A STUDY OF THE DISCUSSION METHOD

AND ITS USE IN MEETING THE BASIC RELIGIOUS PROBLEMS

OF HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH ILLUSTRATED BY THE GOSPEL BY JOHN

By

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INTRODUCTION

A. Statement and Significance of the Problem

The field of Christian Education is continually faced with its two major aspects, method and content. It is the problem of adequate Christian training of all ages to present the content of Christianity, both traditional and practical, by the best methods so as to make possible for each student a vital, growing spiritual experience.

Throughout the history of religious education there has been conflict as to the relative importance of these two factors. At some periods the emphasis has been almost entirely upon content such as at the time of the Reformation and in the early history of religious education in this country. In the past several decades increased attention has been given to method. This has been the natural result of new psychological trends and experimentation in secular education.

One of the newer methods which has gained prominence in both the fields of secular and social education and has been utilized by religious education is the discussion method. It is apparent that there is much misunderstanding and misuse of the method, resulting in the loss of the benefits of its potentialities and in the failure to recognize its limitations. A careful study

of the various factors involved in the discussion method will prove helpful in realizing more fully its contribution and adaptability to religious education.

One of the major criticisms of the discussion method has been that it often lacks definiteness and direction as to content. In the field of religious education it has happened that the best exhibitions of the method have been weak in content. There is the evident necessity to emphasize positive Christian content, both Biblical and experiential.

The problem involves more than theoretically analyzing the factors which go to make up the discussion method and concluding the importance of Christian content; it, to be of most practical help, must include an attempt to illustrate concretely how the Christian content may be presented by the discussion method so as to meet the specific religious needs of a specific age group.

The widespread prevalence of discussion of religion among all types and ages of people is evident. That such interplay of ideas and reaching of conclusions on religious subjects should be directed and made meaningful demonstrates the significance of this study. Its significance is further shown by the fact that the discussion method is peculiarly suited to the period of adolescence when youth seeks to experience, evaluate, and express his

religious life. In addition to the recognition of the prevalence and suitability of the method the fact that Christian educators, realizing the lack in Christian content in the past, are seeking for practical ways of using Biblical material in youth discussion groups makes the study significant.

B. The Contribution of the Study

It is not intended that this study shall include a detailed presentation of the possibilities of all types of group thinking. It is intended to highlight the basic principles and essential factors of group thinking generally, singling out informal discussion in particular, and to illustrate by specific typical examples how Biblical material may be used to meet specific religious problems of youth.

It is intended that this study will set forth clearly and concisely what the discussion method is at its best, what are its advantages and its limitations. The method of procedure in discussion groups and the role of the chairman or leader will be some of the practical aspects. However, though an understanding of the mechanics will be presented as important and fundamental it is realized that this study will contribute to the field of Christian Education only in so far as it throws light on means by which the Bible may be used to solve practically the basic religious problems of youth. The contribution to the effective

teaching of young people by the writer is of immediate
importance.

C. Method of Procedure

As basic to the study the second chapter will
present a careful study of the essential factors of the
discussion method. It is necessary to understand the
philosophy of group thinking before assuming the possibility
of Christian growth through discussion. Much of the con-
fusion involved is in the terminology relating to the
various types of group thinking which will be defined
though it will not be within the scope of this study to
present each thoroughly. Such practical aspects of
discussion method as the method of procedure, the role
of the leader and the participation of the group will be
discussed. Validity of this method educationally will be
sought in its use in secular, social and religious education
generally. Sources for this chapter will be books and
periodicals dealing with the subject of group thinking.

The third chapter will present the basic religious
problems of the high school youth. All the various phases
of his development, physical, mental, social, emotional,
and religious will be treated briefly so that he may be
understood. It is not within the scope of this study
to make an exhaustive presentation of these phases, but to

present what from them is essential to an understanding
of his religious problems. More emphasis will be placed
on an understanding of the areas of his experience which
bear a direct relationship to his religious problems. The
agencies involved in the conflict which he experiences con-
cerning religious matters will be investigated. The problems
which authorities agree upon to be the youth's outstanding
religious problems will be discussed separately. In addition,
some thought will be given as to why the discussion method
is particularly adaptable to the religious thinking and
expression of high school youth. Books on the psychology
of adolescence will provide the general background to an
understanding of him and the areas out of which his problems
have arisen. Sources revealing his specific problems will
be used to determine what his problems are and how they
confront him.

Having arrived at certain basic religious problems
of high school youth, the fourth chapter will seek to show
by illustration the place and actual use of Biblical mater-
ials in youth's discussion of these problems. Suggestive
illustrations of the use of portions of the Gospel by John
will show how the content of the Bible may be used by youth
in discussion under guidance to help him meet his basic
religious problems.

In conclusion certain basic principles for the
use of the Bible in the discussion thinking of high school

youth will be arrived at which may serve to improve the
teaching of youth in particular and other ages in general.

CHAPTER II

THE DISCUSSION METHOD

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THE DISCUSSION METHOD

A. Introduction

A careful study leading to an understanding of
the basic nature of the discussion method is essential
to successful practice of it. "The witty description of
a discussion group as an attempt 'to arrive at collective
wisdom through individual ignorance' is, for all its epi-
grammatic polish, indicative of a failure to appreciate"[1]
what the discussion method essentially is and seeks to do.
The purpose of this chapter is to present the basic educa-
tional philosophy which underlies the validity of group
thinking as a method, to present the different types of
group thinking, to show its position in the history of
education, to enlarge upon the various elements which make
for successful discussion, to describe the various fields
of learning in which the method has produced favorable re-
sults and to conclude its advantage and limitations.

