is needed. Such a project, once launched, must succeed, or more than the mere funds invested will be lost. Any program must be organized and executed with the food faddists and quacks in mind, for already they are using to their own ends the progress made in convincing the public that diet is important and scientific advancement can light the way to better health.

Such a foundation would be very important to the food industry and would need its backing. They could help each other greatly. The food industry is run by businessmen. Before they commit themselves to such a project they will want to know what it plans to do and how it expects to carry out its plans. Where industry is concerned there are bound to be differences of opinion on the approach to the public. How would such matters be resolved? The board of trustees guiding such a project would need to be beyond any accusations of influence by or partiality to a particular industry group.

These and other problems need to be met and thought out in order to have the cooperation and support that is needed to make such a venture a success. It deserves the attention and consideration of industrial executives and public relations people as well as nutritionists, for all must back it if it is to accomplish what is needed. It deserves organized study and consideration in order to define objectives. A concrete plan should be developed which will attract support. It must be well thought out before it is launched and then should be backed loyally by all who have an interest in the proper feeding of people.