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CAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION BECOME SCIENTIFIC?

Benjamin S. Winchester D.D.^a

^a Editor and Educational Secretary, Congregational Sunday School and Publishing Society

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LECTURE COURSES

In 1912-13 the following courses were given:

1. Israel and the Nations. The land of Israel and adjacent countries in the light of recent discoveries. Stereopticon. Five lectures.
2. Introduction to Religious Education. These lectures define the several fields of study and acquaint the student with the best books, equipment, and the means for procuring the same.
3. The World of Paul. In 1913-15 a series of lectures were given on the manuscripts of the Bible.

CAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION BECOME SCIENTIFIC?

BENJAMIN S. WINCHESTER, D.D.

*Editor and Educational Secretary, Congregational Sunday School
and Publishing Society*

Religious Education, and in fact all education, began in a more or less informal way. As civilization has progressed education has become more extensive, complex, and systematic. Its formal processes have been acquired through intuition and experience and have been handed on by tradition. The question is here raised as to whether education, and Religious Education in particular, can become scientific. In other words, are the results to be secured through Religious Education so intangible that the processes by which they are to be attained must forever remain instinctive and traditional or at least based upon opinion.

Every attempt to standardize educational processes and thereby to increase efficiency, involves the attempt to state in clear terms the objective aimed at and to measure the progress toward the desired end. Indeed, as Strayer observes, "Efficiency in any line of human endeavor depends upon our ability to evaluate the results which are secured," and progress in the religious as well as in the other phases of education must come through a careful study of the facts. Such study has been going on for some time in the field of general education. Within the last twenty years various cities have conducted educational surveys and at least three states have made state-wide educational investigations.

The attempts at measurement have, thus far, been confined for

the most part to such subjects as Penmanship, Spelling, and Arithmetic, which, by their very nature, lend themselves readily to quantitative tests. By applying the tests, in Arithmetic for example, it is possible to reveal to the teacher just the degree of the pupil's attainment and also the relative rapidity with which different members of a grade advance. It is also possible to establish objective standards in specific operations, by using these tests throughout a school system. At the same time, the application of the tests reveals to the child his ability and furnishes an incentive to correct his own faults.

It is obviously impossible as yet to provide for Religious Education any such objective standards and units of measurement as have been suggested for Arithmetic. Indeed, such standards are not even proposed for most other subjects taught in the day school. In the teaching of Religion, the choice of subject matter, the organization of the school, the methods of preparing and presenting the lesson, are still largely determined by tradition and suggestions for improvement are based upon opinion.

It should not be assumed, however, that teachers in the Sunday school are wholly indifferent to the question of efficiency. For some time the International Sunday School Association has laid emphasis upon the matter of standards and has formulated a so-called Standard of Excellence. The various denominations, also, have shown an increasing interest in the subject and at Dayton, Ohio, in 1913, the Sunday School Council of Evangelical Denominations joined with the International Sunday School Association in promulgating the following "Standard of Efficiency":

1. Cradle Roll.
2. Home Department.
3. Organized Bible Classes in Secondary and Adult Divisions.
4. Teacher Training.
5. Graded organization and instruction.
6. Missionary instruction and offering.
7. Temperance instruction.
8. Definite decision for Christ urged.
9. Offering for denominational Sunday school work.
10. Workers' conference regularly held.

It was recommended that this be the minimum standard and that it should remain unchanged for a period of years. Department standards are also advocated and adult class standards.

It is evident, however, that this standard is a very different thing from the standards in arithmetic just referred to. For one

thing, the feature of a *quantitative* measurement is conspicuous by its absence. In but two instances out of the ten is there any clear suggestion of *qualitative* considerations. Most of the points included have to do with matters of organization and even so are too vaguely expressed to have real value. It can hardly be regarded as a "Standard of Efficiency" but rather as an attempt to combine several promotion programs into one general program covering the organization of the entire school.