B. Definition of Discussion Method

The simplest definition of the discussion method

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1. Thomas Fansler: Discussion Methods for Adult Groups,
   p. 60

is that it is cooperative and purposeful talk.[1] McBurney
and Hance define it as "the cooperative deliberation of
problems by persons thinking and conversing together in
face-to-face or coacting groups under the direction of
a leader."[2] At the outset it is to be guarded against,
as Barclay states, to think of the discussion method as:

> "a rigidly defined procedure, a highly refined technique,
> an exact step-by-step process, invariably to be used,
> and always productive of desired results in thinking
> and living. There is no such method."[3]

At its best it "is an attempt on the part of a group to
think together reflectively,"[4] say McBurney and Hance and
they further define reflective thinking as "thought in
process arising out of a state of perplexity, hesitation,
or doubt, and proceeding to a search or investigation for
the purpose of resolving this difficulty."[5] The discussion
method, then, is not a simple procedure, but an involved
technique which requires thorough understanding and care-
ful use. It is to be understood that when the term
"discussion" is used interchangeably with "group-thinking"
it is with the broader connotation of the word in mind.

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1. Cf., LeRoy E. Bowman: "Organization of Group Dis-
   cussions and Forums", University of the State of
   New York Bulletin, December 1, 1943, p. 7
2. James H. McBurney and Kenneth G. Hance: The Principles
   and Methods of Discussion, p. 10
3. Wade Crawford Barclay: The Church and a Christian
   Society, p. 312
4. McBurney and Hance, op. cit., p. 4
5. Ibid.

C. Historical Background of Group Thinking

From the earliest times men have discussed their problems. One of the earliest evidences of this method, thinking of it in the broad sense, is to be found in Greek life. Even in Homer's time open discussion was a leading factor in everyday life. In what was known as the "hegira" every male citizen over eighteen years of age was privileged to attend and speak and vote. The ancient historian Thucydides and others give us descriptions of the Athenian general assembly or "ecclesia". It met forty times a year and proved to be a tremendous public force in the development of an individual's ability to discuss in a group. A more private type of discussion was sponsored by the schools of Socrates, Corax and Aristotle. Mahaffy says that:

> "What the ancients called dialectic was probably the closest approximation of modern discussion. Developed and practiced by Plato, it was perhaps given its most complete and systematic treatment in Aristotle's 'Topics'. Here it is explained as a method of discussion (or debate) operating chiefly through questions and answers for the purpose of intellectual training . ."[1]

It appears that Socrates trained his students so that they were able to dramatize in public their private discussions.

No study of ancient history is able to minimize the importance of "The Forum" in the life and thought of the Roman world. Much of the democratic ideal of Roman government found expression in this organized form. If it was practiced and found useful for governmental affairs

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[1] J. P. Mahaffy: What Have the Greeks Done for Civilization, p. 16

it is logical to assume that such type of activity was incorporated in the less formal educational life of the Romans.

It is interesting to speculate that the mystical Round-Table of King Arthur probably had some corresponding activity in actual life. Whatever that may have been it is known that public discussion was fostered in the Anglo-Saxon period in the general assembly known as the "folk-moot".

During medieval history the revival of dialectics under the Scholastics cultivated group thinking. It took more the form of debate and argument than free, unbiased discussion. One of the characteristic features of early American history was the New England town meeting which did much to shape the form of American life. Group thinking characterizes, Coe states:

> "the old Quaker type of deliberation in which there was much silence and listening, but freedom to speak, with the final word of the chairman (no vote having been taken), 'It seems to be the sense of the meeting that . .'"[1]

In contemporary time the Folk Schools, schools for young adults, in Denmark are, doubtless, the most striking examples of the effectiveness of group thinking upon the life of a people.

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1. George A. Coe: The Motives of Men, p. 234

Though there have been evidences of organized
group thinking in the past, it is only within the past
two decades that discussion has been introduced and develop-
ed as a specific educational method. In 1923 a group known
as the "Inquiry" was organized for social study and research.
It was disbanded in 1933. Its work, especially through its
publications, has contributed much to our present conceptions
and practice of the discussion idea. Judson and Judson
describe its growth as follows:

> "The growth of the discussion movement, particularly
> since the beginning of the present decade [third] can
> only be expressed as extraordinary . . Furthermore,
> this widespread interest in group discussion shows
> every sign of continuing."[1]

The right and practice of group thinking expresses
the democratic way of life and its use will precede and
accompany the spread of democracy. Bogardus feels this
when he says:

> "Discussion-group thinking illustrates social thinking
> on its higher levels, but discussion-group thinking is
> not yet extensive. However, a great deal may be
> expected from it in the future. In fact, in countries
> that preserve freedom of speech, it promises to become
> ultimately the main type of thought."[2]

D. Basic Philosophy of the Discussion Method

The underlying philosophy of the discussion

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1. Lyman Judson and Ellen Judson: Modern Group
    Discussion, Preface, p. 3
2. Emory Stephen Bogardus: The Development of Social
    Thought, p. 3

method is summed up by the quotation from Antione

de Saint-Exupéry's Flight to Arras which Baxter and Cassidy

present on the fly-leaf of Group Experience:

> "My love of the group has no need of definition. It
> is woven of bonds. It is my substance. I am of the
> group and the group is of me."[1]

1. Psychological Basis of Learning and Group Thinking

Elliott believes that, "Group thinking involves

in the discussions and decisions of a group the same kind

of process which an individual follows when he is thinking

reflectively."[2] Kilpatrick characterizes the process of

individual thought in the order of the following words:

noting, distinguishing, relating, accepting and acting

upon.[3] It is necessary to analyze more in detail the act

of individual thought. For this purpose the most helpful

and widely accepted presentation is Dewey's:

> "five logically distinct steps:
> (1) a felt difficulty;
> (2) its location and definition;
> (3) suggestion of possible solution;
> (4) development by reasoning of the bearings of the
> suggestions;
> (5) further observation and experiment leading to
> its acceptance or rejection."[4]

Because effective group thinking follows this pattern of

development, according to authorities in the field, it is

valid as a thought process.

