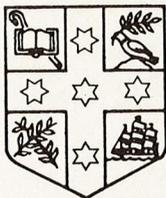


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THE BIBLE
AND
THE CHILD
METHODS OF TEACHING

By
MONTAGUE GOODMAN



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THE BIBLE AND
THE CHILD

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THE BIBLE AND THE CHILD

BY
MONTAGUE GOODMAN



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The Bible and the Child

By MONTAGUE GOODMAN

I. A PRIMARY QUESTION.

THE Bible is a fact of surpassing importance to every thinking man.

It is the greatest miracle in the whole world, and challenges all who come into contact with it. Its history, its achievements, and, above all, the claim it makes, demand the respect and reverence of its readers. No one can afford to neglect its message, for it assumes the position and character of the Word of God, the medium of God's contact with mankind.

As such it becomes

a matter of paramount concern

to all men everywhere. Is it of the same concern to a child? There are, admittedly, many subjects of the first importance to men which are wholly inappropriate to the mentality of children, and even directly harmful to them. Politics, crime, the relation of the sexes, and other important subjects, a wise parent will assiduously withhold from the consideration of his

children, on the ground that they are not of an age to consider them in a correct perspective to life in general.

There are those who hold the Scriptures to be in the same category, and as not of a character to be placed wisely in the hands of a child, but rather to be reserved for consideration in more mature years.

For this they urge several reasons, in part arising from the nature of the Book and in part from the nature of the child.

The Book, they say, is far beyond the mental grasp of a child, and, moreover, contains things that are not good for a child to know. Its teaching may be misleading and even terrifying to an immature mind. And the child is of a nature that does not require or respond to the teaching of the Bible. Its thoughts are childish and superficial. It is enjoying the playtime of life, and ought not to be faced with serious matters which will bias its mind and hinder its development in a well-balanced manner. In fact, it will tend to become a prig. There is plenty of time for the Bible, as there is for other serious matters, in later life.

These objections appear to be based upon **two misapprehensions**

of a fundamental character, both as to the nature of the Book and also as to the nature of the child.

For it is an arresting fact that the Bible differs, not in degree, but in its very nature, from all other books, and that not on account of the subjects of which it treats, but from something inherent in it which no other book possesses. It claims to be "inspired," a word which may be simply translated "God-breathed." There is as much mystery in this as in the nature of man into whom "God breathed the breath of life." It is certain that he thereby became "a living soul," essentially different from all other living creatures. So it is equally certain that

the Bible is essentially different

from all other books, and for the same reason. And being God-breathed, it exhibits the characteristics of God. It is essentially holy, with all the holiness of God; it is quick with the life of God; it is radiant with the light of God; it is sharper than a sword with the convicting power of God. It is not a book to be approached as other books. It cannot be mastered, but, on the contrary, it masters its readers.

And this miraculous Book addresses itself to every form of mentality alike. It is not dependent on the capacity of its reader to apprehend its matchless literary beauty or to respond to its poetic appeal or to understand its deep and prophetic significance. Its message is alike to the wise and unwise,

to the taught and untaught. It speaks even to the dullest and most uncultivated intellect, and not least to the undeveloped understanding of a child. There is, indeed,

no other explanation

of its astonishing appeal to children, who often read with eagerness much that they cannot possibly fully understand.

"Do you think you can follow what I am reading?" said a mother to her little daughter, as she read to her the Scripture Union portion for the day.

"I can understand with my heart, Mother," was the response of the child; and this is very true, for it is to the heart that the Bible makes its chief appeal, and the heart of a child is peculiarly responsive. May it not be for this reason that our Lord told His disciples that they must become as little children if they would enter the Kingdom of Heaven?

Moreover, there is in Scripture

nothing that can harm

the mind of the reader, however young. True, subjects are touched upon which no other book could handle without injury to an indiscriminating reader; yet so holy is this Book, that otherwise unholy subjects become holy in its treatment, and convey, by reason of their setting, holy lessons of the

first importance, some of which could safely be imparted in no other way.

Then, in regard to the nature of the child, the argument in favour of the Scriptures is even more cogent, and that for three main reasons.

