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The graded Bible school

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THE GRADED BIBLE SCHOOL

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B I B L I O G R A P H Y .

- 1- "The Graded Bible School"- Reports 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the Committee on Course of Study to Association of Congregational Churches of Illinois. 1901-04.
- 2- "Education in Religion and Morals," Geo.A.Coe.
- 3- "Elements of Pedagogy," Emerson E. White.
- 4- "Christian Nurture," Horace Bushnell.
- 5- "Personal and Ideal Elements in Education,"
Henry Churchill King.
- 6- "How to Conduct a Sunday School,"
Marion Lawrance.
- 7- "The Point of Contact in Teaching,"
Paterson Du Bois.
- 8- The courses of the Blakeslee System in practice for two years.
- 9- Various outline studies by Hurlbut.

10- Courses for Junior Leagues.

11- "Supplementary" Sunday School Courses, gotten out by Jennings and Graham.

12- International Lessons.

13- Notes and Suggestions from Prof. Beiler.

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O U T L I N E .

- 1- The present condition of the Sunday School.
- 2- The Fault in the system itself.
- 3- Outcome of such a system.
- 4- The church and dead creeds.
- 5- How the church has tried to meet the deficiencies of its Sunday School system.
- 6- The revolt of the world.
- 7- The new age.
- 8- Psychological child study.
- 9- What this points to,- the Graded Bible School.
- 10- Graded according to:
 - (1) The child's intellectual development.
 - (2) The material of the Bible and religion.
 - (3) The child's spiritual development.
- 11- Working it out,- sample grades.
- 12- Conclusion.

THE GRADED BIBLE SCHOOL.

Within recent years, as the outgrowth of the new child study to which a branch of psychology has been devoted, has come the need and demand for the graded Bible School. As has too frequently been the record of ecclesiastical history, a laggard church ever following the world in needed reform, so here the so-called day or public schools have far surpassed the Sunday or Bible School, until to the growing youth the Sunday School has become a by-word of reproach. In the country Sunday-School, the boys are entirely absent except those too young to make any protest. In small city churches, the same thing has been true and in the larger churches the few boys attending have been only too frequently those who had not mettle enough to revolt. In some cases attendance has been increased by covering up the defects of the system by spectacular advertising and drum beating.

But the real fault lay in the system itself. Sunday after Sunday the growing youth, full of life, are bid come and listen to disquisitions by novices

on the morality of (very frequently) outlandish passages of Scripture from which not a drop of milk could be drawn; Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah's Ark, the brazen serpent, and such like, or the exaggerated history of old, dry kings about which no one cared anything; while the unsuspecting and gullible youth are taught to believe everything as literally true.

The course used was planned years ago and has hardly been altered since. The first six months the subject is the Book of Genesis treated as historical fact, then just as some interest is being aroused in the old patriarchs, the Sunday School must jump with a hundred thousand more to the New Testament and the life of Jesus, again as teacher and superintendent are beginning to get results, away goes the game back to the woods of the ancient kings. In the midst of Rehoboam and Jeroboam, the Sunday School returns to Christ, perhaps finishing the course, then back to Babylonia and Assyria, so again before the year is out or the old dry kings exhausted, Paul comes before us in kaleidoscopic change. Then

back to Adam and Eve to continue the weary routine.

The results of such a system are easily seen if one will but take the time to quiz the Sunday School:

1- There is practically no knowledge of the Bible as the book; lesson leaves have been used, and in a general way the pupils believe that it all has come out of that big book closed on the pulpit desk.

2- The scholars have no knowledge of the Bible chronologically- they have worse- they have a mis-knowledge. Old Testament patriarchs and kings are mixed up with Jesus and Paul. I once asked a young girl who came first, Jesus or Abraham, and she couldn't answer. The young people grow up believing in a chaotic chronology which is somewhat after the order of their zig-zag course of leaflet study.

3- The Bible has become to the youth a mass of trite platitudes of no meaning. He has no principle of discrimination and so no power. Beautiful legend portraying the distinctive mind of the Hebrew, a marvelous history of a people,

unsurpassed poetry, virile prophecy, all have sunk to the dead level of goody-goody platitudes of some sorely pressed misinformed teacher who is constantly "trying to bring out the moral of the lesson" as though God's Book needed such aid.