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1. Bernice Baxter and Rosalind Cassidy: Group Experience
2. Harrison Sacket Elliott: The Process of Group
   Thinking, p. 9
3. Cf., William Heard Kilpatrick: Group Education for
   Democracy, pp. 71-72
4. John Dewey: How We Think, p. 72

The type of individual thinking referred to above is particularly that of reflective thought. Looking at the process of group thinking as a whole, when purposeful reflective thinking on the part of each participant is contributed, it too follows the pattern of reflective thought. In addition to being a reflective thought unexpressed, it is expressed and its expression serves to foster accuracy in thinking. "If it is true that one cannot discuss effectively until one knows," Walser says, "it is just as true that one cannot know effectively until one discusses in one form or another."[1] There is close connection between thought and its expression in words. In no way is group thinking to be substituted for individual thinking; individual thinking is absolutely fundamental and yet in and of itself it is not complete without the interplay upon each other of the expression of one's own thoughts and the thoughts of others.

The emphasis of reflective thinking is not so much on "what" to think as on "how" to think. Group thinking is conducive to critical evaluation of one's own thought processes as well as to the thought itself. It is not intended that the "what" of thinking be disregarded, but that the "how" be emphasized. In teaching students

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1. Frank Walser: The Art of Conference, p. 60

"how" rather than "what" to think McBurney and Hance feel that "the discussion approach in the learning situation probably has its greatest claim to superiority over other methods."[1]

The thought process of a group, each individual of which is doing reflective thinking, results not in a variety of different, separate, individual thoughts with little sense of inherent unity, but in group ideas. Follett shows this by her statement:

> "By the subtle process of the intermingling of all the different ideas of the group . . . in the end it is not a question of my idea being supplemented by yours, but that there has been evolved a composite idea."[2]

Individuality in personality is not primarily of difference, but uniqueness of contribution to the whole; so the "composite idea" does not do violence to individual thinking, but serves to correlate and incorporate vitally the contributions of each.

Group thinking employs the basic laws of learning.[3] Sensitiveness to the law of readiness in discussion is fundamental. To force a discussion of a problem when the group is not ready for it is to defeat at the beginning the purpose. However, when a group is ready, whether made ready by natural or artificial means, to delay discussion

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1. McBurney and Hance, op. cit., pp. 259-260
2. M. P. Follett: The New State, p. 25
3. Cf., William Heard Kilpatrick: Foundations of Method, pp. 28-30

is likewise disastrous. The law of use and disuse is illustrated in that reading done in preparation for discussion, according to Sheffield, "gives each reader a use for the information. He reads as one seeking data for thinking, not mere lore to lie on the shelves of his mind."[1] The law of satisfaction and annoyance culminates the individual's evaluation of his own ability to contribute to reflective thinking by effective expression. The group as a whole senses the success or failure of the activity.

The importance of facts and experts will be taken up more in detail later, but several suggestions may add significance at this point. Education in the past has shown the ineffectiveness in certain fields of not interpreting facts in terms of specific problems. Traditionally, learning has meant rote memory which does not prepare the student for every day living. Sheffield emphasizes that:

> "the group . . . stir one another to responses and questions; so that their experience together is not merely that of receiving new facts, but that of actively relating the facts to the situation."[2]

The result involves not only the bare facts themselves, but also their strengthening and enrichment by the "attendant learnings" of responsible and discriminating attitudes toward facts.

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1. Alfred Dwight Sheffield: Creative Discussion; Third Edition, p. 34
2. Ibid, p. 35

In conclusion, group thinking includes what are considered by authorities as the evident steps in the learning process as set forth by Bower, namely, realizing the situation, definition of the issue involved, search of the learner's **past** experience and racial experience, analyzing the situation, identification and evaluation of possible outcomes, choice, appreciation and experimentation of outcomes, generalization and practice.[1]

2. Scientific Method and Group Thinking

It is necessary at this point to show the distinction between the Socratic or dialectic method of approaching a problem and that of group thinking, the scientific method. The dialectic method has the following features in common with group thinking: it is conversational, it employs the use of questions and it is characterized by a "spirit of inquiry". Monroe describes the Socratic method as follows:

> "His custom was to begin in conversation by asking for information, thus getting the views of his companion . . Then through adroit questioning, these original opinions were developed in the words of the person to be instructed, until the folly and absurdities of the superficially formed opinions were fully shown and the supposed possessor of wisdom was brought face to face with consequences that were either contradictory to the original opinion or so absurd that the opponent lost all confidence or becoming involved in the mazes of the argument confessed the error of his opinion or his inability to reach a satisfactory conclusion."[2]

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1. Cf., William Clayton Bower: Character Through Creative Experience, pp. 109-122
2. Paul Monroe: A Text-Book in the History of Education, p. 126

Though dialectics, doubtless, has contributed to the modern conception of group thinking, the scientific method beginning with Francis Bacon in the seventeenth century is primarily responsible for its theory and practice. Whereas dialectics rests primarily on the logic of argumentation, proof and then discovery, and unfortunately sometimes develops into disputation, the scientific method rests on the logic of discovery. In conclusion, Wiener finds that, "These are the essential phases of scientific method: a problem, hypothesis, deduction and verification. These also are the common features of any intelligent discussion."[1]

3. Experience-Centered Method and Group Thinking

The theory that the student learns most effectively when attention is focused upon his own experience and upon the experiences of others is receiving increased prominence. "In any instance of active experience," says Kilpatrick, "learning is going on at every moment of the experience; and, moreover, the learning is absolutely necessary if what is then and there going on is to make sense with itself."[2] In the broad sense where there is activity there is learning whether it is negative or positive. However, for experience to be educative positively it is essential that there

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1. Philip Paul Wiener: "Scientific Method and Group Discussion", Journal of Adult Education; Vol. IX, No. 2; April, 1937, p. 136
2. Kilpatrick: Group Education for a Democracy, pp. 66-67

be a true perspective concerning the experience, an understanding of experience for what it is, a critical evaluation and intelligent utilization of its values.

