

9-1-1937

Approaches to Bible-Study in a Metropolitan Center

A. R. Kretzmann

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kretzmann, A. R. (1937) "Approaches to Bible-Study in a Metropolitan Center," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 8 , Article 71.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol8/iss1/71>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

fortunate Lutheran brethren and others who may be in need of some assistance. It may be possible to make an arrangement by which a Lutheran worker is placed on the staff of some social-service organization, the salary being paid wholly or in part by a Lutheran organization and the work divided proportionately. Or the agency will be glad to put on Lutherans as part-time or volunteer workers. This is not a mingling of Church and State, but it is a way of carrying out the duties of a Christian citizenship.

It stands to reason that the Lutheran pastor will try to have as comprehensive a view of Christian social work as possible, so that he may give proper direction to any enterprise coming under this heading. It will be well to remember in this connection a few statements in an essay by Pastor V. Gloe, entitled "The Theory and Practise of Christian Social Work," read at the Detroit meeting (1936) of the Associated Lutheran Charities. He states, in part:

"Every pastor should seek to familiarize himself with the needs for Christian social work existing in his parish. Every congregation has its socially inadequate, its widows, its needy, its underprivileged, its unemployed, its handicapped, its mentally deficient, its delinquents, its alcoholics, its domestic maladjusted, etc. The house-going pastor soon discovers who these people are and what their problems are. . . . Give your congregation opportunity to express its love in the field of Christian social work.

"To help him understand the social needs of his people, every pastor should devote some time to the study of the social sciences. The Bible has much to say about social conditions and social relationships. A careful study of the Bible from the viewpoint of its social implications is therefore highly necessary. However, it is advisable that the pastor should also be a student of the social sciences. In every modern pastor's library there should be a few good books on economics, psychology, sociology, and social work. A little regular and systematic reading in these texts will give the pastor an understanding of fundamental economic, mental, and social processes, which in turn enable him better to understand the problems of his people."

P. E. KRETZMANN

Approaches to Bible-Study in a Metropolitan Center

To many of our people the Bible is a closed book, not because of the difficulty of understanding it, but because the approaches to it, outside of the sermon, have always been rather ponderous and seemingly uninteresting. A fortunate impatience and natural rebellion against such an attitude has caused us to seek new approaches to Bible-study which would be thoroughly dignified and

674 Approaches to Bible-Study in a Metropolitan Center

truly enriching. The people who have found the way back to the Scriptures through these approaches have contributed to one of the most heartening experiences of a metropolitan ministry. We are not here in order to defend any specific method or suggest any special form — our interest is the Scriptures as God's Word and an approach to it that will make people realize its deathless strength and everlasting beauty.

We cannot join those who absolutely decry *the lecture method*. Our Monday evening adult Bible class is composed of more than fifty per cent. of that fine type of church-member who had all religious instruction in German and comes to the Bible class with a very outspoken desire to become acquainted with the English terminology in religion. It can hardly be demanded of some of these people, who are past fifty or sixty or are even seventy or eighty years, to fall in line with socialized recitation, such as the younger members of the group might do. For these people the Bible class becomes a restatement, in the language of the land and of their children, of the great truths which they learned in childhood and absorbed through years of German preaching. Their earnest desire to absorb the English terminology is usually born of the realization that they must be able to discuss the great truths of their salvation with the English-speaking members of their household and the neighbors round about them.

A second approach to the Scriptures which has proved most interesting is found in the developing of a regular project, either in a *group* or *privately*. The Walther League group, for instance, adopts the liturgy as its project for this year. That means that the Scriptural backgrounds of the liturgy are searched out and presented. The Leaguers in this way gain a great deal of information about the liturgy; but above all the most beautiful passages in both the Old and the New Testament are brought near to them. A study of the Common Service occupied six months. The Vesper is in its third month. The project continues until one discovers a genuine enrichment and a new appreciation of both the Bible and the liturgy.

Private projects are perhaps still more interesting. For several years the problem of the spiritual activity of some of the abler shut-ins weighed heavily on our soul. Finally, through a chance remark, we hit upon the idea of making them find the most comforting passages and asking them to read them to us. When we made a call, we no longer read them the great passages of comfort, but simply asked the question, "What passages have you found of particular comfort in the past days or weeks?" Needless to say, the first experience in each case was somewhat embarrassing. Because of the suddenness of the request, people paged back and

forth rather aimlessly and then, in desperation, began to read wherever they happened to be, with the result that in a list of twelve calls we listened to the genealogy of Christ according to St. Matthew twice. But that only happened the first time. The next time we made a call these people were more than ready for us. They had four, five, and sometimes even six passages or whole chapters that they were ready to read to us, and through five years the interest and the searching of these people has continued unabated. Of course, this must be attempted only with those who are physically able to put a half hour's work into the project daily. It has been such a great blessing, however, that we feel the idea worthy of imitation.

