

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

THE AGREED SYLLABUS¹

I

THE Fifth Schedule of the Education Act (England and Wales), 1944, lays down the "Procedure for preparing and bringing into operation an Agreed Syllabus of Religious Instruction." It provides first of all that for the purpose of preparing any syllabus of Religious Instruction to be adopted by a local education authority, a Conference shall be convened, composed of constituent bodies or committees consisting of persons representing respectively:

- (a) such religious denominations as, in the opinion of the authority, ought, having regard to the circumstances of the area, to be represented;
- (b) except in the case of an area in Wales or Monmouthshire, the Church of England;
- (c) such associations representing teachers as, in the opinion of the authority, ought, having regard to the circumstances of the area, to be represented: and,
- (d) the authority:

Provided that where a committee is appointed consisting of persons representing the Church of England, the committee of persons appointed to represent other religious denominations shall not include persons appointed to represent that Church.²

Reasonable steps are to be taken to ensure that persons appointed are representative of the group from which they come, though the method of appointment is left to the discretion of the authority; where a member resigns from his committee, his successor must be appointed in the same way as he was himself. The task of the Conference is defined thus:

The Conference shall consist of the Committees aforesaid and it shall be the duty of the Conference to seek unanimous agreement upon a syllabus of Religious Instruction to be recommended for adoption by the local education authority.³

¹ In the introduction to the Syllabus of Religious Instruction of Bootle Local Education Authority (published September, 1946), the Director of Education writes: "Mr. Laurence E. Porter, of the Grammar School for Boys, acted as Secretary to the Sub-Committee, which reported to the Conference on 18th July, 1946, when unanimous agreement was reached as to syllabuses for primary and secondary schools which should be recommended to the Authority for adoption. The Conference expressed sincere gratitude to Mr. Porter for the efficient and enthusiastic manner in which he had performed the duties allotted to him." We are very glad to have from Mr. Porter's pen this first-hand account of the production and operation of this kind of Syllabus. (E.D.)

² *Education Act 1944*, p. 96, para. 2.

³ *Ibid.*, para. 5.

All the committees are to be represented on any sub-committees set up by the Conference; in the case of a vote, each committee has one vote. In the event of failure to agree unanimously in Conference upon a syllabus of Religious Instruction, or should the local authority fail to adopt a syllabus unanimously recommended to them by the Conference, the Minister is to appoint a body of persons selected on the same representative lines as those laid down for the appointment of the Conference by the authority. After giving full opportunity for all interests concerned to state their point of view, this body will prepare a syllabus which the Minister may direct to be adopted as the "Agreed Syllabus" for that particular authority. Finally, future decisions concerning the Agreed Syllabus (revision, etc.) shall be taken by a Conference convened on the same basis.

Such, in brief, is the official definition of the Agreed Syllabus and how it is to be compiled. The question naturally arises, why it should be necessary for each authority to draw up its own Syllabus of Religious Instruction. It has never been suggested that a panel of the local education authority should meet with representatives of the chemical and pharmaceutical industries to agree upon what chemistry shall be taught in schools, or that the local chamber of commerce should lay down the syllabus of commercial subjects to be covered.¹

Why, then, should Scripture be singled out for this special treatment? First, there is a long background of history stretching back over a century to the origins of the modern system of elementary education. In the early years of the nineteenth century, voluntary societies like the Nonconformist British and Foreign School Society (1808) and the Anglican National Society (1811), provided elementary education, and in fact all elementary education was "voluntary" until 1870. The State was, however, beginning to realise its responsibilities, and through the Committee of the Privy Council that preceded the establishment of the Board (1899) and later the Ministry (1944) of Education, it made grants to the various agencies which were providing schools and schooling. The Committee made it a condition that religious instruction should be given in schools

¹ On the other hand, of course, it should not be forgotten that many interested bodies, such as those mentioned, do indirectly influence the school syllabus *via* the External Examinations Boards, where their views are sought from time to time. In but a minority of schools is Scripture an examination subject.

to which grants were made, and they tried (though with little success) to secure the use of a conscience clause.¹

In 1870 a new Education Act, for the first time, set up schools provided by the authorities, and not merely subsidised by them. These were the "Board Schools", administered by the local School Boards. This Act included a conscience clause—the well-known "Cowper-Temple Clause"—which allowed parents to withdraw their children from religious instruction and observation if they so desired, and to facilitate this, laid down that such instruction must come either at the beginning of the morning or the end of the afternoon. But in Board Schools there was no compulsion to include Scripture in the curriculum, and H.M. Inspectors were definitely instructed not to include the subject in their inspections and reports. What religious instruction there was, was to contain no doctrinal formulæ distinctive of any particular denomination.