A distinction should be made between a *standard* and a *program*. A program is local and practical; in it are stressed those things which local necessity demands. A standard is an attempt to formulate the ideal. In the standard are included those things which are indispensable if the ideal is to be realized, and the aim accomplished. The program may be regarded as suggesting the steps which must be taken to attain the standard. The best service will be rendered a school when we can say to it in clear and terse expression what it ought to aim at and what it must do if it is to accomplish its aim. It is doing no kindness to the ineffective school to modify the standard to suit its ineffectiveness. It is helpful, however, to point out to it the steps which may first be taken toward the accomplishment of its aim. But the steps will be different for different pupils and for different schools.

The first task in formulating an educational standard is to define clearly the aim. A Sunday school standard should state the aim of the Sunday school, and all specifications should be formulated in terms of this aim. We find ourselves therefore face to face with the question, What is the aim of Religious Education? What is the aim of the Sunday school?

The aim of education in general may be said to be the development of personality. The grading of pupils is an effort to bring together those individuals who are most alike in order that there may be the nearest approach to individual instruction. The grading of lesson material is an effort to bring to each one the stimulus and food which that individual most needs at the time when he most needs it. Specialization of teaching method is again an effort to develop a more intimate acquaintance of the teacher with the individual that he may suit his teaching more fully to the individual needs. Educational institutions of all kinds, including the Sunday school, are earnestly seeking the welfare of the individual (which welfare of course implies the socialization of the individual). A standard for the Sunday school, therefore, must be formulated in terms of the religious life of the individual. In a general way it

may be said that the aim is to develop to the utmost at each stage of his growth the religious life of the individual.

This again of course raises the question as to how one may judge of religious attainment. It is right here that one finds himself baffled in attempting to measure the pupil's progress. Certainly a mere record of attendance furnishes no adequate criterion; neither does the completion of a textbook even when attested by an examination, either written or oral. Yet the fact that it may be difficult to devise a method of measurement should not deter us from making the attempt and it may encourage those who are engaged in the work of Religious Education to reflect that the most thoughtful leaders in the work of general education are wrestling with the same problem.

It will be necessary first to determine upon a qualitative standard before attempt is made to provide quantitative measurement. It has been remarked by a careful student "that experienced teachers will *readily* describe their own procedure in presenting a given topic to pupils, while they will usually hesitate and show embarrassment when asked to describe the procedure to be expected from pupils in studying the same topic." In other words, teachers seem to be conscious that pupils should do something quite different from what they themselves do, but they are more or less in the dark as to what it should be. As another has put it, "The only available measure of the success of the work done in any particular school is to be found in the changes which are brought about in boys and girls, young men and young women, during the period of their school life. The changes sought for in Religious Education as in other forms of education, may take place in habit, knowledge, in methods of work, in interests and ideals, in power of appreciation." The only way in which the teacher can ascertain what changes actually do take place is through the pupils' own expression in word and deed—that is, through the pupils' conduct.

A very interesting and valuable investigation in this field was that recently made by Professor Hanus and his associates in the schools of New York City, the results of which are embodied in a volume by Prof. Frank M. McMurry, "Elementary School Standards." In that investigation an attempt was made to select a list of the main elements in daily living that might be taken as standards in judging instruction. While it was recognized that any such lists would vary according to the person who made them, it was believed that certain essentials could be found that are common to every person's welfare. Four factors were chosen because

of their universality and as being particularly worthy of acceptance as aims of school instruction and sufficient to test the general effectiveness of teaching. Although these are not selected with special reference to Religious Education, it is believed that they will be found applicable here also, and at the same time suggestive in any further research. These factors were as follows:

1. Motive on the part of the pupils. In this it is recognized that ambitions may be increased and improved along with knowledge, and that through the daily work of education a pupil is being prepared to meet the crises and tests of character in a wise way and to make choices with intelligence and confidence.

2. The weighing of values is a second significant factor. Education involves discrimination and skill in testing the relative merits of facts, ideas, and objects of varying value. Education involves a training in judgment, and in power to appreciate relative values.

