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Rev. William H. Boocock ^a

^a Director of Religions Education , First Presbyterian Church , Buffalo, N. Y.

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DIRECTORS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

A DISCUSSION OF SOME OF THEIR PROBLEMS

REV. WILLIAM H. BOOCOCK

*Director of Religious Education, First Presbyterian Church,
Buffalo, N. Y.*

There are now in the United States and Canada approximately one hundred Directors of Religious Education in local churches. Each of these has his specific and peculiar problems, determined by the conditions of his local field. No one can know these so well as the man himself. But there are certain common problems which arise from the nature of our work and which are inevitable in the present stage of its development. The solution of these problems may be hastened by some discussion of them.

Let me, however, preface the mention of some of these by two remarks of a general character.

The first has to do with the aim and method of our work and the second with its spirit. In the more technical discussion of our work, these two things are taken for granted, as belonging to the rudiments of our task, and yet I think they should be prevented from dropping out of sight by frequent mention and special emphasis.

Surely the aim of our work as directors ought to be clearly defined in our own mind. Each one probably has his own statement of his purpose and aim. The statement I personally prefer is this: The development of lives of the Christian type, instructed, trained, and consecrated to the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth. And our method is, of course, to make wise use of all available educational agencies which will contribute to that result: atmosphere, environment, personal influence, art, music, instruction in religious knowledge, and training in Christian service. The three conspicuous features of our work are training in Christian worship, instruction in religious truth, and training in Christian service.

The second prefatory remark concerns our spirit. What should that be? Toward God it must be devotional, spiritual, prayerful, reverent, obedient—in a word, religious. No machinery in the hands of an unreligious person can produce religion in others. Religion cannot be taught unless at the same time it is caught. And toward the pupils under our care our spirit must be one of personal and genuinely affectionate interest in individuals. There can be no substitute for this. Character is not a machine product. So

much of our thought is necessarily given to educational methods and devices that we are always in danger of losing sight of the end in the means, of forgetting the person in the machinery. When the school is so large as to make it impossible to know and be interested in each person, the importance of this personal self-giving should be kept before the minds of the teachers.

Conceding that these personal problems are fundamental and should not be overlooked, let us go on to consider others less personal, but important.

1. In attempting to conduct a school on an educational basis, one problem that immediately confronts all but the most favored is the architectural problem. I need not do more than mention this. Until recently the church meant chiefly the worshipping congregation of adults. The adult was prominent in the thought of the architect and the minister. Gradually the child is coming to his true place in the life of the church. But the process is slow. A steadily increasing number of churches, however, are providing suitable buildings and material equipment for efficient educational work. In some instances the school building offers opportunities for recreation and club life. But most of us have to do the best we can with inadequate and unsuitable rooms and equipment. How to do good work under these conditions or how to secure better accommodations—these are the two horns of the architectural problem.

2. Another problem, arising from the nature of our work, as we conceive of it, is that it is relatively new, and like all new movements it finds the ground occupied and the time preëmpted with other interests. The historic and traditional methods of the church have the right of way, and, though some of these may be losing in power and effectiveness, they still persist and offer resistance to newer methods which on theoretical grounds seem to hold out the promise of larger returns. The problem then is twofold: When the pulpit and the usual agencies of publicity are burdened with other interests, how make the members of the church acquainted with our purposes and methods, and so to secure more time and greater sympathetic and, in some instances, better personal and financial support for our work.

3. Another problem is that of effective correlation of the various agencies employed in educational work. It is quite easy to work out an ideal plan on paper, but it is not so easy, under the complex and perplexing local conditions, to actualize your plan. When the church can get the young people two hours or two and one-half hours a week, part of the time can be devoted to worship,

and part given to instruction, and part to training for service; but in many country churches, on account of distance from the home, and in many city schools, on account of crowded programs, it is impossible to get the children more than once a week. The problem then is how to correlate the various agencies in use as best to promote the end in view. Should we not at once recognize the impossibility of doing this without more time? Why not have a longer session of the school, and combine in one session the three main features of our work?

At different times and places efforts have been made to secure from the state some of the time now used for secular instruction, say, one afternoon a week or one hour each day. Such an effort is deserving of support by all who are concerned for the religious and moral training of youth. The offer made to the churches by the schools of Gary, Indiana, has attracted the attention of educators, and the working out of the plan will be watched with interest.

But would not the request of the church for more time for religious education come with more force if the churches could show that they are making a full and wise use of the time which is already theirs? When the church allows the golden hours of Sunday morning to pass by unutilized for educational purposes, and relegates this important work to one brief, breathless hour at the hungry end of the morning, the church can hardly ask for more time with good grace. In our own church we have been trying this year the experiment of a two-hour-and-a-half school for the junior and intermediate pupils. The juniors assemble at 10 o'clock in the chapel for worship. Fifteen minutes is spent in practicing the best hymns, one of which is the memory hymn for the month. These hymns are selected with much care. There is also a carefully chosen or prepared memory prayer for the month, and the next ten minutes are spent in learning that. Then follows the service of worship proper. It is conducted in a reverent manner, and the young people participate in every part of the service. The program is changed each month. At the conclusion of the devotional service the children form a procession and pass through the church into the Sunday school room. The first half hour is spent in teaching the children the lesson of the day; during the second half hour the children give back the lesson in note book work, with illustrations; and the third half hour is usually spent in work for others. We have a paid professional teacher in charge of each grade.