4- Not only has the pupil been made to believe as historical fact that which is myth, but for him truth itself has become twisted. This is brought about in two ways. The every word of the Bible is not divinely inspired, neither is every life that is there presented to us a pattern of virtue, and moreover, mere words and texts are not constantly teaching trite dicta. Frequently far from it. And to so invert, and twist the simple language of a simple record is to teach falsehood. Again; when the great fundamental universal truth of the whole Book, embodied in legend, poetry, history and high prose of the great organ voices of God are so belittled by these petty platitudes so that the former is lost sight of, truth again is upon the scaffold.

5- We have so far very plainly been speaking of the positive detriment that our Sunday School

system has been causing. In thus far it has been a positive evil, we now turn to the negative results. When opportunity for great good and for vital results is presented as is the case of the opportunity of a school connected with the church of God and that opportunity is let slip because men's minds are tied to worn out ideas, there is sin of omission. Here is the greatest record the world has ever seen, - a Book so intensely human and so intensely divine that, by the history of a peculiarly called people and a literature unsurpassed by any, it reveals a God of love to men and at the same time touches upon the deepest springs of man's nature. Even taught or mis-taught as it constantly is in our Sunday School, it cannot help leading the young to God, yet what possibilities are open to the real Bible School to lead the growing youth into the church.

The Sunday School has performed a great work. That cannot be minimized. But again we must confess that as compared with its greater opportunities it has been laggard. The cause of this deficiency, contradictory though it ought to

be, is found in the position taken by the church. The church has considered children as of depraved nature who must be converted and rescued from the Devil before they could inherit eternal life. Thus there could be no education, no training. The whole idea was to get the children to see that they were sinners, aliens from God, and then in fear and trembling^{to} go through an emotional experience called conversion, and that was all. This kind of thing is shown in the children's catechisms and hymns of fifty years ago. Here is one quoted by Prof. George A. Coe:

"There is beyond the sky
A heaven of joy and love;
And holy children, when they die,
Go to that world above.

"There is a dreadful hell,
And everlasting pains;
There sinners must with devils dwell,
In darkness, fire, and chains.

"Can such a child as I
Escape this awful end?

And may I hope, whene'er I die,
I shall to heaven ascend?

"Then will I read and pray,
While I have life and breath;
Lest I should be cut off to-day,
And sent t' eternal death."

This kind of thing was brought about by the church's former doctrine of total depravity. Nothing in the child is worth bringing out. Development can do nothing for him and he must wait until something happens- a great emotional upheaval with sighs and groans- before he can so much as begin to be religious. From this we have departed to-day. Everywhere is it declared that all little children go to heaven, yea, more than that, that they are in God's kingdom and belong to Him. But we have not gone far enough. Somehow, although we believe thus, there still remains an absolute insistence on conversion coming later on in the child's life. The church has again been strangely dull in not seeing this contradiction. The new evangel is, not only that all childgen are in God's kingdom, but that

they ought to be so trained that they should always remain members of that kingdom and never know themselves as alienated from God, but they should grow spiritually as they grow physically and mentally.

Through such pioneer souls as Horace Bushnell with the new doctrine of "Christian Nurture" the church has slowly come to believe that children ought to be trained in the love and knowledge of God, although a good many moss backs still remain who inconsistently and dogmatically, but with a good deal of show of holy religious zeal insist upon nothing but conversion. To meet these new positions, and at the same time cover up the deficiencies in that department of its activity to which this work properly belongs, the Sunday School, the church has had to resort to pastor's classes for the young, Junior Leagues, Epworth Leagues with their mission and Bible study classes, and like sporadic movements. The latest development of this type is the boys and men's clubs to interest the male branch of the race in God. When all the time a new age has come and the

world demands of the church that it take an advance position. Let there be light.

As we look for guidance in the child's religious training, we notice that there are three factors to be considered: First, the child; second, the religious life; and third, that which pertains to the Bible School, the application of the latter to the former.

