HOW TO TEACH RELIGION
PRINCIPLES AND METHODS

GEORGE HERBERT BETTS

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PRINCIPLES AND METHODS

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DEDICATED TO THOSE WHO HAVE IN THEIR KEEPING THE RELIGIOUS DESTINY OF AMERICA—THE TWO MILLION TEACHERS IN OUR CHURCH SCHOOLS.

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE teacher of religion needs to be very sure of himself at one point. He ought to be able to answer affirmatively the question, "Have I the prophetic impulse in my teaching?" Sooner or later, practical difficulties will "come not singly but by battalions," and the spirit needs to be fortified against discouragement. When driven back to the second or third line defense it is important that such a line really exists; the consciousness of being the spokesman for God makes the teacher invulnerable and unconquerable.

But in order that this divine impulse may attain its greatest strength and find the most direct, articulate, and effective expression, the teacher must know *how* as well as *what* to teach. The most precious spiritual energy may be lost because improperly directed or controlled. Unhesitating insight into the solution of practical problems helps to open up a channel through which the prophetic impulse can find fullest expression.

There is no substitute for mastery of the technique of the teaching process. Prayerful consecration cannot take its place. This ready command of the methods of teaching, on the other hand, is in no sense an equivalent of the consciousness of having been "called" or "chosen" to teach religion. The two must go hand in hand. No one who feels himself divinely appointed for this sacred task dares ignore the responsibility of becoming a "workman not to be ashamed, *rightly* dividing the word of truth."

This volume by Dr. Betts offers the earnest teacher of religion an exceptional opportunity to make more

effective his ideal of instruction. The treatment applies the best of modern educational science to the problems of the church school, without, however, for a moment, forgetting that a vital religious experience is the final goal of all our teaching.

Besides setting forth the underlying principles of religious teaching in a clear and definite way, the author has included in every chapter a rich fund of illustration and concrete application which cannot fail to prove immediately helpful in every church classroom. It is also believed that students of religious education will find this treatment of method by Professor Betts the most fundamental and sane that has yet appeared in the field.

NORMAN E. RICHARDSON.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Children can be brought to a religious character and experience through right nurture and training in religion. This is the fundamental assumption on which the present volume rests, and it makes the religious education of children the most strategic opportunity and greatest responsibility of the church, standing out above all other obligations whatever.

Further, the successful teaching of religion is based on the same laws that apply to other forms of teaching; hence teachers in church schools need and have a right to all the help that a scientific pedagogy permeated by an evangelistic spirit can give them. They also have the obligation to avail themselves of this help for the meeting of their great task.

This book undertakes to deal in a concrete and practical way with the underlying principles of religious instruction. The plan of the text is simple. First comes the part *the teacher* must play in training the child in religion. Then the spiritual changes and growth to be effected in *the child* are set forth as the chief objective of instruction. Next is a statement of the *great aims*, or goals, to be striven for in the child's expanding religious experience. These goals are: (1) fruitful *religious knowledge;* (2) right *religious attitudes—interests, ideals; feelings, loyalties;* (3) the *application of this knowledge and these attitudes to daily life and conduct.*

Following the discussion of aims is the question of just *what subject matter* to choose in order to accomplish these ends, and *how best to organize* the chosen material for instruction. And finally, *how most effectively*

to present the subject matter selected to make it serve its purpose in stimulating and guiding the spiritual growth and development of children.

The volume is intended as a textbook for teacher-training classes, students of religious education, and for private study by church-school teachers. It is also hoped that ministers may find some help in its pages toward meeting their educational problems.

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CHAPTER I

THE TEACHER HIMSELF

IT is easy enough to secure buildings and classrooms for our schools. The expenditure of so many dollars will bring us the equipment we require. Books and materials may be had almost for the asking. The great problem is to secure *teachers*—real teachers, teachers of power and devotion who are able to leave their impress on young lives. Without such teachers all the rest is but as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And to be a real teacher is a very high achievement.

Bishop Vincent was giving a lecture on "That Boy." He himself was "that boy," and in the course of describing his school days he fell into meditation as follows: "That old school master of mine!—He is dead now—*and I have forgiven him!*—And I am afraid that was the chronology of the matter; for I never was able to forgive him while he lived." I, as one of the listeners, smiled at the bitter wit of the speaker, but was oppressed.