The result of these provisions was that there were two distinct systems of elementary education side by side:

1. The Board Schools, provided by the local authorities, where Religious Instruction, if any, might be of the type that soon came to be known as "County Council Christianity", and
2. The Voluntary School, where those who desired a more definite type of religious teaching had to bear the heavy burden of "having to find and repair school buildings in which it was given, and also to pay rates for provided schools in which it could not be given".²

This state of affairs continued until 1902, when the Education Act, which enlarged the public system of education to include secondary schools, also transferred to the Local Education Authority the responsibility for maintaining as efficient all elementary schools, whether provided or voluntary. This eased the burden, but it meant that the powers of the Managers were greatly curtailed and practically limited to the religious aspect. Even so, many people saw in this an unfair imposition that the Church of England, the Nonconformists and even the Roman Catholics should be able to have their children instructed in

¹ Only 205 out of 6,700 C. of E. schools had a conscience clause in their title-deeds (Selby-Bigge).

² Sir L. A. Selby-Bigge, *The Board of Education*, 2nd edn. (1934), p. 228. This book, by a former Permanent Secretary to the Board, has a very interesting chapter (chap. x) on *The Denominational Question*.

their own variety of religion in schools provided out of the rates; not a few "passive resisters" refused to pay their education rate. And so the 1902 Act, in fact, ushered in a period of acerbity and bitterness where religious education became one of the storm-centres of politics. The School Boards had already become the battle-ground between secularists and Christians; and the early years of the century saw greater battles yet on the stage of national politics, when a Bishop of Manchester could lead a party of ten thousand Lancashire men to demonstrate in London against further encroachment of the State upon the Church schools, and so respectable a newspaper as *The Times* could write the next morning: "The proceedings of yesterday . . . do not call for apology."¹

In the new Secondary Schools created by the 1902 Act there was, of course, no heritage of previous disputes, but many schools took advantage of the fact that religious instruction was not compulsory, and was, in any case, immune from H.M. Inspectors. The results of this are well known; in many schools the one period per week allotted to the subject, was either given to members of the staff, regarded as of no use for anything else, or it was considered a useful time for disposing of extraneous matters such as the selection of football teams or collecting various subscriptions. But it would be wrong to assume that this was universally true; there was a small but growing number of teachers, especially in girls' schools, who, either because they were keen Christians with a desire to ensure that their pupils should "know the Holy Scriptures which are able to make . . . wise unto salvation" and to do this, as all their work, to the glory of God, or because they were deeply interested in the Christian religion as an academic interest, taught the subject conscientiously and efficiently. Moreover, various voluntary bodies like the National Society were giving much thought to the question and making great efforts to secure improvement. Local authorities issued regulations governing religious instruction in their schools, and often included a syllabus; a return made in 1906 shows that "out of 293 authorities possessing Council Schools, 225 issued schemes or regulations for religious teaching. Some of the syllabuses were meagre and ineffective, some were full and good."²

¹ E. A. Knox, *Reminiscences of an Octogenarian* (1934), p. 224. Chaps. x, xi, and xiii are full of reminiscences of this period.

² Selby-Bigge, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

We cannot now examine in detail the development of Religious Instruction in schools since 1902, but it has been marked by a steady realisation of the importance of the subject and its right to a place in the curriculum and of the need for serious attention to questions of "methodology" and, above all, the training and equipment of the teacher. The shouting and the tumult seem to have died, and the Spens Report of 1938 finally set its seal upon the status of Scripture as a serious school subject.

In this historical background lies one of the main reasons why Scripture is different from any other subject on the school time-table. The Classics, Mathematics, English, Modern Languages, the Sciences and the rest, have all had their quarrels, their "growing pains" and their controversies, but these controversies have generally been limited to more or less academic circles. The new pronunciation of Latin or the Direct Method may have provided ammunition for wordy disputes inside the teaching profession, but Scripture teaching has been dragged from the classroom to the market-place and made the bone of contention of various political groups.

But there is a second reason for providing a syllabus and that is the fact that whereas all the other subjects in the school curriculum are taught by—or at least under the supervision of—qualified teachers (usually, in the case of the grammar schools, holders of honours degrees in their own particular fields of learning), the teacher of Scripture is, on the other hand, usually an amateur. In a number of schools (mainly girls' schools) it is true, there are specialist teachers, holding a qualification of equivalent status to an honours degree. But the Scripture specialist in most schools, and especially boys' schools, is usually a man whose qualifications have been secured by spare time study since he began teaching. There are now more opportunities than hitherto for taking Scripture as a subject in a Diploma in Education course, and even at some Universities for taking the subject as part of one's Arts degree, while the Lambeth Diploma in Theology (S.Th.) is now available for men as well as women.¹ But even with all these facilities, it is still true that the Scripture specialist, with qualifications equivalent to those of his colleagues in other subjects, is very rarely found—

