





**THE  
DUKE  
DIVINITY SCHOOL  
REVIEW**

**Fall 1975**



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## CONTENTS

Confrontation: Sunday School .....	147
<i>by R. Harold Hipps</i>	
The Last of the Great Religious Movements .....	151
<i>by Robert Wood Lynn</i>	
A Badly Organized Miracle .....	161
<i>by Sara Little</i>	
Myths of the Modern Sunday School .....	173
<i>by Richard Murray</i>	
A Future for the Sunday School .....	183
<i>by John Westerhoff</i>	
By Their Praxis You Shall Know Them .....	202
<i>by Edward A. Powers</i>	
Bibliography for Lay Christian Educators (1970-74) .....	209
<i>by D. Campbell Wyckoff</i>	
An Educational Use Guide .....	213
<i>by John Westerhoff</i>	
Book Reviews .....	215

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Editor: Creighton Lacy; Associate Editors: John Bergland, Donn Michael Farris, Roland E. Murphy, Charles Robinson, John Westerhoff, Laine Calloway, Stephen Cross.

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# Confrontation: Sunday School

by R. HAROLD HIPPS, '49

The Sunday School, a unique American Institution, is in trouble. It is sick and many say it is dying, at least among main-line Protestant churches.

The cause of that illness and whether or not it will result in death was the central focus of two consultations held under the heading "Confrontation: Sunday School" in January and April, 1975. The consultations were a project of the Christian Educators' Fellowship of The United Methodist Church in cooperation with the Center of Continuing Education at Scarritt College in Nashville, Tennessee, and the Office of Continuing Education at Perkins School of Theology in Dallas, Texas.

Almost 500 persons participated in the events at Scarritt and Perkins. Most of the participants were professional Christian educators, although a small number in each event were local church volunteer educators. Because of limited accommodations more than 100 persons were not permitted to register for the consultations, a fact which illustrates the high interest today, especially among professional church educators, in the status of the Sunday School.

It is amazing that prior to these consultations little has been openly faced about the Sunday School crisis. Since 1957, when Life magazine called Sunday School "The Most Wasted Hour in the Week," American Protestantism has suspected a growing crisis in the Sunday School. The main-line Protestant churches have been afraid to bring the issues and the questions out in the open and to deal realistically with the Sunday School. The major denominational Boards of Education have tried to cover the illness with curriculum promotions and the broader arena of the Church School. Church education leaders stopped believing in most aspects of the Sunday School years ago. Many church educators have continued to support the Sunday School only because there was no alternative. For several years the major thinkers and writers in church education have been highly critical of the curriculum-controlled, cul-

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Mr. Hipps is Executive Officer of the Christian Educators' Fellowship and Associate General Secretary in the Board of Higher Education and Ministry of The United Methodist Church.

turally bound Sunday School and have sought innovative alternatives. The message about the failure of the Sunday School has been heard by many; the message about the innovative alternatives has been heard by very few.

The Sunday School is declining, but it is not necessarily dying. Millions of people—children, youth, adults—are still involved in it. The Sunday School does need help, and it does need updating. It is important to improve the Sunday School we have while better options are being explored.

Finding this to be the situation in which most professional Christian educators are now working, the Board of Directors of the Christian Educators' Fellowship determined that CEF should take the lead in forcing The United Methodist Church, at least, to face head-on the crisis of the Sunday School. Thus "Confrontation: Sunday School" was designed to deal specifically with the Sunday School, that period of time usually between 9:30 and 10:30 on Sunday morning when people join together for fellowship and study. The overwhelming response to the consultations demonstrated the readiness of many church educators to confront the crisis.

The Christian Educators' Fellowship, a United Methodist organization of more than 1,000 professional Christian educators, set as the goals of "Confrontation: Sunday School":

- to examine the history of the Sunday School in this country in terms of what we can learn and affirm;
- to examine the present-day Sunday School and its operating assumptions;
- to examine possible futures of the Sunday School.

The CEF Design Team for the events, working with the Continuing Education Centers at Scarritt and Perkins, built the consultation around major input by four resource persons who are recognized scholars and practitioners in church education: Sara Little, Robert Lynn, Richard Murray, John H. Westerhoff III. Participants had opportunities to hear individual lectures and panel discussions by the four leaders and to engage in discussions with them. They worked in small groups to explore their individual and group concerns about the Sunday School, to explore various models for the Sunday School, to share resources, and to do some model building for the Sunday School of the future.

All evaluations indicate that "Confrontation: Sunday School" accomplished its goals in large measure. For those who participated in the Confrontations at Scarritt and Perkins the Sunday School

will not be the same. Which means that the professional Christian educator will have to do some things differently in the future from what has been done in the past or is being done now.

It was agreed in the consultations that "the Sunday School can't be all bad." Neither can professional Christian educators. There is much in the Sunday School, past and future, that we can affirm and support. But some things will have to be different—especially the role of the professional Christian educator.

I have never believed it was intended that the role of the professional Christian educator was to be "The Keeper of the Sunday School," but most professional Christian educators have functioned in this way. We have taken the lay person's Sunday School, and "they know not where we have laid it!" With the help of our Church structures we have put ourselves in a Sunday School box (CEF image says "cocoon"), and now that these boxes are falling apart we do not know what to do. Our difficulty is our own image, our own box (cocoon), in that, for the most part, we have not really functioned as educators, but as administrators of a Church School, and more often as the Keepers of the Sunday School, as programmers, not educators. When the comfortable and familiar structures are threatened, we are threatened.

The new structures of the Church and the Sunday School will demand more of the professional Christian educator—not less. Who should be better equipped or more competent to aid the congregation in study, diagnosis, goal-setting, planning, designing, testing, evaluating, resourcing, leader development? For many professional Christian educators it is a new role, and many are not equipped to function in the role.

The demand is for a different type of professional Christian educator from what was called for five years ago. The need is for persons with Biblical and theological knowledge, first, and then a knowledge of planning, leading, resourcing for the total life of the congregation. The major working arena is not the Commission on Education, but the Council on Ministries; not Church School education, but congregation (church) education.

In the working structures of the professional Christian educator we are moving from:

Sunday School Class	to	Experiential Learning
Class Organization	to	Group Formation
Curriculum Orders	to	Resource Centers
Pastor-Director	to	Staff Team



Dependency	to	Interdependency
Dependence	to	Independence
Certified	to	Qualified

In the working functions of the professional Christian educator we are moving from:

Answering Questions	to	Asking Questions
Telling	to	Listening
Selling	to	Sharing
Defending (Institutions)	to	Renewing (the Church)
Supervising	to	Empowering
Scheduling	to	Freeing
Training Teachers	to	Developing Leaders
Teacher	to	Learner
Leader	to	Enabler
Expert Resource	to	Resource Person
Specialist	to	Generalist
Director	to	Consultant

The role of the professional educator calls for an abundance of insight, love, patience and the ability to cope.

There was no common diagnosis among the consultation participants, but most agreed that the Sunday School will survive, with its continuing health depending on a blend of continuity with the past and change for the future, a renewing of church structures to be the church, and a freeing of professional Christian educators to be educators.

This issue of THE DUKE DIVINITY SCHOOL REVIEW provides a report of "Confrontation: Sunday School." The text of each of the major papers/lectures/discussions presented by the resource persons is included. It is our anticipation that the contents of this special issue of THE REVIEW will provide the resource necessary to enable local churches to confront the crisis of the Sunday School and deal with it realistically in terms of their specific congregations.

# The Last of the Great Religious Movements

by ROBERT WOOD LYNN

In the 1940's one of the staple items in the reading diet of many an American high school student was that short story, *The Purloined Letter*. This tale had the necessary twist at the end. A stolen document was to be hidden in a room that would be thoroughly searched. Where could one put it? In a secret panel? In a hollowed-out rung of a chair? How can one hide something important? The answer, of course, was to leave the letter in an obvious place where the sophisticated police, looking for subtle trickery, would doubtless ignore it. The treasured letter was left in a visible place where everyone could see it—and no one did.

So it is with the Sunday School. This institution has been a fixture on the American scene for such a long time that almost all scholars have overlooked its existence. "As a church historian," Professor Martin E. Marty of the University of Chicago has recently declared, "I have always been amazed to see how little attention has been given this basic institution by historians and scholars."<sup>1</sup> The "purloined letter" syndrome prevails in scholarly circles as well as among detectives. It is all the more difficult, therefore, for the contemporary observer to understand the enthusiasm and acclaim which the Sunday School evoked a century or so ago.

In 1910, for instance, a convention of the World Sunday School Association was held in Washington, D. C. Congress adjourned so that its members could be a part of the Sunday School parade, and even a ferocious rainstorm did not dampen the spirits of the "loyal Sunday School army." But the climactic moment came later. At that convention two men stood on the platform. One of them, the head of the International Sunday School Association, was an American layman, the other a lay leader from Great Britain. Sud-

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Dr. Lynn, until recently Auburn Professor of Religion and Education at Union Theological Seminary in New York, is a consultant with the Lilly Foundation.

1. Martin E. Marty, "American Sunday School May Be Defunct," *Context* (May 1, 1975), p. 2.

denly two men from the audience raced to the stage and, as these two leaders stood side by side, draped the Union Jack around the shoulders of the man from Great Britain and the Stars and Stripes around the American. In one of the most transparently innocent statements ever recorded in print, the American was moved to say, "We have all honor for all the flags of this world, but . . . under these two flags the Anglo-Saxon people have taken upon themselves the responsibility under God of being big brother to all the other flags."<sup>2</sup> If the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes were the flags of this "big brother," certainly one of his favorite institutions was the Sunday School. Through this volunteer agency the Anglo-Saxon race was to work its magic and persuasive wiles upon an unsuspecting world. President Taft spoke on the theme of the Sunday School as an "indispensable institution." Then he lingered to hear the address of Postmaster-General John Wanamaker, known not only for his department stores but in Sunday School circles as the lay leader of one of the largest schools in the country. Among other things Mr. Wanamaker asserted that "the Sunday School was not evolved—it was revealed."<sup>3</sup>

Though it may have been revealed from on high, the Sunday School has also evolved over the better part of two centuries. Let us refresh our memories about that history, dating back to England in the 1780's. The Industrial Revolution had created havoc and disorder within the English society of that time. The older agriculturally-oriented society was being uprooted. As a consequence a flood of disoriented rural folk were pouring into the towns and cities, not unlike the more recent northward migration within the United States. These country folk, once they invaded the cities, became the unwitting victims of the factory system, where adults and children worked for a pittance. The institution of the Sabbath provided the only real escape from relentless drudgery and routine. Sunday was a free day. On that day hordes of children would roam the streets, disrupting civil order and creating mild chaos on all sides. Robert Raikes, a newspaper editor and Anglican layman, was touched by the spectacle of these ruffians who constantly flirted with trouble on the Sabbath. Along with a few other Anglican evangelical laypersons he launched what was

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2. *World-Wide Sunday School Work*, ed. William N. Hartshorn (Chicago: published by Executive Committee of the World's Sunday School Association, 1910), p. 47.

3. Edward Eggleston, "Unpopular Words," *Sunday School Time*, XVIII (May 20, 1876), p. 321.

probably the first Sunday "charity" school—an institution that provided a smattering of instruction in reading and in prayers.

When the "charity" school came to this country, it was imported to meet a somewhat similar problem. Confusion and disorder reigned not only in Philadelphia and New York but elsewhere. The first American Sunday Schools were designed, as were the English charity schools, to meet the need for civic safety on Sunday and to reach a group of neglected human beings. But once arrived on these shores, the "first day" school was gradually converted by evangelical Protestants into an integral part of their distinctive pattern of education. The genius of the American people in the years from 1815 to 1860 was not so much located in persons as it was in institutions. After the War of 1812-14, a remarkable array of institutions came into being.

At the heart of this educational ecology was the Revival. Around this center clustered a host of varied enterprises, propelled into existence by the evangelical spirit of the Revival.

One of the first offshoots of the Revival was the Sunday School. Next came the nineteenth-century denominational college, an institution which differed markedly from its colonial predecessor. Another institution created on the American shores was the seminary. Making up the ecology of that period—an ecology which persists to this day—were others: the system of public schools that was beginning to take form; the various mission agencies of the churches, foreign and domestic; and a variety of reform movements, such as abolition of slavery, peace, temperance, education and the like. Meanwhile numerous religious journals kept church people informed about the work of each one of these educational ventures.

That basic pattern is still in evidence, though often in a feeble and disorderly state. The problems of the contemporary Sunday School are not simply those of one institution, but rather a reflection of a larger systemic confusion within the enterprise as a whole. But wherever the ecology remains intact and the evangelical spirit is strong, there one will discover latter-day reminders of the Sunday School in its heyday. At its height this "big little school" was the symbol of the most enduring religious movement in American history. It reached Americans of almost all classes, races and denominational persuasions in every decade after the War of 1812-14. No other movement compared to it in appeal or cultural influence. In contrast, the peace movement and the Civil Rights crusade of the 1960's, or even the labor movement in the earlier decades of

the twentieth century, are comparatively short-lived, ephemeral eruptions.

The astonishing durability of the Sunday School movement was not an accident. In the luxury of retrospect one can discern a variety of reasons for its success.

### *A Passion for Unity*

This movement survived, first of all, because of its capacity to maintain unity, despite enormous pressures toward diversity. Unlike the Civil Rights movement, which after two or three years of modest euphoria floundered on the question of class differences, the Sunday School retained its sense of solidarity for well over a century. How was this "movement psychology" sustained? Through two devices: the Uniform Lesson Plan and the convention system.

(1) The Uniform Lessons or International Plan, though criticized and discredited for decades, is one of those continuities that could persist into the future. While its critics have been many and their criticisms valid, they have often missed the point. The Uniform Lesson Plan was an organizational device for maintaining unity between generations, denominations and nations. Edward Eggleston, a Sunday School editor who later wrote *The Hoosier Schoolmaster*, was a harsh critic of this scheme. When the Uniform Lesson proposal was approved at a national convention in the 1870's at the prompting of John H. Vincent and B. F. Jacobs, he remarked, "Dr. Vincent or Mr. Jacobs will be able to look at a watch and tell a body just what identical printed questions they are reading simultaneously to little Baptist boys in Burmah, and little Methodist maids in Minnesota."<sup>4</sup> As a matter of fact, Vincent and Jacobs were very much interested in just that possibility. Those "little Baptist boys" and "little Methodist maids" were doing something together, even if they were separated by geography and culture. That weekly experience was a ritualistic sign and seal of global unity. Nothing could tear the Sunday School movement apart—not even the pressure of denominational differences, of cleavages between nations or races. The defenders of the Uniform Lesson Plan embraced it as a symbol of a way of life, declaring their unity in spite of all the divisions that could separate them from other people. In an age desperately in need of symbols of unity, the Uniform Lesson Plan was a reminder of a greater oneness that could transcend all differences.

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4. *Ibid.*, p. 191.



(2) The second device was the convention system. After the Civil War a group of laymen and a few ministers put together the intricate system that linked everybody from village, town, city, county, state and nation—Canada and the United States—and the world! It was all done in the early days without the help of a full-time professional staff. Local conventions focused on teacher training. Saturday afternoon in Buffalo, New York, in the late 1880's was a time when teachers gathered—sometimes 400 or 500—to meet across denominational and church lines to engage in common preparation for tomorrow's Sunday School classes. The conventions helped to start new schools, to support institutions in trouble, and to train and inspire leaders. In that way they kept the movement together.

### *A Liturgy and a Cause*

Another characteristic of a movement is the ability to create a liturgy of its own. Imbedded in that liturgy is the memory and hope of a people, the past, present and future celebrated in song and action. Every movement lives off the music it creates. Certainly that was true of the labor movement. And who can forget "We Shall Overcome"? In the Sunday School a special brand of music developed and flourished over decades. When the creation of that music slacked off in the 1910's and 1920's, the beginning of the end of this movement was in sight.

