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The Religious Day School

REV. HOWARD R. VAUGHN

President, The Bible Teachers' Association of Northwest Wisconsin

"It would be impossible to make any headway in day school with the best teachers and a perfect curriculum, if we could only have the children thirty minutes a week." This remark, made by a very able high school teacher, expressed a fact self evident to any thoughtful person.

There are three essentials in every educational process which the Sunday School can never supply. One of these is time. The very name of the Sunday School reveals its first limitation. It is a school which convenes but once each week. A second essential is work. The Sunday School meets on a rest day, not on a work day. Everything invites to rest. It is not thinkable that either the children or the parents will ever consent to turn it into a real work day and attend a school which does serious work for several hours at a time. A third essential in any educational process is continuity. This is absolutely necessary to the child mind. The lack of continuity in the Sunday School, caused by that break of seven days between each lesson is a limitation for which there is no remedy. No curriculum, however rich, no teaching force, however efficient and consecrated, can ever bring two Sundays closer together, nor shorten that chasm between the two lessons.

The difficulties in the Sunday School are essential and constitutional; they are not in any sense incidental. The Sunday School was not intended by its founders to become the sole or even the principal factor in the religious education of the young. That work was supposed to be done by the home, the day school and by other agencies employed by the church. To place this responsibility upon the Sunday School is in the highest degree unfair and unreasonable.

The problem of religious education is not essentially different from that of general education. The processes are identical.

If we can solve the one, we can also solve the other ; but we can solve neither without the expenditure of time, money and thought. To attempt to impart to the child anything like a symmetrical education in the great field of religious truth, by a half hour lesson once in seven days, is simply to involve the mind in confusion.

The religious day school is but a step in the solution of the problem. It is only a very short step, but it is a real step. It is in all essentials the exact counterpart of the public school with the exception of the curriculum. That of course is religious. It is held in church every day except Sunday for from one to two weeks, during the summer vacation. A successful day school teacher is employed at fair wages. The atmosphere is serious, one of work. The pupils come for work and for no other purpose. Their ages vary from six to over twenty years old. The school opens with twenty minutes of music, and devotion. During this period the students commit to memory the words of some of the noblest hymns in the language. Then follows regular class work. The following are some of the subjects taught: Church History, Home and Foreign Missions, the Bible, Christian Teachings, a daily lesson in some of the cardinal Christian virtues, such as honesty, temperance, promptness, etc. We are seriously handicapped for the want of suitable text books, but that is not an insuperable difficulty. The teacher makes her own lessons in the absence of the text book, teaching the lesson one day and having the pupil recite on the next. Text books are coming and we are finding out what we need by actual experience.

The following are a few of the results achieved by the religious day school: First, The school is a possibility. It is no longer an experiment. It has met with uniform success during the eight years of its history. Second, It has demonstrated the fact that the child will apply himself to the careful, accurate study of religious themes, without pressure or compulsion. This he has done with a much greater enthusiasm than he will evince in any other line of mental effort. Third, The average child will learn fully as much in the religious day school in two weeks, by consecutive study, under the leadership of a trained teacher, as he will learn in the average Sunday School in eighteen months. Fourth, He acquires the habit of close mental application to re-

ligious themes. It is a fact which careful and extensive observation clearly corroborates that the Sunday School lessons are generally not learned. It is the exceptional child in the exceptional class who applies himself to the study of the Sunday School lesson. The religious day school keeps the child intellectually employed on religious themes for ten days, the result is he has acquired an entirely new method of approach to religious subjects. This is one of the most important results achieved. Its effect upon the Sunday School is just like a tonic. In a few cases the religious day school has made it possible to have an efficient Sunday School, where previously it was hardly possible for one to exist. The very best prescription that I know for a sick Sunday School is a two weeks' session of a religious day school, under an efficient teacher, or teachers. And the very best receipt that I can offer for the forming of a Sunday School where none exists, is a religious day school.

A Ritual for Family Religion

The Home Department of the Religious Education Association is attempting to prepare a ritual which shall be helpful in the religious life of the family. It proposes to have contained therein selections from the Bible, prayers and hymns for use in family prayers; graces for the table; provision for the celebration of family festivals; and suggestions for memory work, both from the Bible and from other religious literature. They will be very glad to receive suggestions in any one or all of these directions from those who have had experience along these lines. They want passages of scripture that are known to have interested and held a meaning for children, hymns that children enjoy, and that are good in both words and music, forms of prayer that are truly worshipful and reverential, some for the use of children, some for adults.

All such contributions will be very gratefully received. They may be sent to the Secretary of the Department, Mrs. Andrew MacLeish, Glencoe, Illinois.