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On: 15 January 2015, At: 15:25

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK

Religious Education: The official journal of the Religious Education Association

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/urea20>

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Published online: 10 Jul 2006.

To cite this article: Sarah Elizabeth Bundy (1922) New Possibilities For Adult Classes, Religious Education: The official journal of the Religious Education Association, 17:5, 378-381, DOI: [10.1080/0034408220170505](https://doi.org/10.1080/0034408220170505)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0034408220170505>

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New Possibilities For Adult Classes

SARAH ELIZABETH BUNDY*

One of the most pathetic sights in our High Sierras of California is a giant Sequoia withering at its crown. Naturalists explain this by the fact that the sap has been insufficient to force its way to the topmost branches. One of the saddest phases of our church school life is the corresponding lack of fresh growth in the older departments. This may be explained by similar lack of vitality in the organization as a whole. Like a tree, a church school must grow from its roots up but, although even a Luther Burbank could not graft new life upon the crests of those giant Sequoias, a wise Director of Religious Education can infuse the adult department with new strength and purpose.

Many a school with a fairly well-graded Elementary Division still permits its Intermediate, Senior and Adult Divisions to labor on with the Uniform Lessons. Small wonder that the branches either shrivel or fall off entirely. Much needs to be said about the high school and young people's division, but this article is concerned only with the adult class.

In the first place, why an adult class? When it seems increasingly difficult to bring older folk to regular church services, what justification can there be for drawing them out to an adult session? While in many churches the pure lecture, which is virtually an additional sermon, constitutes the only *raison d'être* of the adult class, the writer firmly believes that less argument exists for that than for the class which sincerely seeks to develop expression rather than accept more impression. Albeit the lecture method has its supporters among those who wish further knowledge of the Bible or religious topics, but claim busy-ness as an excuse for lack of study on their own part, the greatest possible benefit derivable from such a class is denied mere auditors.

In addition to its value from the expressional side, the adult class often tends to stimulate church interest and to develop social intercourse or—best of all—to promote a definite service activity in behalf of the community. Indeed, whatever its course of study, the group will secure one of its greatest gains from a worthy project of that kind. Underlying these activities must always be, however, a valued program for the class-hour itself, or the members will not be held permanently together. Each class will find it best to choose a course of study in relation to its own needs. Many a larger church will grade its adult department as carefully as some of the lower divisions. It is an exceptional church, indeed, which does not possess in its constituency for such a division those whose interests vary from "regular Sunday-school lessons" to the study of anything of modern interest. Surely the needs and to a large extent the desires of these diverse groups should be met. Have one class following the Uniform Series, if they still believe those are the only "regular Sunday School lessons," but do not handicap the other element wishing to select from the long list of available electives.

Because even in the best regulated churches those electives seem so little known, an annotated bibliography follows. From these possibilities

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a group may plan a continuous course or shorter series of lessons. Above all, let us avoid merely detached topics with no continuity from week to week. The courses suggested are drawn from the International Graded Series, Scribner's, University of Chicago Press, Woman's Press, Y. M. C. A. courses and Macmillan's lists. Division under the various topics will suggest the range of subject matter. Care may well be exercised in selection from year to year from different groups, in order that breadth of vision may be developed.

I. STUDIES ABOUT THE BIBLE

1. Hodges—"How to Know the Bible" (Bobbs Merrill)

A popular presentation dealing with the making of the books and including an analysis of the various sections, showing the relationship of the parts to the whole.

2. Fifield—"How to Use the Bible" (Woman's Press)

A textbook seeking to provide a guide to Bible study, rather than the results of such study. Six chapters with questions at the end of each.

The two foregoing texts could be happily used in conjunction with further collateral reading from such books as Smythe's "The Bible in the Making," Gladden's "Who Wrote the Bible?", and Watson's "God's Message to the Human Soul."

3. Goodspeed—"The Story of the New Testament" (University of Chicago)

An admirable text for studying the reasons for and content of these twenty-seven books.

II. STUDIES OF THE BIBLE

1. Kent—"Historical Bible" (Scribner)

In six volumes, this series follows the unfolding from the beginnings of human history through the work and teachings of the Apostles. Every lesson contains selections from the biblical text, with comments by the author and general questions, as well as subjects for further research. Each volume would provide a full year's study.

2. Sanders—"History of the Hebrews" (Scribner)

For use in collaboration with Sanders' and Sherman's "How to Study the Old Testament," this text guides the student admirably into Old Testament history and thinking. Like others of the foregoing, it will serve as valuable collateral for the teachers, but might likewise be used as a class text.

3. Course XIII—International Graded Series—"The History and Literature of the Hebrew People" and

Course XIV—"The History of New Testament Times"

Both of these courses although designated for students younger than the usual adult group have proven exceedingly usable among older folk.

III. SOCIAL STUDIES OF THE BIBLE

1. Course XV—International Graded Series—"The Bible and Social Living"

Dealing with the social aspects of Bible teaching, this course designed for young people of twenty-four years of age has proven stimulating to older groups.

2. Holt—"The Bible as a Community Book" (Woman's Press)

An interpretation of the Bible which relates to community interest and traces the pioneer achievements of the Hebrews along those lines. There is an instructor's guide book available with this.

3. Calkins—"The Social Message of the Book of Revelation" (Woman's Press)

A new and searching interpretation of that much misunderstood book.

4. Kent & Jenks—"The Making of a Nation" and "The Testing of a Nation's Ideals" (Scribner)

Provision for two years' study of the early period of the nation and the

epoch of the Prophets. The course particularly aims to show the inseparable relationship of Hebrew problems to those of modern social conditions.