3. A third factor of importance is organization of ideas. The investigator believes that scattered thinking is a frequent cause of failure. He emphasizes the necessity for *orderly* thinking such as will assure thoroughness of comprehension and consistent force in presentation. In other words, what is taught must be inwrought into the very fibre of one's being. "No subject is mastered until the relation of its parts to one another is determined, until the facts bearing upon each phase are separately grouped, and until enough such facts are collected to give fair support to each leading idea." Certainly here is an indispensable test of the effectiveness of Religious Education.

4. Power of initiative is named as the fourth factor, by which is meant "the ability to act as a leader, whether in one's own affairs or in the affairs of others." The school should cultivate in the pupil the power of self-direction and self-reliance. This has a bearing upon the curriculum, which must be intimately related to the child's experience. It also requires of the teacher a remarkable degree of self-restraint lest the pupil be prevented from sharing to the utmost the leadership of recitation or discussion.

It can hardly be doubted that these four elements are all of decided importance in Religious Education. Motive, the judgment of values, the organization of ideas, and the power of initiative are all qualities which are fundamental to an effective moral and religious character. This list is particularly distinctive in its emphasis upon the fact that instruction should be *dynamic* rather than *static*; i.e., it should aim at a result in *conduct in action* and not merely the repetition of a formula or the acquiescence in a sym-

bol. Whether this is just the list which will best set forth the aims in religious instruction or whether it needs modification to suit this special purpose, may be open to question. The list, however, should be brief, it should emphasize the dynamic aspects of teaching, and it should be applicable universally.

The means by which to attain such results as we have mentioned in the life of the individual are partly personal and partly mechanical. The development of the religious life of the individual is sought through the process of instruction, and the quality of the instruction is conditioned primarily by the clearness with which the teacher perceives the higher aims of his task, and by the intelligence and consistency with which he employs appropriate means for attaining these aims. The quality of instruction is further conditioned by the curriculum of material provided for the teacher, the nature of the organization in which he works, and the kind of supervision attempted.

The standardizing of a school, therefore, involves a *standardizing of the teaching process, the curriculum, the activities, the organization, and the supervision.*

STANDARDIZING THE TEACHING PROCESS

I. TESTS OF THE PUPIL'S RELIGIOUS AND MORAL LIFE.—It may not be altogether apparent as to just how one should go to work to set standards for religious and moral education. The situation here seems to be a little different from the process of standardizing the teaching of a subject in day school. One may go into a literature class, for example, or a class in geography and apply the tests suggested by Prof. McMurry* in such a way as to ascertain whether the teaching of that particular lesson is developing a pupil's ambition and motives, increasing his power of discrimination, giving him mastery of his subject, and offering opportunity for the exercise of initiative. But religion is not a *subject* in this sense. The pupil does not take a textbook in religion like a textbook on geography, and follow it. The problem here rather seems to be to determine how the teacher may use subject material in such wise as to develop these characteristics before mentioned and at the same time strengthen religious attitudes. It would seem that there should be first some test of the pupil's religious and moral powers in terms of these four characteristics as a basis for comparison later on. I would suggest some such scheme as the following for-

* Elementary School Standards.

the study of the individual. In this case let us suppose a boy ten years of age:

1 *Motive*. What are his favorite sports and occupations? How does he spend his free time?

What stories does he like best?

Who are his most intimate friends?

2 *Values*. What are his most highly prized possessions?

Is he considerate of the rights of others?

Whom does he most admire, and why?

Is he reverent towards parents, teachers, the church, the law, and toward God?

Does he use clean language?

Is he truthful?

3 *Organization of Ideas*. Is he fair in his play?

Does he play marbles "for keeps"?

Is he helpful in his home and school?

Is he thoughtful for the sick, the weak and the unfortunate?

Is he kind to his pets and other animals?

Is he faithful in pursuance of his duties?

Is he loyal to his friends?

Is he obedient?

Is he courteous toward his elders?

Is he generous?