It is Barclay's conclusion that, "as no other method of teaching, discussion may be experience-centered."[1] In group thinking, each relates his own past experience; whether participating audibly or silently in the thought of the group he is experiencing in the present, and his future experience will be affected by the discussion. It is essential to recognize that vital thinking is experience as well as is action. The vital stimulus of influences and experiences interacting reciprocally will in turn produce more vital thinking and experience. Discussion provides for the active, purposeful test of one's experiences in the light of those of the past and those of his contemporaries. Fansler believes that it contributes to life in helping "to achieve those desirable educational objectives that tend toward more rational, more self-conscious, more purposeful living."[2]

Creativity of thought is, doubtless, at its height in moments of solitary reflection. The findings of Athearn and Athearn are that "Creative truth is developed through the appreciation of meanings and values, and is

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1. Barclay, op. cit., p. 306
2. Fansler, op. cit., p. 149

made a part of character and personality through creative experience."[1] Group thinking may serve an essential role in preparation for such individual thought by its effectiveness in critical dissection of experience, careful analysis and interpretation and even adjustment of point of view.

"Organized discussion . . .," concludes Sheffield, "is a new method of winnowing wisdom out of experience. To learn from experience one must see it from different points of view."[2] This vitalizing method of examining together what will be considered a cross-section of experience is a valuable technique to produce growth in individuals.

E. Types of Group Thinking

Though it is not within the scope of this study to investigate in detail the different types of group thinking, it will serve to clarify the subject to suggest briefly the different characteristics of each.

1. Symposium

As has been suggested in the discussion of the use of group thinking in a broad sense throughout the ages it has had its roots in the past. The term, symposium,

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1. Clarence R. Athearn and Laura Armstrong Athearn:
    Discussing Religion Creatively, p. 65
2. Sheffield, op. cit., pp. 5-6

syn posie in the Greek, suggests that there was free dis-
cussion in a social setting. The modern meaning of sym-
posium, however, has been narrowed to refer to the present-
ation of a subject in a series of short speeches. Different
phases or angles of the topic are emphasized by different
speakers, prepared in advance. Fansler indicates that,
"The symposium as a technique for instruction in adult
education is a definite attempt to introduce to the audience
several ways of approaching a given topic."[1] This type of
group thinking has the advantage of careful preparation
in advance and inclusion and presentation of the various
aspects of the subject. However, its weakness lies in the
fact that group participation is incidental. In certain
respects it has advantages over the lecture method of
teaching, different aspects are presented by different
personalities. It is limited because it does not lend
itself to the vital incorporation of the thinking of the
group as a whole. In the hands of a chairman with unusual
ability and dealing with subjects the aspects of which
need presentation more than discussion it ;is a valuable
technique.

2. Forum

The idea of the forum originated with the Romans.
Fansler points out that the modern usage of the term implies

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1. Fansler, op. cit., p. 56

that "the forum method consists usually of the presentation of a subject by an expert followed by a question period in which members of the audience ask questions or make brief statements."[1] This method is valuable for the presentation of new information, new analyses and interpretations of known facts or the clarification of issues. It is handicapped in that it usually gives only one aspect of the problem and, as with the symposium method, allows for only incidental participation on the part of the group as a whole. Its widespread use, however, in adult education attests its general value as a method.

3. Round-Table

A waning type of group thinking is what has been known as the "round-table method". As is implied from the name it is a very informal type of discussion which does not necessitate a leader, but all are equal in position and responsibility. This is an ideal, but in practice the absence of a recognized leader makes the discussion tend to lack organization.

4. Debate

The form of logical argument known as debate has been defined by a quotation which Athearn and Athearn give as a "'direct oral contest on a given proposition

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1. Ibid, p. 1

between two opposing sides at a given time and place.'"[1]
It is ;more of a form of group judging than group thinking.
Instead of including all the aspects of the problem, debate
of necessity is limited to only two points of view. The
element of argumentative persuasion is foremost. Training
which debate gives the participant in logical expression is
a valuable contribution to group thinking.

5. Panel Discussion

One of the most popular types of group thinking
is the panel discussion. It was originated by Professor
Harry A. Overstreet and advocated by the American Associa-
tion for Adult Education at its annual conference in Buffalo
in 1932. The elements of a panel discussion, Fansler says:

> "are a topic in which issues and opinions are confused,
> a group who wish to consider the topic in order that each
> may arrive at a more thorough understanding, a selected
> panel of persons chosen to represent the group and
> finally a chairman."[2]

Like the symposium it presents different aspects of a
subject, but seeks to do it more informally, by conversa-
tional discussion among the experts on the panel. It
results in what might be thought of as a dramatization of
an informal discussion. The panel discussion method is
valuable in giving the audience an exhibition of the pro-
cess of reflective thought, but is limited in group

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1. Athearn and Athearn, op. cit., p. 60
2. Fansler, op. cit., p. 105

participation. The members of the panel do the reasoning and make the evident conclusions for the audience which may question minor points but the time usually does not allow for the introduction of different aspects by the group at large.

6. Informal Discussion

Informal discussion type of group thinking seeks to provide for conditions under which members of the whole group have an integral part in thinking and expressing themselves on a problem. As described by Elliott, "group discussion is offered as a method in which the united will is reached by the interaction of the individual opinions . ."[1] Organization, opinion of experts, leadership, and preparation have a part toward the goal of stimulating individual reflective thought, but are not substituted for it. Group discussion goes beyond the emphasis on the supplying of materials for thought to an attempt to think and reach conclusions on the basis of such materials. The "Seminar" idea in colleges and universities is informal discussion at work in an academic situation. It is with informal discussion type of group thinking that this study is concerned and a more complete analysis of its essential elements follows.