Still another important achievement of a movement is its capacity to inspire liturgical action. Little today can compare with the Sunday School parade. There is still, for instance, a public holiday in Brooklyn which marks the occasion of that spectacle. A special hymn was created for one of the first of the Brooklyn parades—"Shall We Gather at the River?" Or in the Penny Gazette of 1855 one can read the description of a Western Sunday School celebration. According to the account several Sunday Schools in the "far-off borders of our land" combined to "unite and keep a holiday with pleasant and appropriate services and enjoyments as a means of social intercourse and improvement." The celebration took place in a clearing in the forest where a few ox-drawn wagons carried a host of enthusiastic boosters. Each group had its own banner—"The Sunday School—the Hope of the World"; "We Won't Give Up the Bible"<sup>5</sup> (Who was asking them to give up the

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5. "A Western Sunday School Celebration," Penny Gazette (Vol. XIII, No. 5), p. 1.

Bible?). These occasions provided an important opportunity for a people to celebrate the convictions and hopes of a movement.

Any movement must also have a sacred cause, or else it will eventually disintegrate. The long life of the Sunday School movement was made possible, in large part, because of its leaders' capacity to define a cause that was understandable to a wide range of persons of conflicting persuasions—a goal that was possible of achievement, yet suggesting the mystery and romance of a great crusade. Early in the career of the movement the most visible symbol of the Sunday School's cause was those children who needed schooling, manners and religion. But then the Sunday School crusade really hit its stride in the 1820's and 1830's, as it concentrated on preparing the way for the revival and for conversion. That sense of purpose carried the movement well into the twentieth century (and, of course, still dominates vast numbers of these schools). None of the more recent substitutes—whether "character education" or "theological literacy" (the 1950's) or "values training" or anything else—has ever quite replaced the earlier evangelical concern as the mainspring of energy for this movement.

Next, the vitality and reach of a movement can be measured by the numbers of martyrs, heroines and heroes it can identify as its own. The martyrs of the Sunday School legion were those missionaries who established outposts of the movement in remote parts of the world. Among the heroes were Benjamin F. Jacobs and John Vincent (later a Methodist bishop). In particular, Jacobs was a superb leader in the Populist mold. A Chicago produce dealer and real estate operator, this "generalissimo of the Sunday School army" (as he was affectionately known) never lost his touch as one who spoke *for* as well as *to* the people. Foot soldiers in this army, the teachers and the superintendents, could identify with B. F. Jacobs. He knew their problems, spoke the same language, and therefore was able to inspire them to renewed efforts on behalf of the common cause. Jacobs died in 1902, and Vincent moved on to other frontiers. The next generation of leaders was intent on developing a core of *professional* religious educators. Their devotion to professionalism as the new form of competence prompted an understandable impatience with the old-fashioned ways of the Sunday School volunteer workers. In the early decades of the twentieth century a subtle shift of enormous importance took place. If the Sunday School movement had once been able to organize its work and carry forward a vast program without dependence upon a major full-time staff, the new religious educators

were intent upon reversing that pattern and placing the paid professional at the heart of the enterprise. The Sunday School movement was never the same. With the coming of the professional religious educator in the 1910's and 1920's and the arrival of the church educational bureaucrats in the 1940's and 1950's, the movement gradually ceased to belong to the laity.

### *A Tradition of Amateurs*

Every movement finally rests upon a foundation of lay loyalty. Although anti-clericalism cropped up occasionally in the course of the nineteenth century, the lay Sunday School workers were largely willing to include the pastors in their work—but on the terms of the laity and not the clergy. In this connection it is important to observe that there was always room and space in the Sunday School movement for the ministry of women. The woman of the early nineteenth century had suffered such social and religious repression that she was usually blocked out of all forms of active participation in church life. She was allowed to pray silently and to be a part of the congregation. What else could she do? Some women formed what they called female auxiliaries, the early forerunners of the later women's organization in the church. Others worked in the Sunday School. The movement provided occasions for women to come together as a group and to take an active part in a common cause. Here for the first time women worked alongside men in church activities, spoke in Christian gatherings, and at most of the conventions voted on issues facing the delegates. It was in the Sunday School, as well as in the female auxiliaries, that church women began to take a timid step forward.

These women along with their male cohorts embodied the tradition of the amateur at its best. One of the root meanings of the word amateur points toward caring and intelligent love. The amateur is not one who does things poorly, but rather the person who cares about the activity and is intelligent in the way in which he cares. From time to time in the nineteenth century the Sunday School movement encouraged the development of caring and intelligent mentors. For instance, John H. Vincent established a system of normal schools where Sunday School teachers could study the latest in up-to-date pedagogy, Bible geography and other topics. He founded Chautauqua as a national Sunday School university, and eventually, from Chautauqua, launched a nationwide system of local reading groups which in turn encouraged local adult edu-



cation. The Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle sparked the first "book of the month" club, sending out books each month in response to the hunger for culture and religion on the part of teachers in Sunday Schools across the land. In its finest moments the Sunday School was a movement of the amateur.

Every movement struggles with the problem of balancing the need for continuity and the imperative of change. A movement that cannot change its ways grinds to a halt, and one which does not incarnate continuity with the past becomes so threatening that it tends to lose its wide appeal and become a sect. For half a century or more the leaders of the Sunday School managed to maintain stability while also encouraging innovation and change. Many a frontier community welcomed the Sunday School missionary—because they were interested not so much in his Gospel offerings as in the presence of a Sunday School as a symbol of civic order and propriety. Succeeding generations of parents looked to the Sunday School as a way of taming their children and maintaining some link with the receding past. While the Sunday School appeared to be an integral part of a conservative social order, it could also harbor and encourage change and experimentation. Kindergartens, for example, were in Sunday Schools long before they entered the majority of the public school systems. In the latter part of the nineteenth century some Sunday School workers were among the pioneers in responding to the challenge of an emerging new stage of life—adolescence. Some of the earliest efforts at formal adult education were begun under the auspices of the Sunday School.

#### *An American Ailment*

The flaws of this movement are no less interesting than its presumed virtues. Its deepest-set trouble was a congenital ailment that has often afflicted movements in the United States. Even at its best the Sunday School movement was often living off the mood of the moment. The leaders of the crusade seldom dipped below the surface of things so as to probe deeply into any root problem over an extended period of time. Instead they were inclined to float from enthusiasm to enthusiasm as the way of keeping the movement going and its appeal ever growing. This tendency toward thinness of thought is especially evident in the Sunday School workers' preoccupation with technique.

In the earlier days of the movement the Sunday School leaders were constantly engaged in trumpeting the virtues of one or more

procedures. At the outset of the nineteenth century they were interested in memorization; that obsession produced several generations of virtuosi who could recount thousands of scriptural verses, though without necessarily understanding the meaning of any one portion. In the middle of the last century the Sunday School experts turned toward Biblical geography. One Sunday School after another could display its version of a topographical map of the Holy Land. (Palestine Park was for years one of the favorite sights at Chautauqua.)

At the turn of the century yet another technique had become prominent. The new cause was punctuality. The clock became a fixture in the Sunday School room, and there was a national organization called "On-Timers' Tribe" which had "a pledge to bind and a pin to remind." Other orders such as the "Loyal Sunday School Army" worked for punctuality and promptness. Not surprisingly, the late Victorian Sunday School specialist believed in the railroad man as the most likely candidate for a Sunday School superintendency. Why? His ability to run a railroad would aid in the management of a Sunday School. In the nineteenth century "Akron Plan" (a guiding design for Sunday schools) the clock was often well-placed; the superintendent's bell punctuated the orchestration of movements from one place to another, and the superintendent sat where he could watch people who came in late.

In succeeding decades Sunday School workers have been no less zealous in the pursuit of the newest in technique. For nearly a century and a half the problem has been much the same: the presence of a popular procedure has often allowed the absence of serious and critical reflection upon that technique to go unnoticed and unmourned.

The same quality of thinness is evident elsewhere in the history of the Sunday School. It is apparent, for example, in the manner in which the Sunday School movement avoided those deeper controversies that could have torn apart the movement. One of these divisive issues was, of course, the distance between black and white America. The Sunday School crusade was never able to span that chasm. Indeed, the Sunday School associations in ante-bellum America went to great lengths to remove from their curriculum any hint of conflict over slavery.

The other failure is symbolized by the Bible. As long as there was no question about the authority of the Bible, the Sunday School (or Bible School) flourished. Yet by the 1880's and 1890's the threat of Biblical criticism was unavoidable. Despite a variety

of valiant efforts to popularize Biblical scholarship and make its findings available to a mass following, the majority of Sunday School leaders managed to ignore this threat and to keep going as though the Biblical critics had never written a single word. To this day the average Sunday School has still not been able to mediate the differences between the teachings of the best of the scriptural experts and the opinions and convictions of the rank-and-file church member.

It is little wonder, then, that the disdainful phrase, "a Sunday School faith," has come to be synonymous with superficiality and self-protective innocence. Perhaps this characteristic of thinness is the most legitimate reason which has prompted American theologians and historians to overlook the "big little school." For all of its failings, however, the Sunday School still offers contemporary Protestants a way to understand both their own religious heritage and the history of social movements in this country. The Sunday School movement will probably never happen again. No large scale movement will be able to develop in our time in the same way that the nineteenth-century movements took hold and extended their life over decades. A media society uses up movements as fodder for the 7:00 o'clock or 11:00 o'clock news show on television. A new Sunday School movement would not have time to germinate and grow and make its mistakes without the hot glare of publicity exposing it to a society that, quickly bored, seeks ever-new sensations.

The old Sunday School movement may, therefore, be the last of the great religious movements in American history. This "purloined letter" is ripe and ready for discovery and critical examination.

# A Badly Organized Miracle

by SARA LITTLE

From my years of being a professional church educator—and that's a good many (since the summer of 1944; you can figure it)—I recognize, in retrospect, that I have operated on several assumptions about the Sunday School. Only in the preparation for "Confrontation: Sunday School" has the oldest, most nebulous of these assumptions reached the stage of formulation. Simply put, it goes something like this: The Sunday School is an occasion by means of which people come to be related to people in a caring way that potentially enriches their lives.

Let me give two illustrations. Several years ago, when I was named professor at Union Theological Seminary, considerable publicity was given to the appointment of the first woman on the faculty. I received a letter. "Do you remember me?" the letter began. "I am your first grade Sunday School teacher, and remember dear little Sara with great affection. I have followed you all these years with love and pride." "Miss Maude"—whom I remembered, of course—said some other things that symbolize what I mean about caring people.

Take another illustration. Early in my career, I helped a large, affluent church establish a small, rural Sunday School—in those days often called a mission Sunday School, though I refused to allow that term to be used. Within about a month, I had recruited and "trained" teachers, organized a Sunday School, a Sunday School council, a youth group, a choir, a 4-H club, and a women's home demonstration club. We had cleaned up and equipped an unused building, turning it into a Sunday School and a community center. Late one night, filled with samples of about five different kinds of freezer-made ice cream from our party, I remember distinctly thinking deep thoughts on that long, moonlit drive back into the city. One such thought went something like this: "It doesn't really matter that this is a Sunday School. What does matter is that people are brought together by something they deem significant. A whole new dimension of life is being offered for these

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Dr. Little is Professor of Christian Education at the Presbyterian School of Christian Education and Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia.

'salt-of-the-earth' people . . . and for me, because of my relation to them." Looking back, I think I was experiencing what Jonathan Edwards once called the expansion of the very self by means of love for others. All of this—Jonathan Edwards excepted—is an illustration of an assumption about the Sunday School, namely, the frequency with which it has created at least the possibility of a caring relationship. Although I have never been naïve enough to think the Sunday School automatically brought about such a relationship, and though I have often found the same kind of thing occurring through other instrumentalities—even, if you please, whatever it is that goes on in graduate theological education—I have a hunch that this first assumption is one in which I represent the masses of Sunday School people throughout the years, whenever it has been possible to say "the glorious Sunday School" with feeling.

There are other assumptions I unearthed in this reflection, but I shall mention only one more—somewhat more abstract, certainly better informed by the academic pursuits in which one engages in order to teach classes. It is this: The Sunday School movement is a lay activity which originated outside the church and is to be understood at least partly in terms of the tensions developed by twentieth-century efforts to integrate it into the life of the institutional church. I think that assumption can be documented. What is now a divisional function in the National Council of Churches was once the domain of the International Council of Religious Education, an official church organization which grew up and gradually supplanted the lay-dominated American Sunday School Union. During the days when I was trying to clarify some of my ideas, I tested out a hypothesis that repeatedly, when the hierarchy of the church has threatened to "take over" the church, some lay movement has emerged to prevent this "takeover." A Lutheran church historian agreed with me. About this time, I came across another confirmation of my thesis in an article in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, calling attention to the commemoration of the founding of the First Baptist Church Sunday School in 1816, 150 years before.<sup>1</sup> It was started in a shoe store, and caused the first split in the congregation when members moved into a gallery in the church. The minister called it a secular organization that had no right to meet on the Lord's Day; the members had prayer meetings and refused to allow ministers to participate. Now the Sunday

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1. *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, Saturday, January 15, 1966.



School of approximately two thousand members is thoroughly "in" the church, with a staff of ministers, but the tensions illustrated in this situation have been characteristic of a kind of lay-clergy dichotomy.

I was not invited here, however, to make an autobiographical statement, whether in terms of experiences or of development of thought, though such a statement would not be unrelated to our task. How *does* one find out about what the present really is in the Sunday School? How does one inquire whether it is truly glorious—which is to say, how does one accurately assess its state of health?

### *Statistics*

There is always the avenue of statistics. It is the one that would speak most clearly to many people, because many people seek "hard data." I have spent considerable time with this question and found some interesting facts. January 1, 1974, the U. S. population was 211,210,000; the Sunday School enrollment, 36,697,785—17.3 per cent of the population. In 1906, according to a National Council of Churches study, the percent of the population in Sunday School was about the same, 17.1 per cent, though there were only 14 million persons.<sup>2</sup> For 50 years after 1906, the overall trend in Sunday School enrollment was up, as was the case with church membership. However, when one looks at the percentage of enrollment in relationship to population, there was a slight decline in the 1920's, an even greater decline in the 1930's, and then a steady move up again. By 1953, 20.6 per cent of the population was enrolled, an increase from 1906 of 122 per cent. I am not sure when the peak enrollment was reached, nation-wide. For the United Methodist Church, it was 1961, with 6,934,876 persons.<sup>3</sup> I imagine that is the pattern with most major denominations. Church membership, for Methodists, and I draw again on the significant "Study of the Church School" by Dr. Warren Hartman, reached a peak in 1964. U. S. Bureau of the Census figures show a parallel in church membership generally—64 per cent of the population in both 1960 and 1965, beginning a gradual decline for every year

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2. Script for filmstrip, "Teach Christ Now," produced by National Council of Churches, Division of Christian Education, for 23rd International Sunday School Convention in Cleveland, Ohio, 1955; and *Yearbook of American Churches*, National Council of Churches, 1960, pp. 279-80.

3. Warren J. Hartman, *A Study of the Church School in the United Methodist Church*. Division of the Local Church, Board of Education of the United Methodist Church, 1972. p. 5.

since that time.<sup>4</sup> According to my figuring, the church membership percentage of the population now stands at 52.1, and, as I said earlier, Sunday School enrollment at 17.3 per cent. The population growth rate is leveling off; in 1973 it was 7.2 per cent, the lowest since 1937. Eventually, unless we continue with drastic losses, the percentage figures may look better. (Not that this is any great comfort.)

