

BIBLE-STUDY IN STATE COLLEGES AND HIGH SCHOOLS: A WAY OUT

ETHAN ALLEN CROSS, PH.M.
Greeley, Colorado

The opposition to the use of the Bible in public schools and in state colleges and universities has not abated. Everywhere teachers recognize the incompleteness of an education that takes no account of the moral, the religious, side of human nature; but everywhere they are confronted with the very real difficulties which so far have prevented any practical use of the Bible as a source of information or as a foundation for moral instruction in the schools. Many are seeking to find a way out—a means by which the Bible may be made use of without giving offense to any denomination or sect. In a larger measure than the country is aware of this seemingly impossible thing has been accomplished in Colorado by what is popularly known as the “Greeley Plan” of Bible-study for credit. More than half of all the students enrolled in the State Teachers’ College at Greeley are doing systematic Bible-study, and their work is being accepted for credit toward graduation in this state-supported school. How is it done?

Four years ago the Young Women’s Christian Association, a strong organization in the college, was conducting several Bible classes composed of small groups of students. These classes appealed only to those who were affiliated with the evangelical Protestant churches. They were viewed with disapproval by other denominations, and, in fact, received half-hearted support from the local churches with which these students were associated. The ministers complained that the students who should attend their church services and Sunday schools felt that their religious obligations had been met if they had attended the weekly devotional meeting of the Young Women’s Christian Association and the study group to which they belonged. The students had but little to do with local churches. What they got in their study groups was not an intellectual foundation for faith, but merely a personal application of religious precept—good enough as far as it goes, but insufficient for one who is seeking to become a religiously educated person in an intellectual age.

The dissatisfaction of the local ministers with the prevailing conditions became acute. Certain of the denominations objected to the exclusion of their adherents from active membership in the Young Women's Christian Association. And then necessity found the way out. One of the most scholarly of the ministers—a man of knowledge, of insight, and of great enthusiasm for education and religion—conferred with the president of the advisory board of the Young Women's Christian Association; and after going into the matter in detail, they made a report to the president of the college asking that arrangements be made for the granting of credit to students who should pursue a successful Bible-study course in any one of the churches of the town. It was understood that this work should take the place of the group study of the Bible in the Christian Association, but that the other functions of the Association should continue undisturbed.

The plan which they proposed was based upon a provision for "non-resident courses" which had been made by the college two or three years previously, recognizing non-resident work as worthy of college credit. In this non-resident work some students were studying alone, outside the college walls, and carrying on their work by means of individual correspondence with the instructors. Others were studying in groups under the instruction of members of the college faculty, who went out to neighboring towns for weekly lectures, or of other instructors, found sufficiently well equipped, and appointed by the Director of Non-resident Work to instruct a particular group. The second phase of the non-resident work, the group plan, was the one seized upon by the Committee on Religious Education. The college was asked to accept work done in the churches in groups under competent teachers, just as it would accept work done in agriculture taught to groups outside the college. The President accepted the recommendation and asked the Director of Non-resident Work to confer with a committee composed of representatives of the Ministers' Association and the Young Women's Christian Association, and with their assistance to work out the plan in detail. The original committee was composed of the ministers of the Baptist, Methodist, Roman Catholic, and Congregational churches; the President of the Advisory Board, and the student president of the Young Women's Christian Association; and the Director of the Non-resident Department of the College.

After a careful consideration of the many problems before it, the committee made a report to the President of the college. This report covered five details of organization: the course of study, the textbooks

to be used, the appointment of teachers, the organization of the classes, and the method of granting credit for the work.

The course of study.—In the Teachers' College students are accepted for entrance whose preparation has covered the usual four years' course in a reputable high school, or the equivalent of that. The college course designed to prepare teachers for elementary-school positions is two years in length. Since most of the students go out to teach at the end of this course of two years, the plan was made to provide for the foundations of a knowledge of biblical history and literature in the work of two years. The committee was painfully aware of the lack of information about the contents of the Bible which is characteristic of most young people of our time. They said, then, that the two years' course should aim to give the student, not a detailed, but a comprehensive study of the story of the Hebrew people, legendary and historical; of the growth of their religious ideas; and of the life and teachings of Jesus. It recommended that a comprehensive, consecutive study of the books of the Old Testament should be the work of the first year, and that the life and teachings of Jesus should be taken up in the second.

This recommendation was adopted and has been adhered to from the beginning. Some supplementary lessons, having to do with teaching methods in the Sunday schools, are given in some of the classes at the option of the teachers.

The work of the third and fourth years, designed for students who stay in the college for the A.B. degree, and for preparation for positions as supervisors and principals, and for teachers of special subjects in high schools, covers in a more detailed way some particular period of biblical history, with emphasis upon the social and ethical significance of the book studied. Here also is provided a larger opportunity for the study of Sunday-school pedagogy. This work thus far has been given in only one or two of the churches, and there only when there has been a number of third- or fourth-year students, who have had the work of the first two years, large enough to warrant the organization of such classes. These courses are outlined in the bulletin concerning "The Greeley Plan of Bible-Study for College Credit" which is sent out by the college, gratis.

