GEORGE HERBERT BETTS

HOW TO TEACH RELIGION

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Содержание

George Herbert Betts
How to Teach Religion / Principles and Methods

DEDICATED TO THOSE WHO HAVE IN THEIR KEEPING THE RELIGIOUS DESTINY OF AMERICA—THE TWO MILLION TEACHERS IN OUR CHURCH SCHOOLS.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The teacher of religion needs to be very sure of himself at one point. He ought to be able to answer affirmatively the question, "Have I the prophetic impulse in my teaching?" Sooner or later, practical difficulties will "come not singly but by battalions," and the spirit needs to be fortified against discouragement. When driven back to the second or third line defense it is important that such a line really exists; the consciousness of being the spokesman for God makes the teacher invulnerable and unconquerable.

But in order that this divine impulse may attain its greatest strength and find the most direct, articulate, and effective expression, the teacher must know *how* as well as *what* to teach. The most precious spiritual energy may be lost because improperly directed or controlled. Unhesitating insight into the solution of practical problems helps to open up a channel through which the prophetic impulse can find fullest expression.

There is no substitute for mastery of the technique of the teaching process. Prayerful consecration cannot take its place. This ready command of the methods of teaching, on the other hand, is in no sense an equivalent of the consciousness of having been "called" or "chosen" to teach religion. The two must go hand in hand. No one who feels himself divinely appointed for this sacred task dares ignore the responsibility of becoming a "workman not to be ashamed, *rightly* dividing the word of truth."

This volume by Dr. Betts offers the earnest teacher of religion an exceptional opportunity to make more effective his ideal of instruction. The treatment applies the best of modern educational science to the problems of the church school, without, however, for a moment, forgetting that a vital religious experience is the final goal of all our teaching.

Besides setting forth the underlying principles of religious teaching in a clear and definite way, the author has included in every chapter a rich fund of illustration and concrete application which cannot fail to prove immediately helpful in every church classroom. It is also believed that students of religious education will find this treatment of method by Professor Betts the most fundamental and sane that has yet appeared in the field.

Norman E. Richardson.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Children can be brought to a religious character and experience through right nurture and training in religion. This is the fundamental assumption on which the present volume rests, and it makes the religious education of children the most strategic opportunity and greatest responsibility of the church, standing out above all other obligations whatever.

Further, the successful teaching of religion is based on the same laws that apply to other forms of teaching; hence teachers in church schools need and have a right to all the help that a scientific pedagogy permeated by an evangelistic spirit can give them. They also have the obligation to avail themselves of this help for the meeting of their great task.

This book undertakes to deal in a concrete and practical way with the underlying principles of religious instruction. The plan of the text is simple. First comes the part *the teacher* must play in training the child in religion. Then the spiritual changes and growth to be effected in *the child* are set forth as the chief objective of instruction. Next is a statement of the *great aims,* or goals, to be striven for in the child's expanding religious experience. These goals are: (1) fruitful *religious knowledge*; (2) right *religious attitudes—interests, ideals, feelings, loyalties*; (3) the *application of this knowledge and these attitudes to daily life and conduct.*

Following the discussion of aims is the question of just *what subject matter* to choose in order to accomplish these ends, and *how best to organize* the chosen material for instruction. And finally, *how most effectively to present* the subject matter selected to make it serve its purpose in stimulating and guiding the spiritual growth and development of children.

The volume is intended as a textbook for teacher-training classes, students of religious education, and for private study by church-school teachers. It is also hoped that ministers may find some help in its pages toward meeting their educational problems.

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CHAPTER I
THE TEACHER HIMSELF

It is easy enough to secure buildings and classrooms for our schools. The expenditure of so many dollars will bring us the equipment we require. Books and materials may be had almost for the asking. The great problem is to secure *teachers*—real teachers, teachers of power and devotion who are able to leave their impress on young lives. Without such teachers all the rest is but as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And to be a real teacher is a very high achievement.

Bishop Vincent was giving a lecture on "That Boy." He himself was "that boy," and in the course of describing his school days he fell into meditation as follows: "That old school master of mine!—He is dead now—*and I have forgiven him!*—And I am afraid that was the chronology of the matter; for I never was able to forgive him while he lived." I, as one of the listeners, smiled at the bitter wit of the speaker, but was oppressed.

This somber view of the impression sometimes left by teachers on their pupils received an antidote the following day, however, when a venerable old man approached my desk bearing in his hands an ancient and dog-eared copy of a text in grammar. He opened the book and proudly showed me written across the fly leaf "Grover Cleveland, President." Then he told me this story:

"I have been a teacher. In one of my first schools I had Grover Cleveland as a pupil. He came without a textbook in grammar, and I loaned him mine. Years passed, and Grover Cleveland was President of the United States. One day I was one of many hundreds passing in line at a public reception to grasp the President's hand. I carried this book with me, and when it came my turn to meet the President, I presented the volume and said, 'Mr. President, do you recognize this book, and do you remember me?' In an instant the light of recognition had flashed in Mr. Cleveland's eyes. Calling me by name, he grasped my hand and held it while the crowd waited and while he recalled old times and thanked me for what I had meant to him when I was his teacher. Then he took the old book and autographed it for me."

Three types of teachers.—Two types of teachers are remembered: one to be forgiven after years have softened the antagonisms and resentments; the other to be thought of with honor and gratitude as long as memory lasts. Between these two is a third and a larger group: those who are *forgotten*, because they failed to stamp a lasting impression on their pupils. This group represents the *mediocrity* of the profession, not bad enough to be actively forgiven, not good enough to claim a place in gratitude and remembrance.

To which type would we belong? To which type *can* we belong? Can we choose? What are the factors that go to determine the place we shall occupy in the scale of teachers?

THE PERSONAL FACTOR

When we revert to our own pupil days we find that the impressions which cling to our memories are not chiefly impressions of facts taught and of lessons learned, but of the *personality* of the teacher. We may have forgotten many of the truths presented and most of the conclusions drawn, but the warmth and glow of the human touch still remains.

To be a teacher of religion requires a particularly exalted personality. The teacher and the truth taught should always leave the impression of being of the same pattern. "For their sakes I sanctify myself," said the Great Teacher; shall the teachers of his Word dare do less!

The teacher as an interpreter of truth.—This is not to say that the subject matter taught is unimportant, nor that the lessons presented are immaterial. It is only to say that life responds first of all to *life*. Truth never comes to the child disembodied and detached, but always with the slant and

quality of the teacher's interpretation of it. It is as if the teacher's mind and spirit were the stained glass through which the sunlight must fall; all that passes through the medium of a living personality takes its tone and quality from this contact. The pupils may or may not grasp the lessons of their books, but their teachers are living epistles, known and read by them all.

For it is the concrete that grips and molds. Our greatest interest and best attention center in persons. The world is neither formed nor reformed by abstract truths nor by general theories. Whatever ideals we would impress upon others we must first have realized in ourselves. What we *are* often drowns out what we say. Words and maxims may be misunderstood; character seldom is. Precepts may fail to impress; personality never does. God tried through the ages to reveal his purposes to man by means of the law and the prophets, but man refused to heed or understand. It was only when God had made his thought and plan for man concrete in the person of Jesus of Nazareth that man began to understand.

The first and most difficult requirement of the teacher, therefore, is—*himself*, his personality. He must combine in himself the qualities of life and character he seeks to develop in his pupils. He must look to his personality as the source of his influence and the measure of his power. He must be the living embodiment of what he would lead his pupils to become. He must live the religion he would teach them. He must possess the vital religious experience he would have them attain.

The building of personality.—Personality is not born, it is made. A strong, inspiring personality is not a gift of the gods, nor is a weak and ineffective personality a visitation of Providence. Things do not *happen* in the realm of the spiritual any more than in the realm of nature. Everything is *caused*. Personality grows. It takes its form in the thick of the day's work and its play. It is shaped in the crush and stress of life's problems and its duties. It gains its quality from the character of the thoughts and acts that make up the common round of experience. It bears the marks of whatever spiritual fellowship and communion we keep with the Divine.