No one type is to be thought of as "the method"

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1. Harrison Sacket Elliott: The Why and How of Group Discussion, p. 9

of group thinking, no type has all the values and no type
is devoid of merit. The choice of method is determined by
the topic, the audience or group, and the speaker or
leader. Certain topics lend themselves better to one
method of presentation than another, the characteristics
of the group reveals one type to be more adaptable than
another, and the personality and training of the leader
or speaker may naturally fit one method better than another.

F. Essential Elements in Discussion Method

Discussion has its characteristics, procedure and
conditions which need to be understood and observed if the
maximum of success is to be realized. Elliott warns that,
"Unless the conditions are observed, group discussions
may end in a turbulent riot or in hopeless insipidity."[1]

1. General Factors

The characteristic of experience-centeredness
is essential to profitable discussion; a growth out of
life-situation and into life-situation is of fundamental
importance. Without a spirit of cooperation between the
leader and participants and between the participants
themselves there is little progress in thinking and acting.
The attitude of discovery, expectancy, personal and group,
prepares for purposeful discussion. Cooperative experience

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1. Elliott: The Process of Group Thinking, p. 11

sharing toward a goal of discovering new and meaningful facts and implications, thrives only in an atmosphere of freedom. Informality, friendliness and vitality are integral parts of this atmosphere of freedom.

There are two general types of group discussion according to Athearn and Athearn: the developmental type and the practical solution type[1]. The first aims to discover truth, to interpret and appreciate values; the second has as its aim the working out of a course of action or planning a practical solution of a problem. Both types are valuable and it depends upon the nature of the problem which type is more useful in a particular situation.

The size of the group ideally ranges from twelve to twenty. Either too small a group or too large a group may seriously handicap the freedom of thinking and expression. The matter of size, however, is to be governed more by flexibility than by numbers. A place of meeting and equipment which are conducive to informality and cooperation lend much to the atmosphere.

2. The Procedure

As was suggested previously group thought takes the same form as individual thought.[2] McBurney and Hance give the following sequence of thought as suggested by

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1. Cf., Athearn and Athearn, op. cit., pp. 79-80
2. Ante, p. 12

Elliott:

> "What is the situation? Why?
> What particular aspects of the situation should be
> discussed?
> What various solutions have been proposed by sincere
> people? Why?
> What solutions seem to be the most in line with . . .
> ideals? Why?
> In the light of our differences and agreements, what
> next steps do we in the group want to take?"[1]

There are three major parts in any discussion: the situation

or problem, its possible solutions, and conclusion. Shef-

field suggests the procedure in four questions:

> "What situation have we here?
> What possibilities of attitude and action does it show?
> What help on it can we get from added facts and recon-
> sidered feelings?
> What decisions can we reach as to satisfying action?"[2]

This procedure is not to be mechanically imposed upon a

group, but as it furnishes the framework for the discussion

there will be progress and purpose in thought.

    a. Stating the Problem. The criteria for the

selection of a problem or topic is its vitalness, timeli-

ness, and manageability. The most satisfactory discussion-

group thinking is built around subjects which turn on clear-

cut issues. The interests, capacities, knowledge, purposes

and preferences of the group as a whole are to be taken into

consideration in choosing a worthwhile question for dis-

cussion. The teacher or leader may stimulate and suggest

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1. McBurney and Hance, op. cit., p. 180
2. Sheffield, op. cit., pp. 16-17

discussion on a certain topic, but the group itself is
actually and finally to choose the problem which it
wishesto discuss.

Upon the way in which the problem is introduced
rests much of the success of the discussion to follow.
There is greater possibility of the participation of the

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An Outline of Group Thinking Procedure
I.   The situation and its problem:
   1.   What is the specific question to be decided?
   2.   What factors in the situation are important
      and must be taken into consideration in the
      decision? Why?
II. What to do?
   1.   Examination of possibilities:
      a.   To meet the situation and problem as
         outlined, what are the possible courses
         of action, and the reason for each?
      b.   What bonds seem to unite the group and on
         what is there agreement as to fact and
         opinion?
      c.   What are the chief differences:
         (1) On matter of fact (as to what is
            true)?
         (2) On matters of opinion or point of
            view (as to what is desirable)?
   2.   Exploration of differences of fact and dis-
      cussion of differences of point of view:
      a.   What are the data on differences as to
         facts?
      b.   What can be said on differences as to
         point of view?
   3.   Reaching a conclusion:
      What decision can be reached which will meet
      the situation with its relevant factors and
      what facts and opinions are the reasons for
      this decision?
III. How to do it (ways and means)?
   1.   What are the ways and means for putting the
      decision into effect?
(Elliott: Process of Group Thinking, p. 35)

whole group if the introduction is informal. There are
various ways according to Barclay of bringing a problem
into the consciousness of a group some of which are: an
incident from current life, the problem stated briefly by
the leader or by several members of the group, statement
from a significant source, poignant statement of historical
fact or test results.[1]

The truth of the following statement made by
Barclay is imperative: "A problem is not satisfactorily
stated until it has become a real situation for every member
of the group."[2] It is essential to recognize both the problem
and the setting of the problem and the two together make the
situation under discussion. That the same problem may appear
differently to different groups is true; it is more signifi-
cant that the same problem may and usually does appear
differently to different individuals within a single group.
A careful analysis of the problem for its different aspects
and issues is essential to an intelligent solution; such
analysis Barclay further says, "marks the transition from
uncontrolled, random or haphazard, hazy thinking and action
to discriminating, critical, reflective thought, and
deliberate choice."[3]

b. Discussing for Solution. Having clearly recognized
the different aspects, the group proceeds to deal in an

. . . . . .

