

SHOULD PROFESSIONAL AND SALARIED TEACHERS
BE EMPLOYED IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL ?

A SYMPOSIUM.

THE Bible school, avoiding technical research, should provide for Bible study by every person, no matter what his grade of intellect, or attainment. Only so can it hold its present members, and reach many now indifferent to prevalent ideals and methods. This mission, mostly unconscious, can be met only by qualified teachers. The instructor is the main factor in educational movements. The system dominant for a generation has not graduated teachers competent for even such imperfect work as satisfies its admirers. Shall qualified teachers be secured (*a*) by the slow development of the Bible school, or (*b*) by training in professional schools with a view to salaried employment ?

The difficulties of the latter are : (*a*) scarcity of openings for trained workers, because of lack of time for, or interest in, thorough study ; (*b*) the problem of compensation ; and (*c*) the conservatism which always resists innovations in the religious realm.

The dangers are : (*a*) a possible increase of the spirit of commercialism in Christian service ; must all work be paid for, and the benevolence of talent discouraged ? and (*b*) the introduction of professionalism into a field which personal consecration has hitherto monopolized.

The secular school is without these problems and dangers. What it offers is deemed a necessity. What the Bible school offers is a spiritual privilege, appreciated only by those whose hearts thirst for it. Attendance on one, from its relation to the daily secular life, is almost compulsory, but on the other optional. A period of life is wholly surrendered to one for mandatory reasons, while the other touches life intermittently, and only by consent. Education in one is considered essential,

but in the other unessential, however desirable. These radical differences, in their function and estimation, make application of the ideals of the one to the other only distantly approximate.

The advantages of trained teachers are: (*a*) better knowledge of the Scriptures; (*b*) acquisition of correct processes of study; (*c*) emphasis on the meaning of "school" as a place for study, rather than a shoal; (*d*) normally, the training of pupils to become teachers; and (*e*) a richer spiritual culture than that produced by faulty form and substance of teaching.

Our opportune question is: Shall we wait for, or anticipate, the demand for such teachers? Few schools are ready for them. Adherence to conventional conceptions, or financial considerations, or the school's personnel, explain the attitude of the majority. The work practicable under these conditions is the awakening of enthusiasm for genuine Bible study. (*a*) The wise pastor, who himself pursues it, must, in sermons, conferences with teachers and scholars, personal conversation, and his own intellectual habits, convince others of its relation to, and value for, the Christian life. Otherwise he has no excuse for holding his office. (*b*) An interested group in any church may leaven the entire membership. (*c*) The few measurably qualified to use better methods should administer their trust by working in the school. (*d*) Exchange of inferior for superior lesson systems, and distribution of general literature upon this subject, will greatly stimulate this interest.

Traditional conceptions are far too pervasive to justify the optimist's belief that many members of the church or Bible school desire trained instructors enough to pay for them. The minority, as usual, are in the van. An earnest few are harbingers of the crescent revival in Bible study which promises more for the spiritual health of the church than all previous awakenings. We must follow God's plan in history, and do the best we can with the material at our disposal, in the hope of the better day.

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The Sunday school, from an educational standpoint, has not been regarded as seriously as it ought to be. Your question whether professional salaried instruction should gain prominence in the Sunday school emphasizes that fact, and the answer might be given under the caption "yes" and "no."

1. *Yes*, for the great forward movement in child-study and religious education involves preëminently a more thorough knowledge and a more systematic study of the Bible. One of the ways to accomplish this is to raise up a class of professional teachers, as are required and provided in secular schools, who will be thoroughly trained in biblical study in schools adapted, and not ground out of some mill; who have not the form simply, but the spirit and an earnest purpose; and who will have reasonable assurance that the church recognizes its responsibility in this direction, and will offer proper remuneration for the service rendered.

It can best be inaugurated by beginning in some of the larger churches and with the heads of departments; for example, the superintendent of the main school and of the primary department, possibly also of the intermediate grade, and teachers of the Bible classes, particularly of the two former, part of whose weekday work should be the raising up and training of voluntary teachers who will always be needed in these departments. This is already in operation to some extent in some schools, and with excellent results. In some instances it is coupled with other service, and should be in the case of paid service—a kind of assistant pastor with other responsibilities, as personal visitation, special meetings, etc. In such cases paid service could be made very useful, and I would be heartily in favor of it. It is quite likely that much would be demanded of such persons, and for this reason salaries might well be paid. This would help to demonstrate whether it should become general throughout the whole school or not. Such professionally trained teachers would stimulate the teaching work of the minister, and tend to bring about a graded system of lessons, systematically covering the whole Bible, which have in them the incentive of promotion. It would arouse a missionary spirit and help to attract to the

Sunday-school youth between seventeen and twenty-three years of age, and members of the church and congregation of maturer years. The church pays its singers (though by no means are they always satisfactory), musicians, and ministers sometimes even extravagant salaries; and I cannot see any good reason why the heads of departments at least, in the Sunday school where Bible instruction is given, should not be treated in the same way.