Another very successful project with individuals is one associated with the *hymn-book*. The pastor and the shut-in together decide on a hymn which is to be correlated with Scripture by the time of the next visit. Stanza for stanza and line for line these people search the Scriptures and mark down the references which they believe to be directly applicable. The results have been most amazing and revealing. Not only has this stimulated our own study and interest in hymnology, but it has also enriched the lives of many people by revealing to them the treasures contained in the great hymns of Christendom. The difficulty with this project is the work which it imposes on the *Seelsorger* himself. It means that he must know at least as much about these things as his searching, studying parishioner.

The *home devotional* type of study is also very interesting. In this type of work the weekly Bible class does not devote its time to the study of one single portion of Scripture, but a selection is made for every day in the week. These seven selections are then touched upon very briefly, and for each of them a set of questions is evolved, which the *Hausvater* is to answer. The class is conducted very frankly for the purpose of reestablishing the office of the *Hauspriester*, and the results, while they have not been great or many, have been very gratifying. The father who has been able to answer these questions by searching the Scriptures feels himself very secure in the knowledge that he is making a genuine endeavor to bring up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. In this connection we always encourage the reading of the Scriptures by the children in the household, the explanation given by the father, and the prayers which he offers. Surely no one will deny that the development of this project should be of inestimable value throughout our entire Church in the reestablishing of the family altar.

A combination of the *Bible Student* with the free *Lesson Helps* published by the Walther League also makes for a fine and easily

676 Approaches to Bible-Study in a Metropolitan Center

workable plan for research, even with older members of the group. If the members are assured that they have only to turn in their lessons in writing and that they will be carefully and confidentially reviewed and corrected by the pastor, they will not be so hesitant about joining in this type of work. The pastor must, however, be ready to examine each lesson leaflet turned in with chapter summaries very carefully; otherwise he will find that the people will soon lose interest.

Younger groups in Bible-study (for instance, informal meetings of the Junior Walther League) can sometimes be led into excellent research by *map study*. It is possible to secure outline maps of the Mediterranean World and Palestine quite easily, although ours were usually produced on the church's mimeograph. They were distributed, then a list of cities was mentioned which had to be placed in the map. After the cities had been more or less accurately located, certain outstanding journeys, such as the travels of Jesus, the journeys of St. Paul, and the missionary journeys of other apostles were traced. Scripture references were required for every city and for each activity.

The *biographical approach* has been used to such great profit that it is hardly necessary here to point out again what the editors of the *Bible Student* and the *Concordia Bible Student* have done in such an able way. Naturally we concentrate our attention first of all on the principal characters, many of whom are still vaguely familiar from Bible History classes; but sometimes character sketches and studies of minor characters can bring out just as much of Christian personality and worthy traits as some of those whom we call major figures. Particularly if we endeavor to place these great Bible characters into the world of today and the problems of today, do we realize their full greatness.

No true Lutheran pastor will deny the wisdom of strict *doctrinal study*. Reviews of the Catechism form very interesting classes for adults, although the approaches may have to be slightly different from those made with children. It requires mimeographing and careful work. For instance, we mimeograph all the Bible-passages of the Schwan edition, leaving the right-hand third of the page blank for notes. Asterisks denote the beginnings of new divisions and sections, although no numbers for passages and questions are given. Each section of these Bible-passages then becomes the object of special study. The group must analyze the passage in order to find out what it teaches and write it in the margin. Then the leader of the group can show how the statement of the Catechism fully coincides with the Scriptural teaching as the members of the group have discovered it in the passage. Excellent guides for this type of study are found in Koehler's *Annotated Catechism*

and Kurth's *Catechetical Helps*. We have discovered that very often the conventional approach through the pages of the Catechism which our day-school children have used for seven years seems so familiar to them that they do not react with the anticipated interest to the teaching in the confirmation class. Where this lack of interest seems to be found, an approach of this kind may prove very interesting and profitable, because it forces the children who are already familiar with the statements of the Catechism to get at them from a new angle.

Young people's groups in particular are interested in the *problem method*. This is an excellent way of arousing interest in missions and in the study of comparative religion. The problem for one evening will be the "regaining of one who has developed inclinations towards Christian Science." What arguments can the group present against Christian Science? What does Christian Science teach that is definitely opposed to the Scriptures? What are the historical backgrounds of Christian Science? etc. In this manner one may take up the problems of all the denominations round about us as well as the problem of work in foreign fields. Books, such as Fleming's *Contacts with Non-Christian Cultures*, Monson's *The Difference*, Mueller's *My Church and Others*, Burrows's *Founders of Great Religions*, Lankenau's *The World Is Our Field*, Eldridge's *Christianity's Contribution to Civilization*, etc., will prove valuable helps. The problems of atheism and evolution may also be dealt with in a very similar fashion with the help and guidance of Dr. Th. Graebner's excellent work in these fields, as well as *The Case against Evolution*, by Barry O'Toole; *God or Gorilla*, by Alfred McCann; *After Its Kind*, and *The Deluge Story in Stone*, by Byron C. Nelson. If the problem happens to be one in the American mode of living, the rearing of children, religious education, reading, etc., books such as Woodward's *Relations of Religious Training to Adult Religious Life* and Lynd's *Middletown* will be very valuable.