Professor Dewey tells us that character is largely dependent on the mode of assembling its parts. A teacher may have a splendid native inheritance, a fine education, and may move in the best social circles, and yet not come to his best in personality. It requires some high and exalted task in order to assemble the powers and organize them to their full efficiency. The urge of a great work is needed to make potential ability actual. Paul did not become the giant of his latter years until he took upon himself the great task of carrying the gospel to the Gentiles.

Our own responsibility.—It follows then that the building of our personalities is largely in our own hands. True, the influence of heredity is not to be overlooked. It is easier for some to develop attractive, compelling qualities than for others. The raw material of our nature comes with us; is what heredity decrees. But the finished product bears the stamp of our training and development. Fate or destiny never takes the reins from our hands. We are free to shape ourselves largely as we will.

Our inner life will daily grow by what it feeds upon. This is the great secret of personality-building. What to-day we build into thought and action to-morrow becomes character and personality. Let us cultivate our interests, think high thoughts, and give ourselves to worthy deeds, and these have soon become a life habit. Let our hearts go out in helpfulness to those about us, and sympathy for human kind becomes a compelling motive in our lives before we are aware. Let us consciously listen to the still small voice speaking to the soul, and we will find our souls expanding to meet the Infinite.

The secret.—He who would develop his personality into the full measure of its strength and power must, then, set his goal at *living constantly in the presence of the* BEST. This will include the best in thought and memory and anticipation. It will permit none but cheerful moods, nor allow us to dwell with bitterness upon petty wrongs and grievances. It will control the tongue, and check the unkind word or needless criticism. It will cause us to seek for the strong and beautiful qualities in our friends and associates, and not allow us to point out their faults nor magnify their failings. It will cure us of small jealousies and suppress all spirit of revenge. It will save us from idle worry and fruitless rebellion against such ills as cannot be cured. In short, it will free our lives from the crippling

influence of negative moods and critical attitudes. It will teach us to *be ruled by our admirations rather than by our aversions*.

Above all, he who would build a personality fitted to serve as the teacher of the child in his religion must constantly live in the presence of *the best he can attain in God*. There is no substitute for this. No fullness of intellectual power and grasp, no richness of knowledge gleaned, and no degree of skill in instruction can take the place of a vibrant, immediate, Spirit-filled consciousness of God in the heart. For religion is *life*, and the best definition of religion we can present to the child is the example and warmth of a life inspired and vivified by contact with the Source of all spiritual being. The authority of the teacher should rest on his own religious experience, rather than on the spiritual experience of others.

A character chart.—There is no possibility, of course, of making a list of all the qualities that enter into our personalities. Nor would it be possible to trace all the multiform ways in which these qualities may combine in our characters. It is worth while, however, to consider a few of the outstanding traits which take first place in determining our strength or weakness, and especially such as will respond most readily to conscious training and cultivation. Such a list follows. Each quality may serve as a goal both for our own development and for the training of our pupils.

	POSITIVE QALITIES	NEGATIVE QUALITIES
1	Open-minded, inquiring, broad	Narrow, dogmatic, not hungry for truth
2	Accurate, thorough, discerning	Indefinite, superficial, lazy
3	Judicious, balanced, fair	Prejudiced, led by likes and dislikes
4	Original, independent, resourceful	Dependent, imitative, subservient
5	Decisive, possessing convictions	Uncertain, wavering, undecided
6	Cheerful, joyous, optimistic	Gloomy, morose, pessimistic, bitter
7	Amiable, friendly, agreeable	Repellent, unsociable, disagreeable
8	Democratic, broadly sympathetic	Snobbish, self-centered, exclusive
9	Tolerant, sense of humor, generous	Opinionated, dogmatic, intolerant
10	Kind, courteous, tactful	Cruel, rude, untactful
11	Tractable, cooperative, teachable	Stubborn, not able to work with others
12	Loyal, honorable, dependable	Disloyal, uncertain dependability
13	Executive, forceful, vigorous	Uncertain, weak, not capable
14	High ideals, worthy, exalted	Low standards, base, contemptible
15	Modest, self-effacing	Egotistical, vain, autocratic
16	Courageous, daring, firm	Overcautious, weak, vacillating
17	Honest, truthful, frank, sincere	Low standards of honor and truth
18	Patient, calm, equable	Irritable, excitable, moody
19	Generous, open-hearted, forgiving	Stingy, selfish, resentful
20	Responsive, congenial	Cold, repulsive, uninviting
21	Punctual, on schedule, capable	Tardy, usually behindhand, incapable
22	Methodical, consistent, logical	Haphazard, desultory, inconsistent
23	Altruistic, given to service	Indifferent, not socially-minded
24	Refined, alive to beauty, artistic	Coarse, lacking æsthetic quality
25	Self-controlled, decision, purpose	Suggestible, easily led, uncertain
26	Good physical carriage, dignity	Lack of poise, ill posture, no grace
27	Taste in attire, cleanliness, pride	Careless in dress, frumpy, no pride
28	Face smiling, voice pleasing	Somber expression, voice unpleasant
29	Physical endurance, vigor, strength	Quickly tired, weak, sluggish
30	Spiritual responsiveness strong	Spiritually weak, inconstant, uncertain

It is highly instructive for one to grade himself on this list of qualities; or he may have his friends and associates grade him, thus getting an estimate of the impression he is making on others. Teachers will find it well worth while to attempt to grade each of their pupils; for this will give a clearer insight into their strengths and weaknesses, and so indicate where to direct our teaching. Mark each separate set of qualities on the scale of 10 for the highest possible attainment. If the strength of the *positive* qualities of a certain set (as in No. 10) can be marked but 6, then the negative qualities of this set must carry a mark of 4.

THE TEACHER'S BACKGROUND OF PREPARATION

One can never teach all he knows. Dr. John Dewey tells us that the subject matter of our instruction should be so well mastered that it has become second nature to us; then when we come to the recitation we can give our best powers of thought and insight to the *human element*—seeking to understand the boys and girls as we teach them.

Our knowledge and mastery must always be much broader than the material we actually present. It must be deeper and our grasp more complete than can be reached by our pupils. For only this will give us the mental perspective demanded of the teacher. Only this will enable our thought to move with certainty and assurance in the field of our instruction. And only this will win the confidence and respect of our pupils who, though their minds are yet unformed, have nevertheless a quick sense for mastery or weakness as revealed in their teacher.

A danger confronted by teachers in church schools.—Teachers in our church schools are at a disadvantage at this point. They constitute a larger body than those who teach in the day schools, yet the vast army who teach our children religion receive no salaries. They are engaged in other occupations, and freely give their services as teachers of religion with no thought of compensation or reward. The time and enthusiasm they give to the Sunday school is a free-will offering to a cause in which they believe. All this is inspiring and admirable, but it also contains an element of danger.

For it is impossible to set up scholastic and professional standards for our teachers of religion as we do for the teachers in our day schools. The day-school teacher, employed by the state and receiving public funds, must go through a certain period of training for his position. He must pass examinations in the subject matter he is to teach, and in his professional fitness for the work of the teacher. He must have a certificate granted by responsible authorities before he can enter the schoolroom. He must show professional growth while in service if he is to receive promotion or continue in the vocation.

Greater personal responsibility on church school teacher.—Naturally, all this is impossible with volunteer teachers who receive no pay for their services and are not employed under legal authority. No compulsion can be brought to bear; all must rest on the sense of duty and of opportunity of the individual teacher. Yet the Sunday school teacher needs even a more thorough background of preparation than the day-school teacher, for the work of instruction in the Sunday school is almost infinitely harder than in the day school. Religion and morals are more difficult to teach than arithmetic and geography. The church building usually lacks adequate classroom facilities. The lesson material is not as well graded and adapted to the children as the day-school texts. The lessons come but once a week, and the time for instruction is insufficient. The children do not prepare their lessons, and so come to the Sunday school lacking the mental readiness essential to receiving instruction.

This all means that the Sunday school teacher must rise to a sense of his responsibilities. He must realize that he holds a position of influence second to none in the spiritual development of his pupils. He must remember that he is dealing with a seed-time whose harvest involves the fruits of character and destiny. With these facts in mind he must ask himself whether he is justified in standing before his class as teacher without having given the time and effort necessary for complete preparation.