2. *No*, if it means mere mercenary professionalism. There must be heart, the spirit of self-sacrifice and of a great saving purpose, in it. An eminent divine has said recently: "It seems to me that the curse and bane of church and state is mercenariness—unwillingness to do any service without being paid for it—the notion that all work and influence must be paid for in money. This is affecting the church life." It does not, however, necessarily follow that professional salaried teachers in the Sunday school will be less devoted to their work simply because they receive pay. This is not true of the teachers in secular schools, nor is it true of men in the ministry.

The Sunday school is depended upon to give spiritual instruction. The day school professedly does not do so. Non-religious homes do not give it. Family instruction in many Christian households is seriously neglected. So it is of greatest importance that the teaching in our Sunday schools be thoroughly Christian. The love element cannot be too strong.

One of the greatest practical difficulties that stand in the way is the lack of funds, but that would probably adjust itself if the demand were once clearly seen and felt by the church. But by far the most serious objection to a general movement of this kind is that it would take away the opportunity for that voluntary service which the average church member desires and prefers, and ought to have a chance to give. Some who are eminently well fitted by training and otherwise would be unwilling to accept pay. Then there are others just as well prepared who may need to do so. The great principle enunciated by Christ, that he "came not to be ministered unto but to minister," must forever remain the supreme motive underlying all church

or religious service, but it does not hinder its usefulness to be lifted into the sphere of the highest possible intelligence and orderly connection. It glorifies him who "taught" with "authority and not as the scribes." Those whom he taught said, "Never man spake like this man;" and again, "Did not our heart burn within us, . . . while he opened to us the Scriptures?"

No greater responsibility has been committed to the church than giving proper instruction to the children and youth; and for this reason I am decidedly in favor of any wise method that will increase the efficiency of Sunday-school teachers.

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A question at once so large and so indefinite can be briefly answered only in its own mode. Theology and denominational bias do not yoke kindly with sound educational methods. The theological seminaries, as a rule, lay very little emphasis on the Sunday school, and young men go out to pastorates with no strong predilections in its favor, much less any training for its management. The Sunday school, indeed, has no very well defined function in the eyes of the seminary, except perhaps as a place of possible "good influences" on the "children." Of course, many pastors sooner or later see that the seminary slight is a mistake and a blight. But it is difficult even for them to concede to the layman's desk and chair its divinely ordained position. Yet, happily, some of the braver and more independent of them do. Under these conditions how are we to have "a general professional Bible-teaching class for Sunday schools as there is for the work of secular education"? Would the church courts and conventions sanction this? Would the seminaries tolerate it?

Not many churches could afford to employ a paid competent Bible-class teacher. Rather let me say that not many pastors would think it wise to expend much money in that way. What more do the people want than the pulpit and the choir?

This is a natural attitude for the pastor to take, for his school took it before him. And with the pastors in this attitude no rapid progress can be expected toward the employment of competent salaried teachers in the Sunday school. Notwithstanding this unpromising situation, it is desirable that many, if not all, Sunday schools should have a paid superintendent, Bible-class teacher, and primary teacher. Of course, many rural and small village schools could not afford this, but that does not affect the question of desirability. The middle grades between primary (children over eight years) and adult "Bible" or normal classes should, I am quite convinced, be taught (or "influenced") by volunteer Christian workers, doing the best they can.

I can see no reason why there should not be a Sunday-school teaching class, or profession, for the youngest and the adults—except the reason, already indicated, that the local church-governing bodies, headed by the pastors, would be slow to recognize the importance of such teachers to the extent of paying them adequately or approximately.

The remedy appears to me to lie, first, in the reformation of the theological seminaries; and, second, in the establishment of denominational or interdenominational schools for the training of professional Sunday-school workers—superintendents and two grades of teachers. Something is already doing, by individual churches, in the direction of real Sunday-school advancement; there are also special enterprises, like the *BIBLICAL WORLD* and the Chicago correspondence schools, the Springfield school, and teachers' institutes like that at Philadelphia and those in New York. Good as these efforts are, their influence must be very limited so long as they are without official recognition from the great religious bodies. Mention, at least, ought to be made here of the very business-like and highly promising movement in the diocese of New York for raising the educational standards of the Sunday school in the Episcopal church.

I would reiterate, however, my essential proposition, that, for most denominations at least, the tap-root of the problem lies in the divinity schools and theological seminaries.

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The question of professional salaried instruction in the Bible school divides itself into three parts: (1) Is it desirable? (2) If desirable, to what extent? and (3) How may such instruction be secured to our schools?