We begin with the child. Really, he is the starting point. Unless we had him, there would be no need of this discussion. With Prof. Coe, "We are not to think of the child as a miniature reason a miniature will, and a miniature conscience, but rather as a simpler personality which is in process of organizing itself into reason, conscience, and will." In a rough way, his life may be divided into the periods of infancy, childhood, and adolescence. During this time he is undergoing a process of development. At first all his needs must be met, he soon develops the play impulse which is a natural trait and not one to be killed but to be trained into the right channels. To try to kill this

impulse on Sunday or in any connection with religion naturally turns that child away from religion. Then comes the age of interest in wonder-stories. And here again we have a proper development. "Reason and imagination are not antagonistic to each other except where false education has made them so." Then comes the age of questionings, in which naturally the child seeks to know and justly so, and should be answered as his age can understand. Adolescence fraught with dangers follows. The individual ego begins to assert itself and at the same time comes the gang impulse. This is a time of increased emotional experiences and therefore the early part of this period is the time for a right decision in regard to the religious life. The largest proportion of conversions occurs here. The influences that touch the sentiments are more effective now than at any other period of life. Later as the youth grows into manhood he passes through the period of intellectual doubts and questionings and the real forming of the adult is taking place.

We next turn to look at the religious life.

Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God and revealing to mankind the love of God and his interest in man, a truth never before known in that great, high, intimate sense. And he required of men that they forsake sin, have faith in God, and cling to righteousness, through belief in his own personality. To a sinner and one outside the Kingdom of God this came by a complete turning around and instead of following the sinful course, of following the opposite, that of righteousness, or, in other words, of being converted. To adults in sin this was necessary. But with the children,- they are already in the Kingdom of God, for Jesus took them in his arms and said, "Suffer the children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for to them is the Kingdom of Heaven." As they grow up then, it is necessary that these little ones of the Kingdom who are placed in our care should be trained in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and the truth be imparted to them according to their development. As they reach the so-called age of accountability they should be taught that they are God's and when adolescence

comes they may be confirmed as members of God's church. Thus the child should grow up never knowing himself as other than in the Kingdom. If he should deliberately choose the evil rather than the good, then he may be a subject for conversion. But otherwise, if we talk of conversion of the child, it cannot mean other than a turning away from God. To be one, there must be two conversions.

The application of this training in religion to the child follows in order, and the great importance and place of this work cannot be overestimated. So I am now to speak for the graded Bible School. I purposely drop the old designation and use the new because of the emphasis upon the word, Bible. We have been led away from it by good intentioned, but out of date, teaching. Let us now get back to use that word more frequently and to use the Book. Let us rather say, "Forward with the Bible and with Christ."

The graded Bible School is none other than pedagogy and the Bible together for our youth. A principle so plain and simple that it is surprising

that it was not applied and worked out long ago. Here we cannot do better than to look at the example of our so-called secular schools. We see that, although perfection has by no means as yet been attained, the graded public schools are a great success. But they are incomplete. The intellectual, physical, aesthetic, side of our youth are cultivated while the religious nature is absolutely left out. But when we look for a good definition of education, such cannot be left out. The preparation for no other than for life itself, is education. The religious and moral element must be there. The Bible School must supplement the Public School.

Another imperative claims attention. To be truly successful the school must be graded. "The foundation of all progress in our public schools has been the system of grading by which the subjects may be ordered and adapted to the pupils and a complete and rounded education made possible. It seems that any great improvement in the Bible School must begin by introducing a system of grades similar to that in the day schools."

For this there should be a continuous course with regular promotions. The Bible, text-books on Bible, church history, and missions, maps, reference books should take the place of the ephemeral leaflets.

All the activities of the young people should center around the Bible School. The Junior League should be an integral part, as also the Epworth League and young men's clubs. The pastor's training class for the young converts and probationers likewise belongs here. Much better results would be obtained in thus bringing the various organizations of the church for its young people together, uniting them and making each do its quota of work for religious education.

The departments of the School have been well worked out, as: 1- The Cradle Roll, taking in the babies under the age where they can come to the school; 2- The Kindergarten includes all children who have not yet entered the first grade of the public school; 3- The Graded Bible School divided into Junior, Intermediate, and Senior, included twelve grades corresponding

to the grades of the public schools through the high school. Then follow as a collegiate course, 4- the adult Bible classes, and 5- the normal course for teachers, and as a department of this advance work, 6- the Home Study Department.