Textbooks.—No one textbook is required. The committee originally recommended a book for each year as a guide to the student in his study of the actual textbook, the Bible. This recommendation is still made. It is understood by all, however, that this is only a recommendation. If the teacher in any one of the churches prefers a book other than the

one named by the committee, the book is submitted to the college Director of Bible-Study for his approval, and, being found acceptable, it is used in that class as substitute for the recommended book.

For the first year, the Old Testament studies, the committee recommends Georgia L. Chamberlin's *The Hebrew Prophets*, or her *An Introduction to the Bible for Teachers of Children*. These books are to be supplemented by such others as Professor Kent's *Historical Bible*, Cornill's *History of the People of Israel*, Cornill's *Prophets of Israel*, and, for special topics, by *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, *The Jewish Encyclopaedia*, and Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*.

For the second year, the New Testament studies, Burgess' *Life of Christ* was used for one year, and Kent's *The Life and Teachings of Jesus* thereafter. Classes in the Roman Catholic church have used Abbé Fouard's *Life of Christ*, and Pope's *The Prophets of Israel*. For Jewish classes Montefiore's *The Synoptic Gospels* has been recommended. Some variations from time to time have been authorized for the classes in the Episcopal church and others; but in the main the classes follow the recommendations of the committee.

Teachers.—The success of this work depends almost *exclusively* upon the quality of the teaching, for it is upon the academic quality of the work alone that the college presumes to pass judgment. Consequently the college is obliged to be very careful in the selection of persons, not members of the regular faculty, to conduct its work in non-resident groups. It has been especially careful in approving teachers nominated for the groups in Bible-study. The teachers are named by the superintendents of the Sunday schools. They must then be approved by the college Director of Bible-Study. The Director insists upon the teacher's having a good general education, usually indicated by a college degree. Besides this, the teacher must have special preparation for teaching the Bible, and personal fitness for this kind of work. In the Greeley churches now supporting these classes all the teachers have had their training in colleges or theological seminaries; all but one are graduates, and four out of the nine are Masters of Arts or Philosophy. Everyone of the number meets the requirements of personal fitness and special preparation for teaching the Bible.

Classes.—When the students are enrolled in the college, the Director of Bible-Study asks for their church preference or church membership. A list of the students preferring a certain church is sent to the pastor of the church. These are then invited to become members of the

Bible-study class in that church and to take the work either for credit or without, as the student desires. Persons not enrolled in the college may take the work in these classes without credit; or, if they desire the college credit, they may enrol as non-resident students.

Credit.—The regular work for a student in the college is sixty term hours a year—twenty hours a term of twelve weeks. Bible-study for the full year of thirty-six weeks is credited as four term hours. This makes it the equivalent of one-fifteenth of a year's work. The four hours in Bible-study may be taken in addition to the sixty hours of credit that a student regularly earns in the classes within the college walls. To earn this credit of four term hours the student is required to attend not less than twenty-eight lessons of forty-five minutes each, the lessons to be presented on Sundays throughout the school year.

The Director reserves the right to set a final examination covering the work of the year; but usually the student is asked to present in its stead his class notebook and a short thesis, covering some piece of independent study, at the end of each twelve-week term. These are first read and approved by the teacher of the class and are then presented to the Director for his approval. Work of an inferior quality is not accepted. The amount and quality of this work compares very favorably with that of any other department in the college.

The success of the plan.—From the beginning the plan has been a success. In the first year about a hundred and fifty students enrolled in the classes, and about one-third of these took the work for credit. There has been no great wave of enthusiasm, to be followed by a deadly falling off; but instead, a healthy increase in numbers and efficiency from year to year. This year there are vigorous classes in nine churches in Greeley—the Methodist Episcopal, Baptist, Congregational, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, United Presbyterian, Unitarian, Episcopal, and Disciples of Christ. The total number of students enrolled is two hundred and seventy-one—60 per cent of the total enrollment in the college proper. One hundred and forty-five of these are taking the work for credit.

The plan meets with the approval of all the churches of the city—Catholic, Protestant, and Unitarian. There is no Jewish synagogue in Greeley, but the director of this work has had letters of hearty approval of the plan from eminent Jews. On the legal side I may say that there has been no test case of the plan carried into the courts; but lawyers of some reputation have declared it to be within the law, basing their opinions on the fact that the college presumes to pass only upon the

academic quality of the work, the same as it does upon work in domestic science, history, or language when sent in as work done in non-residence, on the fact that the study of the Bible is not carried on within the college buildings, and that no state money is expended for this work.

Thus far the college authorities have not thought fit to extend these courses to groups in churches outside of Greeley. So long as the plan is somewhat experimental, it seems best to keep the classes under the personal supervision of the Director. If they were extended to other towns and cities the employment of a paid director who could give all of his time to them would be necessary to keep this study up to a satisfactory academic standard. This expenditure of public money would be contrary to the law. As it now is, the Director carries this work in addition to that which he does as head of another department in the college.

An important extension of the "Greeley Plan."—A year ago representatives of the Colorado State Sunday School Association in conference with a committee from the State Teachers' Association adapted the "Greeley Plan" to the requirements of the public high schools of the state. Their plan was put into successful operation last September by a number of schools. Very recently the Board of Education of the city of Denver, after a full hearing of the matter, authorized the adoption of the plan for its high schools.