¹ See J. W. Harmer, *Christian Education: the Needs and Opportunities*; also W. H. Backhouse, *Religion and Adolescent Character*, pp. 77-80.

a fact noticed by both the Spens and Norwood Reports.¹ We are not here concerned with whether or not the fully-qualified specialist teacher in Scripture is necessary—or even desirable—in a school, or whether in this subject as many of the staff as are willing and reasonably capable should take their part; but it is clear that as long as the present situation obtains most teachers of Religious Instruction will need—and welcome—the guidance that a well-prepared syllabus affords.

There are other considerations that justify the different approach to Scripture teaching from that of other subjects, for instance, the question of examinations. The syllabus in other subjects is largely governed by the requirements of the various external examination boards, whereas in Scripture the number of schools taking the external examinations is very small.

But more important still is the fact that this subject touches the child's experience in different ways from the purely academic disciplines. Here the subject matter is concerned with things moral and religious, with how we are to behave and with the eternal destiny of the human soul. In the light of this, it is surely reasonable that other interests besides the specifically academic should be allowed a hearing, and it is just this, of course, which is provided for in the arrangements for the compilation of the Agreed Syllabus.

II

For these and other reasons, then, it was inevitable that Religious Instruction should be singled out for this "special treatment". Perhaps at this point it might be of interest to give some details of how a Conference appointed under the Fifth Schedule, set about fulfilling its responsibilities. I had the privilege of being a member of the Conference called by the local education authority which I serve, and I have gathered that the procedure adopted in most cases was very similar to that we followed.

First of all the "panels" or representative committees were set up. The authority was represented by a special sub-committee which had already been formed to deal with the many miscellaneous questions arising out of the 1944 Act. The Church of England was invited to nominate a committee of four,

¹ Spens Report, chap. v ; Norwood Report, chap. iii.

and the local Free Church Council, seven. Seven teachers were invited to constitute the Teachers' panel, and were nominated by the staffs of the Boys' and Girls' Grammar Schools and the Secondary Technical School (one each), and the local branches of the National Union of Teachers (two) and the National Association of Schoolmasters and the Head Teachers' Association (one each).

The clergy, ministers and teachers held preliminary meetings of their panels to appoint conveners and to discuss general principles, and shortly afterwards a meeting of the full Conference was held. The Chairman of the Education Committee opened the proceedings with an outline of the tasks and responsibilities of the Conference, and then called on the three conveners to report on the findings of their panels. There was some discussion, and it was decided that the authority should compile its own syllabus, and to that end a "Co-ordinating Committee", composed of two members of each panel, was set up to go into details.

This co-ordinating committee then met and decided first (after careful examination of many existing syllabuses) to adopt in a slightly modified form the outline syllabus published on pp. 337-8 of the I.V.F. Christian Education Committee's handbook, *The Scripture Lesson*, and to supplement it by outline notes on each section. This does not deal with the "under-eleven" part of the school, so for the primary sections we borrowed (with the permission of the authorities concerned!) from the Lancashire, Liverpool and York City Syllabuses. We did not feel equal to providing outlines on these junior sections, and it was felt, moreover, that at this stage such outlines are not so essential, seeing that the main part of the work is in making the children acquainted with the stories as they are told in the Bible.

As for the preparation of the outlines, the members of the Co-ordinating Committee each undertook to be responsible for a few sections, and as each was completed, it was sent in type-script to all the schools in the borough, so that all teachers might express their views and make suggestions. Finally, the whole work being finished, it was submitted to the full Conference for its approval, and then to the Education Committee. The Committee having adopted it as drafted, the syllabus was published and officially became the "Agreed Syllabus" of the authority.

In some authorities, the Conference, instead of drawing up a fresh syllabus, adopted one of those already existing. The Cambridgeshire, Surrey and West Riding Syllabuses were especially popular, and have been widely adopted; one authority¹ has already adopted our Bootle Syllabus.