1. Is professional salaried instruction desirable in the Bible school? The answer to this is a most emphatic yes. The character of the teaching in our public schools has undergone a marked change since the days of Horace Mann, through the influence and work of normal schools and teachers' colleges. As a result our boys and girls are well taught during the week by trained and experienced teachers, in thoroughly graded schools, with carefully planned courses of study. But in the Bible school they find very different conditions prevailing: imperfect classification, poor teaching by incompetent though consecrated teachers, and a course of study planned in ignorance of, or without regard to, accepted pedagogical principles. The result of this is seen in the majority of schools which have been established for any length of time—the boys and girls and the young people are drifting away. It is only by adding to the consecration of the teacher that other essential to the largest success, viz., professional training, that the school may hope to retain its hold upon its members from the primary to the adult departments. Another, and perhaps more cogent, reason why such professional instruction is desirable is the importance of the work of the Bible-school teacher. However much we may lament the fact, the Bible school is today practically the only institution for definite religious instruction. The home has largely given up its privileges to the church school, the public school is debarred from exercising such privilege, and “the Sunday school is in this way brought into a position of great responsibility and importance, for it is, in fact, a necessary part of the whole educational machinery of our time.”¹ If the trained teacher is needed for the development of the intellectual side of the scholar's nature, surely some training is needed for those who would undertake the important and delicate task of developing the spiritual powers of a soul.

¹ PROFESSOR N. M. BUTLER in *Educational Review* for December, 1899.

2. To what extent is professional salaried instruction desirable? Granting the desirability of some professional training for all Bible-school teachers, is it necessary in order to obtain teachers with such an equipment that they be paid a definite salary? Such a plan, even if thought desirable, which I very seriously question, is altogether impracticable; but to have the superintendent of the school a professionally equipped man (or woman?), giving his entire time to the educational interests of the church and receiving an adequate salary, is practicable in the great majority of cases. In the larger schools the heads of the various departments might also be trained and salaried workers. An important part of the work of such superintendents and assistants would be the training of the class teachers, the instruction being given in normal classes organized as a department of the school, with courses of study carefully planned along biblical, psychological, pedagogical, and sociological lines. In this way the schools would soon have a body of trained teachers, working under skilled leadership, the results of which would be quickly apparent.

3. How may such instruction be secured to our schools? By stirring the church to a realization of its obligations in the matter. The church must properly evaluate the different elements of its organization; the child must be considered of more value than the choir, the teacher of more importance than the sexton, and class-room accommodations of greater moment than church adornment. With an enlightened intellect and an awakened conscience the means for providing professional salaried instruction, as indicated above, will be forthcoming.

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It is far easier to see the evils of the current Sunday-school methods than to propose acceptable and practicable remedies. No problem awakens more solicitude on the part of the superintendent than that of securing and developing a suitable and effective teaching staff. There are many elements which

complicate any solution. The teaching of a Sunday-school class is often viewed as a legitimate social or religious function, its moral obligations being imperfectly grasped by would-be teachers. The average superintendent falls short of the ideal in ability to organize and unify the work of his school. The Sunday school is not definable as an institution which exists in order to promote a better acquaintance with the Bible. Its sphere is much broader. The study of the Bible is but a means to the larger end of sound and stimulating religious education.

It seems to me that the problem is fairly well solved—relatively very well solved—in schools which make earnest and judicious use of the current remedies for poor teaching. A teachers' weekly meeting, rightly handled by an inspiring leader who makes the meeting a coöperative one, yet insures that it shall always be stimulating, educative, and uplifting, can go far toward unifying and enlightening the teaching of a school or of a group of schools. It is the lack of wise leadership rather than the lack of ability or of consecration that accounts for the poverty of results in many Sunday schools.

There is clearly a place for a well-trained and paid instructor in the Sunday schools of a city or town of considerable size. In addition to such direct instruction as he might be able to give to one or more classes, he would be invaluable as the leader of a helpful teachers' meeting, as the organizer and director of wise Sunday-school concentration or extension, and as a unifier of the Sunday-school work of the community. So evident would the good effects of his services be that his support could be readily managed.

That such a man would be helpful in any Sunday school goes without question. His example and his counsels would be invaluable to other teachers, and would exert an inspiring influence over the school as a whole. Probably the schools which can afford to secure one or more such teachers may be counted on one's fingers, but there are many groups of schools which can well afford the experiment.

I have ignored the question of paying Sunday-school teachers for their work of instruction, and of holding them up to the

standards insisted upon in secular education, since it did not seem to be included in the question proposed for consideration. Such a solution, however, commends itself less to me than the securing of an inspiring, well-trained leader. The ideal Sunday-school teacher is not securable for a salary, and cannot be mechanically prepared for the work. It involves a training in sound methods of teaching and an acquisition of a general grasp of the facts to be taught, but it also involves an intelligent enthusiasm which can best be imparted by contact with some inspiring personality.

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