Individual denominational studies give the same picture. I studied ten denominations over the period from 1969 to 1974—American Baptist, Southern Baptist, Christian Church (Disciples), Evangelical Covenant, Lutheran Church in America, United Methodist, Presbyterian Church U.S., United Presbyterian Church, Episcopal Church, United Church of Christ. With few exceptions, there has been a fairly steady decline in enrollment. The only gains among these ten, from 1973 to 1974, are among the American Baptists and the Southern Baptists. A Presbyterian Church U.S. study for 1960-68 (I wish it were current) shows a gradual decrease of 27.1 per cent. But for 1966-68, the average *attendance* increased by 38.6 per cent.<sup>5</sup> United Methodist losses from the peak of 1961 to 1970 were 23.8 per cent.<sup>6</sup>

Statistically, then, we have evidence that the Sunday School is not only not growing; it is losing ground, both in relation to its own past and as a percentage of the population. For this information to be helpful, however, much more work is needed. What about geographical regions? Inner cities, rural areas, suburban areas? What about age group enrollment in relation to population trends? Why is it that as evangelical denominations are growing, main line denominations are decreasing? Several studies are under way, nearing completion, and these will be instructive.

Even if these studies were available, for me, at least, they would require some frame of reference, some categories for interpretation. In other words, we need some way of perceiving reality other than a statistical way. This is particularly true for consideration of the present. Last fall, when I consulted a distinguished collection of friends—specifically, Ellis Nelson, John Westerhoff, and Bob Lynn—as to how they would go about interpreting the present, Ellis Nelson said immediately, “Why, the Sunday School is what you

4. *Statistical Abstracts in the United States*. U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1972.

5. Study of the Office of Educational Research, Board of Christian Education, Presbyterian Church, U. S. (Now General Executive Board, 341 Ponce de Leon Avenue, N.E., Atlanta, Georgia), 1969.

6. *A Study of the Church School in the United Methodist Church*, p. 5.

think it is!" Somehow we spontaneously began building on that idea, in a stimulating short time of brainstorming. Actually, I thought I had my speech practically done, with the notes I made, but when I started to work, they were gone. That was a crisis. I have had to rely more on my own formulations, though I am sure I have drawn on what my colleagues said in that conversation—as well as on hundreds of other conversations, visits to Sunday Schools, articles, and other sources. I believe a case can be made for interpreting the present by means of any one of these images. Engage with me in a kind of metaphor-making activity as my primary way of getting at the present. What is your response when I say, "The Sunday School is what you think it is"? Reflect on some of these possibilities.

### *Images*

#### 1. Incubator for conversion

What an "incubator for conversion" is I am not sure, but the phrase does evoke a kind of image of what the Sunday School is to hundreds of people. I thought of alternative terms—a weekly revival, an evangelistic agency, or, as I read in a book by Arthur Flake, *The True Functions of the Sunday School*, a soul-winning agency.<sup>7</sup> That book, incidentally, a Southern Baptist volume first written in 1930, has been in constant use in various revisions at least through the 1955 edition, which I used. Of the eight "true" functions, at least four are variations on the evangelistic theme. You may think I am talking about the past, but I insist it is the present. You know the Elmer Towns volumes on *The Ten Largest Sunday Schools* and *The World's Largest Sunday School*. Then there is the survey of 50,000 evangelical congregations, reported by Kenneth O. Gangel in *Christianity Today*. From that survey he concludes that "the Sunday School is alive and well." There were some problems he discovered in the approach of these congregations. "1) It offers a conscience-saving, though inadequate, alternative for parents who neglect Christian teaching at home. 2) It has focused too much on children and too little on adults. 3) It may have so emphasized evangelism that it has neglected nurture. 4) It too often is used as a substitute for a total Church program of nurture."<sup>8</sup>

7. Nashville, Tennessee: Convention Press, rev. ed. 1955.

8. "Emerging Patterns in Church Education," *Christianity Today*, Vol. XVII, No. 20, (July 6, 1973), p. 5.



The Sunday School exists to convert. That focus is clear. William Kennedy, now an educational executive of the World Council of Churches, has said that the Sunday School has moved in this century from concern with "the gathering of the saints" to concern for "the perfection of the saints." There have been moments, studying the new curriculum developments of the 1950's and 1960's, when I agreed. But I daresay that the "gathering of the saints," the evangelistic focus, is still more dominant, numerically speaking.

## 2. Training school for character

There is a little rank-ordering or voting exercise I have used on several occasions with church school teachers, parents, or adults concerned in some way with the educational enterprise. Take some words or phrases like conversion, personal growth, discipleship, learning to be good, and others, and ask which are top priorities for the Sunday School. Again and again, people place "learning to be good" at or near the top. People *expect* boys and girls to be caught to be good in Sunday School—honest, kind, truthful. I think of Ernest Ligon's Character Education projects and the materials developed to be used in character education. I think of morals, tacked on to the end of every Bible story. Of all the possibilities for interpretation of the Sunday School, this "training school for character" is the most problematic for me, both educationally and theologically. Being good, like being happy, is a by-product; taken as a goal, it is elusive and self-defeating. Besides, ethically, how *dare* anyone seek to produce in anyone else a certain quality or characteristic? Theologically, devotion to God and the purposes of God may eventuate in discipleship, faithfulness, obedience. Some of the work being done today, called moral education, certainly is to be distinguished from the older "character education" approaches; it cannot be contained within the Sunday School structures.

This image, which historically has been so powerful, may be less functional today. Our awareness of our own lack of moral health, individually and as a nation, may make us doubt the efficacy of this institution, the Sunday School, which, for years, has stood as at least a symbol of the desirability of being good. Very little of the glorious present is here, I think.

## 3. School

Some people do not even say Sunday School. They simply see and think and feel *school*, with all that it entails—curriculum,

administration, systems, teacher education, all the terms that are used in the public domain in connection with schooling. As to forms assumed by the school, at least twenty could be named in three minutes. One can find everything from a kind of miniature university with required core courses and electives, all on Sunday morning, to extension operations, like extension divisions of state universities, operating in conference centers, homes, offices. As to the organization of learning, again, many patterns are to be found—grades, learning centers, open classrooms, schools without walls. As to educational theory, these all exist. Martin Buber's description of education as a funnel, where teachers pour knowledge into their pupils, is operative, as is his contrasting description of education as a pump, where a teacher enables a student to become what he or she already is, in a kind of self-actualization. There may even be found Buber's own concept of education as dialogue. Certainly the affective and the cognitive domains are terms tossed about in connection with educational theory. But the umbrella, the unifying factor for all these diverse forms and theories, is the school. To have a "real" school—that is the twentieth-century dream of professional church educators. And if the school itself cannot bring in the kingdom, then innovations within the school can do it. Or teacher education programs can do it, if we can get just the right ones.

#### 4. Function

Some people, probably many people, would say Sunday School is an anachronism. It is just a noun we use out of the past to designate a function of the church. The lay movement, of which I spoke in my second assumption, has in fact moved back into the life of the church as an integral part of it. The believing community, in maintaining its own life and outreach, nurtures its members, and the educational function is carried out in various ways—situational, intentional, relational. This is like much of what happens as a natural dimension of the life of the home. I read an article recently somewhere, maybe in *Harvard Educational Review*, entitled "The Pedagogy of Participation." The title is the only thing I remember. It captures the essence of this fourth option.

In the fall of 1973 there was a Consultation on Evaluating the Sunday School Contribution to Church Education in Europe. Participants were "highly critical of Christian education programs directed almost exclusively at the minds of children," although they recognized that most new curriculum materials were directed

toward teaching "the facts of the faith." Their conclusion was this: "We must no longer talk about Sunday School teaching, but about Christian nurture. Children are to be nurtured into the faith, not taught about it. Such nurturing can only occur as children take their proper place in the life of the loving, serving and worshipping Christian community."<sup>9</sup>

The term, then, is "Christian nurture," akin to, but not identical with, "church school" or "school of the church." It is the successor to the Sunday School, but also, in relation to our earliest history, a return to the way we were "educated" then.

## 5. Community of love

Is the Sunday School like a community of love? I am not content with that metaphor. First I wrote down fellowship. For many people, that is exactly what the Sunday School is, or what they most want it to be. In the United Methodist report on the church school, when people were asked what factor would most influence their choice of a new church home, over two-thirds checked "friendliness of the people." What did they want from their church school? Seventeen per cent wanted fellowship; only eight per cent wanted serious study.<sup>10</sup> In a Presbyterian Church, U.S., study of adults, most people (43 per cent) reported they attended the class they did because of fellowship; they felt that they belonged, they enjoyed one another. Only 18 per cent said they attended in order to learn.<sup>11</sup> Fellowship, not learning, is what is important. It is interesting that fellowship was even more important for churches of over 1,000 members, and/or located in the middle city. Small churches evidently have an advantage here.

This need to be known individually, to feel that one belongs, may be behind the human relations and sensitivity groups, the human potential groups, all the small groups with personal focus that have developed within the last twenty-five years. Many people see the Sunday School as an encounter group. I thought of using that term, but chose "community of love" as including the more traditional fellowship focus. Some of you may have seen the television production, "Circle of Love." The possibility of a small

9. "Christian Nurture: Consultation on Evaluating the Sunday School Contribution to Church Education in Europe," Education Newsletter, Office of Education, World Council of Churches, Vol. III, No. 1 (March 1974), p. 1.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

11. Margaret J. Thomas, *Survey of Adult Study Patterns Within the Church School of the Presbyterian Church, U. S.* Educational Research, Board of Christian Education, Presbyterian Church, U. S., 1969. p. 78.

group, already existing in the Sunday School class, is a natural for that "circle of love" to be undergirded by the Christian tradition and thus transformed into a genuine community.

#### 6. Launching pad for dealing with social issues.

I am taking this term from the Methodist study. That is what six per cent of the people wanted the church school to be. It was not even mentioned in the Presbyterian Church, U.S., study, though to be honest I should say that questions dealt more with methods of teaching than with the purposes of the Sunday School. I think most denominations have a small minority of youth and adults who want to "do something" with the knowledge they have gained, who see ministry groups as replacing the Sunday School, who want their lives to make a difference. I remember an eloquent plea from a young lawyer whom I invited to serve on a panel in one of my classes. The question was: "What do you want from the professional leadership in your church?" His answer was something like this: "Help us to deal with crucial social issues in the light of our Christian faith. Who wants to wander in the wilderness with the Israelites for forty years when the world is falling to pieces? Isn't there some sequence, some progression? Isn't it possible to focus on some tasks in childhood, some in youth, and then to *build* on that in adulthood, with something distinctive? I don't want to sound pious. But I do want to serve Jesus Christ as my Lord." There are technical terms for what he was talking about, but the important thing here is his plea to turn the Sunday School class into a "launching pad for dealing with social issues."

#### 7. An answer to every need

In the United Methodist study, 58 per cent gave a "multiple purposes" answer to the question about what the church school should be.<sup>12</sup> A Ford Foundation study report proposes that there are two approaches to reforming education in the city: the "add-on" model and the "spread-out" model.<sup>13</sup> I suggest that this seventh image includes both of these—add on activities and organizations, spread out the school to take care of all the interests of all the people. Everything that has not been said already about what the Sunday School is can be placed here.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

13. Edward Meade, Jr., "Models for Reforming Education in the City," Ford Foundation, Office of Reports, 1973.

### Questions

Many questions could, and should, be raised about what I have said. I shall choose only two for reflection. First of all, what does all this amount to? Second, *is* the present glorious?

You have your own responses. Let me suggest some of mine. It is difficult to interpret the present. For some of us, the Sunday School is, in fact, not one thing, but many things. For some of us, there are strong implicit assumptions about what it is, assumptions coloring our reaction to proposals, programs, work we do. Those assumptions become perceptions shaping both present and future, as Ellis Nelson suggested in his statement that "the Sunday School is what you think it is." I would like to illustrate this "shaping" response to our perceptions by going back to my earlier statement about the lay movement—the strong ownership laity feel in the Sunday School movement. Several years ago a young minister who, evidently, had actually heard something in a Christian education class that gave him ideas about how he might carry out his office of teaching elder, made a proposal to the church he served. Instead of a new building, why not use limited facilities, abolish the Sunday School, add another professional to the staff, and let the two do all the teaching? A varied through-the-week schedule would make this possible. In the days following his proposal, he said that, although he had been a pastor in Mississippi during some bad racial tensions and had been "in trouble," nothing there even touched the intensity of emotion aroused by such an educational proposal in a "progressive" Virginia community. The plan *did* go through, the response was good, people said they were learning. But when the minister moved and the D.C.E. married and left, the congregation re-established the Sunday School, put up a building, and things are as they were.

Those people perceived the Sunday School as *theirs*, a fellowship, a school, with at least elements of evangelism. Often we professionals have operated at cross-purposes. We have imposed *our* image of a school, whereas I do believe that all the images I have mentioned are operative, as well as others, and should be taken seriously. More seriously, if you please, than innovation. More seriously than behavioral objectives, written in realistic, measurable, performance terms. More seriously than accountability. Or, rather, than the "modern" school version of accountability. Perhaps what I am talking about is accountability of a deeper dimension, an accountability that takes into account the kind of spiritual



hunger that is pointing to a vacuum which seems to exist, or that recognizes the longing for a kind of personal piety that may be behind the Gallup poll's findings that people are taking religion more seriously these days. But I am getting into the future.

Let us return to the present with the second question, *Is the present "glorious"?* Yes and no. No, when I think of how we rely on the latest fads to make it glorious—the behavioral objectives, simulation games, value-clarification, TA, PET, TET, a particular technology or program for teaching skills. One of my favorite persons, Charles Kraemer, former moderator of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, once quoted from someone else the comment that we were always in search of some unfailing infallible means of grace. That's true. We educators lead the record for the search. And the present is never glorious when we try to make the Sunday School infallible.

Nor is the present glorious when we are overcome with despair or hopelessness. What can we do in a mobile, pluralistic society, when we are in a minority group? The "glorious" Sunday School? The thought angers us. I think of what Norman Cousins wrote in an editorial last December: "The main trouble with despair is that it is self-fulfilling."<sup>14</sup> I remember one occasion in Covenant Life Curriculum days when past, present, and future came together in a kind of moment of despair. In a decision that had been made and had to be lived with, I suddenly realized that we were already out of date, that the future had impinged upon the present, which could not be changed. I could not announce that to a class, and undermine confidence and enthusiasm. Nor could I ignore realities. In a way, we who are here considering this "Confrontation: Sunday School" may be in precisely that moment of in-betweenness, of ambiguity, of tension, of being honest about our own convictions and involvement and yet being responsible to the "images" of those with whom we work.

Try this for another image, the one I choose for my answer to the question of whether the present is glorious. The Sunday School is a "badly organized miracle, through which God made grumbling participants into articulate messengers of the reformation truth that we survive by grace alone."<sup>15</sup> Albert van den Huevel, a leader in the ecumenical movement, quotes the late Hank Crane in that

14. "Hope and Practical Realities," *Saturday Review/World*, December 14, 1974, p. 4.

15. Albert van den Heuvel, "Don't You Demythologize My Central Committee," *Risk*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (1972). p. 50.

remark about a particular Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. Hank Crane had a "refreshingly acid-tipped pen," van den Heuvel says. (So does van den Heuvel.) In his article, "Don't You Demythologize My Central Committee," he says, "Even if it is bad, it is better than nothing. Even if it is boring, it is exciting. Even if it is irresponsible, it is nice."<sup>16</sup> I may not "buy" all the adjectives as being applicable to the Sunday School, but the polarities of that with which I expect we are doomed and privileged to live do bring a certain fascination to the present.

Try one final statement in answer to our question, "Is the present glorious?"