III

We have now seen something of what an Agreed Syllabus is, and of the *raison d'être* for Agreed Syllabuses; our attention must now be turned to what they contain. When the provision to be made for them in the Act was first announced, many were doubtful as to the result; would the various component committees ever succeed in reaching unanimity? and if they did, would not the resulting syllabuses be hopelessly diverse? Here is one typical view:

“This scheme [i.e. the scheme outlined in Schedule Five] seemed . . . to have two serious defects: first that in many areas the three sections of the committee might quickly reach a position of deadlock, with the subsequent imposition of a syllabus by the Ministry of Education—a solution which would commend itself to none of the parties; and secondly that there might arise a multiplicity of widely-differing syllabuses, varying according to the desires of the dominant section of the committee, whichever section managed to attain to this position in a given district—with the result that the difficulty of providing suitable textbooks for the course would be increased.”²

With regard to the first fear, it has happily proved unfounded, perhaps to some extent due to the very existence of the threat of an “imposed” syllabus if agreement were not reached. Not only has the production of so many syllabuses given the lie to it (for their very appearance means that there has been unanimous adoption), but often the preface includes a note stressing the unanimity. “We are glad to place on record the extraordinary measure of positive agreement reached throughout our sessions.”³ “They have discharged their common task with entire agreement.”⁴ “Although there have been divergencies of view, there never has been any divergency of aim.”⁵ The measure of agreement shown is an eloquent testimony to the distance we have travelled during the last half century.

And what of the second doubt, of the possibility that each authority would do what seemed right in its own eyes, and that

¹ West Ham.

² W. H. Backhouse, *Religion and Adolescent Character*, p. 119.

³ *City of York Syllabus*, p. 1.

⁴ *Cambridgeshire Syllabus*, p. x.

⁵ *Durham Syllabus*, p. viii.

the result would be complete confusion? An examination of the various syllabuses produced, shows that fears on this score were baseless too, since certain well-defined paths seem to have been trodden by all. Mr. Backhouse, in the book already quoted, attributes this to the appearance of the *National Basic Outline*:

“ Happily this position is not likely to arise, since most of the local committees can be expected to follow the lines laid down in the *National Basic Outline*, which has the support of the Joint Conference of Anglicans and Free Churchmen, the Association of Education Committees, and the National Union of Teachers.”¹

This is probably claiming too much, as when this document appeared (in 1945) many of the syllabuses were already in print, and others at an advanced stage of preparation; and far from laying down lines to be followed, the *National Basic Outline* might be more fairly said to summarise the position already existing.

In the primary portion of the syllabus, there is great similarity between those of most authorities. In the Nursery Class and the Infants' Department, the simplest Bible stories taught through various activities in which the child, of course, takes part, are linked up with the idea of God's Love seen in those things that are within the child's own experience; nature, home, parents, food and clothes, etc. Towards the end of this section already, short passages for memorising are introduced, and as the child goes on to the Junior School at seven, memory work continues and increases, while in the class lessons during the four years from seven to eleven, the whole range of the more familiar stories from the Old Testament, the Gospels and *Acts* are covered, the most important several times. In addition, stories of great Christians of the ages, right down to our own times, take their place by the chronicles of the biblical heroes of the faith.

I do not propose to say more about the Primary section, since—as already mentioned—in compiling our own syllabus we concentrated, for the most part, on the Secondary section. I trust that I shall be pardoned if I limit my examination of the content of the Agreed Syllabus to the 11-18 age-groups. My comments are based on a careful study of ten Agreed Syllabuses,² and several other schemes of work in Religious Instruction,

¹ *Religion and Adolescent Character*, p. 119.

² The Counties of Durham, Surrey, Gloucester, Lancashire, Cambridge, Cheshire, and the Boroughs of York, Liverpool, Exeter and Bootle.

including that of the Institute of Christian Education (1938) and others published in books on the subject.¹

Roughly speaking, the Secondary Syllabus falls into three parts:

- (a) A preliminary course of two or three years (11-13 or 14) when the stories of the Old Testament, the Gospels and *Acts* are studied again, no longer as individual stories, but in their context as successive parts of the unfolding story of God's Providence as seen in biblical history.
- (b) The remainder of the course up to 16, where the emphasis is on the significance of the stories, and the development of God's self-revelation to men in the Bible.
- (c) The Sixth Form.

There are several elements that go to make up the content of the syllabus: (1) the Old Testament, the preparation for the Gospel; (2) the Gospels, the manifestation of the Saviour; (3) the Early Spread of the Gospel as seen in *Acts*; (4) Church History, the subsequent Spread of the Gospel; (5) Memory work.

(a) In the first part of the Secondary School Syllabus, Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Durham, York and Gloucester spend three years on Old Testament outlines, and Bootle, Lancashire and Liverpool, two. Surrey makes a rapid revision survey in one year, and in the second year deals with how the Old Testament came to be written. Exeter starts with a classification of the books of the Old Testament with their contents in the first year, and then proceeds to the Old Testament outlines in the second and third years. With regard to (2) and (3), the treatment of the Gospels and *Acts* at this stage, one finds more or less the same sort of thing, except that there are various ways of approach to the Gospel story. Some take the outline of the Life of Christ, drawing their materials from all four gospels, others take a different Gospel in succession each year. So Cheshire does a year each at Mark, Matthew and Luke, in that order; York does Mark, Luke and John. Lancashire and Liverpool spread their New Testament work over *four* years, and do one of the Gospels in each of the first four years of the course. Church History does not figure in all the syllabuses; where it is studied, there are variations. In some it is studied systematically side by side with the Old and New Testaments, while in others it is limited to specific sections of the course.