4 *Initiative*. Is he a leader among his companions or is he himself easily led?

Is he communicative or reticent?

Does he resent injustice?

Is he investigative?

How does he behave when suddenly confronted by danger, injustice, or a suggestion for dishonest, unfair, cowardly, immodest, disobedient, or lawless conduct?

What differences are noticeable in his behavior at home or in school, as compared with that upon the playground or with other boys?

II. THE COURSE OF STUDY.—This will be governed by the following considerations:

1 *Motives*. It will contain what a boy of ten likes,—story material, in which are reflected his favorite occupations, the qualities he admires in his friends and others.

2 *Values*. It will furnish opportunity to exercise judgments as to things of most value in his own life, as to the rights of himself

and of others, as to responsibility of himself and others, as to the best ways of self-expression in language and conduct.

3 *Organization.* It will suggest ways for relating new ideas to present experience: Play, home, school, and daily conduct in various relationships. This implies an accompanying program of appropriate activities for both Sunday and week-day, closely related to the course of study on the one hand, and to the boy's daily life on the other.

4 *Initiative.* It will be so presented as to facilitate at each step in the teaching the spontaneous co-operation of the pupil through his own questions, suggestions, attitudes, or activities.

III. THE SCHOOL.—The school should be built up of units (grades or classes), each composed of pupils brought together because they are similar in their personal qualities and needs.

The school curriculum should be constructed of courses of study selected, prepared, and taught in accordance with the principles suggested above and extending over the whole period of life represented in the community.

Besides study courses the curriculum should provide a complete program of correlated activities not duplicating, but related to, all the other educational agencies of the community, formal and informal, and providing full opportunity for initiative and self-expression.

IV. ADMINISTRATION.—The administrative task prepares a close analogy to the task of the teacher, except that here the superintendent becomes the teacher and the teachers are his pupils. In planning the school policies, therefore, the superintendent needs to study the motives of his teachers and present his suggestions in such a way as to appeal to their interest. He will leave them plenty of room for exercising discrimination and forming independent judgments. He will see that new ideas and theories are not matters held merely as theories, but find their expression in the actual work of the school. He will encourage each teacher to develop originality and initiative in his teaching methods. In short, the whole teaching process from primary class to Bible class and theological seminary should be subjected to the same searching analysis and measured by the same standards.

QUANTITATIVE MEASUREMENT

The above considerations have significance only in determining the quality of teaching. Quantitative tests must follow. These may be arrived at by careful study of each step in the teaching process

recording the results for a given period of time and comparing these from time to time.

Some criticisms of present methods:

1 *Current "Standards" are pitifully meagre.* Schools will never be standardized by a promotion campaign with ten or any number of "Points of Excellence." Such a campaign may be valuable in creating public opinion favorable to standardization, but to bring up a school to a real standard is a slow and methodical undertaking.

2 *Courses of Study.* The best of these are now based upon the characteristics and needs of children, and are designed to appeal to their interests and enlist their co-operation. The specifications accompanying them, however, are still framed too largely in terms of what the teacher must do and not sufficiently with reference to the changes desired to take place in the child. Many of them are too much influenced by other considerations; e.g., desire to cover so much ground in a given time, desire to fit in with the church year, desire to prepare for church membership.

3 *The Teaching Process.* Too little provision is made for practice in weighing values, in forming judgments, in making choices, and in pupil initiative. Fullest suggestions are needed, at least in terms of pupil activity.

4 *Expressional Activity.* For this a fuller program is required parallel to and correlated with instruction, day school life, the home, and the playground. This should provide opportunity for organizing ideas through action and for initiative.

5 *Weak Places.* Perhaps the weakest spot in Religious Education is for that period of youth from twelve or fourteen years old upward, especially later adolescence. This is shown by the fact that the Sunday schools and churches lose hold of most of their young people during these years. Moreover, these are years when there is large and growing desire on the part of the pupil to exercise initiative and to organize his ideas into a system, and where churches most of all fail to provide for these things.