IV. STUDIES ABOUT JESUS CHRIST

(Many of the foregoing include this in the general surveys of the Bible, as for example Volume 5 in the "Historical Bible," by Kent, but the following deal exclusively with this topic.)

1. E. I. Bosworth—"*Studies in the Life of Jesus Christ*" (Association Press)
An exceptionally clear and sympathetic interpretation.
2. Adams—"*The Mind of the Messiah*" (Woman's Press)
A well arranged course of 20 lessons, guiding the student's study of the four Gospels.
3. Fosdick—"*The Manhood of the Master*"
A course arranged for daily readings and weekly comment which has been widely popular.
4. Holmes—"*Jesus and the Young Man of Today*" (Macmillan)
Another course of daily readings which give a very modern and fearless interpretation, relating the experiences of Jesus to those of young men of today.

V. THE SOCIAL MESSAGE OF CHRISTIANITY

1. Kent & Jenks—"*Jesus' Principles of Living*" (Scribner)
Well adapted to a year's course in considering the application of those principles to modern conditions.
2. Rauschenbusch—"*The Social Principles of Jesus*" (Association Press)
One of the College Voluntary Study Courses adaptable to older groups. Following the daily reading and weekly summary method, it challenges the solution of present-day social economic problems in the light of His teaching.
3. Fosdick—"*The Meaning of Service*" (Association Press)
The latest volume from this popular writer which completes the trilogy. In some respects the most original and stimulating of his courses.
4. "*What is the Christian View of Work and Wealth?*" (Association Press)
A most stimulating discussion course prepared by a commission of the Federal Council with cooperating agencies. The ten chapters relate concretely to modern problems with exceedingly arresting questions and quotation of current opinion on the various issues.

VI. STUDIES ON FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

1. Fosdick—"*The Meaning of Prayer*" (Association Press)
Arranged in daily readings.
2. Fosdick—"*The Meaning of Faith*" (Association Press)
Following the same form as the above, these two volumes will inevitably deepen one's personal religion.
3. Cook—"*Christian Faith for Men of Today*" (University of Chicago)
Usable in a mature group with an exceptionally well qualified leader.

VII. STUDIES IN COMPARATIVE RELIGIONS

1. Soper—"*The Faiths of Mankind*" (Association Press)
Arranged in daily divisions, this text approaches the topic in an elementary way.
2. Barton—"*The Religions of the World*" (University of Chicago)
A more thorough-going study less well adapted to class use, but suggestive for the leader.

VIII. TEACHER TRAINING

No Adult Department can afford to be without some provision for this need. In addition to the Standard Training Course,* the following are suggested as attractive alternatives:

1. Horne—"*Jesus, the Master Teacher*" (Association Press)

An outline study of twenty-seven lessons, involving thorough study of the teaching method followed by Jesus and leading the student directly to a personal analysis of the Gospels.

2. Graves—*"What Did Jesus Teach?"* (Macmillan)

This volume includes an examination of the material as well as the method employed.

3. Betts—*"How to Teach Religion"* (Abingdon Press)

Probably the best text in print on principles and methods.

*The training-course text books, both elementary and advanced, published by the different denominational houses, should be examined in every case. Send to one or more of these houses for complete lists. The texts above are in addition to such standard courses.

IX. PARENTS' CLASSES

Untold possibilities in this department await development by the church that will realize its full responsibilities in guiding parenthood. Many of the teacher-training courses, especially the third year specialization texts, properly will be introduced into this department. The wealth of material makes possible the grading of parents' classes in accordance with the ages of the children whose destiny, in such large measure, the fathers and mothers direct. Only certain general courses that have proven their usefulness are included below:

1. St. John—*"Child Nature and Child Nurture"* (Pilgrim Press)

Twenty-six lessons which provoke discussion of means for training the child in respect to his physical, mental, social and moral nature. The author avoids the merely theoretical and considers practical questions in a most helpful way.

2. Cope—*"Religious Education in the Family"* (University of Chicago Press)

This text in the series of Constructive Studies first discusses the present status of family life, making clear the ideal elements which must remain; and then proceeds to such vital topics as "Family Worship," "The Ministry of the Table," "Stories and Reading," "Dealing with Moral Crises," and so forth. It is a book guaranteed to stimulate discussion which should lead to permanent values.

3. Cope—*"The Parent and the Child"* (Doran Co.)

A newer book than the foregoing, which provides "case studies in the problems of parenthood." The study questions at the end of each chapter as well as the direct approach to typical concrete problems are calculated to result in their more intelligent solution.

4. Hartshorne—*"Childhood and Character"* (Pilgrim Press)

Although designed primarily for teachers its introduction to the unfolding religion of childhood will enlighten any parent.

5. Forbush—*"Child Nature and Child Training"* (Scribner's)

The course is definitely directed towards a wiser parenthood. Laboratory method of observation and experimentation is encouraged after the foundation principles have been accepted and understood.

X. MISSION STUDY COURSES.

Courses for the current year as well as selection from those of previous publication are always available.

The list above might be almost indefinitely extended. Indeed, a number of admirable texts published by the University of Chicago Press, Scribner's, and the Association Press are omitted for lack of space. The length of this list, however, serves at least to indicate that no adult class need limit itself to the use of Uniform Lessons for lack of alternatives. Countless examples could be cited of new life infused into the old organization by adoption of a stimulating course of study. We may well adopt the horticulturist's method of grafting on fresh vitality in this way. A committee may be delegated to investigate certain of these courses and to make recommendation to an individual class. Often publishers will send texts for examination if they are not locally available.