In this school we are to notice three principles which are fundamental. The first is that which is always placed first by pedagogy. "Teaching, both in matter and method, must be adapted to the capability of the taught." And so the nature of the developing child is to be considered. The play impulse must be cultivated and guided in the kindergarten by sand tables, colored pictures, and the acting out of simple Bible stories; the later interest in wonder stories, by the wonder stories of Genesis; the tendency to hero worship, by the stories of the great Old Testament characters, and modern missionary heroes; then the study of the biography of Paul and of Jesus and the history of the Jews, followed in graded order by an appreciation of the poetry and finally of the grand prophecy of the Jews.

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Our second principle is that the school should be graded according to the Bible material. Instead of being treated in a semi-superstitious way the Bible is treated as it is, a compilation of myth, biography, history, poetry, sermons, law, prophecy, letters, and embracing the history of a marvelously chosen people from their earliest times until the Christian church is founded. The material, varying thus in literary style and also in import, cannot be taught unless properly systematized and properly related part to part for graded study. Careful selection must be made for each age of the child and so presented as to become a part of that child's intellectual equipment. As the child's nature unfolds, the revelation of God to mankind through the development of a people from its childhood in a nomad tribe up to its fully developed priesthood and law and its consummation in the coming of the Redeemer, will likewise unfold itself to him.

What possibilities lie hidden here! No other history is so fraught with meaning. The

budding of the conception of one true God in a time and place of surrounding polytheism, and the blossoming out of this God given idea into a childlike trust of a nation upon their God as Father; the marvelous and unparalleled conception of God as person dealing with persons shown in poetry and song- the divine immanence- while nations around were nature fakirs; the bursting forth of that great conception from the lips of the prophets, the storm petrels of history, when the national religion seemed almost doomed by an empty ritualism and immorality; and finally through bloody trial, persecution by foes without and worse foes within the nation, purified by fire and sword, that conception of God, by the very deathlessness of the idea itself, bears fruit in the coming of Jesus. But here, even, we cannot stop. We find all that has gone before is but the grey that precedes the dawn and the bright day. Jesus with his life of love and salvation to men, and his great exponent, Paul, and the early church and victory and an established Christianity centering about the Christ are what follow.

The study of the Bible could profitably be supplemented by a brief history of the development of the church from the apostolic age to the present and by study in Christian missions. The Bible study classes and mission study classes as conducted by the Epworth League are nothing else than a reflection on a failure on the part of the Sunday School.

But there is still a third principle and this the most important of all and for the want of which the other two are useless and the school a total failure. The school must be graded for the spiritual development of the child. The real mission of the Bible school lies here. No mistake ought to be made as to presenting the Bible truthfully and according to its nature or later intellectual doubts may impede the religious life of the growing youth, but the object of our school is to save the youth to the Kingdom of God, and in so doing to save lives for life. We have already seen that he is God's child, Jesus claimed the children and he claims him to-day, and in the sacrament of infant baptism

the church acknowledges this claim and pledges itself with the family to bring the child up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The part of the church in this is the graded Bible School.

As the impulses of the child are unfolded they are guided by a wise Christian teacher. No one but a consecrated disciple of Christ can be a teacher in a Sunday School, It is worse than no teacher at all to have one who has not the burden of the responsibility of spiritual training, to attempt a class of boys and girls in the Sunday School. Here is the crux of meeting this important principle. The spiritual life is taught largely through personal contact. Jesus' life and teaching and the whole basis of our faith on a person teaches us that. Even more important than the Bible is the person of the teacher. God must literally abide in that man or woman who is to be in charge of the spiritual development of the child. In importance, the selection of this teacher far exceeds that of her sister in the day school.

Consequently, we see the need of proper

teacher-training for this work. And for the teacher of these teachers there must be some one of special training and equipment. Unless such a specialist can be had, the pastor ought to be the head of this department. The teachers' meeting and teacher training class is one of the most important elements of the Bible School. This class if taught by the pastor ought to be at some other time than the session of the school, for his presence is needed elsewhere just then. That is in a specially important class.