¹ Especially G. L. Heawood, *Religion in School* (1938); J. W. Harmer, *The Scripture Lesson* (1944); R. L. Arundale, *Religious Education in the Senior School* (1944); W. H. Backhouse, *Religion and the Adolescent Character* (1947).

Some authorities make a special point of the history of Christianity in their own locality, notably Gloucestershire and Durham, which have sections on "The Gospel reaches Gloucestershire" and "The Gospel reaches Northumbria", respectively. Finally, there is the question of *memory work*. Some of the syllabuses make no mention of it after the primary stage, but on the whole most seem to agree that some work of this kind is desirable throughout the course. York continues to prescribe set passages for memorising just as it did in the Junior section. Surrey gives an extensive list from which passages may be chosen. Lancashire and Liverpool have the rubric at each of the first four years of the senior course—"Passages for Memorising. A suitable selection to be made by the Teacher". Cambridgeshire has a very useful appendix discussing "Memory Work and the Speaking of Scripture", while Mr. R. L. Arundale, in his *Religious Education in the Senior School*, devotes a considerable portion of the book to the whole subject of classroom methods, working out differentiated methods which will enable boys and girls in the "C" stream to cover the same syllabus as those in the "A" stream; a most important question, since the "secondary" portion of the syllabus is set not only for the brighter pupils in the Grammar School, but also for those in the weaker forms at the Modern Secondary School. One other point about memory work is a most interesting feature of the Cheshire Syllabus.¹ In the earlier parts of this syllabus, there are references in the margin side by side with the topics proposed for study at the various stages,

"intended as suggestions of verses which should be brought in at their appropriate place in the telling of the story, almost as a refrain, or as the keynote or climax of the story. In this way the texts will be learnt with pleasure and in their proper context".²

(b) In the second part of the Secondary Syllabus, the last two or three years of the pre-certificate course (ages 13 or 14-16), there is not quite the same measure of common material. Many authorities, whose syllabuses date back to the days when provision was made primarily for the old "elementary" schools, and when the "secondary" schools followed either their own syllabus or none at all, carry their scheme of work only to age 15.

¹ Borrowed, I understand, from the Oxfordshire Syllabus, of which I have not been able to procure a copy.

² *Cheshire Syllabus*, p. 6.

For example, the 1942 Surrey Syllabus, and the Lancashire-Liverpool scheme as well, have no suggestions at all for the 15-16 year. Exeter has a progressive syllabus up to age 15, and then gives a list of suggested subjects and discussion topics for use in the Fifth and Sixth Forms.¹ Durham, having completed its outline study of the content of the Bible by 15, devotes the 15-16 year to "The Relevance of Christianity to personal and social life".

In general, the main difference between this second portion of the Secondary Syllabus and the first is that the emphasis changes from narrative to more specifically religious teaching, there is more interest now in the world of *ideas* than in mere *facts*. No longer is it enough to know what Abraham and Moses, David and Paul, did; but what they thought of God, how God revealed Himself to them, how they thought and how their thoughts were recorded, preserved and transmitted to us.

Despite the fact that there is less uniformity in this part of the syllabus than in the earlier portions, yet here again we find certain elements which appear in all the syllabuses, especially those which do make provision for a continuous course up to age 16. Here are the principal ones:

1. *The Making of the Bible*. Most schemes agree that children who remain at school until 16 ought, at some time fairly near the end of the course, to become acquainted in general outline not only with what the sacred books contain, but also with how they came to be compiled.

With regard to the Old Testament, most lay down that the pupil should be familiar with the theory of the compilation of the Pentateuch connected with the letters J, E, P, D; and assume that the Wellhausenist theories are, in fact, the true account of how the Books of Moses came into being. Speaking personally, it seems to me, especially in view of the writings of Prof. Edward Robertson, late of Manchester, that the last word on the subject has not yet been said, and this view is expressed in the Bootle Syllabus,² as also in *The Scripture Lesson*.³ But this is not, it must be admitted, the view of all writers on the

¹ The Devon County Supplement, edited by Mr. J. W. Harmer, deals with the older age-groups in a much fuller manner.

² Pp. 76-8.