1. Cf., Barclay, op. cit., pp. 313-314
2. Ibid., p. 315
3. Ibid.

orderly fashion with them. Whatever contributes to the progress of the thought has a part. Through the search of personal experience, contemporary experience and past experience suggestions as to the best solution may be arrived at. Elliott suggests such a guard against indefinite and irrelevant participation as:

> "in every case the person making the contribution should indicate why: why he considers the facts he mentions important; why he thinks this a question of concern; why he believes the issue he states is the important issue; or why he believes these are the reasons for the difficulty."[1]

The bulk of the discussion will take place generally at this point. Here, as throughout the whole, a high standard of reflective, purposeful thought is to be maintained.

c. Reaching a Conclusion. It is not to be expected that every discussion will produce final conclusions to the problems dealt with. By conclusion is meant reaching some decision upon which each member of the group or the group as a whole may act. The action may be renewed discussion or actual activity, personal or cooperative. Some problems will never be resolved into a consensus of opinion, but worthwhile conclusions are possible nevertheless. In such problems as present the possibility of a definite solution then conclusion is the ultimate goal. Betts

. . . . . .

1. Elliott: The Process of Group Thinking, p. 46

refers to the example of the Master Teacher, Christ, in
this matter:

"He never failed to have definite aim or conclusion
toward which his teaching was directed, and the words
or questions he used in his instruction moved without
deviation toward the accomplishment of this aim."[1]

3. Role of the Discussion Leader

"Properly to conduct a discussion class," Betts
and Hawthorne say, "probably demands more ability, resource,
and preparation on the part of the teacher than almost any
other type of teaching."[2] The lack of fine leadership is
largely responsible for poor discussion-group thinking.
Personal qualifications and specific duties are the two
areas which determine success in leadership.

a. Personal Qualifications. To be group-centered
rather than self- or subject-centered is the first quali-
fication of good group leadership. This quality Elliott
stresses, "A person who shows himself to have glowing
interest in the group and who tends to call out the best
in other people, stimulates discussion and gives warmth,
earnestness, and genuineness to it."[3] This keen interest
in the group as a whole and in each individual member of

. . . . . .

1. George Herbert Betts: How to Teach Religion, p. 219
2. George Herbert Betts and Marion O. Hawthorne: Methods
   in Teaching Religion, p. 220
3. Elliott: The Process of Group Thinking, p. 83

the group will produce the cooperation so essential. The leader is to be more concerned with the progress in thinking which the group is making, their understanding and cooperation leading to the enrichment of their experience than with the problem itself or with his own relation to the problem.

The general intelligence of the chairman is important according to Judson and Judson:

> "He should be better than average in the sheer rapidity of his thinking processes. He should be able to recognize the goal of a speaker's line of argument even before the speaker announces the goal."[1]

To be able both to analyze and synthesize is the leader's responsibility. Knowledge of the subject matter under discussion is essential, but more than this a knowledge of the group itself is of paramount importance. Open-mindedness or impartiality does not necessitate that the chairman have no personal convictions on the subject under discussion, but that he hold such so as not to restrain other points of view. Speaking ability plays an important part in group leadership.

Sincerity will effect his attitude throughout the discussion. Serenity, tactfulness, poise, self-restraint and an objective attitude will grow out of this sincerity. A sense of humor at just the right time will do much to

. . . . . .

1. Judson and Judson, op. cit., pp. 55-56

relieve certain situations, but is to be controlled

carefully so as never to give offense. As no other method

discussion requires an unusual reserve of patience, to

guide what is at times the very slow process of group

thinking. This patience will be rewarded by the effective-

ness of discovery. Leigh concludes:

> "If to adequate background, fairness, openmindedness,
> self-control, patience, power of acute analysis, we
> add a sense of humor, directness, sincerity, and
> sympathy, we have that paragon--the effective chairman."[1]

The qualification particularly important in

leading persons to think cooperatively on topics and prob-

lems involving Christian truths and principles is depth of

true spiritual resources. Discussion of Christian truths

has such potentialities in either negative or positive

attitudes and results that a heavy weight of privilege

and responsibility rests upon the leader. This inner

resource is further spoken of by Walser:

> "The most helpful chairman will be above all one who is
> possessed of real inner serenity. He will recognize
> that attention to his own personal integration is a
> vital necessity for whoever would lead constructively
> in a discussion."[2]

b. Specific Duties. The establishment of rapport is

the first duty of the leader; it is the friendly attitude

of partnership which does much to achieve an atmosphere of

. . . . . .

1. Robert D. Leigh: Group Leadership, p. 84
2. Walser, op. cit., p. 115

freedom and cooperation. The leader is an artist in being able to draw out expression from individuals and at the same time control it, to give it organization without stunting its freedom.

Discussion requires preparation on the part of the leader, an increase of his own knowledge of the group and the subject. It is not his responsibility to present necessary facts, but to have prepared for someone to have them ready or to refer to available sources of information. It is well for him to imagine a hypothetical discussion of the problem including issues, emergencies and solutions which may be involved to serve as a background, but not to form a pattern necessarily.

Responsibility for introducing the problem rests with the leader whether he does it personally or arranges for someone else to do it. Throughout the discussion he is also responsible for stimulating the discussion. In focusing attention on the main issues and tactfully avoiding by-paths, in curbing garrulous talkers and encouraging timid ones, in supplying new starting points or recalling the thinking to overlooked issues he may stimulate discussion. This duty Elliott enlarges upon:

> "He [the chairman] should see that an effective group thinking procedure is followed, that the issues are clearly defined and understood, that the important factors in the situations are brought out and recognized, that the possibilities as to what to do are stated and the real reasons for each felt, that the points of

agreement are recognized and the differences understood
and explored, that the discussion moves toward an
integration of fact and opinion in as united conclusion
as is possible."[1]

The most effective means of realizing progress in group

thinking is summaries. By summarizing the leader indicates

for the group the steps which they have taken in their think-

ing thus avoiding repetition and stimulating further thinking.