The teacher and his Bible.—The teacher should know his Bible. This means far more than to know its text and characters. The Bible is history, it is literature, it is a treatise on morals, it is philosophy, it is a repository of spiritual wisdom, it is a handbook of inspiration and guidance to the highest life man has in any age conceived.

To master the Bible one must have a background of knowledge of the life and history of its times. He must enter into the spirit and genius of the Hebrew nation, know their aspirations, their political and economic problems, and understand their tragedies and sufferings. He must know the historical and social setting of the Jewish people, the nations and civilizations that surrounded them, and the customs, mode of life, and trend of thought of contemporaneous peoples.

Not all of these things can be learned from the Bible itself. One must make use of the various helps and commentaries now available to Bible students. The religions of ancient Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Greece, and Rome should be studied. Ancient literatures should be placed under tribute, and every means employed to gain a working knowledge of the social medium out of which the Christian religion developed.

The teacher's knowledge of children.—Time was when we thought of the child as a miniature man, differing from adults on the physical side only in size and strength, and on the mental side only in power and grasp of thought. Now we know better. We know that the child differs from the adult not only in the *quantity* but also in the *quality* of his being.

It is the business of the teacher to understand how the child *thinks*. What is the child's concept of God? What is the character of the child's prayer? How does the child *feel* when he takes part in the acts of worship? We talk to the child about serving God; what is the child's understanding of service to God? We seek to train the child to loyalty to the church; what does the church stand for to the child? We teach the child about sin and forgiveness; just what is the child's comprehension of sin, and what does he understand by forgiveness? We tell the child that he must love God and the Christ; can a child control his affections as he will, or do they follow the trend of his thoughts and experiences? These are not idle questions. They are questions that must be answered by every teacher who would be more than the blind leader of the blind.

Coming to know the child.—How shall the teacher come to know the child? Professor George Herbert Palmer sets forth a great truth when he says that the first quality of a great teacher is the quality of *vicariousness*. By this he means the ability on the part of the teacher to step over in his imagination and take the place of the child. To look at the task with the child's mind and understanding, to feel the appeal of a lesson or story through the child's emotions, to confront a temptation with the child's power of will and self-control—this ability is the beginning of wisdom for those who would understand childhood. The teacher must first of all, therefore, be a sympathetic investigator in the laboratory of child life. Not only in the Sunday school, but daily, he must *observe, study, seek to interpret children*.

Nor should the teacher of religion neglect the books on the child and his religion. Many investigators are giving their time and abilities to studying child nature and child religion. A mastery of their findings will save us many mistakes in the leadership and training of children. A knowledge of their methods of study will show us how ourselves more intelligently to study childhood. Comprehension of the principles they represent, coupled with the results of our own direct interpretation of children, will convince us that, while each child differs from every other, *certain fundamental laws apply to all childhood*. It is the teacher's task and privilege to master these laws.

Knowledge of technique.—Teaching is an *art*, which must be learned the same as any other art. True, there are those who claim that anyone who knows a thing can teach it; but often the teacher who makes such a claim is himself the best refutation of its validity when he comes before his class. Probably most of us have known eminent specialists in their field of learning who were but indifferent teachers. It is not that they knew too much about their subjects, but that they had not mastered the art of its presentation to others.

The class hour is the teacher's great opportunity. His final measure as a teacher is taken as he stands before his class in the recitation. Here he succeeds or fails. In fact, here the whole system of religious education succeeds or fails. For it is in this hour, where the teacher meets his pupils face to face and mind to mind, that all else culminates. It is for this hour that the Sunday school is organized, the classrooms provided, and the lesson material prepared. It is in this hour that the teacher succeeds in kindling the interest, stirring the thought and feeling, and grounding the loyalty of his class. Or, failing in this, it is in the recitation hour that the teacher leaves the spiritual life of the child untouched by his contact with the Sunday school and so defeats its whole intent and purpose.

The teacher of religion should therefore ask himself: "What is my craftsmanship in instruction? Do I know how to *present* this material so that it will take hold upon my class? Do I know the technique of the recitation hour, and the principles of good teaching? Have I read what the scholars have written and what the experience of others has to teach me. Have I definitely planned and sought for skill? Is my work in the classroom the best that I can make it?"

The teacher must continuously be a student.—The successful teacher of religion must, therefore, be a student. He must continually grow in knowledge and in teaching power. There is no possibility of becoming "prepared" through the reading of certain books and the pursuit of certain courses of study and then having this preparation serve without further growth. The famous Dr. Arnold, an insatiable student until the day of his death, when asked why he found it necessary to prepare for each day's lessons, said he preferred that his pupils "should drink from a running stream rather than from a stagnant pool." This, then, should be the teacher's standard: *A broad background of general preparation, constant reading and study in the field of religion and religious teaching, special preparation for each lesson taught.*

The churches of each community should unite in providing a school for teacher training. Where the community training school cannot be organized, individual churches should organize training classes for their teachers. Such schools and classes have been provided in hundreds of places, and the movement is rapidly spreading. Wherever such opportunities are available the best church school teachers are flocking to the classes and giving the time and effort necessary to prepare for better service.

Even where no organized training classes are at present available, the earnest teacher can gain much help from following an organized course of reading in such lines as those just given. Excellent texts are available in most of these fields.

The reward.—One deep and abiding satisfaction may come to the teacher who feels the burden of reaching the standards set forth in this lesson. *It is all worth while.* Some make the mistake of charging against their task all the time, effort and devotion that go into preparing themselves as teachers of religion. But this is a false philosophy. For *a great work greatly performed leaves the stamp of its greatness on the worker.* All that we do toward making out of ourselves better teachers of childhood adds to our own spiritual equipment. All the study, prayer, and consecration we give to our work for the children returns a hundredfold to us in a richer experience and a larger capacity for service.

1. Recall several teachers whom you remember best from your own pupil days, and see whether you can estimate the qualities in their character or teaching which are responsible for the lasting impression.

2. Are you able to determine from the character chart which are your strongest qualities? Which are your weakest qualities? Just what methods are you planning to use to improve your personality?

3. In thinking of your class, are you able to judge in connection with different ones on what qualities of character they most need help? Are you definitely seeking to help on these points in your teaching?

4. Do you think that church-school teachers could pass as good an examination on what they undertake to teach as day-school teachers? Are the standards too high for day-school teachers? Are they high enough for church-school teachers?

5. Have you seen Sunday-school teachers at work who evidently did not know their Bibles? Have you seen others who seemed to know their Bibles but who were ignorant of childhood? Have you seen others whose technique of teaching might have been improved by a little careful study and preparation? Are you willing to apply these three tests to yourself?

FOR FURTHER READING

Palmer, The Ideal Teacher.
Hyde, The Teacher's Philosophy.
Slattery, Living Teachers.
Horne, The Teacher as Artist.

CHAPTER II
THE GREAT OBJECTIVE

All teaching has two objectives—the *subject* taught and the *person* taught. When we teach John grammar (or the Bible) we teach grammar (or the Bible), of course; but we also teach *John*. And the greater of these two objectives is John. It is easy enough to attain the lesser of the objectives. Anyone of fair intelligence can master a given amount of subject matter and present it to a class; but it is a far more difficult thing to understand the child—to master the inner secrets of the mind, the heart, and the springs of action of the learner.

Who can measure the potentialities that lie hidden in the soul of a child! Just as the acorn contains the whole of the great oak tree enfolded in its heart, so the child-life has hidden in it all the powers of heart and mind which later reach full fruition. Nothing is *created* through the process of growth and development. Education is but a process of unfolding and bringing into action the powers and capacities with which the life at the beginning was endowed by its Creator.

THE CHILD AS THE GREAT OBJECTIVE

The child comes into the world—indeed, comes into the school—with much potential and very little actual capital. Nature has through heredity endowed him with infinite possibilities. But these are but promises; they are still in embryonic form. The powers of mind and soul at first lie dormant, waiting for the awakening that comes through the touch of the world about and for the enlightenment that comes through instruction.