The Sunday School appears to take the character of an endless experiment. By the grandeur of its object, by the inexhaustible interests it touches, by the immortality of the souls it nourishes, as well as by the variety of conditions in which it exists, it is invested with this mystery and charm of an ever-unfinished enterprise. Its plan is never quite filled out. The hopes of its true-hearted friends run before their performance, and their aspirations are not realized. Its processes are all tentative. It works by an open pattern. A suspicion, which is probably wholesome, haunts us all that there is some secret about it not yet found out. An undertone of criticism, if not of complaint, can be heard in many of its reports. Greater things are felt to be in its possibilities than in its achievements; and the heart of every workman in it, that is worthy of his place, prophesies a future for it better than the past. Meantime, the consolation is that it is steadily striving to honor the Lord of the vineyard of whose spirit it sprang into life; and the support of its servants is that it gathers its annual harvest, of such as shall be saved, into the life everlasting.<sup>17</sup>

That statement is a direct quote from the Reverend F. D. Huntington, in an address delivered to the State Convention of Massachusetts Sunday School Teachers on June 13, 1860. I found it, rummaging around in the book stacks on a rainy, dreary Saturday afternoon, and succumbed to the temptation to draw on the past for the present. And I know of no better answer to the question, "Is the present glorious?" than to say "The Sunday School appears to take the character of an endless experiment." 1860. 1975. Who knows what is next?

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16. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

17. F. D. Huntington, *The Relation of the Sunday School to the Church*. (Boston: Henry Hoyt, 1860), pp. 3-4.

# Myths of the Modern Sunday School

by RICHARD MURRAY

Many people are convinced that the Sunday School in main-line Protestant churches is dead, but in Dallas, the city in which I live, the Sunday School is alive and kicking. On any given Sunday morning in the suburban churches of Highland Park or North Dallas hundreds of cars crowd the parking lots at the Sunday School hour.

Recently I taught at Spring Valley United Methodist Church in North Dallas. Each of those Sunday mornings I had to force my way down the hall, elbowing my way through a wall-to-wall crowd of children, youth and adults to get to my classroom. Once there, I found some forty adults ranging in age from mid twenties to early sixties who had come to take part in a series of lessons entitled "Ways of Studying the Bible." I wondered why these people thought it was worthwhile to jam into that small room for an hour with me. But there is no doubt in my mind that they were there because they wanted to be there and that they believed that this Sunday School class was worth their time and effort.

Although Sunday School attendance and membership in many United Methodist churches have fallen off drastically in recent years, it is not true that only sect type, conservative churches have healthy Sunday Schools. On the contrary, while many doubt that anything significant really happens in the Sunday School, it remains a thriving suburban, anglo phenomenon of major proportions, especially in the southeastern and southwestern portions of the United States.

But what *is* the Sunday School? A functional description suggests that the Sunday School is an organization within many churches in which children, youth and adults are divided into classes which meet for approximately one hour on Sunday mornings before, after or during a worship service. In these classes one or more teachers lead the participants in some combination of study and worship, based upon some printed curriculum resource. The

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Mr. Murray is Associate Professor of Christian Education and Director of Continuing Education in the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University.



members of these classes, by and large, enjoy being together and engage in a good bit of fellowship and attend primarily to promote and undergird many of its interests, as well as a wide variety of service projects in the church and community.

I both love and hate this Sunday School. As a local church minister of education, I used to hate how hard I had to work to recruit and train a steady stream of people who seemed to achieve so little. And yet I used to love and be stimulated by that steady stream of folks who thought it was worth coming to Sunday School and who appreciated my being there.

I am convinced that our Sunday Schools are extremely durable social institutions and that no matter what changes occur in the future, the Sunday School will continue much like it is. This will be true because the Sunday School provides a number of extremely useful benefits to a large number of people.

One of these is support for the belief that persons are doing what God wants to be done—namely, engaging in Christian community for the sake of Christian growth. While some men are in a class because their wives brow-beat them into coming, and many children are there because they were forced, most people attend Sunday School because they believe that this is what they ought to do and that while they are learning a little they do not have to work too hard to do so. For children another important benefit is a warm accepting community with much less discipline and a lot more personal attention than their weekday schools. Finally, for all ages, the Sunday School is a place for persons to assume leadership and feel needed. These are among some of the major reasons people continue to come to Sunday School week after week.

Another way to look at the present Sunday School is to consider realistically what it can and cannot do. While many illustrations could be used, I will mention only two.

First, the Sunday School cannot change the social views and behavior of its participants. It *can* share in exposing persons to various social needs and wrongs, the Gospel's impact or confrontation with those social needs and wrongs, ways in which some people are working to right those wrongs, and how they might share in that process. Often we expect the Sunday School to do what it can not possibly do, and we do not affirm it for doing what it can do and indeed has done.

Second, a Sunday School cannot provide a Christian education; it cannot teach what a Christian should know of the faith, the Bible, or anything else. What the Sunday School can do is to pro-

vide a series of engagements with the stories of the faith, excerpts from the documents of the faith, and some dialogue with persons in their faithful journey, past and present. By so doing the Sunday School can transform lives.

As I reflect on my fifty-one years in the Sunday School, thirty of those as a professional, I believe that one can say a lot about the Sunday School in the present by speaking about its "myths." My use of the term myth is not precisely correct, but what I mean by the term in this context is those ideas people hold which, while participating in the truth, are in fact largely false. In one sense, these myths point to tensions between two poles of a problem which is persistently present year after year. Some of these myths are held primarily by lay persons, others by church educators and ministers. In every case I have struggled with the truths contained in these myths, and in most cases I have been forced to change my mind over the years.

A first and basic myth is that "the Sunday School should be a real school in which instruction is paramount." Instruction is always present, learning does take place, but the Sunday School is basically groups sharing their faith. Church educators are often frustrated in their efforts to improve everything done in this lay school, going to great lengths to change structures, procedures and content to insure that better schooling can take place.

Because the Sunday morning sessions of the Sunday School are very resistant to such changes, professional educators tend to ignore the Sunday morning classes and turn their attention and energies to creating other forms of schooling—during the week, extended sessions, etc.—where they feel that "real" learning can take place. The problem is, how do we upgrade the teaching—learning interaction without destroying the warmth of community?

Another myth is "the way to improve the Sunday School and make it grow again is to hire a fulltime educator who has been trained in a seminary or a college where he or she has learned the knowledge and skills of Christian Education." While few would doubt that such an education usually helps, a high percentage of today's leading church educators are persons who learned on the job, or ministers who often did not ever take a single course in Christian education. The truth is this, if a professional educator is to help a Sunday School be its real self, this person needs to be a warm, patient person with an unlimited capacity for hard work, love, openness and toleration for ambiguity. Indeed, to help the

Sunday School grow it does not make any difference at all, in my observation, whether the educator has a theological education or not. At the Dallas "Confrontation: Sunday School," a lay person present said, "I am totally frustrated. The professionals in our group would not listen. I had valid points, but they are 'right' and 'know it all.' The key issue for the Sunday School is getting Christian educators to listen, really listen, and not humor us."

But it is also a myth that the Sunday School does not want or need professional help. I can remember vividly how grateful and excited the teachers in my Sunday School classes were when I would spend two days going through their curricular resources for the next quarter on my own and then meet with them for an evening and share my excitement about some Biblical and theological insights to which they had never been exposed. They were always grateful; they never wished I was not around, and, even though they sometimes disagreed with my understanding of the faith, they always appreciated the fact that I was dealing with them at a point where they had felt a need. I do not want to imply that that is the only way that we professionals can be of help, but I think it is certainly one.

Another myth is "that a Sunday School class or any other group of Christians must become a warm, personal community before any real Christian learning can take place." Contrary to this myth, a group of two hundred strangers will, if the conditions are right, learn a great deal. The truth is that it will not be worth the effort for such a large group to spend time getting to know each other. Many persons in a large class will never see each other again, and those who do will build their community through repeated associations. We have mistakenly equated *love* for the pupil with *knowing* the pupil well or liking everyone in the class. Phil Phenix at Teachers College in New York has said that "persons should teach as an expression of love," but we need not sentimentalize that statement. I was enrolled in a course he taught entitled "Ways of Knowing." I am sure I have never been in a more exciting course in my life. There were 95 of us in that class. About a third of them were nuns who wore huge habits, and one of the first things I learned was to arrive early so I could see the teacher. Professor Phenix knew few of our names, and we never became acquainted with each other. But he taught as an expression of his love, and every one of us knew that he loved us and he loved his work even though he did not know us. There was no doubt in any of our

minds that he had an extreme concern for us as persons and that we were a community of strangers working joyfully in a common task. That is why many adults in our Sunday Schools attend very large classes. They feel more community in a hundred people than they do in the give and take of ten. Often they are convinced that the teacher or other persons in that class care about them even though they do not know much about them.

The corollary to that myth is another which says that "only small classes can be intimate or only small churches can be warm or only small Sunday Schools can be close." I was raised in a church of several thousand members in Des Moines, Iowa, and have worked in churches of many thousand members, among them First United Methodist Church, Houston, and First United Methodist Church, Dallas. Often in the larger church there is more community than people believe. Why, even the portion of the balcony that I used to sit in at First Church in Dallas was a community. We did not ever say much to each other, but we knew when one was missing, and we came to know each other as valuable persons who sat in that part of the balcony.

Closely associated with size is what I believe is a most important reason sect-type church Sunday Schools grow and our main-line Sunday Schools sometimes do not. This is the *myth* that "it is un-Christian for any leader, especially a lay person, to stand out too much in his or her teaching." Team-teaching, this myth goes, is always to be preferred, and any person who is unwilling to try to teach as a part of a team is too egotistical to teach anyway. This is simply not true and can be a very destructive myth which causes untold harm in our Sunday Schools. As Phillips Brooks observed many years ago, "truth is known through personality," and this is also true of the truth of the Gospel epitomized in the fact that God chose to reveal Himself finally in a Person. We have mistakenly tried to inhibit God's major gift—a strange, sometimes obnoxious, individual person who in his or her own unique way often is extremely valuable in communicating the truth of the Gospel. Team-teaching *is* valuable, and recruiting persons to be a part of a team is often easier than recruiting a teacher to teach a class by himself or herself for a whole year, but the Sunday School has historically known in its bones that the warm charismatic person often shares the Gospel more persuasively than any team.

I am not saying we ought to dash home and do away with all of our teaching teams. I am saying explicitly and with emphasis

that many good Christian folk can do excellent Christian teaching in Sunday Schools by themselves and do not have to be in teams. Furthermore, those of us who are church professionals know we like to shine; why not let some others shine too!

I am convinced that most of you are not reading this article because God called you to read it; you are reading it because you want to and you want to because you get "strokes" out of doing a better job in your work in the Sunday School. We are in the church for rewards, and the rewards are intrinsic to our being, and we need to eat those rewards every morning for breakfast. The rewards of which I am speaking are praise and appreciation, satisfaction from a job decently done, and the response of people who tell us they really need us and are grateful to us. And we all know we appreciate their saying so. Yet we professionals are jealous of that teacher of a big adult class who attracts many who go home after the class rather than stay for church. We need to re-examine our doctrine of personhood, of that creature whom God made as a messenger and revealer of His own being.

Another myth: "Nothing significant can ever be done in thirty minutes, often all the time there is for a lesson on Sunday morning." The myth continues, "we must have more time: fifty minutes at a minimum and an hour and a half is preferable." The fact is that thirty minutes *is* enough for some significant things to happen *if* there is a sharp focus and you don't try to cover too much. If someone knows something and shares it; if persons get involved mentally, emotionally, or physically for any period of time; and if the Gospel is made present through the persons present, thirty minutes is enough. Often we urge our teachers to try to cover too much material or too many kinds of experiences. My theme song to improve the quality of the Sunday School is to *reduce* what happens. Do less and urge your leaders to do less, and do it more intensively and more personally.

There are a lot of myths concerning curriculum which are tied to this matter of time. One is: "people are going to study at home." We all know that this rarely happens, but the tragedy is that much of our curriculum material is still written with the assumption that it is going to be used outside the classroom. This is a policy which we should force our curriculum editors to change. We should demand that the editors and writers pay attention to the *real* Sunday School and to the fact that that curriculum will be used only during the class, if at all. Of course, there *are* bright exceptions. Sometimes it is the oldest ladies' class, and at other



times it is a group of "gung-ho" children in the elementary grades who are really swept up in their subject. Home study *does* happen, but our materials should be developed and written to be used in class only.

Another important myth which helps us understand our Sunday Schools as they really are, is—"the curriculum resources should have a carefully planned, sequential development which will be used Sunday after Sunday by participants who are regular in attendance." As we all know, this is hardly the case. Attendance of the vast majority of children, youth and adults is highly irregular, and it is simply not true that the experiences and ideas of a previous session can be depended upon for the following week.

The adult class which I taught recently at Spring Valley United Methodist Church was made up of persons who gave evidence that they were greatly interested in the subject, but only about one fourth of the class was present all of the five Sundays in the series, about half were there two or three of the sessions, and the rest attended only once. In today's Sunday School this is typical. The irregularity of attendance is not because they feel that the subject is insignificant or boring. The class members simply have other family and personal priorities which the church has taught them are important. We have taught church members to value family life, and with the opportunities for family recreation on weekends this means "don't go to church some Sundays, do other things."

This brings up another Sunday School myth concerned with teacher recruitment. The myth says—"every good Christian who is interested in teaching a class should be willing to teach for a full year—at a minimum, a quarter." Those who try to hold to this myth tend to feel that something is wrong with the Christian priorities and commitment of those who say that such a long time span is out of the question. The truth is that there are many people who are willing to lead a class for four to six weeks but who are unwilling or unable to set aside other aspects of business or personal life for a longer time. I am one of those persons. If a church wishes to use me as a teacher, it has to adjust to my schedule—I cannot fit into theirs. This is often hard for professional church educators and ministers to understand because *they* must be there every Sunday, but remember it is their job.

Another curriculum myth says—"many people reject the denominational curriculum resources because they do not have

enough Bible in them." In most cases, in my experience, this is not the real reason for the antagonism, and we do not help by counting the number of Biblical chapters or verses which are supposed to be covered by the lessons and telling people about them.

There are many complex reasons for not liking denominational material in the present day Sunday School. One of the major reasons for rejection (although seldom explicitly expressed) is because the format and art work are too different from what the adults in the church knew as children. The simple matter of asking people to read their Bibles rather than printing selected Bible verses in the material itself has caused great concern. Fear of trying unfamiliar methods and concern with a demand for too much individual creativity and time are also upsetting. It comes out, "we want more Bible," but the words most often point to something else.

Nevertheless, it is very important for us to listen carefully to the cry of those who say "we want more Bible in the curriculum" because they are really saying "we do not have a satisfactory way to deal with the faith and the Scriptures in our family and we want help!" As family stresses and strains increase, most Christians feel a great need to bring the data of the faith to bear upon their problems, and they desperately want the Sunday School to compensate for their own uncertainty.

Another myth, usually held primarily by professionals in church education, says—"only those portions of the Bible should be used with children which they can understand." Many lay persons in today's Sunday Schools fight back against such a myth, and I often wish to join them.

I do not fully understand the creation stories, even after hundreds of readings and much study, but they do help me know a good deal about the God of the Hebrews as well as a lot about the nature of men and women, including myself. At what age should we use such stories? I am very glad I was *exposed* to them long before I could "understand" them, otherwise I would be still waiting.

With the permeation of daily life by TV our children are exposed to most of the stories of the Bible as soon as they can sit up (often through re-runs of "The King of Kings"), and to believe that we should protect them from the gory details of the crucifixion until they are in third grade is quite unrealistic.

While a return to uniform lessons for *all* age groups would hardly be warranted, it does have its merits, but the closely graded

imitation of the public school also has both values and limitations. In any case, knowledge of and experience with most of the stories of the faith as found in the Bible are still important.

A final myth concerning curriculum resources is that "the curriculum resources used are crucially important and the use of the denominational materials is best." In any careful analysis of Sunday Schools, I am sure that the teacher will be very crucial and the particular materials used be unimportant. It is hardly an overstatement to say that 85 per cent of what is learned and experienced is traceable to the prejudices, knowledge, personality, and skills of the teacher. Much excellent material is grossly misused, and the Bible is often hardly heard because of untrained and unskilled leaders. One accurate description of today's Sunday School is that it spends far too much money and energy on the development of curriculum materials and far too little on the development of quality teachers.