4. Participation of the Group in Discussion

"Cooperative thinking," Coe makes clear, "does

not flatten out the individual; rather, it saves him from

the merely type-reactions of both himself and his profess-

ional and social environment."[2] A mutual discipline upon

each other is realized. Each shares according to his

ability. Attitudes which will produce progress for the

participant as well as the whole group are: open-mindedness

and expectation of learning, a consideration of the common

good, assumption of one's share of group responsibility,

purposeful listening, objective contribution and over all an

attitude of sincerity. In voicing honest opinions though

they may be wrong the participant puts himself in a position

to be put right in a sympathetic way. Brief, frank contri-

butions made time after time as in conversation is advised.

Barbour recommends that:

. . . . . .

1. Elliott: The Process of Group Thinking, p. 66
2. Coe, op. cit., p. 241

"As long as the students are all really thinking and
keenly interested, let them discuss. One idea thought
out for themselves, one difficulty faced and overcome,
is worth a dozen conclusions given by you."[1]

Preparation is an integral part of each member's responsi-

bility. Bogardus believes that, "A discussion group is

at its best when all who participate come prepared to con-

tribute the findings of research and to integrate the mean-

ings with other research contributions."[2]

5. Questions in Discussion

That there is a vital relationship between dis-

cussion and the art of questioning becomes increasingly

apparent from observation. A question has power both to

stir and guide to action. It "is one of the supreme methods,"

according to Athearn and Athearn, "by which a maturer mind

can assist a learner's growing mentality."[3] By stating the

problem in question form, the leader is more likely to

stimulate reflective thinking than by making a direct state-

ment. It arouses attention and interest, invites inquiry

rather than dogmatic assertion, and implies the necessity

of thoughtful investigation. The answer to a question is

not always the important thing, but what the question does

. . . . . .

1. Dorothy Dickinson Barbour: Making the Bible Desired, p. 66
2. Emory Stephen Bogardus: Contemporary Sociology, pp. 260-261
3. Athearn and Athearn, op. cit., p. 101

to arouse thinking. Questioning is a technique whereby the leader may test out the previous ideas of the individuals in the group. It reveals bias, limitations, misconceptions and general needs. The group is to be encouraged to ask all questions necessary to the clarification of thought. The skill of the leader will be shown not in answering the questions himself, but in getting satisfactory answers from the group.

6. Role of Expert Opinion in Discussion

Elliott emphasizes the importance of expert opinion in saying, "The group is just as dependent as is the individual upon reliable data and upon the contribution of the expert."[1] To disregard facts and those able to present facts is to disregard what is fundamental to sound reasoning. Books and experts are the main sources of the necessary facts. An expert is one who through experience, position or training is peculiarly able to speak with authority on a certain subject. Expert opinion may be obtained in various ways: by calling in a special person or persons, by reports from members of the group, by having reference books on hand for research by members of the group at any point in the discussion that it is needed, by seeking impromptu information from the group, and from the leader

. . . . . .

1. Elliott: The Process of Group Thinking, pp. 17-18

himself. In discussion in Christian education the Bible furnishes the most complete and reliable source of expert opinion.

7. Place of Emotion in Discussion

There will be deep emotional accompaniment in direct proportion as the problem under discussion vitally concerns the group members and as the issues involved make any difference in their life. Coe recognizes the contribution of conflict to discussion:

> "When discussion is at its best it treads the dangerous edge where intrenched interests and supposedly sacred convictions practice the philosophy of preparedness."[1]

Interests fused with emotion become convictions and the clash of these convictions produces conflict. Fansler gives his personal opinion, "I am of the opinion that conflict is the sine qua non of discussion."[2] Conflict is a generative force in discussion so long as it means honest opinion and enthusiasm and eagerness in the expression of such opinion, but it becomes destructive when it becomes prejudice and dogmatism. Personal likes and dislikes, reactions, associations and satisfactions are bound to produce conflict. However, according to McBurney and Hance, "conflict plays a necessary and important role

o . . . . .

1. Coe, op. cit., p. 238
2. Fansler, op. cit., p. 146

in discussion."[1] It is the spark of life, dangerous yet
stimulating and satisfying. Tension capacity is tested
in one's ability to meet conflict and character strengthened
by its satisfactory resolution.

Because unity rather than uniformity is desired,
conflict is not to be resolved by restraining the presenta-
tion of convictions, or suppressing differences, but by
bringing such out into the open. Walser feels that:

> "The right creative spirit in discussion will not accept
> harmony reached through vagueness, indecision, or
> faltering conviction. This is merely a compromise.
> Instead, the constructive way is to face the difference,
> compel its definite expression and then trace it to
> its roots. There a real solution may be suggested."[2]

Neither the leader nor any member of the group is to impose
his views upon the others.

There are two types of conflict to be recognized:
intrinsic, which is inherent in an adequate discussion of
the problem; and extrinsic, which is unessential and for-
eign to an adequate discussion. Emotional clash arising
from the former is necessary and its resolution valuable,
whereas conflict growing out of the latter type is confusing
and does not contribute to the discussion. Disagreement
as to actual fact is simpler to dissolve than disagreement
over interpretation of facts. Integration to conserve the

. . . . . .

1. McBurney and Hance, op. cit., p. 243
2. Walser, op. cit., p. 106

essential values and purposes of the group is the highest aim in resolving conflict.