³ Chap. v; for those interested, a useful discussion of the subject will be found in chap. iv of *The New Bible Handbook*, ed. G. T. Manley (I.V.F., 1947).

subject! *The Times Educational Supplement*¹ reviewing the Bootle Syllabus, said that it "is liable to confuse the teacher by regarding the documentary origin of the Pentateuch as still under discussion".

However, apart from this debated question, there are other things under the heading of "The Making of the Old Testament" that boys and girls ought to know; e.g. the literary forms represented by such books as the Psalms, Job, and the books attributed to Solomon, the Hebrew arrangement of the Old Testament writings, etc.

When we come to the making of the New Testament, the question is, of course, rather more simple, though pupils of this age group generally find the outlines of the Synoptic Problem very interesting, and are able to do first-hand work themselves in comparing parallel passages, etc. The Institute of Christian Education Syllabus definitely puts down the Synoptic Problem as a subject for study at this stage.

This is also the opportunity for a lesson or two on what the Apocrypha is and contains, and how it differs from the canonical Scriptures; a subject upon which questions always seem to be asked by the pupils.

2. *The Progressive Teaching of the Old Testament.* The familiar stories of the Old Testament are studied again from a different point of view:

The teacher's aim must be to show how, from very elementary beginnings, God slowly taught His People the truth concerning His nature and His will, in preparation for the full revelation which was to be made through Jesus Christ, His incarnate Son. God did not leave His other children without light at any time: in every land there was some knowledge of the truth, and men were required to live according to the knowledge they possessed. Nowhere else, however, was there found anything like the historical sequence of the progressive revelation which was made by God through the chosen teachers of His own People, among whom the Messiah was to be born "in the fulness of time". It should be clearly taught that, while the Incarnation made it necessary that there should be a special preparation of the Chosen People, the revelation made to them was not intended by God to be a closely guarded national privilege, but was meant to be communicated by them to all mankind.²

So says the Surrey Syllabus, and all the schemes of work examined make it clear that they regard it as one of the most important elements in the religious instruction of the middle forms of the secondary school—which now, of course, are also the senior forms of the modern school—that they should study

¹ 15 Feb., 1947.

² *Surrey Syllabus* (1942), p. 54.

this "historical sequence of progressive revelation". Some treat it as one topic; others deal with it in two sections, first "God's Revelation to His Covenant People", or the "Development of the Idea of God" or some similar headings; and then the study of the Prophets.

Mr. Harmer, in *The Scripture Lesson*, suggests one term during this part of the course to study Genesis, a plan followed by Bootle; Professor T. H. Robinson, however, reviewing Professor S. H. Hooke's *In the Beginning*, says:

a sound scheme for Old Testament teaching will leave the Book of Genesis to the end of the Course: it raises problems which are far too difficult and complicated for younger children to grasp, and it is not till the sixth form is reached that scholars will have either the background or maturity of judgment to do justice to the subject.¹

This is no doubt true if it is felt necessary to go into details of documentary theory, but there is surely much teaching in the Book of Genesis which can profitably be studied without the technicalities of the Higher Criticism.

3. *The Teaching of Jesus*. As we should expect, and as is natural, the Teachings of our Lord fill the greater portion of the time during at least one of the years at this stage. They are in fact the focus of all the teaching: the Old Testament Revelation points to Christ; the spread of the Church, the teachings of the Apostles and all subsequent Church History spring out of His Message.

Some syllabuses lay down a scheme of teaching either under headings of what the Lord taught on various topics, or an attempt at a chronological interpretation of the teachings, or perhaps a study of some particular aspect such as the Parables; others approach this theme through a systematic study of John's Gospel, which in most courses has been little used before this stage.

4. *The Epistles of Paul and the Teaching of the Apostles*. The spread of the Early Church was accompanied by the formulation of the Church's teaching. On the first Easter Sunday the Lord on the Emmaus Road expounded to the two disciples "in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself",² and much of the New Testament is devoted to the reinterpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures in the light of the Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is found in the speeches and sermons

¹ *Religion in Education*, vol. 15, p. 67 (Spring, 1948).

² Luke xxiv, 27.

in Acts, and in the Epistles, especially in the great body of doctrinal writing that bears the name of Paul. This again is an indispensable part of the religious instruction of the 14-16 year olds.

5. *Church History.* Some syllabuses devote a whole term at this point to a formal study of the development of the Christian Church throughout the ages. In others, where Church History has formed an integral part of the Course in the lower forms, attention is now turned to the Church to-day, and such topics as the distinctive contributions of the various denominations, the Ecumenical Movement and hopes of Christian Reunion, and the general question of Christian Missions.