Bible-study through pictures is a field which is very frequently left entirely to the primary grades, and still it is a fact that some of the greatest masterpieces in the world can be comprehended and understood only by the adult mind. A Bible-class room ought to have very carefully selected pictures, which are changed regularly, and during the great seasons of the church-year, such as Christmas, Lent, etc., the great pictures centering around the Savior's life ought to be displayed. It would take years to collect these pictures; but slide-lectures will help to bring them to our churches most quickly. Every pastor ought to be familiar with Bailey's *The Use of Art in Religious Education*, with John La Farge's *The Gospel Story in Art*, and with Bailey's *The Gospel in Art*. The wonderful

678 Approaches to Bible-Study in a Metropolitan Center

hints for teaching and preaching that can be gained from these books will be of inestimable value. Branch's two volumes, *Sermons on Great Paintings* and *Christ's Ministry and Passion in Art*, are also very fine helps, even though we would not call them sermons in the strictest sense of the word. Allied with this type of study is the *poster work* with Juniors. Several of the more gifted members of the group are selected to make posters to announce the following week's Bible class or even for several weeks in advance. The next lesson will be, "St. Paul's Preaching with Reference to the Altar of the Unknown God." Now the Junior must find that lesson, study the circumstances and the background and, with the simplicity which must characterize a poster, give an indication of Mars Hill, a few pillars to designate the temple, a square block for the altar, and possibly, if it is very good, the figure of a preaching man. The results of this type of work have been most amazing and have uncovered so many original approaches that one feels amply repaid for the many hours of work and the special guidance which must go into it.

Last, but certainly not of least importance, is the type of Bible-study which leads people more deeply into the *study of prayer*. We speak about prayer a great deal, but we fear that very often our people do not understand what we mean when we talk of more earnest prayer and intercession. Our Church with its fine liturgical prayers and forms has not tended to develop a laity well informed and instructed in the manner of *proper ex-corde* prayer. We fear that often our injunctions to prayer only confuse our people because for them prayer means nothing more than the pouring of words into molds formed early in childhood and preserved to this day. But surely prayer ought to mean more than that for our people. They ought to be familiar with the outline of a true prayer and in that way build themselves up in this grace and virtue continually. The best time to develop this is undoubtedly in the confirmation class under the leadership of the pastor. There the children can be taught what every true prayer must contain. A course of prayer study in the Bible class is used to examine the great prayers of Scripture and show how certain essentials are always found in them. It will teach the proper processes of meditation on Scripture-passages so that people will finally be able to translate into prayers of thanksgiving and petition the great truths and revelations of Scripture. This type of study will be of greatest benefit to the pastor himself because he certainly needs to develop more and more each day the grace of prayer by which God would bestow upon him and his flock the richest blessings. Books such as Lunn's *The Secret of the Saints*, Oxenhan and Dunkerley's *First Prayers for Children* and Fleming's *The Dynamic of All Prayer* will be

More Uniformity in the Externals of Our Public Service 679

found valuable guides and helps, although they are entirely sectarian in their approaches. It would surely be a desirable and worthy thing if we could have a book in this same field, written with a truly Lutheran background.

The above approaches to the problem of Bible-study are only a few chosen out of an almost endless variety. The devoted pastor, in his earnest desire to reach out and bring the blessed Word close to the hearts of every member of his flock, will surely find many more ways that will meet the needs of his individual group even more closely and more thoroughly than those presented in such a brief form and condensed manner in this place. The leaders of our young people in particular will search for ever more attractive ways of presenting the precious, inspired Word to the hearts of those groups committed to their charge. Truly, no effort on our part can be too great in order that these young people may be developed into consciously redeemed moral agents and interested searchers for the way of life in the Book of God. The contributions which are made in this field for the broadening of the vision of our young people on the basis of the Word of God and its view of the world and our place in it are among the most lasting and surely the most worthy which it is given to poor sinful man to make for the kingdom of God and our blessed Savior.

Chicago, Ill.

A. R. KRETZMANN

Delivered at the Walther League Christian Knowledge Conference, January 18, 1937, Chicago, Ill.

What can Synod Do in Order that There Be More Uniformity in the Externals of Our Public Service?

Published by Request of a Pastoral Conference

Not only has the lack of uniformity been lamented for the past fifty years, especially since the majority of our congregations have regular English services, but of late, through the revival of the study of liturgics in every section of the Christian Church, there have appeared definite symptoms which seem to indicate that just when we were about to be led out of the wilderness of liturgical confusion, we are to be led back into a new liturgical chaos.

We propose to set forth four principles:

1. Liturgy belongs to the realm of adiaphora.
2. Changes in liturgy may cease to be adiaphora.
3. Uniformity in liturgy is most desirable.
4. When changes in liturgy are introduced, these should be made a) without thoughtlessness, b) without offense.