Given just the right touch at the opportune moment, and these potential powers spring into dynamic abilities, a blessing to their possessor and to the world they serve. Left without the right training, or allowed to turn in wrong directions, and these infinite capacities for good may become instruments for evil, a curse to the one who owns them and a blight to those against whom they are directed.

Children the bearers of spiritual culture.—The greatest business of any generation or people is, therefore, the education of its children. Before this all other enterprises and obligations must give way, no matter what their importance. It is at this point that civilization succeeds or fails. Suppose that for a single generation our children should, through some inconceivable stroke of fate, refuse to open their minds to instruction—suppose they should refuse to learn our science, our religion, our literature, and all the rest of the culture which the human race has bought at so high a price of sacrifice and suffering. Suppose they should turn deaf ears to the appeal of art, and reject the claims of morality, and refuse the lessons of Christianity and the Bible. Where then would all our boasted progress be? Where would our religion be? Where would modern civilization be? All would revert to primitive barbarism, through the failure of this one generation, and the race would be obliged to start anew the long climb toward the mountain top of spiritual freedom.

Each generation must therefore create anew in its own life and experience the spiritual culture of the race. Each child that comes to us for instruction, weak, ignorant, and helpless though he be, is charged with his part in the great program God has marked out for man to achieve. Each of these little ones is the bearer of an immortal soul, whose destiny it is to take its quality and form from the life it lives among its fellows. And ours is the dread and fascinating responsibility for a time to be the mentor and guide of this celestial being. Ours it is to deal with the infinite possibilities of child-life, and to have a hand in forming the character that this immortal soul will take. Ours it is to have the thrilling experience of experimenting in the making of a destiny!

Childhood's capacity for growth.—Nor must we ever think that because the child is young, his brain unripe, and his experience and wisdom lacking, our responsibility is the less. For the child's earliest impressions are the most lasting, and the earliest influences that act upon his life are the most powerful in determining its outcome. Remember that the babe, starting at birth with nothing, has in a few years learned speech, become acquainted with much of his immediate world, formed many habits which will follow him through life, and established the beginnings of permanent character and disposition. Remember the indelible impression of the bedside prayers of your mother, of the earliest words of counsel of your father, of the influence of a loved teacher, and then know that other children are to-day receiving their impressions from us, their parents and teachers.

Consider for a moment the child as he comes to us for instruction. We no longer insist with the older theologies that he is completely under the curse of "original sin," nor do we believe with certain sentimentalists that he comes "trailing clouds of glory." We believe that he has infinite capacities for good, and equally infinite capacities for evil, either of which may be developed. We know that at the beginning the child is sinless, pure of heart, his life undefiled. To know this is enough to show us our part. This is to lead the child aright until he is old enough to follow the right path of his own accord, to ground him in the motives and habits that tend to right living, and so to turn his mind, heart, and will to God that his whole being seeks accord with the Infinite.

Religious conservation.—If our leading of the child is wise, and his response is ready, there will be no falling away from a normal Christian life and a growing consciousness of God. This does not mean that the child will never do wrong, nor commit sin. It does not mean that the youth will not, when the age of choice has come, make a personal decision for Christ and consecrate his life anew to Christ's service. It means, rather, that the whole attitude of mind, and the complete trend of life of the child will be religious. It means that the original purity of innocence will grow into a conscious and joyful acceptance of the Christ-standard. It means that the child need never know a time when he is not within the Kingdom, and growing to fuller stature therein. It means that we should set our aim at *conservation* instead of reclamation as the end of our religious training.

Yet what a proportion of the energy of the church is to-day required for the reclaiming of those who should never have been allowed to go astray! Evangelistic campaigns, much of the preaching, "personal work," Salvation Army programs, and many other agencies are of necessity organized for the reclaiming of men and women who but yesterday were children in our homes and church schools, and plastic to our training. What a tragic waste of energy!—and then those who never return! Should we not be able more successfully to carry out the Master's injunction, "*Feed my lambs*"?

The child-Christian.—All of these considerations point to the inevitable conclusion that the child is the great objective of our teaching. Indeed, the child ought to be the objective of the work of the whole church. The saving of its children from wandering outside the fold is the supreme duty and the strategic opportunity of the church, standing out above all other claims whatever. We are in some danger of forgetting that when Jesus wanted to show his disciples the standard of an ideal Christian he "took a child and set him in the midst of them." We do not always realize that to *keep* a child a Christian is much more important than to reclaim him after he has been allowed to get outside the fold.

The recent report of a series of special religious meetings states that there were a certain number of conversions "*exclusive of children*," the implication being that the really important results were in the decisions of the adults. The same point of view was revealed when a church official remarked after the reception of a large group of new members, "It was an inspiring sight, *except that there were so few adults!"* When shall we learn that if we do our duty by the children there will be fewer adults left outside for the church to receive?

NO SUBJECT MATTER AN END IN ITSELF

The teacher must first of all take his stand with the child. He must not allow his attention and enthusiasms to become centered on the matter he teaches. He must not be satisfied when he has succeeded in getting a certain fact lodged in the minds of his pupils. He must first, last, and all the time look upon subject matter, no matter how beautiful and true it may be, as a *means* to an end. The end sought is certain desired changes in the life, thought, and experience of the child. There are hosts of teachers who can teach grammar (or the Bible), but comparatively *few who can teach John*.

This does not mean that the material we teach is unimportant, nor that we can fulfill our duty as teachers without the use of interesting, fruitful, and inspiring subject matter. It does not mean that we are not to love the subject we teach, and feel our heart thrill in response to its beauty and truth.

Making subject matter a means instead of an end.—One who is not filled with enthusiasm for a subject has no moral right to attempt to teach it, for the process will be dead and lifeless, failing to kindle the fires of response in his pupils and lacking in vital results. But the true teacher never loves a body of subject matter for its own sake; he loves it for what *through it* he can accomplish in the lives of those he teaches.

As a *student*, searching for the hidden meanings and thrilling at the unfolding beauties of some field of truth which we are investigating, we may love the thing we study for its own sake; and who of us does not feel in that way toward sections of our Bible, a poem, the record of noble lives, or the perfection of some bit of scientific truth? But when we face about and become the *teacher*, when our purpose is not our own learning but the teaching of another, then our attitude must change. We will then love our cherished body of material not less, but differently. We will now care for the thing we teach as an artisan cares for his familiar instruments or the artist cares for his brush—we will prize it as the *means through which* we shall attain a desired end.

Subject matter always subordinate to life.—It will help us to understand the significance of this fundamental principle if we pause to realize that all the matter we teach our children had its origin in human experience; it was first a part of human life. Our scientific discoveries have come out of the pressure of necessities that nature has put upon us, and what we now put into our textbooks first was *lived* by men and women in the midst of the day's activities. The deep thoughts, the beautiful sentiments, and the high aspirations expressed in our literature first existed and found expression in the lives of people. The cherished truths of our Bible and its laws for our spiritual development appeal to our hearts just because they have arisen from the lives of countless thousands, and so have the reality of living experience.

There is, therefore, no abstract truth for truth's sake. Just as all our culture material—our science, our literature, our body of religious truth—had its rise out of the experience of men engaged in the great business of living, so all this material must go back to life for its meaning and significance. The science we teach in our schools attains its end, not when it is learned as a group of facts, but when it has been *set at work* by those who learn it to the end that they live better, happier, and more fruitful lives. The literature we offer our children has fulfilled its purpose, not when they have studied the mechanism of its structure, read its pages, or committed to memory its lines, but when its glowing ideals and high aspirations have been *realized in the lives* of those who learn it.

And so this also holds for the Bible and its religious truth. Its rich lessons full of beautiful meaning may be recited and its choicest verses stored in the memory and still be barren of results, except as they are put to the test and find expression in living experience. The only true test of learning a thing is *whether the learner lives it*. The only true test of the value of what one learns is the extent to which it affects his daily life. The value of our teaching is therefore always to be measured by the degree to which it finds expression in the lives of our pupils. *John*, not grammar (nor even the Bible), is the true objective of our teaching.