6. *The Relevance of Christian Faith and Worship to Life.* There is a danger that in our attempts to give our scholars an adequate grasp of the essentials of Biblical history, religious development and Christian doctrine, we shall have succeeded in merely adding another contribution—and a most important one—to their intellectual equipment. Scripture is an intellectual discipline, calling for as much technical study and scholarly approach as any of the great Humanities; but it is, in addition, far more. It is the avenue whereby we draw near to God, and as such is in a particular way relevant to our everyday life and experience. "The real work of Religious Instruction", said the late Archbishop Temple, "is the formation of a habit of mind which tries to understand life and its problems by the light of the knowledge of God."¹ This is, of course, partly recognised in the provision of the Daily Act of Worship, and should be implicit in the Scripture teaching right from the beginning, but most of the syllabuses also devote time in these pre-Certificate years to a definite section on Christian Life and Worship, the relations between morality and Christianity, the importance of Church membership and the need for conversion or a definite act of the will embracing the Christian faith and way of life.

7. *Public Examinations.* It is axiomatic that where the School Certificate papers in Scripture Knowledge are taken, the syllabus must be modified to fit in with the work set by the Examinations Boards.

¹ *York Syllabus*, p. 2.

(c) And so we come to the final part of the Secondary Syllabus, the Sixth Form, where all the pupils are holders of the School Certificate, and the majority are reading for Higher School Certificate and University Scholarships. Here the work must be of a high academic standard, and the teacher must show the conviction throughout the lessons that the old legend that Divinity is academically a "soft option" is unfounded. Much of the work will take the form of discussion, but here several important principles must be observed:

1. Discussion should supplement and not replace instruction.
2. Discussions should arise out of a definite syllabus, and not be allowed to range so far and wide as to become vague and pointless.
3. The boys' natural inclination and zeal to talk politics and economics should be limited to points which are relevant to the matter in hand.

Few of the syllabuses appear to make provision for Sixth Formers, and yet professional journals and books on Scripture Teaching often give accounts of interesting work done in this field. This would suggest that at the most advanced stage the teacher is left very much to his own devices. The syllabuses that do make suggestions usually limit themselves to a number of topics which for their treatment assume a good general knowledge of all that has gone before.

The Institute of Christian Education Syllabus (1938) offers two suggestions: (A) readings from John and the Epistles, followed by Edwyn Bevan's *Christianity*, are the basis of a two-year course on Christian beginnings and development down to the present day; and (B) a two-year course entitled *Problems*, covering ground very similar to the section on Christian Faith and Worship mentioned above, though, of course, in more detail, and leading on to Christian History and a study of other religions in comparison. In addition, the syllabus offers other schemes in an appendix. Durham suggests nine topics:

1. Literary evolution of the Bible.
2. The early stories of Genesis.
3. The works of John.
4. Literature of persecution in the New Testament.
5. Life and letters of Paul.
6. History of Christian Worship.
7. Comparative study of religion.

8. Personal and Social Problems.
9. The Christian Faith.

and offers useful outline notes on them.¹ Derbyshire, after enunciating four aims of Sixth Form teaching:

- (a) to explain the tenets of the Christian Faith,
- (b) to relate Christian belief to Christian conduct,
- (c) to compare the challenge of Christianity with that of other world religions, and,
- (d) to discuss sincerely and open-mindedly some of the problems confronting thoughtful students of Christianity,

goes on to suggest eight topics of similar character:

1. The Book about God.
2. The influence of the Bible on our life and thought.
3. Comparative religion.
4. The study of Christian people and movements in the last 200 years.
5. Problems of personal and social ethics, e.g., what is a Christian? Why should I be good? Is prison reform my business?
6. The Life and Teaching of Christ.
7. The development of the Idea of God from the Prophets to Paul and John.
8. Closer study of selected books, one Old Testament and one New Testament.²

Gloucestershire has a similar list, but adds to the list Christianity and Science and the History of Christianity in England, while Bootle adds to the list the suggestion of taking a sort of "set book", either a formal handbook of Christian Doctrine like Whale's *Christian Doctrine* or Gore's *Belief in God*, or a recent work by a Christian thinker of the type of C. S. Lewis or D. R. Davies. By far the most serious attempt to provide for the Sixth Former is found in the recent Devon supplement to the Exeter Syllabus. The preface to this supplement makes the interesting suggestion that "some of these topics might very profitably be taken with the Senior Forms of Modern Secondary Schools, with a view to helping the pupils, in their last year at school, to face some of the problems of religion, conduct and the Christian Faith".³

IV

Having surveyed the content of the Agreed Syllabuses, it remains now only to offer a few observations on how to use them, and the most important subject of the relation between

¹ Pp. 119-52.

² I have not seen this syllabus: information has been kindly supplied by Mr. G. S. Humphreys.

