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P. E. Kretzmann

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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Practical Suggestions for Conducting Bible Classes.

Bible classes, generally speaking, may be divided into three classes. The so-called Junior Bible class consists of the young people who have been confirmed in recent years, who still retain a large amount of the information imparted to them in the training-class and the catechumen lesson, but do not possess the background of adult experience and thinking and hence require an approach in keeping with their age and knowledge. The so-called Senior Bible class consists of young people of the senior age, such as have, as a rule, finished high school and made their first personal contacts with life, for which reason their viewpoint will ordinarily be that of late adolescence. While they still lack experience, their thinking will, as a rule, be fairly advanced, in fact, often be unusually keen, more so than that of adults who have gone stale in their intellectual activities. And finally we have the mixed, or general, Bible class, in which we may have all confirmed members of the congregation present, from those who were just confirmed to those who have their life's journey behind them and can supply enlightening suggestions and other helps from the experience of a long career.

But no matter what the character and the complexion of the Bible class itself may be, Bible-class work, like topic work in young people's societies, seems to belong to the most difficult tasks of faithful pastors. And there is no denying that the conducting of Bible classes is difficult work, that it requires the most careful preparation and the most painstaking application on the part of the pastor or leader. It is apt to take all the vitality, emotionality, intelligence, and spirituality that a man possesses.

Our question is: *What methods shall the Bible-class leader employ in his work, and how may he apply them to the best advantage?*

Let us assume that the lesson is that of Acts 19, 21—40: The Tumult of Demetrius. The outline of this lesson, or the lesson plan, would be approximately the following:—

Analysis:—

Plans of Paul at that time, vv. 21. 22.

The speech of Demetrius, vv. 23—27.

The effect of the speech, vv. 28—34.

The end of the riot, vv. 35—41.

Difficulties:—

The meaning of "silver shrines for Diana."

The significance of "The law is open, and there are deputies."

Special Topics:—

The temple of Diana at Ephesus.

The rulers of Ephesus (Asiarchs).

Chief Lessons:—

The bigotry of idolatry.

Agitation by reference to the danger of financial loss.

The first, in fact, the traditional method of conducting a Bible class is by the so-called *lecture method*, with the leader doing most, if not all, the talking. This does not mean, however, that the leader will give a so-called running commentary, or rambling exegesis, of the passage, interspersed with occasional practical applications. To sit through the average Bible lesson of this kind in the midst of intelligent, wide-awake, well-indoctrinated young people of our Church is a torture, to say the least. In most cases the presentation will lack the most essential feature of a real lesson, the participation of those present. At its best it may be an informational homily, while at its worst it becomes a dry-as-dust preaching.

Yet the lecture method can be used if it is properly applied and reinforced. This can be done if the leader uses the blackboard for his outline as well as for illustrations and references. He may furthermore attain his object if he makes his presentation as vivid as possible throughout, with constant application of the text to present-day conditions and circumstances. Even so we would strongly suggest that he pause from time to time to allow for questions on the part of those in attendance or to suggest a few topics for further discussion. To that extent at least his lesson will follow the principle of self-activity. But it takes an unusually able leader to use the lecture method effectively in Bible-class work.

But the second method for conducting Bible classes, the *outline-discussion method*, is a great improvement over the straight lecture method. For this method it is necessary that the members of the class or the assembly have printed or multigraphed copies of the topic in their hands. It must be understood that *the Bible itself is always the real text-book* and that Bible-study leaflets and booklets should be merely supplementary and ancillary. If there is any danger that the students will have their attention diverted from the Bible-text by any helps which might be given them, such helps should not be furnished.

But with only an outline of the lesson or topic in the hands of the Bible-class members the leader may introduce the topic in a few words, also explaining the outline in brief, so that all present may understand what the content and the purposes of the lesson are. The lesson proper consists in a discussion or conversation concerning one point after the other, with the leader constantly supplying thought or development questions. For example: What do we know about the provinces mentioned vv. 21 and 22 in the story of Paul's missionary labors? (Macedonia, Achaia, Asia.) What does the Bible tell us about the companions and friends of Paul mentioned in this lesson? (Timotheus, Erastus, Gaius, Aristarchus, Alexander.) What was the real reason behind the uprising of Demetrius?