A final myth, which in many ways is a key to all the rest, is sometimes expressed—"because the church is Christ's Church and the Sunday School is Christ's Sunday School, when something is said to be good for the Sunday School everybody should want to do it." Another way this myth can be stated is—"because the Sunday School is centered on Christ it should be pure and of one mind." This myth is institutionalized in the idea of a unified budget, but, as I seek for a broad descriptive explanation of the best Sunday Schools today, I would say they function as "an umbrella over a wide variety of sects." And the best professional church educator is "*a little shepherd of the sects.*"

In contrast to the myth that everyone should do the same things in the same way for Christ's sake, we have today a proliferation of sects within our churches, each of whom is sure that the entire church or Sunday School should believe and behave as do they.

These sects range from the "group discussion is the only way to learn" type, to "Bible study is the only thing we ought to do" type. In many ways the youth, the social activists, the lay witness enthusiasts, and even the "let's not do or try too much" sects are typical in every church and Sunday School.

A sect is characterized by exclusiveness, purity, high standards of discipline, and a great desire to accomplish a task for the sake of God. Its members will often go to great lengths to convert others to their point-of-view and are usually quite blind to the virtues and values of other groups with other goals. All such sects



are sure the Sunday School would be a great institution if everybody was like them.

A Sunday School full of different sects may seem very fragmented and undesirable, but the alternatives also have problems. It would not be healthy to believe that the entire Sunday School should really act like one sect and anyone who does not want to do things that way can go somewhere else. Nor would it be wise to believe that the entire Sunday School should act like an inclusive church which tries to attract all kinds of people and never engages in much activity because there is no consensus, and without a consensus no peace and harmony.

The leader in today's Sunday School often finds himself or herself standing between the sects of the Sunday School trying to "shepherd" them all at the same time. Much time is spent just keeping one group from destroying another. That's not bad. A reasonable goal for such a leader and such a Sunday School would be to enable the sects to develop toleration for one another, and to hope that out of toleration would come understanding and some mutual trust which might end up in genuine love.

The Sunday School of the future will include a number of new elements and different approaches, but it is also going to be a lot like the Sunday School in all ages, in which earnest Christians will continue to be warm, sometimes bitter, often anxious, and engage in angry interchange because each wants to "*learn Christ*" in his or her own way. But the Sunday School will live on.

# A Future for the Sunday School

by JOHN H. WESTERHOFF

Society exists through the process of transmission. This transmission occurs by the means of communication of doing, thinking, and feeling from the older to the younger. Education is the means of this social continuity of life.<sup>1</sup>

John Dewey

When this conference was planned, I was asked to address "The Future of the Sunday School." My first thought was: that will be easy, there isn't any. Then, recalling the tenacity of the Sunday School in the face of similar prognoses, I found myself enticed by the challenge to face the future of the Sunday School afresh. However, after much struggle, all I had to show for my labors was a waste basket full of scraps. To speak of *the* future of the Sunday School pushed me toward prediction, but having no crystal ball, I was immobilized. Just as the Sunday School has many presents, it will surely have many futures. I changed the title of my address to "A Future for the Sunday School." That made my work more possible, though not more simple. To present a future is to possibly exert influence; that is an awesome responsibility. Through the years I have tried to convince those who will listen to me not to take too many notes. I have always been wary of giving the impression that I know and others do not. In my experience that simply is not true. I am quite aware that I have sometimes been wrong and often changed my mind. Nevertheless I have accepted this assignment, and I do want you to take my remarks seriously, if not authoritatively. Thoughts about the future can too easily be believed or discarded; neither is wise.

Today I plan to speak of *a* future for the Sunday School, but what sort of future do I have in mind? Is it the future I think *can be*, based upon an analysis of the present; the future I think *is apt to be*, based upon projections of current trends; or the future I *hope will be*, based upon my personal dreams? I have chosen a Sunday School I desire, but also a Sunday School I think can be and indeed is quite likely to be. Of course, you will have

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Dr. Westerhoff is Associate Professor of Religion and Education at Duke University Divinity School.

1. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), p 3.

to judge whether my imagination has taken over for my reason, and also whether or not you can share my commitments. In any case, my intention is not to sell you on my hoped for anticipations, but to stimulate you to envision for yourselves.

Let me therefore begin with a warning. Don't expect too much from this address. Thinking about the future is too important to be left to one or even a group of academics or denominational executives. The future is everyone's business. And the future of the Sunday School is uniquely the responsibility of congregations, of the laity and their educational leaders. Sometimes I fear that local churches, while wildly objecting, will let themselves be carried into the future by the words and actions of national decision makers rather than by their own prayed-through convictions. Therefore I encourage you to reflect critically upon my remarks and not too easily accept any of my conclusions. Futurists, academics and denominational executives can be fools.

L. F. Senabaugh, onetime Methodist Superintendent of the Department of Teacher Training for the Virginia Conference Sunday School Board, in 1930 penned a training manual, the first chapter of which he entitled "Making the Old Sunday School New." Senabaugh began:

The story is told that when the board of directors of a great railway system determined upon building a new terminal station in an eastern city to meet the new needs of their business, they called in certain engineers and architects and gave instructions for the drawing of plans for the great building. The plans were finally completed, the board of directors was in session, the engineers and architects had made their report, and a vote was to be taken ordering the construction to begin, when the superintendent of transportation arose from his place at the directors' table and asked the question, 'Gentlemen, you are planning to build these new buildings on the site of the old ones. It will take years to complete this task. What do you propose to do with the traffic that we now have while the new building is being erected?' This question made it necessary to draw new plans that would permit traffic to continue uninterrupted while the new building took the place of the old.<sup>2</sup>

That story provides a necessary prolegomenon for my remarks. As many of you know, for some time I have questioned the relevance of the "schooling-instructional" paradigm which has dominated church education since the turn of the century. You also know that I am committed to the construction of an alternative paradigm. While I am beginning to get a clear picture of a new

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2. L. F. Senabaugh, *The Small Sunday School* (Nashville, Tenn.: Cokesbury, 1930), p. 20.

way to think about church education, in recent days I have also become aware of the need for some interim plans. I realize the importance of Mr. Senabaugh's parable. While we strive to build an alternative future for the church's educational mission and ministry, the process of education must, and indeed will, go on. To pronounce an Illichian benediction over the Sunday School is both immature and irresponsible. And so on with the problem.

### *Part of a Whole*

Recall, there was a joke at the turn of the century. It began with a question. "When is a school not a school?" The answer, "When it is a Sunday School!" In response to that bit of scathing humor, many of us endeavored to make the Sunday School into a significant educational institution, that is, one modeled after the best of our public schools. Perhaps that was an error. Surely the Sunday School is most alive and flourishing today in those churches which never joined in that effort. It appears that the Sunday School, as John Wesley suggested, is best suited to be "a nursery for the church," that is, a place where the faithful endeavor to build community, sustain and transmit their heritage, and bring others to faith. That may not be all there is to church education, but it is foundational and characteristic of what a Sunday School seems best able to contribute to the church's educational ministry.

The church is an intentional community with a shared cumulative tradition within which persons can experience and reflect on Christian faith, make conscious decisions for or against the faith, and be both equipped and stimulated for apostleship in the world. Church education is a process of interaction between and among the generations within a community of faith. Through various and diverse deliberate, systematic and sustained efforts it has as its goal the growth and development of individual and corporate faithing selves. The Sunday School can provide *one* context for church education, an environment where people can strive to be Christian together as they become conscious of their identity as a tradition-bearing community of faith. The Sunday School can not and never will be all of church education, but it appears well suited for one important ingredient in the church's educational ministry. That is not a new idea.

In 1905 John Vincent, the great Methodist leader of the Sunday School movement, then in his later years, gave an address at the Eleventh International Sunday School Convention in Toronto,

Canada. Having accepted an assignment much like my own, he entitled his address, "A Forward Look For the Sunday School." Vincent began by saying he was going "to dream of things that are to be."<sup>3</sup> (That's more than I have claimed.) However, before he revealed his dream, he made an important observation:

It is possible in our day to make too much of method, of recent educational theories, of curricula, and merely intellectual training. The Sunday school in its desire to gratify modern educators is in danger of making a blunder and of sacrificing good things that are old. . . .<sup>4</sup>

Then he made his prediction. In the future, the Sunday School will be less of a school and more of a home. Its program will be more like the past; it will focus on conversation and the interaction of people, rather than the academic study of the Bible or theology. The Sunday School will be a place where friends deeply concerned about the faith will gather for conversation and living, for reflection and action. Next Vincent interestingly pointed out, "We must remember that the Sunday school is not the whole of the church, nor does it cover all the educational functions of the church."<sup>5</sup> The church school, he suggested, ought to be the name of the total educational effort, and its goal will be to enable people to apply the truths of God to their individual and corporate lives, and thereby join with all social reformers who dream of a Christian civilization and wish to contribute to that vision. The church school will, he continued,

promote unification and completeness in the various agencies that make for symmetrical education: the family, the pulpit, the pastorate, the Sunday school, the public school, the college, the libraries, the philanthropic and reformatory organizations, the literary and reading circles, and the societies for the study of the Bible and social problems.<sup>6</sup>

And then, commenting again on the Sunday School, he closed with these words: "As I look, it appears to be a vision of a noble future. I look again and I find it the reflection of an actual past . . ."<sup>7</sup>

Notice, in Vincent's dream, the distinction he notes between what he calls the church school, or the overarching educational program of the church, and the Sunday School, which he sees as one piece in that larger program. My own thoughts parallel his.

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3. John Vincent, "A Forward Look For the Sunday School" in *Eleventh International Sunday School Convention* (Boston, Mass.: Executive Committee of International S. S. Assn., 1905), p. 166.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 165-166.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 175.



From one perspective, then, there will be little new in my position; from another perspective, however, the difference is significant. Consider the best of Christian Education literature in the '40's, '50's, and '60's. In most cases, a point was made of the importance of the many facets of learning present in the church. As soon as this point had been made, however, these authors began to emphasize the place of a school in the church. The result was disastrous. Church educators focused their major attention on schools, attempting to build comprehensive educational programs within them.

I want clearly and forcefully to disassociate myself from that error. The Sunday School will never be more than a very small piece in a comprehensive educational program. The professional educators can never again permit themselves to become the guardians of the Sunday School. Instead they need to provide leadership for the church's total educational ministry. The Sunday School will only be adequate for reaching limited goals, goals primarily aimed at the needs of children six to twelve years of age. Totally new, not yet existent, programs of youth and adult education are needed. Likewise, planning for church education will necessitate a de-emphasis on schooling. Only if we engage in new forms of education involving the total life of a faith community will we in our churches be able to establish an adequate educational program. As part of that larger program, however, a new-old intergenerational Sunday School can make an important contribution. But remember, unless we have new additional programs for youth and adults, the Sunday School of which I am speaking will be unsuccessful. Indeed, the greatest educational challenge we face is evolving significant programs of education with youth and adults. I regret that I see no viable future for the Sunday School in meeting the advanced faith development needs of either, except in so far as youth and adults also have a need to interact religiously with children and share with them their lives of faith. *If*, and I emphasize that again, we establish new non-schooling programs for youth and adults and engage more mindfully in holistic church education, then there is a role for the Sunday School, a role especially important in meeting foundational faith needs for all ages. With those important qualifications, I turn to a future for the Sunday School.

I will attempt to describe what might be called a futuristic Sunday School, that is a Sunday School not now realized, but one



which can be conceived to be existing in the near future because it has value to a significant number of persons who are equipped with the necessary skills to build it. Further, I believe that the futurible Sunday School I plan to describe will meet both some essential needs of church education in the next decade and provide a continuing context for foundational church education within the alternative paradigm I am in the process of creating.

### *Reconsidering the Past*

What might shock some of you is that my model for a futurible Sunday School is more like the earlier Sunday School than our contemporary church school. Recall that the church school was modeled after the public school. I contend that that was a mistake. Because some of us deplored the Sunday School's theology, we tried to discard one of the most significant religious educational institutions in modern history. Until aspects of the old Sunday School are reintroduced, the church will lack a necessary dynamic for life in a secular world. That may appear to be a strange position for me to take, but review our most recent past.

Following the lead of the public schools, we professional church educators tried to create church schools, new educational institutions. Soon they became divorced from church life. Rarely were they able to meet the needs of any but our large, sophisticated, suburban churches. And typically they relegated church educators to an island of instruction with children and youth. The church school did give professional identity, just as it theoretically provided a context for engaging in quality education. Yet rarely did it become the school of the people or a natural expression of any faith community's life. The old Sunday School was different. It was at the center of the church's life, it had the loyalty and commitment of its people, and it met basic religious needs of all.

During the last few months I have visited a number of large dynamic mainline liberal churches with professional staffs. In Charlotte, North Carolina, I found one of those rare churches where the dream of the perfect church school was actualized. All their teachers were trained. They had developed an exemplary curriculum. Their educational plant, equipment, supplies and organization would make many public schools envious. Yet they have evaluated their achievements and found them lacking. The modern church school, at its very best, is less than adequate. The laity and the professionals in these churches want to know what they can do to bring vitality back into their Sunday Church School.

Recently I also discovered the massive world of the small church. For a professional educator it was common to ignore these thousands of churches. I, like numerous other church educators, got used to talking about educational plants, supplies, equipment, curricula, teacher training, closely graded classes and learning centers with individualized instruction or some other current educational enthusiasm. Lately I have been confronted by churches which share a pastor, more than likely will never have the services of a professional church educator, have at best a couple of small rooms attached to their church building, no audio-visual equipment, few supplies, an inadequate number of potential teachers, and not enough children for age-graded classes. Yet in these churches the Sunday School is still the heart of the church's life. The Sunday School Superintendent is the lay pastor and true leader of the congregation. If it were not for the Sunday School, these churches might have died long ago. Nevertheless Sunday Schools in these small mainline churches are sick, sick in part because they have tried to become modern church schools and failed. The Sunday School statistics board in the front of their churches dramatizes their situation and has resulted in depression. Denominational programs, many of which they are often unable to use, bring on feelings of inadequacy and failure. (And remember, 85 per cent of all Methodist churches have less than 300 members, and 75 per cent of Methodist Sunday Schools have less than 100 members.)

In the last months I have been working with some of these churches, small Methodist parishes in Caswell County of North Carolina. When they asked me to help them, they stated their problem in this way: "The Sunday School was always at the heart of our church. Now it is sick and the whole church is sick. Where have we gone wrong? What should we do?"

I recall facing a similar series of questions a few years ago. At the time I was the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries liaison person with our churches in Hawaii. On one of my visits I met with the members of a number of our small pure Hawaiian churches. They still called their church schools Sunday Schools, though through the years they had obediently and faithfully tried to develop a Christian education program like those recommended by the church's educational professionals. They struggled to raise money to build classrooms; they bought the denominational curriculum and sent their people to teacher training workshops and lab schools. Still, attendance dropped, teachers were difficult to

secure, and more seriously the faith was not adequately transmitted. They asked me why they were failing. I was stumped. They were doing everything we had suggested, yet they were unsuccessful. In desperation I asked them to tell me about the days when they were succeeding. And they did. They explained how many of their churches used to gather each Sunday afternoon for a *luau*. Young and old came together to dramatize Bible stories, sing hymns, witness to their faith, discuss their lives as Christians, eat and have fellowship together. They did almost everything natural to their culture except dance; we taught them that was immoral. When they finished describing their old Sunday School, I suggested they return to having *luaus*.

Well, following on what I learned in Hawaii, I asked the people in the Caswell County churches to share their faith-biographies. How did they come to be the persons of faith or unfaith they are now? As each shared her or his life story, we listed the most significant influences and situations in their growth and development of faith. People told of homecomings, family gatherings, revivals, of picnics and pageants, of choirs and fellowship, of caring, helping, and witnessing, but most of all, they described the persons whose lives had touched theirs and with whom they had shared significant moments.