(1) *The child is not a plaything, nor is childhood playtime.*

It is a fundamental error to assume that a child is not a serious being, nor to be treated as such. On the contrary, a child takes life (such as it knows it)—and certainly takes itself—very seriously indeed. It thinks often and much to the utmost limit of its capacity. It resents the treatment often accorded it as though it were a kind of living toy to be played with, humoured, and amused. Much of the daily programme in the Radio Children's Hour errs in this regard. A child's thoughts are

childlike, but seldom childish.

Its inability to express itself, and formulate its thoughts and ideas, is apt to mislead the unobservant.

(2) *The child is not innocent.*

Unfortunately this is too true. If its thinking is only limited by its child capacity, so is its sinning. True, its conscience is a far greater deterrent than in later life, but its heart is deceitful to an astonishing degree. The early age at which a little child will

acquire the art of effective lying is in itself a proof of this.

(3) *The child is responsive to the Scriptures.*

This is true to a surprising extent, perhaps even more so than when maturity is attained.

The Bible often

exerts an authority

over the child mind which will not be denied and which is not discounted, or even rendered nugatory, by higher critical doubts which are implanted in after years. It is easy for a child to believe that God has spoken, and to stand in awe of His message.

It is, of course, sadly true that a child can become the victim of doubt and unbelief concerning the Bible, but such doubts are generally imparted or gleaned from others.

It is hard to measure the grave responsibility which is being incurred by modernist teachers in our schools and colleges in view of the accepted method of teaching concerning the Scriptures. Here is

**an extract from a modern school text
book,**

written by the Headmaster of a Public School, and largely employed as a handbook to the Old Testament in several of our schools throughout this land. It purports to be an honest and fair representation of the story of the Fall as recorded in Genesis 3.

“Adam and Eve are ignorant and innocent (as they were made by Jahveh); the Creator tells them not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge, but does not give any really valid reasons for the prohibition. He says, indeed, that in the day they eat of it they will surely die, but this does not turn out to be quite true. And why should knowledge produce death? The supposition is not borne out by experience. Then when—beguiled by the serpent that need surely not have been granted this baneful power of interference by an Almighty Creator—they commit their somewhat trivial fault, Jahveh loses His temper, acts in a very undignified manner and issues curses on all His creatures. He then (apparently out of pure jealousy) forbids Adam and Eve to taste of the Tree of Life (which previously had not been mentioned), turns them out of the Garden and condemns both them and their yet unborn and obviously innocent descendants to endless pains and penalties.”

The most distressing element of such a travesty of Scripture is not that an educated adult in a responsible position could perpetrate it, but that the young people of our land should have to listen to it and be encouraged to believe it! What wonder if such distortions of Scripture should rob our

youth of all confidence both in their teachers and in the Bible they mishandle, resulting in their wholesale abandonment of the belief or practice of any religion whatever !

II. HOW THE BIBLE SHOULD BE TAUGHT TO A CHILD.

There is one, and only one permissible mode of presentation of the Bible to a child — *as the Word of God*. To present it in any other way is to stamp upon it the teacher's human opinion, which he has no right to impose upon the child. If the teacher does not believe the Bible to be what it undoubtedly and repeatedly claims to be, he should not teach it at all. He has no right to present it as something other than it represents itself to be. Or, at any rate, if the teacher must express his opinion, he should not fail to impress upon his scholars that such opinion is at variance with the judgment of all God's people down the ages ! He should at least have the honesty to indicate that perhaps, after all, he may be wrong, so that they may not unwittingly be misled by him into the miasma of unbelief.

To the believing teacher the advice would be to teach the Bible, simply and without argument, as the Word of God.

To set out to prove it

to be so on the lines of Christian Evidences more often than not defeats the end in view, since such arguments suggest to the mind of

the child more doubts than they remove. Strictly speaking, the truth of the Bible is not finally demonstrable to an unwilling mind, though it will, and does, produce conviction amounting to assured knowledge in those who desire to know with a view to obeying its message. "If any man wills to do His will," said Jesus, "he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God."

A lecture on the ingredients and process of making bread is by no means necessary to quicken the appetite of a child to eat it, however interesting and instructive such information may be; nor does a child require to understand gastronomic processes before it can digest its food. These are matters that may well be deferred until later life, whereas the food itself is a present vital necessity.

There are, however, certain

all-important matters

which should be taught in order that the child may approach the Bible with a right mental attitude.

The child should be taught how our Lord treated the Old Testament Scriptures.