EFFECT OF THE OBJECTIVE ON OUR TEACHING

Not only will this point of view vitalize our teaching for the pupils, but it will also save it from becoming commonplace and routine for ourselves. This truth is brought out in a conversation that occurred between an old schoolmaster and his friend, a business man.

The true objective saves from the rut of routine.—Said the business man, "Do you teach the same subjects year after year?"

The schoolmaster replied that he did.

"Do you not finally come to know this material all by heart, so that it is old to you?" asked the friend.

The schoolmaster answered that such was the case.

"And yet you must keep going over the same ground, class after class and year after year!" exclaimed the business man.

The schoolmaster admitted that it was so.

"Then," said his friend, "I should think that you would tire beyond endurance of the old facts, and grow weary beyond expression of repeating them after the charm of novelty and newness has gone. How do you live through the sameness and grind?"

"You forget one thing!" exclaimed the old schoolmaster, who had learned the secret of the *great objective*. "You forget that I am not really teaching that old subject matter at all; I am teaching *living boys and girls!* The matter I teach may become familiar. It may have lost the first thrill of novelty. But the *boys and girls are always new*; their hearts and minds are always fresh and inviting; their lives are always open to new impressions, and their feet ready to be turned in new directions. The old subject matter is but the means by which I work upon this living material that comes to my classroom from day to day. I should no more think of growing tired of it than the musician would think of growing tired of his violin."

And so the schoolmaster's friend was well answered.

Unsafe measures of success.—It is possible to lodge much subject matter in the mind which, once there, does not function. It is possible to teach many facts which play no part in shaping the ideals, quickening the enthusiasms, or directing the conduct. And all mental material which lies dead and unused is but so much rubbish and lumber of the mind. It plays no part in the child's true education, and it dulls the edge of the learner's interest and his enjoyment of the school and its instruction.

It is possible to have the younger children in our Sunday schools from week to week and still fail to secure sufficient hold on them so that they continue to come after they have reached the age of deciding for themselves. The proof of this is all too evident in the relatively small proportion of youth in our church-school classes between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five.

It is possible to offer the child lessons from the Bible throughout all the years of childhood, and yet fail to ground sufficient interest in the Bible or religion so that in later years the man or woman naturally turns to the Bible for guidance or comfort, and fails to make religion the determining principle of the life.

The child the only true measure of success.—Let us therefore be sure of our objective. Let us never be proud nor satisfied that we have taught our class so much *subject matter*—so many facts, maxims, or lessons of whatever kind. We shall need to teach them all these things, and teach them well. But we must inquire further. We must ask, What have these things *done* for the boys and girls of my class? What has been the outcome of my teaching? How much effect has it had in life, character, conduct? In how far are my pupils different for having been in my class, and for the lessons I have taught them? In how far have I accomplished the *true objective* of my teaching?

Let us never feel secure merely because the children are found in the Sunday school, and because the statistical reports show increase in numbers and in average attendance. These things are

all well; without them we cannot do the work which the church should do for its children. But these are but the externals, the outward signs. We must still inquire what real influence the school is having on the growing spiritual life of its children. We must ask what part our instruction is having in the making of Christians. We must measure all our success in terms of the child's response to our efforts. We must realize that we have failed except as we have caused the child's spiritual nature to unfold and his character to grow toward the Christ ideal.

1. As you think of your own teaching, are you able to decide whether you have been sufficiently clear in your objective? Have you rather *assumed* that if you presented the lessons as they came the results must of necessity follow, or have you been alive to the real effects on your pupils?

2. Are you able to discover definite changes that are working out in the lives of your pupils from month to month as you have them under your instruction? Are they more reverent, more truthful, more sure against temptation, increasingly conscious of God in their lives? What other effects might you look for?

3. Do you think that the church is in some degree overlooking its most strategic opportunity in not providing more efficiently for the religious education of its children? If more attention were given to religious nurture of children, would the problems of evangelism be less pressing, and a larger proportion of adults found in the church? What can the church school do to help? What can your class do?

4. Do you love the matter that you seek to teach the children? Do you love it for what it means to you, or for what through it you can do for them? Do you look upon the material you teach truly as a means and not as an end? Are you teaching subject matter or children?

5. Do you feel the real worth and dignity of childhood? Do you sometimes stop to remember that the ignorant child before you to-day may become the Phillips Brooks, the Henry Ward Beecher, the Livingstone, the Frances Willard, the Luther of to-morrow? Do you realize the responsibility that one takes upon himself when he undertakes to guide the development of a life?

6. Can you now make a statement of the measures that you will wish to apply to determine your degree of success as a teacher? It will be worth your while to try to make a list of the immediate objectives you will seek for your class to attain in their personal lives. Keep this list and see whether it is modified by the chapters that lie ahead.

FOR FURTHER READING

Harrison, A Study of Child Nature.
Moxcey, Girlhood and Character.
Dawson, The Child and His Religion.
Forbush, The Boy Problem.
Richardson (Editor), The American Home Series.
Richardson, Religious Education of Adolescents.

CHAPTER III
THE FOURFOLD FOUNDATION [1]

All good teaching rests on a fourfold foundation of principles. These principles are the same from the kindergarten to the university, and they apply equally to the teaching of religion in the church school or subjects in the day school. Every teacher must answer four questions growing out of these principles, or, failing to answer them, classify himself with the unworthy and incompetent. These are the four supreme questions:

1. What definite *aims* have I set as the goal of my teaching? What *outcomes* do I seek?
2. What *material*, or *subject matter*, will best accomplish these aims? What shall I stress and what shall I omit?
3. How can this material best be *organized*, or arranged, to adapt it to the child in his learning? How shall I plan my material?
4. What shall be my plan or *method of presentation* of this material to make it achieve its purpose? What of my technique of instruction?

THE AIM IN TEACHING RELIGION

First of all, the teacher of religion must *have* an aim; he must know what ends he seeks to accomplish. Some statistically minded person has computed that, with all the marvelous accuracy of aiming modern guns, more than one thousand shots are fired for every man hit in battle. One cannot but wonder how many shots would be required to hit a man if the guns were not aimed at anything!

Is the analogy too strong? Is the teacher more likely than the gunner to reach his objective without consciously aiming at it? And can the teacher set up for attainment as definite aims as are offered the gunner? Do we *know* just what ends we seek in the religious training of our children?

Life itself sets the aim.—This much at least is certain. We know *where to look for* the aims that must guide us. We shall not try to formulate an aim for our teaching out of our own thought or reasoning upon the subject. We shall rather look out upon life, the life the child is now living and the later life he is to live, and ask: "*What are the demands that life makes on the individual?* What is the equipment this child will need as he meets the problems and tests of experience in the daily round of living? What qualities and powers will he require that he may the most fully realize his own potentialities and at the same time most fruitfully serve his generation? What abilities must he have trained in order that he may the most completely express God's plan for his life?" When we can answer such questions as these we shall have defined the aim of religious education and of our teaching.

The knowledge aim.—First of all, life demands *knowledge*. There are things that we must know if we are to avoid dangers and pitfalls. Knowledge shows the way, while ignorance shrouds the path in darkness. To be without knowledge is to be as a ship without a rudder, left to drift on the rocks and shoals. The religious life is intelligent; it must grasp, understand, and know how to use many great truths. To supply our children with *religious knowledge* is, therefore, one of the chief aims of our teaching.

Yet not all knowledge is of equal worth. Even religious knowledge is of all degrees of fruitfulness. Some knowledge, once acquired, fails to function. It has no point of contact with our

[1] The point of view and in some degree the outlines of this and several following chapters have been adapted from the author's text "Class-Room Method and Management," by permission of the publishers, *The Bobbs-Merrill Co*., Indianapolis.

lives. It does not deal with matters we are meeting in the day's round of experience. It therefore lies in the mind unused, or, because it is not used, it quickly passes from the memory and is gone. Such knowledge as this is of no real value. It is not worth the time and effort put upon its mastery; and it crowds out other and more fruitful knowledge that might take its place.