We then discussed hopes for their families, their children, their youth, themselves, their church, and their community. Their list included knowing the story of our faith, experiencing that faith, being a faithful community, witnessing to the faith, being more Christian in their daily lives, building a better world, and making their community more Christian. We called their hopes goals, and their faith-biography discoveries strategies. Together, then, we framed a life for their Sunday Schools, a life that creatively brought together their goals and strategies. Their plan, while in some ways very contemporary, had much in common with the best of the old Sunday School. I told them that, and we celebrated. Once again they had a vision, hope and a plan. They didn't need new buildings, curriculum, or the equipment and supplies of the modern church school. They didn't need to train a host of teachers for age-graded classes or learning centers which for them could never be. But they could be a faithful community; they could sustain and transmit their faith; they could provide a place where persons might experience and act out their Christian faith. They had begun to build a new-old Sunday School. They were liberated from the

oppressions of an educational program they could never adapt to their situation, and they had begun to determine their own future as a faithful Christian community.

Now I don't want you to think that I have become an uncritical, nostalgic romantic, who in these difficult days has decided to return to the womb or a past that never was. For years I was part of the movement to reform the Sunday School by building it into a modern church school, like unto the best of our public schools. Then I went through a stage of critically judging this whole endeavor and even suggested that neither a church school nor Sunday School was necessary. Neither in retrospect seems reasonable. Now I want to renew the Sunday School as one piece of an educational design, and my model for that renewal is found in some of the characteristics of the old Sunday School. Of course, the theology of the old big-little school I do not share. Nor do I uncritically accept its pedagogy. I affirm a liberation theology which unites the truths of both liberalism and neo-orthodoxy, and I am grounded in the insights of the best of the progressive tradition, of John Dewey and George Albert Coe. Nevertheless I believe that we have in the old Sunday School a basis for the genesis of a new Sunday School, relevant to the future, to liberation theology, progressive education, and our mainline churches.

### *Old Images and New*

In 1816 J. A. James wrote *The Sunday School Teacher's Guide*. He opened with a conviction:

Teaching religion is something more than giving instruction. The accumulation of Biblical facts and figures and the memorization of passages of Scripture are merely a small part of religious training. . . . Teaching is not to be an end in itself, but a means to an end, and that end that we seek is right living. . . .<sup>8</sup>

James went on to describe the Sunday Schools he knew best. He first told of children, youth and adults preparing for and celebrating special occasions, such as Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, Missionary Day, and Decision Day. In a chapter entitled "We Learn By Doing" he described life in the Sunday School. He included plays and musicals, games, hikes and hunts, parties and picnics, social service projects and community activities, all with children, youth, parents and grandparents participating together.

8. J. A. James, *The Sunday School Teacher's Guide* (New York: The Female Union Society for the Growth of Sabbath Schools, 1816), pp. 83-84.

At Duke we have a fascinating collection of local English Methodist Sunday School histories. Typical is the history of the Lincoln Fields Wesleyan Methodist Sunday School and Society. It tells of a Sunday School with string bands and choirs and with a host of societies: some for social improvement, the care of the sick, mothers of young children, support of libraries and the writing of tracts. The function of the Sunday School described in these histories, with their variety of programs, was to provide persons with an opportunity to experience the faith, acquire the tradition, and learn what it meant to act as Christians. The key to these Sunday Schools was not curriculum, teaching strategies, or organization; it was people.

Benjamin Jacob, the Baptist layman who helped to transform the Sunday School into a world-wide movement, spoke of teaching as leading others, by example, on the road to spiritual maturity.<sup>9</sup> Children, he pointed out, may or may not study their Bibles as diligently as desired, but they will study the lives of the adults they meet in the church. Teachers, therefore, must be models of what they desire others to become; they are to be spiritual mentors, not instructors.

In 1887 John Vincent wrote *The Modern Sunday School*.

The Sunday school is a modern title for an ancient and apostolic service of the church. It is a school first and foremost for disciples. It is a school with a master, the teacher, and with his disciples gathered around him.<sup>10</sup>

Vincent presents in this little book a variety of roles a teacher might play: he can entertain his pupils and keep them happy; he can work at winning their admiration; he can make them into good scholars who know the Bible and the church's doctrines. Vincent accepts none of these. Instead, he lists the spiritual qualities needed by a teacher so that he may aid in the spiritual growth and development of those he meets. A number of years later Senabaugh wrote in a similar vein:

Surely not just anyone can teach, for religion is caught more than taught and we cannot teach what we do not know. Religion is an experience and we cannot fully teach anything that we have not verified. The teacher may teach about Christianity but if he is to teach Christ he must live in fellowship with him.<sup>11</sup>

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9. See John Westerhoff, "Models of Teaching for Religious Faith," *The Religious Educator*, Sept. 1974.

10. John Vincent, *The Modern Sunday School* (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1887), p. 32.

11. L. F. Senabaugh, *The Small Church School*, p. 39.



The old Sunday School appears to have cared most about creating an environment where people can be religious together, where persons can experience Christian faith and see it witnessed to in the lives of significant others. The old Sunday School seemed to be aware of the importance of the affections, of story telling, of experience, of community building, and of role models. While many of these concerns remain in the rhetoric of the modern church school movement, we seem to have created an institution more concerned with teaching strategies, instructional gimmicks and curricular resources than spiritual mentors; more concerned with age-graded classes for cognitive growth than communities concerned with the affections, more concerned with the goals of knowing *about* the Bible, theology and church history than communities experiencing and acting upon the faith.

That may be unfair to the modern church school and a fiction of the old Sunday School, but I think that most of us in our main-line churches are aware of how little of the story we know and how empty our moral and spiritual lives have become.<sup>12</sup> Verbal language, both spoken and written, has dominated Christian education for too long. Perhaps as far as Christian faith is concerned, we have attached too literal an interpretation to the primacy of the Word. By sanctifying the oral and verbal traditions we have lost something of the richness of the early church where the great truths of the community were enshrined in myth and symbol.

We humans have been granted two major modes of consciousness. One is analytical and the other is holistic; one is rational and the other intuitive. Each is complementary, and the spiritual life depends upon their complementarity. Yet with our emphasis on abstract reasoning and formal thinking we have tended to let the intuitive, creative mode of our consciousness atrophy.

Prayer and the spiritual life require that we regain our God-given ability to wonder and create, to dream and fantasize, to imagine and envision. We need to be encouraged once again to sing, dance, paint, and act. We need to cultivate our capacities for ecstasy, for appreciating the new, the marvelous, and the mysterious. Sensual awareness and the ability to express ourselves emotionally and non-verbally need encouragement. The affections are as always at the heart of the life of faith. The old Sunday School seems to have known that.

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12. See John Westerhoff, "Learning and Prayer" in *Religious Education*, May-June, 1975.

But the affections are not enough. There is another foundational need to the spiritual life: an historical awareness. Regrettably, we seem to live in an a-historical time. People have been taught history as a meaningless collection of dates, names, and places, as external happenings involving others in another time. Christian faith, however, is founded upon an historicist perspective. Only when the past becomes present and personal does it have any power over our lives. To internalize our history, we need once again to become a story-telling people. We must find a way to tell the story as our story. The old Sunday School took that concern seriously. People knew and cared about the story; it was theirs and they wanted to pass it on. Their understanding and use of scripture may, from our perspective, have been inadequate, but their concern for community, the affections, the story and the witness of spiritual mentors needs to be emphasized again. And the good news is that here and there these needs are being creatively addressed. A new-old Sunday School is emerging.

### *Framing the New-Old School*

Let me describe what I see, but first a few generalizations. My new-old Sunday School may or may not meet on Sundays, and it may or may not meet every week. When it does meet, it brings together children, youth and adults for common activities. Music, dance, drama, the plastic arts, and film-making provide the dominant forms of expression. Integral to its life is celebration, the focus of its program is the Christian story, and its primary concern is for opportunities to be religious together.

The following examples are all based upon real churches. None employs professional educators; each has under 300 members and represents a different denomination. My first is a small New England congregation. At a church meeting each year the people decide on a series of themes for their Sunday School. Last year they chose Moses and the Exodus, Advent—Christmas, Contemporary Christians, and Life in the Early Church. The Sunday School meets intergenerationally for four blocks of time during the year. Each thematic unit is assigned to a group of families. They create and lead the Sunday School for that period. The first block of time runs from the first day of school through Thanksgiving. During the summer those who were interested prepared a dramatization of episodes in Moses' life. In the first week of Sunday School they presented their dramatization. During the next week

interest groups were formed. There was an opportunity to make unleavened bread, to create poetry of modern parallels to Moses' experience, and there was an art group to illustrate the poetry. Other activities were taken from *The Jewish Catalogue*,<sup>13</sup> one of the truly great resources for religious education and a good example of the sort of resources needed for the Sunday School of the future. There was even a group who used the dark, dirt-filled junk-strewn basement of the church to create a simulation of the Israelites' faith during the darkness of the long exodus. Two weeks of such activities led to two weeks of planning for a Sedar, using Waskow's *Freedom Sedar*<sup>14</sup> as the basis for their celebration. At last they united for that special occasion. This was followed by two weeks of preparation for a special Thanksgiving celebration. Here was an opportunity to identify their Congregational Puritan history with the Exodus. The unit ended with a grand Thanksgiving celebration, at which five grains of corn were put at everyone's place, a child asked why, and the story of the one year when that was all their forefathers and foremothers had to give thanks for was told. After a few weeks people were ready to begin their Advent-Christmas theme.

A mid-West Sunday School uses the church lectionary to determine their Sunday School program. Each week the scripture lesson read in church is used as the text for the sermon and as the focus of the Sunday School hour. The week I observed, the lesson was Romans 5:20: "Moreover the law entered, that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." The theme was "You are Accepted." In this particular church people from twelve years of age up volunteer to be responsible for organizing diverse activities around the theme. They get together the week before and plan. On this week, after they sang some hymns and folk songs, the lesson for the day was read, and various activities were announced. One teen-age girl said that she wanted to talk about acceptance and paint pictures. A group of about ten gathered around a table she had set up in the hall. They talked about those in the community who were not accepted, and she commented that the Christian church accepts everyone, even if they don't deserve it. Then she suggested they all paint pictures. Most drew Indians, representing those not accepted, but one boy

13. Richard Siegel, Strassfeld & Strassfeld, *Jewish Catalogue* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973).

14. Arthur Waskow, *The Freedom Sedar* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969).

drew a tremendous monster urinating. The girl, in a validating manner, praised all the pictures and put them up on the wall. I watched the boy's face and saw it light up. I suspect that he had set out to test her statement that the Christian church accepts everyone, and as a result of her marvelously gracious act he had experienced grace.

In the same church that week another scene was occurring. One little boy spent the whole time destroying other people's work. No one felt that he or she handled the situation very well. During the break between Sunday School and family worship the leaders for the week gather to reflect on their experiences while the rest of the congregation engages in fellowship and recreation. Today this boy was the focus of their concern. One of the adults asked if anyone knew what might be the matter. "Sure," said a teen-ager; "he wants attention." Well, what were they going to do about that? "Let's divide him up," one junior high girl suggested. "That is," she explained, "let's each one of us take him for a week and be his special friend and give him all the attention he needs." They did, and that young boy also experienced grace; it would not be too dramatic to say that someday, when recalling his memories of the Sunday School, he will tell about this experience.

There is another church on the west coast whose Christian education committee decided that it wanted to give a rebirth to their Sunday School. They were tired of cajoling people to teach, and they were disturbed that children had stopped coming. So they ditched their curriculum and decided to focus on drama, art and music. Someone remembered reading about the old Medieval plays which used to enact principal episodes from the Old and New Testament. In Medieval times the plays were undertaken by the crafts guilds, analogous to our present day trade unions. When possible, the guilds presented plays that dealt with themes associated with their craft: the bakers presented the Last Supper, the goldsmiths the Adoration of the Magi, the shipwrights the Noah play, and so on. All the actors were amateurs, and scripts were usually not necessary because most of the players were illiterate. This particular church had families sign up in groups according to their favorite pastimes. There were the mountain climbers, the sailors, the gourmet cooks, the musicians and so forth. Each group was given a Biblical episode to work on in any way and at any time it chose. They were told to create two dramas, one of the Biblical story and one a contemporary expression of the story. Planning the drama was to be half the fun, and everyone was to

have a part. There were costumes and props to be made and parts to be learned. Then on the weeks during Lent everyone gathered so that each group could present its play and involve everyone in the action. Each was followed by discussion and refreshments. The plays went so well that they have decided to do it again next year.

There is one last Southern church I'd like to mention. This church chose the church year as its organizing principle. Activities were to be created which would help the congregation prepare for each season of the church year. A season was assigned to some existing group or organization in the church. The youth group was responsible for Pentecost. They created an interesting group of activities for the weeks before Pentecost, and every child, youth, and adult chose a group to participate in. One group planned to bake and decorate a mammoth birthday cake for the church. Another made banners for a parade symbolizing the works of the Holy Spirit. Another made ceramic medallions to be given to those persons who renewed their confirmation vows at the Pentecost celebration. Some worked on original vocal and instrumental music and others on a dramatic production of the Acts account of Pentecost. A last group designed and planned games from around the world for the birthday party of the church. On Pentecost they united their labors into a fantastic celebration.

My examples could go on. Many of you have your own living examples to witness to; of course each has its limitations, but my imagination and yours could construct a hundred others. You will find little pieces of the old Sunday School in each of these modern creations, and those of you familiar with Dewey's idea of a school can also sense glimmers of the pedagogical insights of the progressive era. And so we have a new-old Sunday School, a Sunday School of my future.

### *A Theological Undergirding*

One issue, however, still remains. The Sunday School historically was an expression of evangelical theology, and where it thrives today in the ten largest Sunday Schools, some forms of that theology still persist. The question must be raised, what will be the theology of my new-old Sunday School? It would be well for us to remember the book my colleague H. Shelton Smith wrote in 1940, *Faith and Nurture*.<sup>15</sup> In that book he confronted himself and other religious educators with the dissonance between

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15. H. Shelton Smith, *Faith and Nurture* (New York: Charles Scribners, 1954).



theology and pedagogy. He called for a new synthesis. Any future for the Sunday School will have to address numerous theological issues. I have, but I am not sure if my conceptualization is hopeful or anticipatory. There is no time for a long theological discourse, but I would like to suggest an outline of a theological pedagogy for the new-old Sunday School, one which is consistent with the best of evangelical theology and the social gospel. It goes back to the work of George Albert Coe, who is, in my estimation, the most significant person in the history of church education. His book, *A Social Theory of Religious Education*, has influenced me more than any educational work. In 1916 he wrote:

The aims and methods of Christian education, as of church life in general that this generation inherited, were predominantly individualistic.

But . . . the redemptive mission of Christianity is nothing less than that of transforming the social order. The duty of making Christian education Christian will mean bringing it into line with this social message.<sup>16</sup>

We continue to suffer from the same malaise. Christianity is to be focused upon the kingdom of God; it is to live by a radical community consciousness. Christian education at its best aims at the transmission of a tradition that calls for the continuing reconstruction of society.

As Bob Lynn, my mentor, has pointed out on numerous occasions, the Sunday School was once an instrument of mission for the total reform of society. Too often, however, our educational programs have led persons to a life of mere inwardness, of personal piety, thus blessing the existing social, political and economic order regardless of the serious injustices it may perpetuate. Liberal theology and neo-orthodoxy have come together in liberation theology.

I will always be indebted to my friend James Luther Adams, who taught me many years ago that the covenant of the people of God with the Lord of history entails responsibility for the total character of society. Pietism is a turning from the God of Christian faith, a denial of the sovereignty of God over the whole of life, and thus a form of idolatry.