Nothing could be more striking than the contrast between our Lord's attitude and that of the modern school teacher (and, alas! others claiming to be leaders of thought in the Church) in this matter. No honest

student of Christ's life and teaching can deny the devout reverence He displayed toward the Scriptures, His entire confidence in them, His appeal to them as the end of all argument, His reliance on them in the hour of temptation, and, above all, His repeated assertion of their authority and invulnerability.

These facts should be brought to the notice of the child as undeniable and immensely significant and as

an invaluable guide

to him in his mental and spiritual attitude to the same Scriptures. It is not honest to impose the unbelieving views of the modern critic on the child and withhold this vital information. The child should at least have the opportunity of choosing between the critic and Christ. There is little doubt as to his choice if really given the opportunity.

The child should be shewn clearly the authority that our Lord claimed for His own words.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this in its relation to the understanding of those words and, in consequence, of the whole Scripture. For Christ placed His words on a level with Scripture, regarding them as of the same authority and sanction as the writings of the Old Testament. His method of teaching was not by deduction,

but by declaration. He drew nothing from the stores of human wisdom.

He spake with authority,

and not as the Scribes. "I say unto you" preceded the most searching and far-reaching statements of truth human ears have ever heard. He claimed His words to be God's words in every particular. He asserted that if men had believed Moses' writings they would have believed His words, placing them clearly on the same level as coming from the same source. He said His words were spirit and life and the only safe foundation upon which men could build for eternity. He stated that His words would be the final criterion upon which men would be judged in the Last Day.

Upon these two fundamental axioms, our Lord's attitude to the Old Testament Scriptures and His estimate of His own teaching, rest the whole case for the authority of the Word of God as we have it to-day. For all the writings of the Apostles will be found to have their root and spring in the words of Christ and to be in perfect harmony with the Hebrew Scriptures which He so highly revered. To have inculcated into the minds of the scholars these two basic facts will be to have laid such a foundation for their confidence in the Bible as neither the higher critic nor the open unbeliever will be able easily to shake.

III. METHODS OF TEACHING.

A primary object of the teacher should be to familiarize the mind of the child with the text of the Bible. For this purpose, methods should be employed that will be directed not so much to the instruction of the child concerning the varied incidents, history, parables, prophecies, etc., as to storing its mind and memory with the actual record itself.

To this end, the first and foremost method advocated is *Regular Reading of the Bible*. Both in class and in private the child should cultivate the habit of reading in his own Bible the actual words of Scripture. Where possible it is often found useful for the whole class to read aloud together the whole of a selected passage. This can be rendered very effective with a little instruction as to manner of reading and the minding of "stops." More important than class reading is private daily reading by the child as a regular cultivated habit.

The Scripture Union

is an excellent medium for the encouragement of this practice. Children should be taught to make this as regular and rigid a part of their daily routine as the "saying of their

prayers." Most children early acquire the latter habit and they often retain it through life; sometimes, it is true, from little more than a superstitious motive. It would be well if the daily reading of the Bible could become as universal and rigid a habit. The well-known example of King George might be quoted in encouragement of this course.

The method of memorizing Scripture

is greatly to be commended for the same purpose. The great and outstanding Gospel texts should be learned by heart in the earliest years, for the mind and memory of the young are retentive to a surprising degree, and what is learnt is often retained as a permanent possession for life. Famous chapters of the Bible should similarly be committed to memory. The writer visited a Gospel Meeting for Jewish children in the East End of London some years ago, and was astonished to find a couple of hundred Hebrew youngsters repeating by heart the whole of the Epistle to the Hebrews! They could not understand it, but it was being stored in their minds for future use.

Another highly commendable method is

Bible Searching.

Here the children are encouraged to seek out texts and passages bearing on selected

subjects; they thus become familiarized with the order of the Books and learn their way about the Bible, much as they would about a town.



IV. THE CONTENT OF SCRIPTURE.

Here, of course, we reach the Bible Teacher's greatest and hardest task. For all is of little avail unless the child comes to understand what is the real Message of the Bible and what the Book has to say to him and to all who read it.

For the Scriptures are essentially a Record of God's revealed mind on certain all-important matters which can be learned nowhere else. The Teacher's objective is to make that mind of God known and apprehended by the scholar. It will not be achieved all at once or by any intensive methods. It must be "precept upon precept; line upon line; here a little, and there a little." The important thing is, *it must be achieved*, or the main object of the Bible in relation to the child will be lost.