This somber view of the impression sometimes left by teachers on their pupils received an antidote the following day, however, when a venerable old man approached my desk bearing in his hands an ancient and dog-eared copy of a text in grammar. He opened the book and proudly showed me written across the fly leaf "Grover Cleveland, President." Then he told me this story:

"I have been a teacher. In one of my first schools I had Grover Cleveland as a pupil. He came without

a textbook in grammar, and I loaned him mine. Years passed, and Grover Cleveland was President of the United States. One day I was one of many hundreds passing in line at a public reception to grasp the President's hand. I carried this book with me, and when it came my turn to meet the President, I presented the volume and said, 'Mr. President, do you recognize this book, and do you remember me?' In an instant the light of recognition had flashed in Mr. Cleveland's eyes. Calling me by name, he grasped my hand and held it while the crowd waited and while he recalled old times and thanked me for what I had meant to him when I was his teacher. Then he took the old book and autographed it for me."

Three types of teachers.—Two types of teachers are remembered: one to be forgiven after years have softened the antagonisms and resentments; the other to be thought of with honor and gratitude as long as memory lasts. Between these two is a third and a larger group: those who are *forgotten,* because they failed to stamp a lasting impression on their pupils. This group represents the *mediocrity* of the profession, not bad enough to be actively forgiven, not good enough to claim a place in gratitude and remembrance.

To which type would we belong? To which type *can* we belong? Can we choose? What are the factors that go to determine the place we shall occupy in the scale of teachers?

THE PERSONAL FACTOR

When we revert to our own pupil days we find that the impressions which cling to our memories are not chiefly impressions of facts taught and of lessons learned, but of the *personality* of the teacher. We may have

forgotten many of the truths presented and most of the conclusions drawn, but the warmth and glow of the human touch still remains.

To be a teacher of religion requires a particularly exalted personality. The teacher and the truth taught should always leave the impression of being of the same pattern. "For their sakes I sanctify myself," said the Great Teacher; shall the teachers of his Word dare do less!

The teacher as an interpreter of truth.—This is not to say that the subject matter taught is unimportant, nor that the lessons presented are immaterial. It is only to say that life responds first of all to *life*. Truth never comes to the child disembodied and detached, but always with the slant and quality of the teacher's interpretation of it. It is as if the teacher's mind and spirit were the stained glass through which the sunlight must fall; all that passes through the medium of a living personality takes its tone and quality from this contact. The pupils may or may not grasp the lessons of their books, but their teachers are living epistles, known and read by them all.

For it is the concrete that grips and molds. Our greatest interest and best attention center in persons. The world is neither formed nor reformed by abstract truths nor by general theories. Whatever ideals we would impress upon others we must first have realized in ourselves. What we *are* often drowns out what we say. Words and maxims may be misunderstood; character seldom is. Precepts may fail to impress; personality never does. God tried through the ages to reveal his purposes to man by means of the law and the prophets, but man refused to heed or understand. It was only when God had made his thought and plan for

man concrete in the person of Jesus of Nazareth that man began to understand.

The first and most difficult requirement of the teacher, therefore, is—*himself*, his personality. He must combine in himself the qualities of life and character he seeks to develop in his pupils. He must look to his personality as the source of his influence and the measure of his power. He must be the living embodiment of what he would lead his pupils to become. He must live the religion he would teach them. He must possess the vital religious experience he would have them attain.

The building of personality.—Personality is not born, it is made. A strong, inspiring personality is not a gift of the gods, nor is a weak and ineffective personality a visitation of Providence. Things do not *happen* in the realm of the spiritual any more than in the realm of nature. Everything is *caused*. Personality grows. It takes its form in the thick of the day's work and its play. It is shaped in the crush and stress of life's problems and its duties. It gains its quality from the character of the thoughts and acts that make up the common round of experience. It bears the marks of whatever spiritual fellowship and communion we keep with the Divine.

Professor Dewey tells us that character is largely dependent on the mode of assembling its parts. A teacher may have a splendid native inheritance, a fine education, and may move in the best social circles, and yet not come to his best in personality. It requires some high and exalted task in order to assemble the powers and organize them to their full efficiency. The urge of a great work is needed to make potential ability actual. Paul did not become the giant of his latter years until