4. Another problem of directors is the problem of curriculum. Each of the four or five major lesson systems has its own peculiar

excellences and defects. The ideal system, prepared by the collaboration of the competent Biblical scholar, the child psychologist, and the practical and successful grade teacher, has not yet appeared. What we need is an adequate course of lessons based on a correct principle, and graded programs of expressional activity. In the teaching of the young we must adopt a single principle. At present we are proceeding on a dual principle: we are endeavoring to nurture the child in the religious life, and we are trying to teach the Bible. The underlying assumption is that if we teach the Bible we shall nurture the religious life. But that is not necessarily true. It depends upon what portions of the Bible are taught and how they are taught. My conviction is that we must frankly adopt a single principle, viz: that of the religious nurture of the child or youth, and that the material should be selected solely with reference to its value to promote that end. This material will be taken chiefly, but by no means exclusively, from the Bible. The purpose will determine the choice. And the study and interpretation of the Bible as a body of literature containing a progressive revelation of God, with the interpretative problems involved, will be deferred until the senior or adult period, when the student has attained some degree of mental maturity. My thought is that the subject of instruction throughout the Sunday school should be one subject, viz: God and His revelations. In the kindergarten and primary periods, chiefly the revelation of God in nature; in the junior period, the revelation of God in typical events in the Bible and, to some extent, out of the Bible, which have marked epochs in the advance of the Kingdom; in the intermediate period, the revelation of God in and through great and noble lives, and supremely, of course, in the personality of Jesus Christ, our Lord; and in the senior period, the revelation of God in great truths, scientific and religious, and perhaps also in institutions. As the result of such instruction, the pupil ought to become increasingly conscious of God in the life of the world, and be able to recognize Him whenever and wherever He is to be seen and heard.

In the young people's societies or training school, the chief purpose should be to inculcate the spirit of service and to train young people as individuals and groups actually to serve. But in connection with such training some incidental instruction will be necessary, and this should be, I think, on one subject also, viz: The Kingdom of God. In the primary period the child should be taught and trained so to act in the home—his predominant environment at that age—that his conduct will help to make the home a section of the

Kingdom of God; in the junior period he should be taught and trained so that he may contribute his share to making the day school and play circle what God wishes them to be; in the intermediate period the next stage in the widening environment would be the church and community life, and the purpose of making these realms an actual part of the realized Kingdom of God should determine the instruction and training; and finally in the senior department pupils should be so taught and directed as to enter heartily into efforts for the Christianizing of our country and world. As a result of such instruction and training, the pupil ought to have his senses exercised to detect the presence or absence of the Kingdom of God in a human life or a social group, and, believing that all the kingdoms of this world are potentially the Kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, to coöperate with God and good men to make them actually his.

The problem here, then, is that of securing better correlated and more effective curricula of instruction and programs of expressional activity.

5. Then there is the problem of teacher selection and training. In some schools the newer methods will call for a change in the kind of teachers. A more careful selection of teachers, with reference to their fitness for the task, should displace the purely volunteer method. When the funds of a church permit, the problem of teacher training is simplified by engaging paid professional teachers. Where that is not possible, each director can only do the best he can under peculiarly difficult and complex conditions. What is needed in every community is an adequate training school for Christian workers and teachers. The problem is to secure that, or, for the present, to find a way of instructing and training the teachers in a local church. No one, so far as I know, has solved that problem.

6. Then, finally, there is the parent problem. Every worker in the field of religious education realizes that, without the interest and coöperation of the parents, the church, with its limited time and equipment, must come short in its religious nurture of the young. But how to awaken this interest and secure helpful coöperation is the problem. Some parents, of course, are interested and are doing the best they know, but confess themselves in need of guidance and suggestion. Some feel they ought to do something, but not knowing what to do, do nothing. Here is the church's opportunity to help. But the great majority of parents are undoubtedly indifferent to the Sunday school, and feel no sense of

responsibility to help in its work. Now what can the director do in the presence of this situation? Something perhaps can be done by keeping the parents informed of the aim and methods of the school, of the progress of the pupil in the school. Something more may be done by occasional exhibits, by visitation, by joint gatherings of teachers and parents, and by parents' classes. It is easy to enumerate these things, but the amount of work involved in carrying these plans through successfully is, in view of other claims upon one's time, often prohibitive; yet, when given, the results, while far from being all one could wish, fully justify the effort.

THE PUBLIC SCHOOL AS A FACTOR IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

W. J. KNOX, M.A.

Presbyterian Commission on Religious Education, Toronto, Canada

Every problem which demands our attention to-day is naturally looked at in the lurid light shed by that death struggle which is raging in Europe and which is wielding its blighting influence in every portion of the globe. At a time like this the truth of certain principles is laid bare with such a clearness that "he may run that readeth." Germany stands before the world as a nation from whose educational life the soul of true religion has gone out. This fundamental lack explains her unbridled lust for power and dominion, her unpardonable breach of faith and her ruthless disregard for the rights of a small and almost defenceless nation. There was no lack of scholarship or intellectual development. From the point of view of technical skill and scientific knowledge Germany had no superior. Her fatal blunder was that she let slip the essential thing—the education of that spiritual element in the soul of man which through meekness, reverence, and humility links him to God. The education of the physical power, of the intellect, of the will, and of the æsthetic nature will not suffice to produce a truly great nation or a really great man. The training of these faculties which man holds in common with the brute will not necessarily make the man anything but brutish. Such training in itself will merely fit him to become a greater menace to his fellows and to prey more successfully upon them. There can be no true education without the leading out, in ever more complete realization, of the spiritual