The child then should learn that the Bible is not a history book, nor a book of sermons, nor a collection of stories. Nor is it written to impart any information for information's sake.

It should be explained that while all it contains is true; the history is true history, the facts are true facts, the science is true

science; yet all is written with an underlying motive, that there is some deep spiritual purpose in everything it contains,

a message on every page

that can only be apprehended by the aid of the Holy Spirit in answer to the prayer, "Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy Law."

In elucidation of this fact, the child should be shewn the masterly manner in which our Lord handled Old Testament stories by way of illustrating to His followers how all Scripture should be interpreted. Striking instances (which, if rightly presented, will not fail to impress the scholar) may be indicated in our Lord's reference to the Serpent in the Wilderness as a foreshadowing of Calvary, and to Jonah as a type of His own death and resurrection. Nor should the child be left with the impression that these occurrences were merely fortuitous illustrations of spiritual truth, but rather that they were permitted to happen in order that we might by their means learn such truths. This is clear from Paul's words in I Cor. 10. 6, 11. Indeed, it is clear that our Lord went to great pains in His post-resurrection talks with the Apostles to "expound unto them in *all* the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

This, then, is

the main duty of the teacher.

He is to impart to the scholar the spiritual content of the Bible. That duty will not be fulfilled by attaching a moral to each Bible story—such treatment will appear to the child, as it is in fact, artificial and forced, and will impress him very little. It may even mislead him into the idea that the Bible is merely a book of moral stories.

The whole true content of Scripture must be imparted to the child, if the Book is to have its avowed effect upon the life and character of the child. That effect is stated in the following terms :

“ To make . . . wise unto salvation . . . All Scripture is . . . profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

What, then, is the main content of Scripture ?

It is threefold in character.

It is a revelation of God, a revelation of Man, and a revelation of Christ.

These are the three cardinal revelations of Scripture, and they call for careful consideration in all efforts to bring the child into contact with the Bible in any vital sense.

First and foremost,

The Bible is a Revelation of God.

It cannot be too strongly emphasized to-day that if a child (or anyone else) is to

know God aright, it can only be as the Bible reveals Him. Apart from Scripture, nothing is known of God save “ His eternal power and Godhead.” This is partly inherent in man and partly observed from His handiwork in nature. How then can the true God be known ?

Only as He has been pleased to disclose Himself in the revelation of His Word. It is a primary duty of the Teacher to instruct the child, with reverent care and diligence, what the Bible teaches concerning the nature and character of God. It is the failure to do this that lies at the root, not only of

the many heresies that abound,

but of the loose thinking and false ideas of God and of man’s relationships and responsibility to Him which characterize the general public to-day.

For men are busy constructing Gods of their own conception which bear little resemblance to the God of the Bible. A God of one’s own imagining is an idol, and the warning of John the Apostle was never more timely than in these days, “ Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” The child, then, should be taught all that the Bible says about God, in order that he may know “ the true God.”

The revelation of God in Scripture is partly by way of explicit statements which

should be learned by heart by every child.

Among them are the following :

God is a Spirit.

God is Light.

God is Love.

The Lord thy God is Holy.

Our God is a Consuming Fire.

Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity.

The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

And that most famous and illuminating revelation of God to Moses in the Mount :

“ The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty ; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.”

But

an even fuller Revelation of God

is contained in the record of His acts in Scripture. As is the case with any one of us, the character of God is most perfectly disclosed by the things He does ; by His acts rather than His words. And these are recorded in rich variety in the pages of Scripture and should be studied with the

child in order to gain a right understanding of the true nature, character and mind of “ the God with Whom he has to do.”

Care should be taken to explain the progressive revelation of God in the Bible and that, while it is cumulative, it is never corrective. That is to say, that the God of Genesis is the same God as the God of Revelation, the God of Moses identical with the God of Paul, and all that is said of each is equally true of both. The commonly-taught theory of the God of Israel being a Tribal Deity of national propensities and vindictive character should be carefully refuted from the pages of the Old Testament itself, where the most majestic conceptions of God in the whole Bible are to be found.

Secondly,

the Bible is a Revelation of Man.

If, as Pope says, “ the proper study of mankind is man,” then the proper book in which to study him is the Bible. If it is important for the child rightly to understand God, it is also important that he should rightly understand himself.