According to our Christian story, the power of God was working in its most characteristic and decisive way when our foremothers and forefathers were being liberated from bondage in Egypt. Indeed, the appearance of Jesus Christ and the birth of

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16. George Albert Coe, *A Social Theory of Religious Education* (New York: Charles Scribners, 1917), p. 6.

the church was the second great Exodus. It is the restriction of religion to the immediate relations between an individual and God and to interpersonal relations, believing that institutions will take care of themselves if people have personal faith, that is a denial of our faith. If we transmit our story more fully and faithfully, we surely will become aware that the kingdom of God is a call for the transformation of the whole of life.

Let us never believe that the church is what it is supposed to be. We live privatized lives which deny corporate selfhood. We need to be liberated from ourselves so that we can identify with those who are oppressed. The Christian religious establishment in which we conduct our Sunday Schools stands under judgment. We need to become sensitive to our potential for corporate selfhood through the telling and retelling of our story, the story of God's action in history and our call to the cost and joy of discipleship.<sup>17</sup>

Our programs in the new-old Sunday School need to aid us in thinking, feeling, and acting socially. As Coe suggested, our focus must be on social welfare (ecology, health care, quality education, housing, a guaranteed income and so forth), on social justice (overcoming racism, sexism, and classism), and world society (peace and whole community). The consequence of ignoring such issues causes people to struggle against forces inside themselves and not see or combat the social, political and economic sources of our problems; it causes introversion and an over-concern for the inner life in relationship to an other-worldly God rather than the God of history, the incarnate God of political kingdom building. It also makes church activities assume undue importance as compared with the church's influence on the world, and in the end it causes people to separate religion and life.

For the last few years I have worked with the United Church of Christ on the Shalom curriculum, really a non-curriculum consistent with the needs of the new-old Sunday School. It provides us with some of the tools to bring a social theory of religious education and liberation theology together. The Biblical notion of God acting in history and the nature of His/Her intentions for the world can be experienced and interpreted; ecumenical environments which enable us to identify with the oppressed and facilitate a commitment to resist life as it is can be created. We can celebrate the vision of God's kingdom. We can help children learn to deal

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17. See Frederick Herzog, *Liberation Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1972).

creatively with conflict, aggression, possession and the distribution of scarce resources. We can play and live together in ways that stress cooperation over competition, community over individualism and non-aggression over aggression. We can enable persons to acquire new racial and sex role images rather than harmful stereotypes. Children can begin to experience the reality of world community, the nature of justice, and role models of the people of God who act with God in His/Her kingdom building. And all of this can be accomplished in a community of faith striving to learn and transmit its story, for that story is the drama of God's continuing deeds in history, which parenthetically is also "her story." As the old hymn goes,

We've a story to tell to the nations  
That shall turn their hearts to the right,  
A story of truth and mercy,  
A story of peace and light. . . .  
For the darkness shall turn to the dawning  
And the dawning to noon-day bright,  
And Christ's great Kingdom shall come on earth,  
The kingdom of love and light.<sup>18</sup>

What is the story we have to tell? It is a story of a vision of the mighty acts of God, of signs of the vision realized and of hope; it is a story of judgment and grace, of estrangement and wholeness, of selfish denials and conversion, of darkness and light, and of an open future.

### *Last Thoughts*

As you see, I believe there is a future for the Sunday School in our liberal mainline denominational churches. My new-old Sunday School, providing one piece of the church's educational program, will meet at various times on a regular or irregular schedule. It will be intergenerational though its focus will be the needs of children. Youth and adults will have other non-schooling educational programs, and the church's total life will be seen as the context for Christian education. The new-old Sunday School will, through the use of the arts, center on the affections and will aim to transmit through word-in-deed the Christian story and way of life as our story and our way of life. Curriculum for the Sunday School will be increasingly planned and designed locally; resources will be gathered from diverse sources. The Biblical story will be

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18. Colin Sterne, "We've A Story to Tell" in *The Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House, 1939), No. 501.

central and transmitted in both word and deed. The laity will once again find themselves leading in the exciting adventure of sustaining and transmitting through community activities the cumulative tradition of the Christian faith. The church school with its denominational curriculum built around teachers meeting weekly with pupils in enclosed classrooms and following closely graded lessons will slowly pass away, and in its place a new-old Sunday School will emerge, providing through celebration, experience and action, opportunities for the community of faith to sustain and transmit its tradition—its story of God's liberating action within history—to meet the needs of persons for a belonging and caring fellowship, and to provide the foundations for our vocation in society as God's Kingdom builders. It's a good future, one worthy of the church and worthy of our labors.

And so I close by quoting the words of John Vincent, who wrote more than a century after the founding of the first Sunday School and more than a century ago:

In the interest of the church, the home, the state and society, we who represent the Sunday school sing with Robert Browning our song of hope:

'The best is yet to be, the last  
For which the first was made.'<sup>21</sup>

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21. John Vincent, "A Forward Look for the Sunday School," p. 164.

# By Their Praxis You Shall Know Them

by EDWARD A. POWERS

Paulo Friere has helped American church educators to discover the word *praxis*, the measure of intent and happening in an educational endeavor. The word comes from the Greek, meaning *doing* or *action*. Webster defines *praxis* as "the exercise or practice of an art, science, or skill."

The word *praxis* refers to what really goes on—the patterns, effect and practice of an enterprise. In seeking to understand the word's meaning we ask questions such as: How do our operations or practice reflect our goals and intent? What is the effect of our enterprise? What, in fact, do people learn and experience in a given educational operation? It is by their fruits (*praxis*) that one knows the identity of the species—so Jesus taught us.

Friere himself, of course, writes out of a situation in which the majority of persons are oppressed by unjust structures and maldistribution of wealth and resources. In that situation, educational *praxis* either furthers domination or fosters liberation. To seek to educate without taking seriously the context of oppression or liberation in which people's lives are set is almost surely to maintain the *status quo*. In that situation, the *praxis* will sustain domination and oppression.

We often seem to concentrate on particular forms, programs, and traditions when we plan the church's educational enterprise rather than to look hard at the whole life of the church, at the faith roots, at context and at *praxis*. It is easy to forget that the church throughout its history has used a variety of forms for its educational ministry. The Sunday School is only one and, as history goes, a quite recent one on the church's horizon.

Jesus taught his disciples in what today we might call an extended family or a commune. His was an itinerant educational

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While this paper was not part of "Confrontation: Sunday School," the editors of the REVIEW thought it useful to place the future of Christian education in a wider perspective. Dr. Powers is General Secretary of the Division of Education, Evangelism and Extension of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries.



ministry. In the first-century church, non-believers or candidates for membership were called catechumens (from the Greek "to teach"). They remained in the outer chambers of the church until their preparation qualified them to participate in the sacraments and the rest of the church's life.

The Reformers sought to make the Bible available to the laity so it could become a central instrument of self-instruction. Thus they translated the Bible into the people's language. This meant that people could learn afresh the meaning of faith. The variety of educative forms which the church has used throughout its history includes the sermon, theatre in the market place and the sanctuary, the itinerant missionary or catechist, monastery, parochial schools, confirmation classes, the college and the seminary, and, latterly, the summer camp, vacation school, Sunday church school, and adult education program.

Several historians<sup>1</sup> have reminded us of the roots of the Sunday School movement. It began in England as a way to teach illiterate youths. As it developed in the United States in the nineteenth century, it was often anti-clerical, non-denominational and outside the life of the church. To this day, many Sunday Schools have separate everything—officers, facilities, worship, and treasury. More often than not throughout its history on the American scene, the Sunday School has been regarded as an instrument of evangelism rather than education.

Horace Bushnell's *Christian Nurture* introduced the notion that a child is to grow up in such a way that he or she never knows an identity other than that of being Christian. Bushnell stressed the importance of context and environment (although he did not use those words) in the nurturing of the young. Such nurture was to be seen in contrast to the heavy reliance on conversion and suddenness of faith response. Bushnell's emphasis was particularly upon the family.

These historical comments remind us of the importance of looking afresh at our purposes and options as we face education's shape for our future.

### *Dimensions of a Whole Praxis*

Any realistic assessment of a congregation's educational praxis needs to touch the variety of educative forces which help form

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1. See especially Elliott Wright and Robert W. Lynn, *The Big Little School* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 108 pp.

the person's sense of identity. These fall into four categories: what the whole life of the church teaches; the community's educative instruments; the family and its bearing upon its members, particularly the young; and the educational programs sponsored by the congregation. Let us look at each of them in turn:

Most people learn what a church is and what the faith is about as they experience a live church in the flesh. Whatever its preaching or formal teaching, a congregation has a life style, values, patterns of relating to persons and the world at large, elements of faith, a particular kind of environment. A church that has sanctuary seats in the round says something different about how people relate to each other and to God than one with fixed pews all facing a single direction. A church whose facilities are used to the hilt for a range of community and program activities forty or more hours a week says something different than the building which is locked all but two hours on Sunday morning. A congregation whose budget is spent totally at home and mostly on staff and furnishings conveys a different image of what the church is for than one whose budget is split fifty-fifty (one half for us and the other half for others).

These "teachings" are often part of what is sometimes called the "hidden curriculum." The phrase—"the whole life of the church teaches"—is hardly very helpful until we unpack its meaning. True, the total impact of a given congregation is what conveys to persons the values and central meanings of that body's life. But the whole is made up of a variety of pieces: pastor, worship service, physical environment, public presence, priorities, style of human relationships, the things it cares most about, budget, forms and styles of organization, and the like. We tend to teach more intensively when we do not intend to teach than when we do.

When we speak of the second dimension, the community's instruments of education, we mean not only such explicit educational enterprises as schools, but also such implicit schools of life as pool halls, gangs, advertising media, movies and television, peer groups, and civic values. The church which cares about education will look hard at the *praxis* of community institutions and forces of socialization. Again, the hidden curriculum is the most telling: the presence or absence of integrity in public officials, the nurture of violence, the structures of prejudice, "what you can get away with." The church body that is serious about education will have to challenge the power brokers and the opinion makers. It will have to unmask the hidden assumptions by which standards

are set. To be "in, but not of, the world" does not involve silence on these matters.

As Bushnell made clear as early as 1847, the family (and whatever is its functional equivalent for those who do not live in family situations) gives to its members a sense of what community and self are. Long before a young child discovers the words of the Bible, he or she discovers all the great themes of the Bible: reconciliation, atonement, justice and injustice, love, joy, hope, trust, faith, alienation, compassion. These are learned in the earliest of relationships and conveyed by experience both in the negative and in the positive.

The church that is serious about education will seek ways to sustain the family and familial settings to which it has access. It will do this in part by dealing with systemic issues like adequate income, television fare, morality in public life, opportunities for recreation, leisure, and employment. It will find ways in which parents can strengthen their own faith and life as well as their capacity to function as mother and father. It will provide ways in which the whole family can celebrate its life together. It will offer other adult role models and provide alternative examples of forms of family life. It will avoid the assumption that all families are nuclear or that one must "come coupled" to be acceptable in the Lord's or the church's sight. Finally, the congregation will seek in a supportive fashion to be an extended family for all who touch its life.

The fourth dimension takes its full place in the context of the others. Education as planned teaching/learning experiences has the best chance of doing its job in the full context of dealing with other dimensions of church and community which also teach the faith or its obverse. A Sunday church school program which does not stand in isolation from the rest of the church but provides perspective on other experiences stands a better chance of being the most valuable hour of the week. The youth group through which young people generalize on their weekly experiences and the other dimensions of the church's life will have a chance of being incarnational. The Word will in fact be made flesh in the heart of their life's heartbeat. An adult education program through which adults develop a perspective on the issues to which faith calls them will offer the *praxis* of liberation and new creation.

*Some Examples and Trends*

I consider a number of new developments on the religious education scene to be reaching in the direction of a more adequate *praxis*. The first of these I would call the *holistic trend*. A number of congregations are beginning with the premise that the perspective of wholeness is fundamental to measuring their intent and effect. An illustration of one such congregation is found in William Beaven Abernethy's *A New Look for Sunday Morning*, published recently by Abingdon Press.<sup>2</sup> South Congregational Church in Middletown, Conn., of which Mr. Abernethy is the pastor, has focused upon the rhythm of worship, learning, and celebration. The two-hour Sunday morning segment is symptomatic of the search of that church to come at life, learning, and ministry whole.

Plymouth Church in Seattle has taken on the hunger issue. Over 100 families have covenanted to eat only half as much beef as previously was the case. They have been influenced by studies which indicate that the amount of grain used to fatten beef cattle would provide protein for others without its double use in fattening cattle to produce protein.<sup>3</sup> Alternate diets are being developed and used. Suppliers and the public are being helped to understand their rationale. Seattle understands hunger in a way some communities do not in that massive unemployment has happened over several of the last years. The churches and others have banded together to form Neighbors in Need, a feeding resource for hungry people. Money saved by the Plymouth families is used to support hunger groups and projects around the world.

Several denominations through Joint Educational Development have developed the Shalom Curriculum.<sup>4</sup> This is not a traditional curriculum in the sense of a series of books and courses all neatly laid out. It is a traditional curriculum in the sense of the root meaning of the Latin word *currere*: course, race course, chariot, running. It is a course to be run, as life is. Shalom's focus is two-fold: the Biblical concept of *shalom* (wholeness, community, unity, peace, justice; Jesus is our Shalom) and the sense of the whole life of the church. Resources are prepared to help a congregation

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2. William Beaven Abernethy, *A New Look for Sunday Morning* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), 176 pp.

3. This issue is documented in a number of places including "Fantasies of Famine," by Frances Moore Lappé in the February, 1975, Harper's, pp. 51ff.

4. The background book to interpret this approach is *Signs of Shalom*, by Edward A. Powers (Published for Joint Educational Development by United Church Press, Philadelphia, 1973), 160 pp.

examine its life from the perspective of the Shalom idea. Various resources are available to help children, youth, and adults deal with such issues as "Why People Fight," "Learning to Be Free," "Shalom is Whole Community," and "Builders for Justice."<sup>5</sup> The key focus is upon the process by which people come to a fresh understanding of the Bible's claim to be Shalom makers and the ways in which their common life can make that happen.

The nine partner denominations in Joint Educational Development are developing a systemic approach to education in the church. The project is called "Christian Education: Shared Approaches." Each approach features a basic conceptual design, an understanding of teaching/learning opportunities and contexts, leadership resources, and media resources. There are four such approaches, each of which seeks to provide a lens through which a congregation can look whole at its intentions and its *praxis*.

The United Church of Christ is rethinking its approach to outdoor education under the direction of a task force which has caught a vision of the campsite as an "experimental outpost" for a new life style. Such a life style would foster a new sense of interdependence among human beings and within the eco-system. The concern for hunger, alternate diets, and the forces of economic injustice have led the Task Force on Outdoor Education to develop a new philosophy statement. In part, the statement says:

We have a vision of a 'new earth' and some clues about how we can use our particular opportunities in outdoor education to work toward the embodiment of this vision. The dire consequences of our present life styles are daily and irresistibly made clear to us. The ethic of exploitation by which we have lived has rationalized a desecration of the land, life, and the interrelatedness of all creation to the point of our threatened extinction. A new ethic of 'wondrous responsibility' for the earth and its people energizes our vision of Shalom.<sup>6</sup>

Churches which have been having a failure of nerve on ethical issues are suddenly discovering that they have contributed to the Watergate mentality, whose consequences have so sorely and recently tried the nation's soul. I hope they will reach beyond the

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5. The quoted phrases are sample titles from the listing of resources published to augment the Shalom concept. For a full listing, write Division of Publication, United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, 1505 Race Street, Philadelphia, Pa., 19102.

6. "Toward a Philosophy of Outdoor Ministries," United Church of Christ Task Force on Outdoor Education, Room 911, 287 Park Avenue South, New York, N. Y. 10010.



values clarification stage toward that form of church life described by James Gustafson as

a gathering of people with the explicit intention to survey and critically discuss their personal and social responsibilities in the light of moral convictions about which there is some consensus and to which there is some loyalty.<sup>7</sup>

Gustafson puts forward the notion of the church as a community of moral discourse. He suggests<sup>8</sup> that there are three criteria for this: the discourse is moral; the church understands itself to stand in some specific moral tradition; and the leadership gives direction to this effort in ways which inform the whole of the church's life. Watergate (which, after all, was brought to its course by the press and the Congress, not the church, which supposedly guards public morals) provides a new call to the church for moral understanding.