I speak of the class in the intermediate department for boys and girls of the adolescent change. This is properly the pastor's class. Ordinarily we have divorced it from the system and the pastor has something like it meet him on some week night. Most frequently this important class is neglected altogether, and the youth pass this age in the charge of some ignorant teacher who entirely misses the importance of this awkward and unmanagable age of the boys and bashful age of the girls, and the point of contact is lost.

In our Bible School these candidates

for manhood and womanhood reach the pastor's class with a good foundation in Bible knowledge that is fairly well systematized in their minds.

The pastor with his lady assistant, preferably the pastor's wife, now takes them in charge for a year. "The direct aim of the work in this grade is to secure definite choice of the Christian life at the time when such choices may be most naturally and readily made. This aim will best be attained by bringing the scholars to a direct and practical study of the facts of Christian experience, from which conversion and public confession may follow as the natural fruitage. . . . The task of the teacher is to help the boys and girls who have reached the age of adolescence to develop naturally into Christian men and women."

The report here quoted, suggests as the subjects for this ninth grade: Success in life, Being a Christian, Christian hopes and beliefs, Christian duties, the church, the Bible, Prayer, etc. We would suggest that for the first quarter of the year, a content review of the Bible be given as to its spiritual message to men, and this

followed (or preceded) by the same amount of time spent in a psychological study of man's nature and the necessity of spiritual training, then the second half year may be given over to a study of such topics as Being a Christian, Faith, Prayer, and the Christian life as the crown of perfect manhood and womanhood. Jesus Christ should be constantly held up as the ideal of perfect manliness for this class. Who else is fit for this harduous task but the pastor and his well-directed assistant, and what an important work he has here!

In the grades that follow, special attention ought to be given in training in Christian activity and the importance of the inner development of the life for God insisted upon. But as this principle of spiritual development is the crux of the Bible School, so is the crux of this principle to be met in the pastor's ninth grade.

There are several systems of grading worked out which embody the above principles, but no one has as yet found universal acceptance.. In general, the grading should be done after careful and mature deliberation and an adaptation

made to meet local conditions. The course worked out by S.B.Haslett in "The Pedagogical Bible School" seems to meet most of the requirements. But even better is that suggested by the Committee of Illinois Congregational Churches above quoted. In the following table, we make a few changes and make the ninth grade the decision class, and give the eighth grade a course designed especially to prepare for the ninth grade work.

Age.Grade.

Courses of Study.

5	1	Stories from the life of Christ, centering about the three festivals of Christmas, Easter, and Children's Day.
6	2	Bible wonder-stories and myths.
7	3	Nature lessons with the Bible.
8	4	Bible hero-stories.
9	5	Life of Christ.
10	6	Life of Paul.
11	7	The Early Church.
12	8	Teachings of Christ and the apostles.
13	9	The Christian Life. (See above.)
14	10	Old Testament History.
15	11	Old Testament Poetry and Prophecy.

16	12	The Life of Christ.
17- on.	Elective Courses.	Social teachings of Jesus, Christian Evidences, etc., etc.

The work of the Bible School does not end here but goes on with the advance elective Bible and mission courses for adults. Any part of the Bible or Christian biography may be taken up and treated with as much thoroughness as desired. And what a splendid time the mature minds, yea, and souls, too, of those who have graduated from the preceding departments can have.

We thus look to the graded Bible School of the future for the solution of many of the problems which the church is facing to-day. Our forces must be systematized and brought together under one leadership, and our scattering attention concentrated upon the effective work to be done. Problems of how to hold the youth will become less hard, of how to bring men into the church will resolve itself in how to keep the boys there, and the critical problems concerning

the Bible that greivously vex so many will lie at rest, for all will see the grand old Book in its true perspective. So our agancies will be concentrated upon the effective salvation of a whole race, child, youth, man and woman for the Kingdom.

Many vexing questions could not be touched upon in this short article. Only general principles laid down. For effective solution these must be mixed with much common sense and work.

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*J. Cabot Justin,
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