To be a true end of education, knowledge must be of such nature that it *can be put at work*. It must relate to actual needs and problems. It must have immediate and vital points of contact with the child's common experiences. The child must be able to see the relation of the truths he learns to his own interests and activities. He must feel their value and see their use in his work and in his play. This is as true of religious knowledge as of knowledge of other kinds. The religious knowledge the child needs, therefore, is a knowledge that *can at once be incorporated in his life*. To supply the child with knowledge of this vital, fruitful sort becomes, then, one great aim in the teaching of religion.

But knowledge alone is not enough. Indeed, knowledge is but the beginning of religious education, whereas we have been in danger of considering it the end. Many there are who *know* the ways of life but do not follow them. Many *know* the paths of duty, but choose an easier way. Many *know* the road to service and achievement, but do not enter thereon. If *to do* were as easy as to know what to do, then all of us would mount to greater heights.

The attitudes aim.—Life demands *goals* set ahead for achievement. It must have clearly defined the "worth whiles" which lead to endeavor. Along with the knowledge that guides our steps must be the impulses that drive to right action. Besides knowing what to do there must be inner compelling forces that *get things done*. The chief source of our goals and of the driving power within us is what, for want of a better term, we may call our *attitudes*.

Prominent among our attitudes are the *interests, enthusiasms, affections, ambitions, ideals, appreciations, loyalties, standards, and attachments* which predominate. These all have their roots set deep in our emotions; they are the measure of life's values. They are the "worth whiles" which give life its quality, and which define the goal for effort.

Chesterton tells us that the most important thing about any man is the *kind of philosophy he keeps*—that is to say, his *attitudes*. For it is out of one's attitudes that his philosophy of life develops, and that he settles upon the great aims to which he devotes himself. It is in one's attitudes that we find the springs of action and the incentives to endeavor. It is in attitudes that we find the forces that direct conduct and lead to character.

To train the intellect and store the mind with knowledge without developing a fund of right attitudes to shape the course of action is therefore even fraught with danger. The men in positions of political power who often misgovern cities or use public office as a means to private gain do not act from lack of knowledge or in ignorance of civic duty; their failure is one of ideals and loyalties; their attitude toward social trust and service to their fellow men is wrong. The men who use their power of wealth to oppress the poor and helpless, or unfairly exploit the labor of others to their own selfish advantage do not sin from lack of knowledge; their weakness lies in false standards and unsocial attitudes. Men and women everywhere who depart from paths of honor and rectitude fall more often from the lack of high ideals than because they do not know the better way.

The goal and the motive power in all such cases comes from a false philosophy of life; it is grounded in wrong attitudes. The education of those who thus misconceive life has failed of one of its chief aims—*to develop right attitudes*. Hence character is wanting.

The conduct, or application, aim.—The third and ultimate aim of education has been implied in the first two; it is *conduct, right living*. This is the final and sure test of the value of what we teach—how does it find *expression in action*? Do our pupils think differently, speak differently, act differently here and now because of what we teach them? Are they stronger when they meet temptation from day to day? Are they more sure to rise to the occasion when they confront duty or opportunity? Are their lives more pure and free from sin? Do the lessons we teach find expression in the home, in the school, and on the playground? Is there a real outcome *in terms of daily living*?

These are all fair questions, for knowledge is without meaning except as it becomes a guide to action. High ideals and beautiful enthusiasms attain their end only when they have eventuated in worthy deeds. What we *do* because of our training is the final test of its value. Conduct, performance, achievement are the ultimate measures of what our education has been worth to us. By this test we must measure the effects of our teaching.

Summary of the threefold aim.—The *aim* in teaching the child religion is therefore definite, even if it is difficult to attain. This aim may be stated in three great requirements which life itself puts upon the child and every individual:

1. *Fruitful knowledge*; knowledge of religious truths that can be set at work in the daily life of the child now and in the years that lie ahead.
2. *Right attitudes*; the religious warmth, responsiveness, interests, ideals, loyalties, and enthusiasms which lead to action and to a true sense of what is most worth while.
3. *Skill in living*; the power and will to use the religious knowledge and enthusiasms supplied by education in shaping the acts and conduct of the daily life.

True, we may state our aim in religious teaching in more general terms than these, but the meaning will be the same. We may say that we would lead the child to a knowledge of God as Friend and Father; that we seek to bring him into a full, rich experience of spiritual union with the divine; that we desire to ground his life in personal purity and free it from sin; that we would spur him to a life crowned with deeds of self-sacrifice and Christlike service; that we would make out of him a true Christian. This is well and is a high ideal, but in the end it sums up the results of the religious *knowledge, attitudes*, and *acts* we have already set forth as our aim. These are the parts of which the other is the whole; they are the immediate and specific ends which lead to the more distant and general. Let us, therefore, conceive our aim in *both* ways—the ideal Christian life as the final goal toward which we are leading, and the knowledge, attitudes, and acts that make up to-day's life as so many steps taken toward the goal.

SELECTING THE SUBJECT MATTER

After the aim the subject matter. When we would build some structure we first get plan and purpose in mind; then we select the material that shall go into it. It is so with education. Once we have set before us the aim we would reach, our next question is, What shall be the means of its attainment? When we have fixed upon the fruitful knowledge, the right attitudes, and the lines of conduct and action which must result from our teaching, we must then ask, What *means* shall we select to achieve these ends? What *material or subject matter* shall we teach in the church school?

The subject matter he presents is the instrumentality by which the teacher must accomplish his aims for his class. Through this material he must awaken thought, store the mind with vital truths, arouse new interests, create ideals and lead the life to God. As the artist works with brush and paint, with tool and clay, so the teacher must work with truths and lesson materials.

Guiding principles.—Two great principles must guide in the selection of subject matter for religious instruction:

1. *The material must be suited to the aims we seek.*
2. *The material must be adapted to the child.*

The tools and instruments the workman uses must be adapted to the purpose sought. Ask the expert craftsman what kind of plane or chisel you should buy for a piece of work you have in mind, and he will ask you just what ends you seek, what uses you would put them to. Ask the architect what

materials you should have for the structure you would build, and he will tell you that depends on the plan and purpose of your building.

The material must fit the aim.—What materials of religious truth should the teacher bring to his class? The answer is that truths and lessons must be suited to the aim we seek. Would we lead our children to understand the Fatherhood of God and to love him for his tender care? Then the lessons must contain this thought, and not be built on irrelevant material. Would we lead youth to catch the thrill and inspiration of noble lives, to pattern conduct after worthy deeds? Then our lesson material must deal with the high and fine in character and action, and not with trivial things of lesser value.

So also, if we would capture the interest of childhood for the church school and bind its loyalty to the church, the subject matter we offer and the lessons we teach in the house of God must contain the glow and throb of life, and not be dry and barren. If we would awaken religious feeling and link the emotions to God, we must not teach empty lessons, meaningless dates, and musty facts that fail to reach the heart because they have no inner meaning.

Small use to set high aims and then miss them for want of material suited for their attainment. Small use to catalogue the fine qualities of heart and mind we would train in our children and then fail of our aim because we choose wrong tools with which to work. Not all facts found in the Bible are of equal worth to children, nor are all religious truths of equal value. Nothing should be taught *just because it is true*, nor even because it is found in the Bible. The final question is whether this lesson material is the best we can choose for the child himself; whether it will give him the knowledge he can use, train the attitudes he requires, and lead to the acts and conduct that should rule his life.

The material must fit the child.—The subject matter we teach *must also be fitted to the child*. It must be within his grasp and understanding. We do not feed strong meat to babes. What may be the grown person's meat may be to the child poison. It does no good to load the mind with facts it cannot comprehend. There is no virtue in truths, however significant and profound, if they are beyond the reach of the child's experience. Matter which is not assimilated to the understanding is soon forgotten; or if retained, but weighs upon the intellect and dulls its edge for further learning.

There can be little doubt that we have quite constantly in most of our Sunday schools forced upon the child no small amount of matter that is beyond his mental grasp, and so far outside his daily experience that it conveys little or no meaning. We have over-intellectualized the child's religion. Jesus was "to the Greeks foolishness" because they had no basis of experience upon which to understand his pure and unselfish life. May not many of the facts, figures, dates, and events from an ancient religion which we give young children likewise be to them but foolishness! May not the lessons upon some of the deepest, finest and most precious concepts in our religion, such as faith, atonement, regeneration, repentance, the Trinity, be lost or worse than lost upon our children because we force them upon unripe minds and hearts at an age when they are not ready for them?