³ P. 41.

the teacher and the syllabus. With almost unanimous voice the prefaces to the various syllabuses make it clear that they are to be regarded as tools, and not masters. Archbishop Temple, for example, in the Foreword to the York Syllabus, says:

It is very important that its real purpose should be appreciated. In every department of Education, what matters most is the free play of intercourse between the mind of the teacher and the mind of the learner; but in no department is this so important as in connection with religion. The syllabus should, therefore, be used with great freedom and elasticity. It is a guide, but nothing more. The wise traveller who visits, say Florence, does not feel bound to see every sight mentioned in his guide-book; he quickly finds out which objects of interest are of importance or value to him personally, and gives less attention to the rest. A guide-book is a servant, not a master; and this syllabus is a guide-book for those engaged in the difficult, but supremely important work of religious instruction.

First of all, then, the syllabus must be used as a *guide*, and not as a substitute for the preparation of lessons. Mrs. M. V. Hughes¹ tells of a "lesson" she once inspected, where a head teacher struggled painfully—with an odd remark or two on spelling—through a portion of Scripture in which neither he nor the class was interested, merely because it was "on the syllabus" for that week. The material in the particular section of the course concerned is to be used as the groundwork of the lesson, but the processes of selecting the details for illustrating the main points, of emphasising what is essential, of adapting the material to the class's powers of comprehension and assimilation; these things are necessary, but you will not find them in the syllabus! The Institute of Christian Education Syllabus says in its Introduction:

In offering the suggestions which follow, the compilers are fully aware that there is a great danger in anything which might appear to imply that a formula can be offered for religious teaching.²

Secondly, it must be remembered that even if one tried to go conscientiously through the syllabus, there just would not be time to get through all the masses of information contained therein. In his *Religious Teaching in Schools* (1944),³ Mr. A. C. Toyne analyses the time factor and shows how impossible this would be, especially on the usual allowance of one period per week.

Thirdly, the teachers' own tastes and studies will influence

¹ *Scripture Teaching To-day*, p. 35.

² Pp. 60-5.

³ *I.C.E. Syllabus*, p. 1.

the form the teaching takes. In a term which the syllabus accords to the study of the Prophets, one teacher might give in his ten or eleven lessons an outline of the Writing Prophets, evoking the great movements, events and personalities of the period, reinforcing all with selections from the relevant Scriptures. This indeed might be the normal approach of most. But, as the headmaster of Marlborough Grammar School says:¹

One schoolmaster will be happier to set his class down to a detailed study of the book of Amos and to take a term over it, to the complete exclusion of the other prophets. But his class may in this way learn more of the meaning of the Old Testament, the place of the Prophets, and God's ways with men than by any other method.

With this, the Preface of the Durham Syllabus² agrees:

Although the *matter* of the syllabus is arranged so that children can discover truths for themselves, yet the Committee hope that the teachers will exercise their freedom in regard both to their own methods of teaching and in their individual approach to the religious ideas of the syllabus. It is intentionally comprehensive, and the Committee do not anticipate that all the detail will be used in every school. Provided that the general scheme of the syllabus is preserved, alternative *matter* may well be selected and introduced. The attention of teachers is called to the danger of attempting to "cover the syllabus". Hurrying through excessive detail cannot but be detrimental to the true spirit in which the teaching should be given.

Finally, there is one other point. While it is the teacher's duty to use the syllabus in the way that he believes will best procure the end he is aiming at, it must be remembered also that the teaching in any one term is part of a scheme beginning with the first day of the child's school life and going on until schooldays are over. What the Agreed Syllabus does do is to draw up a plan, a sequence of topics to be dealt with in a certain order. A child who, at the end of a term or a year, leaves one Scripture for another should, despite the change, be aware of this sequence. So, while pleading the need for freedom and elasticity, we hold that this sequence ought to be observed. The York Syllabus is preceded by a note expressing this view:

This syllabus is to be used as a guide, and not as a master. It is to be suggestive and not compulsory. It has a definite sequence, which should be kept, but this need not destroy its elasticity. To some it will seem to have too much matter both for teaching and repetition; to others it will have too little, but it must be remembered that it is a *guide* only.

¹ G. L. Heawood, *Religion in School* (1938), p. 88.

² P. 3.

V

So we come to the end of our survey. We have seen what an Agreed Syllabus is; why it is necessary; how it is compiled; and what it contains. We have discussed its use, and there seems little doubt that if properly used the Agreed Syllabus will do something to reverse the current ignorance of, and indifference towards, the Bible. And, to quote for a last time from the Durham Syllabus:

The deep things of God are opened to us, in all our felt insufficiency and need, in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

LAURENCE E. PORTER.

*Grammar School for Boys,
Bootle.*