“ Know thyself ” is a behest that can only be obeyed by the medium of the Bible. For the Bible is a mirror of the soul in which the child will see reflected his true nature and condition.

Children are an enigma to themselves. They are greatly puzzled, and the questions can find solution from one source only.

It is not too much to say that, if wisely taught, the child will find in the Bible a portrait of himself which he will assuredly recognize. It will afford him

the only reliable explanation

of the problem of himself and the bias to evil he speedily discovers to exist within him. How many a child has re-echoed Paul's piteous cry, "The good that I would I do not : but the evil which I would not, that I do . . . O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me . . . ?"

Here is a theme upon which the teacher may dwell with a wealth of illustration well nigh inexhaustible. No teacher need be at a loss for a lesson of arresting interest when he takes his Bible in hand to teach the child about himself.

The story, sad as it is, may be traced as the history of

the descent of man

from the image of God to the image of the earthly, from the Fall in the Garden to the Cross of Calvary. Point out the nature of the Fall and its reason, the testing whether God's new creature man would not only be good, but choose good ; explain his sad and tragic choice of evil, and how evil did

then, as it does to-day : separated the evil-doer from fellowship with God. Shew how fallen man, like some wonderful ruined cathedral, still retains in the broken image traces of his former loveliness. Trace the progress of God's dealings with man since the Fall, and their failure to recover him from his fallen state. Shew him sinning yet more in face of all God's gracious efforts, in spite of Precepts and Promises, Privileges and Punishments, the Pleadings of the Prophets and even of the Pity that gave Jesus to die.

The child will see himself

in the picture. Take him to Sinai and let him hear the Commandments of God until he trembles. Take him to Calvary and shew him the Love of God until he weeps. Be faithful and unrelenting in this matter and a good foundation will surely be laid for the third and greatest Message of the Bible to reach the heart of the child. It is the Message concerning the Saviour, for, Thirdly,

the Bible is the Revelation of Christ.

Here is the third and greatest theme of all the Word of God. All else is subsidiary and preparatory to this, the all-embracing message from Heaven to men—

God, Who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by

the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son. Christ the Living Word is the key to the Written Word, and all teaching of the Bible must have Christ for its object or it will fail.

The child must be taught that

(1) Christ is the Solution of all man's problems ;

that He is God's remedy for sin and its consequences in time and eternity.

He should be made to see that no life can be complete without Christ, and that with Him life in every variety of circumstances is a blessed thing ; therefore, that his first and foremost concern must be to know Christ.

(2) Christ can only be known as He is revealed in the Bible.

This should be untiringly explained and emphasized, and made the reason for his searching the Scriptures, for "they," Christ said, "are they which testify of Me." To omit this is often to leave the child with some sentimental idea of Christ which is all too common and which will not stand the test and stress of time.

(3) Christ is to be found in all the Scriptures, and that all the Scriptures are therefore essential to a right appreciation of Him. For God's Christ is not the Jesus of the Gospels only, not the Jesus of History,

but the Lord of Glory. One of the great dangers in the teaching of children is lest they acquire an unworthy conception of God's Christ. Many children's hymns containing references to "the little Lord Jesus" and similar conceptions are responsible for this, and care should be taken to counteract it. Even the Apostles ceased to contemplate Him in His humble earthly guise as Jesus of Nazareth, and knew Him no longer "after the flesh," but as "crowned with glory and honour." It is striking to hear Peter declare,

"He is Lord of all ;"

and even more so to find James, the Lord's brother, who had played with Jesus in the village home of Nazareth, allude to Him in his Epistle as the "Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory." And John, who once had rested on His bosom, "fell at His feet as dead" before His ineffable glory when he saw Him at Patmos. We need, then, to use the greatest care that the Christ we present to our children is the Christ of the Scriptures and not "another Jesus." There are many such to-day, figments of men's imagination who bear little resemblance to the Christ of Calvary and the Throne. It is worth remembering that it was to the Old Testament Scriptures that Paul made reference when he spoke of seeing "as in a

glass the glory of the Lord," and it is only those who so see Him there who will ever fully understand His portrayal in the Gospel Story and the Epistles.

All these things are

within the reach of a child

who is taught by the Holy Spirit of God, and there is nothing more lovely or desirable in all childhood than a lowly, simple faith and love and worship evinced to the Lord and Saviour in tender years. Having this, the child will grow, as his Lord did, "in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."

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