Let us then, *not forget the child* when we teach religion! Let us not assume that truths and lessons are an end in themselves. Let us constantly ask, as we prepare our lessons, Will this material work as a true leaven in the life? Will it take root and blossom into character, fine thought, and worthy conduct? While our children dumbly ask for living bread let us not give them dead stones and dry husks, which cannot feed their souls! Let us adapt our subject matter to the child.

The use of stress and neglect.—That the lesson material printed in the Sunday school booklets is not always well adapted to the children every teacher knows. But there it is, and what can we do but teach it, though it may sometimes miss the mark?

There is one remedy the wise and skillful teacher always has at his command. By the use of *stress* and *neglect* the matter of the lesson may be made to take quite different forms. The points that are too difficult may be omitted or but little emphasized. The matter that best fits the child may be stressed and its application made. Illustrations, stories, and lessons from outside sources may be introduced to suit the aim. Great truths may be restated in terms within childhood's comprehension. The true teacher, like the craftsman, will select now this tool, now that to meet his purpose. Regardless

of what the printed lesson offers, he will reject or use, supplement or replace with new material as the needs of his class may demand. The true teacher will be the master, and not the servant, of the subject matter he uses.

HOW SHALL WE ORGANIZE AND PLAN THE LESSONS?

When the *content* of the subject matter has been decided upon then comes its *organization*. How shall we arrange and plan the material we teach so as to give the children the easiest and most natural mode of approach to its learning?

The great law here is that *the arrangement of subject matter must be psychological*. This only means that we must always ask ourselves how will the child most easily and naturally enter upon the learning of this material? How can I organize it for the recitation so that it will most strongly appeal to his interest? How can I arrange it so that it will be most easily grasped and understood? How can I plan the lesson so that its relation to immediate life and conduct will be most clear and its application most surely made?

The psychological mode of approach.—I recently happened into a junior Sunday school class where the lesson was on faith. The teacher evidently did not know how to plan for a psychological mode of approach to this difficult concept. He began by defining faith in Paul's phrase as "the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen." He then went to the dictionary definition, which shows the relation of faith to belief. He discussed the relation of faith to works, as presented in the writings of James. But all to no avail. The class was uninterested and inattentive. The lesson did not take hold. The time was wasted and the opportunity lost. I excused myself and went to another classroom.

Here they had the same topic. But the teacher had sought for and found a starting point from which to explain the meaning of faith in terms that the children could understand. The teacher's eye rested for a moment on John; then: "John, when does your next birthday come?"

"The sixteenth of next month," replied John promptly.

"Going to get any presents, do you think?" asked the teacher.

"Yes, sir," answered John with conviction.

"What makes you think so?" inquired the teacher. "Not everybody does receive birthday presents, you know."

"But I am sure I will," persisted John. "You see, I know my father and mother. They have never yet let one of my birthdays pass without remembering me, and I am sure they are not going to begin to forget me now. They think too much of me."

"You seem to have a good deal of *faith* in your father and mother," remarked the teacher.

"Well I guess I *have!*" was John's enthusiastic response.

And right at this point the way was wide open to show John and the class the meaning of faith in a heavenly Father. The wise teacher had found a *point of contact* in John's faith in the love and care of his parents, and it was but a step from this to the broader and deeper faith in God.

It is a law of human nature that we are all interested first of all in what affects our own lives. Our attention turns most easily to what relates to or grows out of our own experience. The *immediate and the concrete* are the natural and most effective starting points for our thought. The distant and remote exert little appeal to our interest; it is the near that counts. Especially do these rules hold for children.

Making sure of a point of contact.—All these facts point the way for the teacher in the planning and organization of material for his class. The point of departure must always be sought in some *immediate interest or activity in the life of the child*, and not in some abstract truth or far-away lesson, however precious these may be to the adult Christian. And no lesson is ready for presentation until the way into the child's interest and comprehension has been found. Many a lesson that might have been full of rich spiritual meaning for the child has been lost to our pupils because it was

presented out of season, or because the vital connection between the truth and the child's experience was not discovered by the teacher.

This principle suggests that in the main children should not be taught religious truths in terms which they cannot grasp, nor in such a way that the application to their own lives is not clear. For example, the vital truths contained in the church catechisms are not for children; the statement of them is too abstract and difficult, and the meaning too remote from the child's experience. Many of the same truths can be presented to children in the form of stories or illustrations; other of the truths may rest until the child becomes older before claiming his attention. Bible verses and sentiments completely outside the child's comprehension are not good material for memorizing. Lessons upon the more difficult concepts and deeper problems of religion belong to the adult age, and should not be forced upon children.

Our guiding principle, therefore, is to *keep close to the mind, heart, and daily life of childhood.* Then *adapt the subject matter we teach to the mind, interests, and needs of those we teach.* Definitions, rules, abstract statements, general truths have little or no value with children. It is the story, the concrete incident, the direct application growing out of their own experiences that takes hold.

PRESENTING THE LESSON—INSTRUCTION

After the aim has been clearly conceived, and after the lesson material has been wisely chosen and properly organized, there still remains the most important part—that of "getting the lesson across" to the class. Many a valuable lesson, full of helpfulness, has been lost to the pupils because the teacher lacked the power to bring his class to the right pitch for receiving and retaining impressions. Many a class period has been wasted because the teacher failed to present the material of the lesson so that it gripped interest and compelled attention.

Response a test of instruction.—The *first* test of good instruction is the *response of the class*. Are the children alert? Are they keen for discussion, or for listening to stories told or applications made? Do they think? Do they enjoy the lesson hour, and give themselves happily and whole-heartedly to it? Is their conduct good, and their attitude serious, reverent, and attentive? Are they all "in the game," or are there laggards, inattentive ones, and mischief-makers?

These questions are all crucial. For the first law of all learning is *self-activity*. There is no possibility of teaching a child who is not mentally awake. Only the active mind grasps, assimilates, remembers, applies. The birth of new ideas, the reaching of convictions, the arriving at decisions all come in moments of mental stress and tension. Lethargy of thought and feeling is fatal to all class-room achievement. Therefore, no matter how keenly alert the teacher's mind may be, no matter how skillful his analysis of an important truth may be if his class sit with flagging interest and lax attention.

Results a test of instruction.—The *second* test of good instruction is our skill in handling the material of the lesson, and *shaping the trend of thought and discussion*. Are the children interested in the right things? Are the central truths of the lesson being brought out and applied? Is the discussion centered on topics set for our consideration, or does it degenerate into aimless talk on matters of personal or local interest which have no relation to the lesson? In short, does the recitation period yield the *fruitful knowledge* we had set as a goal for this lesson? Does it stimulate the *attitudes* and motives we had meant to reach? Does it lead to the *applications* in life and conduct which were intended? *Does it get results?*

The four points of this lesson are of supreme importance in teaching religion. The *aim* must be clear, definite, and possible of attainment. The *subject matter* of instruction must be wisely selected as an instrument for reaching the aim set forth. The *organization* of this material must adapt it to the mind and needs of the child. The *presentation* of the lesson material in the recitation must be such that its full effect is brought to bear upon the mind and heart of those we teach.

Each of these four points will be further elaborated in the chapters which follow. In fact, the remainder of the text is chiefly a working out and applying of these fundamental principles to the teaching of religion.

1. To what extent would you say you have been directing your teaching toward a definite aim? Just how does the problem of this chapter relate itself to the preceding chapter on the "Great Objective"?

2. Do you think the majority of those who have come up through the church school possess as full and definite a knowledge of the Bible and the fundamentals of religion as we have a right to expect? If not, where is the trouble and what the remedy?

3. Have you been consciously emphasizing the creation of right attitudes as one of the chief outcomes of your teaching? Do you judge that you are as successful in the developing of religious attitudes as in imparting information? If not, can you find a remedy?