As I list issues which seem to me to be signs of hope and wholeness, I cite also the increasingly effective focus of feminists and others upon the issue of sexism in church life and in Christian education. They are helping us to understand the ways in which more than one-half of the human community has been denied images of wholeness through language, myth, symbol, and context. Their focus upon the Bible has dealt not only with the patriarchal context of much of the Biblical material, but with mistranslations in which words with no gender connotation are rendered male. They have helped us to understand that the God who is above gender must be freed from the masculine images and language which limit both deity and humanity from an adequate self understanding.

This essay has sought to convey images of wholeness and understanding through which those who plan for church education in the future can think and see new possibilities for their educational ministry. By their *praxis* you shall know them!

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7. James M. Gustafson, *The Church as Moral Decision-Maker* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1970), p. 84.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 85-95.

# Bibliography for Lay Christian Educators (1970-74)

by D. CAMPBELL WYCKOFF

Apps, Jerold W., *How to Improve Adult Education in Your Church*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972.

A thoroughgoing introduction to adult education in the parish, intended to be used by local committees and adult educators who are looking for guidance in evaluating and changing their programs and approaches.

Babin, Pierre (ed.), *The Audio-Visual Man, Media and Religious Education*. Dayton, Ohio: Pflaum, 1970.

This first full-scale treatment of the idea that "the medium is the message" in religious education turns out also to be a first-rate book in religious education theory. Deals with "the new man" who sees, hears, and communicates differently, and makes discriminating suggestions on the use of the media in religious education.

Caldwell, Irene S., Richard Hatch, and Beverly Welton, *Basics for Communication in the Church*. Anderson, Indiana: Warner Press, 1971.

One of the "Foundations for Teaching" series, this is a guide for independent or group study, developed around a model of communication: "Someone perceives an event and reactions in a situation to make available materials in some form conveying content of some consequence." Introduces the teacher to himself and his task in the context of cognitive perception theory.

Cully, Iris V., *Change, Conflict and Self Determination: Next Steps in Religious Education*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972.

A "direction-finder" for today's religious educator. Mrs. Cully provides the context for discriminating innovation in religious education theory and practice.

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\*The following listed books are considered the most significant works on Christian Education published during the last four years and are therefore recommended to churches and church educators. Dr. Wyckoff is Professor of Christian Education at Princeton Theological Seminary.

DeBoer, John C., *Let's Plan*. Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1970.

An analytical and practical handbook that puts the best of planning theory at the disposal of churches and other voluntary organizations. Shows the place for planning, the process of planning, and the role of research in planning. Detailed enough to be used by non-professional leaders.

Gillispie, Philip H., *Learning Through Simulation Games*. New York: Paulist Press, 1973.

Plans for specific games are groups under the themes of freedom, life, peace, love, happiness, and communication.

Haughton, Rosemary, *The Theology of Experience*. Paramus, N. J.: Newman Press, 1972.

An exploration of the experiential sources of religious life and thought in community, ministry, family, sexuality, and the spirit.

Hellwig, Monika, *Tradition, The Catholic Story Today*. Dayton, Ohio: Pflaum Publishing, 1974.

Written to clarify the scope of Christian education for religious educators, by a theologian of first rank who is also quite at home with religious education thinking. The scope, or content, of Christian education is embodied in the life and work of the community of faith, here delineated in a dynamic and critical way. Within this context, faith can be invited, encouraged, and supported.

Jensen, Mary and Andrew, *Audiovisual Idea Book for Churches*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974.

Introductory chapters deal with theory and organization and are followed by twenty chapters on specific audio-visuals and their uses. This book may well replace others as a church's basic guide to the field.

Kemp, C. Gratton, *Small Groups for Self-Renewal*. New York: Seabury Press, 1971.

An absolutely straightforward, no-nonsense approach to the varieties of small groups and the processes used in them. Special help for religious educators is found in sections "In Teaching" and "With Focus on the Church," but the whole book will be invaluable for them. Probably the best book now available that spans the needs of the professional and the non-professional.

Lynn, Robert W., and Elliott Wright, *The Big Little School*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

A sparkling and refreshing history of the American Sunday School from its British beginnings to the present. Carefully analyzes and assesses the growth of the movement and the influences that have been brought to bear on it: evangelicalism, professional education, neo-orthodoxy, etc.

Moran, Gabriel, *Design for Religion, Toward Ecumenical Education*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1970.

Incisive thinking on theology and education, leading to the conclusion that traditional religious education has actually lacked the essential religious quality, and that henceforth it must be set firmly in an ecumenical framework—that is, with a concern for all that is human. One of the most important recent books in the field.

Reed, Elizabeth L., *Helping Children with the Mystery of Death*. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1970.

This excellent little book is carefully wrought from a lifetime's experience in working with children and their parents. Dealing adequately and sensitively with its topic, perhaps its most valuable asset is the inclusion of many vignettes from parents and others who have helped children with situations involving death. Includes a long section of valuable resources—Bible passages, poems, stories, etc.

Rood, Wayne R., *Understanding Christian Education*. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1970.

A splendid addition to the major literature in Christian education theory. Organizes a wealth of historical, philosophical, and theological material around four key figures: Horace Bushnell, John Dewey, George Albert Coe, and Maria Montessori. A concluding chapter spells out the author's own position analytically, critically, and comparatively.

Rood, Wayne R., *On Nurturing Christians*. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1972.

Cites the more obvious changes taking place in education, human relations, and ways of thinking at present, and proposes to interject Christian nurture into the situation to effect basic change. The process of nurture is analyzed (tradition, community, theology, and life-style), with suggestions on implications for life-span education.

Ryan, Mary Perkins, *We're All In This Together*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972.

Three Christian education theories are reviewed and evaluated: the preconciliar, the conciliar, and the "developing." The latter emphasizes "truly human living." This important book is the result of years of thought and experience at the very heart of reform of religious education, and the product is a seasoned and critical account of ecumenical significance.

Strommen, Merton P., *Five Cries of Youth*. New York: Harper and Row, 1974.

A brief but detailed report on a long and extensive interdenominational research on youth. The research reveals five major dynamics operating in the lives of church youth: low self-esteem, family conflict, social-action orientation, closed-mindedness, and religious commitment. The particular elements found to be involved in each of these are delineated. The book is well written, challenging to the specialist and understandable to the layperson.

Westerhoff, John H., III, *Values for Tomorrow's Children*. Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1970.

An exciting and challenging book for religious educators, evaluating past and present plans and performance, and presenting vigorous alternatives for the future. Westerhoff knows and appreciates what has gone into the religious education tradition and program in the past, and seeks a correspondingly new vitality for the enterprise today and tomorrow.

Westerhoff, John H., III (ed.), *A Colloquy on Christian Education*. Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1972.

A collection of reprints from the magazine, "Colloquy." Varied overview of positions and practical suggestions in Protestant religious education at the present time. A "smorgasbord" that indicates considerable vigor in the field.

Westerhoff, John H., III, and Gwen Kennedy Neville, *Generation to Generation*. Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1974.

An anthropologist and a religious educator team up to deal with religious socialization and its implications for religious education. The book is cast in a dialogical form, and consists of a variety of materials put together to provide data upon which the reader may base further investigations and judgments. The two main sections of the book deal with the dynamics of religion, cultures, and education and with the processes of their interaction through the life-cycle.



# An Educational Use Guide

by JOHN H. WESTERHOFF

Suggest that your Board of Christian Education, church school teachers, or other interested adults read this issue of the DUKE DIVINITY SCHOOL REVIEW.

Plan a workshop to discuss your program of Christian education and your hopes for your Sunday School. A few suggestions follow for a five-hour gathering on an afternoon or evening.

1. Share a meal together and/or have a short hymn sing.
2. For about thirty minutes have each person share with another person his/her faith biographies (the story of how he/she became the person of faith or unfaith he/she now is), their memories of Sunday School and how it influenced their growth in faith. Ask the other person to listen carefully and note the most significant influences and memories.
3. Share these significant influences and memories with the total group, recording them on newsprint for everyone to see. When all have been reported, strive to group them together into major categories such as (a) pageants and plays, (b) opportunity for responsibility, (c) feelings of belonging, (d) concern of persons and so forth.
4. For about thirty minutes, form small groups of four or five persons. Ask them to describe their Sunday School program today. What is it like; what are its greatest strengths and weaknesses; what are their desires and hopes for it in the future? Have them list their thoughts on newsprint.
5. Share the newsprint sheets and have one person in each group report their conclusions.
6. Take a fifteen-minute coffee break.
7. For another thirty minutes return to small groups. Ask them to discuss their findings in the light of the articles in this REVIEW.
8. Now ask each group to take another half hour and develop concrete suggestions for their Sunday School program during the next year. List their suggestions on newsprint.

9. Share small group reports with the total group.
10. Share a meal together and/or participate in a celebration liturgy or evening prayer.

### *An alternative*

Following the first three steps as outlined, proceed in this manner:

4. For thirty minutes discuss in small groups all the articles in the DUKE DIVINITY SCHOOL REVIEW in the light of their own discoveries, but especially have them share their thoughts on "A Future for the Sunday School."
5. Ask persons to take fifteen minutes and write a short newspaper article describing the Sunday School of their dreams. Pretend it is 1980. Have them explain what is going on in their visionary Sunday School, not the Sunday School they think *will be* or even are sure *can be*, but the Sunday School they *hope* will be.
6. In small groups of five have each person share his/her visions of the Sunday School. Ask the others to note anything they hear in another person's news article about which they are enthusiastic. Put these on newsprint and place the newsprint around the walls of your room.
7. Take a fifteen-minute coffee break. Ask everyone to walk around the room and read the newsprint sheets.
8. Have persons return to their small groups and ask them, for thirty minutes, to brainstorm ideas of what they might do next year in their Sunday School that would encourage them to reach the dreams of their 1980 Sunday School. Put these on newsprint.
9. Have each group report, and ask the total group to rank order these suggestions. Take those ideas people like best and divide your total group into small groups to work on the details of these most popular ideas.
10. After thirty minutes of small group work share your reports at a meal, celebration, or evening worship service.

## Book Reviews

*Justice and Mercy.* Reinhold Niebuhr.  
Edited by Ursula Niebuhr. Harper  
and Row. 1974. 137 pp. \$5.95.

It is curious and unfortunate how quickly, in the history of Christian thought, a particular thinker becomes typed or stereotyped as playing on one motif or theme. So with Niebuhr, who, since his death in 1971, is associated with theological "realism" and is chiefly remembered for his critiques of the political issues of his day, and for his restoration of the classical doctrine of man's sin, against the ebullient optimism of the Enlightenment and liberalism.

These indeed were crucial aspects of Niebuhr's theology, but in this collection of sermons and prayers, edited by Ursula Niebuhr, the many other profound aspects of his faith, his liturgical sensitivity, his Biblical rootage, and his homiletical skill are all amply illustrated. We should be grateful indeed to Mrs. Niebuhr for editing this posthumous volume of sermons, most of which were preached at university chapels or at Union Seminary, together with prayers of thanksgiving and intercession.

Many of the familiar Niebuhrian themes are heard: the presumptions and prides of man, the need for repentance and contrition as preconditions for receiving grace, the moral ambiguities of human behavior. In an analysis of the "hazards and the difficulties of the Christian ministry," he forewarns seminarians at Union that "nothing is more insufferable than a professional holy man in the pulpit who pretends to all the Christian virtues . . . He may have entered the ministry because he is an exhibitionist at heart." (p. 131)

But the dominant theme is in the major key: the affirmation of God's grace and mercy, as known in Christ,

that goes beyond His justice, a mercy that forgives and renews Christian action in both the private and the public arenas. In this volume the reader can glimpse the depth of Reinhold Niebuhr's own Christian faith, and can better understand what sustained him in his magnificent career as prophet to our times.

—Waldo Beach

*In Search of a Responsible World Society.* Paul Bock. Westminster. 1974. 251 pp. \$10.

In the year of the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (to be held in Nairobi, Kenya, in November) this is an invaluable, perhaps an imperative, book. The only previous comprehensive survey of this kind was written, ironically, by a Roman Catholic (Edward Duff, *The Social Thought of the World Council of Churches*, 1956); a lot has happened in the past two decades. A new generation of Christians has never heard of the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work, or even of "Amsterdam, 1948." An older generation has forgotten—or never really heard.

For the amazing thing about Bock's review, sprinkled with abundant quotations, is its prophetic—now "contemporary"—wisdom and relevance. The ecumenical leaders of the past sixty years were farsighted and foresighted to an incredible degree.

We do not consider the state as the ultimate source of law but rather as its guarantor. It is not the lord but the servant of justice. (Oxford, 1937)

As to whether we should center upon individual conversion or upon social change to realize this kingdom, we reply that we must do

both. . . . There is such a thing as an evil soul, but there is also such a thing as an evil system. (Madras, 1938)

Defense against Communism [in certain Asian countries] might become a means of suppressing the movement of national liberation and social justice in the country. (Lucknow, 1952)

Any discrimination against human beings on the grounds of race or color, any selfish exploitation and any oppression of man by man is, therefore, a denial of the teachings of Jesus. (Jerusalem, 1928)

Violence is very much a reality in our world, both the overt use of force to oppress and the invisible violence perpetrated on people who by the millions have been or still are the victims of repression and unjust social systems. (Geneva, 1966)

After a brief historical sketch, Bock deals with ecumenical thinking in five main areas: political-economic orders, war, communism, race, economic and social development. In the effort to cover sixty years of changing and often controversial Christian ethics, the author sometimes oversimplifies, sometimes blurs the continuity, sometimes loses the sense of vital, active, personal, existential involvement. Somewhat disconcertingly, his subheadings are not (as in most books) sectional topics, but journalistic clues to the next few lines. (For example, "The Churches Support the United Nations"—a subject inadequately brushed by elsewhere—introduces seven lines on the U.N. from Uppsala, 1968, and seven other paragraphs not one of which mentions the United Nations.) Each chapter concludes, helpfully, with a Summary (which does fulfill that claim, a bit abruptly) and "Correlation with Roman Catholic Social Thought."

One might raise cautions about the precise language of the titles. This is not so much *In Search of a Responsible World Society* as "in search of a responsible Christian (Protestant-

Anglican-Orthodox) approach to world society." It is not merely what the sub-title calls "The Social Teachings of the World Council of Churches," but of all the conciliar, ecumenical agencies and conferences and pronouncements, beginning with the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches, 1914. Bock notes, but does not always himself observe, the distinction between study conferences and official W.C.C. assemblies or statements (similarly disregarded by Paul Ramsey in *Who Speaks for the Church?*). One may question, too, whether predominantly Protestant ecumenical views should be labelled "social teachings" in the Roman Catholic authoritative sense (note that Father Duff used the term *Social Thought of the W.C.C.*). Certainly one of the critical failures of the ecumenical movement in this area has been its tendency to "pontificate" to its constituency and to world governments, instead of achieving effectual education.

One final caution: this very useful and comprehensive little volume deals with a limited scope of Christian activity, its *social* concern. It does *not* review W.C.C. accomplishments in evangelism, dialogue with other faiths, ministries to students and laity, the theological contributions of Faith and Order. It would be totally unfair to use this compendium of history and quotation, unsurpassed in its limited field, to "prove" the World Council's preoccupation with this world at the alleged neglect of Biblical and evangelistic commitment. As Bock reminds his readers, the Life and Work movement took as its slogan, "Doctrine divides, but service unites" (Stockholm, 1925). But the World Council of Churches (bringing together Life and Work, Faith and Order, Mission and Evangelism) still seeks even more centrally to fulfill another motto (Oxford, 1937): "Let the Church be the Church"—in the world but not of it.

—Creighton Lacy