If the leader watches his time and also notes the reaction of

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the members of the class, he will have little trouble about maintaining interest at a high level throughout the lesson period. But it is evident that he must prepare himself most thoroughly in order to do really effective work. It is self-evident that he will have maps and, if possible, pictures of Ephesus, of the ancient temple, of the theater, of the image of the goddess Diana, ready to be shown; in fact, the more visual instruction is available, the more may interest be aroused and maintained. A short *excursus* on Roman government in the provinces presented by the leader will likewise stimulate the attention of the class.

The third method which has been found very useful is the method of *outline analysis, with members of the group leading the discussion*. If this method is used, it is again necessary that all the members of the class be provided with a fairly complete outline of the lesson. But the chief and distinctive feature is this, that a few members of the group or society be prepared and prepare themselves beforehand to take a part in leading the discussion. For this particular lesson four leaders would be sufficient, each one of these being in charge of one section of the passage. They are to bring out the main points of their respective sections by means of a talk of from one to three minutes, by which the points which they have arranged are to be presented for discussion to the whole group. At the same time these discussion-leaders could introduce either some difficulty or some special topic of the text. If this work is properly coached, it will invariably stimulate the other members of the group to contribute their best to the discussion, and the Bible-lesson can be made most interesting and fruitful.

The fourth method which has been used with success is the *topical-question* method. In this case it is not necessary to have printed or mimeographed outlines ready, unless the members of the class request them for their preparation of the lesson to guide them, as it were, in their study of the text. If this method is to be successful, the passage to be discussed in any lesson must be announced at the end of the preceding lesson. The method requires that the leader have a number of questions, usually about ten or twelve, prepared on slips, in such a way that every one present receives a question.

Let us suppose that the group consists of forty members and that eight topical questions have been prepared. Then each of the eight questions will be in the hands of five members of the group. The leader will ask each subdivision with the same question to assemble in some part of the room in order to discuss the question and its answer for a few minutes, the length of time being carefully watched by the leader. The class will then be seated in order, and members of each group will discuss the answer to the respective questions. This is a splendid way of stimulating self-activity; for there is an element

of rivalry connected with the method that sustains interest in a very satisfactory manner.

The fifth method is really a variety of that just presented, namely, one that is based upon typewritten or mimeographed sheets containing *true-false or multiple-choice statements* or questions, prepared by the leader or by some other person with pedagogical training. It will be found advisable to have about ten *important* statements to be discussed and possibly twenty minor points, which can be taken up incidentally or as time will permit. Statements which could be used in connection with the lesson outline given above are:—

If heathen are satisfied with their own religion, Christian missionaries should make no attempt to convert them to Christianity.

A missionary may at all times refrain from placing his life in danger.

The town clerk made legitimate use of his knowledge of mob psychology.

The assembly of Greek cities was the prototype of a Christian congregation in its administration.

It depends upon the make-up of the class, of course, whether yes-no statements such as suggested above might safely be employed or whether the leader would prefer simpler questions. But experience has shown that an approach of this kind will stimulate individual and class activity and have excellent results.

We may state in conclusion that these methods have all been tried out as here briefly described and have been found most valuable. Whatever we can do, by the way of stimulating methods, by introducing a wealth of visual instruction material, and especially by having our attendants at Bible class do their own thinking, will certainly make such classes eminently worth while.

P. E. KRETZMANN.

Dispositionen über die altkirchlichen Perikopen.

Erster Adventssonntag.

Matth. 21, 1—9.

Wir leben in schweren Zeiten. Enttäuschung, Not, Herzeleid, Hoffnungslosigkeit und Verzweiflung sind an der Tagesordnung. In der Welt und in der Kirche, im allgemeinen und beim einzelnen. Auch bei uns herrscht zeitweilig eine recht trübe Stimmung. (Konkrete Darstellung.)

Da erschallt der Heroldsruf: „Tochter Zion, freue dich!“ Gegenseitig fordern wir uns auf: „Freuet euch, ihr Christen alle!“ (Lied 18.)

Aber können wir uns unter gegenwärtigen Umständen wirklich freuen? Gibt uns die Adventszeit tatsächlich Ursache zur Freude? Ganz gewiß. Ich zeige euch,