4. To what extent do you think your instruction is actually carrying over into the immediate life and conduct of your class in their home, school, etc.? If not to so great an extent as you could wish, are you willing to make this one of the great aims of your teaching from this time on, seeking earnestly throughout this text and in other ways to learn how this may be done?

5. Do you on the whole feel that the subject matter you are teaching your pupils is adapted to the aims you seek to reach in their lives? If not, how can you supplement and change to make it more effective? Have you a broad enough knowledge of such material yourself so that you can select material from other sources for them?

6. To what extent do you definitely plan each lesson for the particular children you teach so as to make it most accessible to their interest and grasp? Do you plan each lesson to secure a psychological mode of approach? How do you know when you have a psychological approach?

FOR FURTHER READING

Betts, Class-Room Method and Management, Part I.
Coe, A Social Theory of Religious Education, Part II.
DuBois, The Point of Contact in Teaching.

CHAPTER IV
RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE OF MOST WORTH

The child comes into the world devoid of all knowledge and understanding. His mind, though at the beginning a blank, is a potential seedbed in which we may plant what teachings we will. The babe born into our home to-day can with equal ease be made into a Christian, a Buddhist, or a Mohammedan. He brings with him the instinct to respond to the appeal religion makes to his life, but the kind and quality of his religion will depend largely on the religious atmosphere he breathes and the religious ideas and concepts placed in his mind through instruction and training.

What, then, shall we teach our children, in religion? If fruitful knowledge is to be one of the chief aims of our teaching, *what* knowledge shall we call fruitful? What are the great foundations on which a Christian life must rest? Years ago Spencer wrote a brilliant essay on *knowledge of most worth* in the field of general education. What knowledge is of most worth in the field of religious education? For not all knowledge, as we have seen, is of equal value. Some religious knowledge is fruitful because it *can be set at work* to shape our attitudes and guide our acts; other religious knowledge is relatively fruitless because it *finds no point of contact* with experience.

To answer our question we must therefore ask: "What knowledge will serve to guide the child's foot-steps aright from day to day as he passes through his childhood? What truths will even now, while he is still a child, awaken his spiritual appreciation and touch the springs of his emotional response to the heavenly Father? What religious concepts, once developed, will lead the youth into a rich fullness of personal experience and develop in him the will and capacity to serve others? What religious knowledge will finally make most certain a life of loyalty to the church and the great cause for which it stands?" When we can answer these questions we shall then be able to say what knowledge is of most worth in the religious training of our children.

THE CHILD'S CONCEPT OF GOD

The child must come to know about God, even as a little child. Long before he can understand about *religion*, he can learn about a heavenly Father. This does not imply that the child (or that we ourselves!) can know God in any full or complete way. Indeed, a God who could be known in his entirety by even the deepest and wisest finite mind would be no God at all. Yet everyone must give some meaning to God. Everyone does have some more or less definite idea, image, or mental picture of the God he thinks about, prays to, and worships.

The child's idea of God develops gradually.—We need not be concerned that God does not mean the same to the child with his mental limitations that he means to us. Meaning comes only out of experience, and this will grow. The great thing is that the child's fundamental concept of God shall start right, that in so far as it goes it shall be essentially true, and that it shall be clear and definite enough to guide his actions. More than this we cannot ask for; less than this does not give the child a God real enough to be a vital factor and an active force in his life.

It is to be expected, then, that the child's earliest concepts of God will be faulty and incomplete, and that in many points they will later need correction. Probably most children first think of God as having human form and attributes; the idea of spirit is beyond their grasp. God is to them a kind of magnified and glorified Father after the type of their earthly father. This need not concern us if we make sure that the crude beginnings of the God-idea have no disturbing elements in them, and that as the concept grows it moves in the right direction.

The harm from false concepts.—Mr. H.G. Wells[2] bitterly complains against the wrong concept of God that was allowed to grow in his mind as a child. These are his words: "He and his hell were the nightmare of my childhood.... I thought of him as a fantastic monster perpetually waiting to condemn and to strike me dead!… He was over me and about my silliness and forgetfulness as the sky and sea would be about a child drowning in mid-Atlantic." It was only as the child grew into youth, and was able to discard this false idea of God that he came to feel right toward him.

The harm done a child by false and disturbing concepts of God is hard to estimate. A small boy recently came home from Sunday school and confided to his mother that he "didn't think it was fair for God to spy on a fellow!" A sympathetic inquiry by the mother revealed the fact that the impression brought from the lesson hour was of God keeping a lookout for our wrongdoings and sins, and constantly making a record of them against us, as an unsympathetic teacher might in school. The beneficent and watchful oversight and care of God had not entered into the concept.

It is clear that with this wrong understanding of God's relation to him the child's attitude and the response of his heart toward God could not be right. The lesson hour which left so false an impression of God in the child's mind did him lasting injury instead of good.

How wrong concepts may arise.—Pierre Loti tells in his reminiscences of his own child-life how he went out into the back yard and threw stones at God because it had rained and spoiled the picnic day. In his teaching, God had been made responsible for the weather, and the boy had come to look upon prayer as a means of getting what he wanted from God. It took many years of experience to rid the child's mind of the last vestiges of these false ideas. The writer recalls a troublesome idea of God that inadvertently secured lodgment in his own mind through the medium of a picture in his first geography. In the section on China was the representation of a horrid, malignant looking idol underneath which was printed the words, "A God." For many years the image of this picture was associated with the thought of God, and made it hard to respond to the concept of God's beauty, goodness, and kindness.

Wrong concepts of God may leave positive antagonisms which require years to overcome. A little girl of nearly four years had just lost her father. She did not understand the funeral and the flowers and the burial. She came to her mother in the evening and asked where her papa was. The stricken mother replied that "God had taken him."

"But when is he coming back?" asked the child.

The mother answered that he could not come back.

"Not ever?" persisted the child.

"Not ever," whispered the mother.

"Won't God let him?" asked the relentless questioner.

The heart-broken mother hesitated for a word of wisdom, but finally answered, "No, God will not let him come back to us."

Care and wisdom needed.—And in that moment the harm was done. The child had formed a wrong concept of God as one who would willfully take away her father and not let him return. She burst out in a fit of passion: "I don't like God! He takes my papa and keeps him away."

That night she refused to say her prayer, and for weeks remained rebellious and unforgiving toward the God whom she accused of having robbed her of her father. How should the mother have answered her child's question? I cannot tell in just what words, but the words in which we answer the child's questions must be chosen with such infinite care and wisdom that bitterness shall not take the place which love toward God should occupy in the heart.

Another typical difficulty is that children are often led to think of God as a distant God. A favorite Sunday school hymn sings of "God above the great blue sky." To many children God is "in heaven," and heaven is localized at an immeasurable distance. Hence the fact of God's nearness is

[2] God the Invisible King, p. 44.

wholly missed. Children come to think of God as seated on a great white throne, an aged, austere, and severe Person, more an object of fear than of love. And then we tell the children that they "must love God," forgetting that love never comes from a sense of duty or compulsion, but springs, when it appears, spontaneously from the heart because it is compelled by lovable traits and appealing qualities in the one to be loved!

The concept of God which the child needs.—The concept of God which the child first needs, therefore, is God as loving Father, expecting obedience and trust from his children; God as inviting Friend; God as friendly Protector; God ever near at hand; God who can understand and sympathize with children and enter into their joys and sorrows; God as Creator, in the sunshine and the flowers; but above all, God filling the heart with love and gladness. The concept which the child needs of Jesus is of his surpassing goodness, his unselfish courage, and his loving service. All religious teaching which will lead to such concepts as these is grounding the child in knowledge that is rich and fruitful, for it is making God and Christ *real* to him. All teaching which leads to false concepts is an obstacle in the way of spiritual development.

THE CHILD'S CONCEPT OF RELIGION

Gradually throughout his training the child should be forming a clear concept of religion and the part it is to play in the life. This cannot come through any formal definition, nor through any set of precepts. It must be a growth, stimulated by instruction, guided by wise counsel, given depth of meaning through the lives of strong men and women who express the Christian ideal in their daily living.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.