G. Uses Made of Discussion Method

A presentation of the discussion-group thinking would not be complete or valid without a demonstration of its practical effectiveness in education. Its employment in three areas of education, secular, social and religious, will be investigated.

1. Use Made in Secular Education

According to McBurney and Hance, "Educators are emphasizing its [discussion method] importance in the schools."[1] The important contribution which the discussion method is making to modern education is in objectively relating the content of history, mathematics, sociology, and other subjects to life. One of the essential features of progressive education is freedom, freedom of thought and expression. Along with this freedom is stressed the value of critical judgment. These are characteristics of the discussion method according to Lyman:

> "The training of judgment; the ability to choose and select 'reliable information . . .'; the benefits of organizing one's ideas logically; the spur of the necessity of trying to make truth apparent to others; and finally, the exercise of mastery of self in public

. . . . . .

1. McBurney and Hance, op. cit., p. 19

controversy, are to be had fully by discussers and
in some measure by listeners."[1]

Is it practical? is a legitimate question.
Smith and DeLong conclude as the result of comparative
tests made that:

"learning which goes on during a discussion is more
real, less academic than that which takes place during
a lecture. During the discussion the individual re-
sponds to the facts and issues brought forward by the
different members. These stimuli induce recollections
from his past experiences. He evaluates and makes
judgments which are associated with these past exper-
iences. Therefore, however poor or however worthwhile
his contributions may be, some real learning has gone
on within him. This learning will be remembered much
better and much longer than academic facts presented
by a lecturer."[2]

Further evidence of the effectiveness of the discussion
method is given by Noyes:

"Students did better examination work when taught
by the discussion method than when taught by the
lecture-quiz method. An analysis of the responses
in the examinations showed that the students in the
discussion sections made higher scores both on the
parts calling for general interpretations of the
examinations and on the parts demanding memory of
details."[3]

The same tests revealed its growing popularity, "A

. . . . . .

1. R. L. Lyman: "The Forum As an Educative Agency",
Quarterly Journal of Speech, April, 1915, 1:1-8;
quoted in Judson and Judson, op. cit., p. 21
2. H. B. Smith and L. R. DeLong: "The Discussion
Technique", School and Society, October, 1931, 34:533-535
3. A. H. Noyes: "Some Recent Developments in History
Instruction: The Lecture Versus the Discussion Method",
Educational Research Monographs, 15:151-153, 1932

majority [of students], 68%, preferred the discussion
method."[1] Because of its effectiveness as a method in the
education of young people and adults, Jackson recommends
that it be used "not for rudderless discussion, but for
planned and directed thinking under trained leaders, using
every available source for the acquisition of true knowledge."[2]
Time and resources spent on its perfection as a technique
will be rewarded.

2. Use Made in Social Education

  Discussion-group thinking is the democratic way
of thinking. Franklin D. Roosevelt, quoted by Judson and
Judson, has expressed its place in our democratic life:

> "It is of great importance to the future of our democracy
> that ways and means be devised to engage the maximum
> number of young people and adults in a continuous,
> fearless and free discussion and study of public affairs."[3]

Discussion is playing an increasingly important role in
various types of social work, agricultural extension programs
and the radio. Conferences, conventions and institutes are
using it to marked advantage.

  Though discussion may not be the quickest way of
presenting information regarding social conditions yet vital
participation by the group as a whole in discussing social

. . . . . .

1. Ibid.
2. Anne E. M. Jackson: "An Apology for Lectures", Journal
  of Adult Education 3:438-42; October 1931
3. Judson and Judson, op. cit., p. 119

problems is more effective to produce right social
attitudes than other methods. Cooperative thinking and
planning serve as a remedy for dogmatism, prejudice and
personal or group introversion. Group thinking may be
part of what Kilpatrick means by:

> "a cooperative, purposeful activity in group affairs
> that has perhaps most to do with building the healthy
> social character, with its spirit of give and take,
> its like-mindedness, its tendency to prefer the group
> and its welfare to one's own private and personal
> welfare."[1]

The results of groups' and communities' thinking their
problems through reflectively is responsible acting.

3. Use Made in Religious Education

Effective methods in secular and social education
are being utilized as effective tools in religious education.
The expository and hortatory teaching of the past is gradu-
ally being replaced by the discussion method. In the field
of religion as in no other field it is necessary to relate
what is being learned to life. Discussion in religious
education relates fact to life, according to Athearn and
Athearn, by, "arriving at a mutual understanding and evalu-
ation of spiritual truths and ideals, and their application
to character and conduct."[2] The developmental type of
discussion[3] is more applicable to religious education than

. . . . . .

1. Kilpatrick: Group Education for a Democracy, p. 114
2. Athearn and Athearn, op. cit., p. 14
3. Ante, p. 25

the practical solution type because there is a definite
body of religious truth which needs to be discovered in
terms of known facts, interpreted in terms of personal
and social needs, and appreciated and appropriated in
life. Discussion is a method which requires the highest
type of Christian personality for effective leadership and
vital, purposeful cooperation in participation on the part
of each member of the group. Laura F. Boyer infers that
Christ used to some extent what is now thought of as the
discussion method.[1]

It is imperative in religious education that the
vital principles of the Christian gospel be brought to bear
upon individual and social life. Barclay stresses the
fact that:

> "One of the most important ways by which this may be
> accomplished is reflective thinking through a process
> of group discussion in which learners are brought
> face to face with the necessity of solving real-life
> problems, thinking through actual life-situations by
> a process of analysis, weighing of alternatives, and
> choice of outcomes."[2]

Moral conviction and ability to apply critical judgment to
spiritual issues develops in cooperative thinking inner
spiritual resources. The integration of emotion, intellect,
and active service is the goal of Christian teaching.

. . . . . .

1. Cf., Laura F. Boyer: The Method of the Group
   Discussion, p. 5
2. Barclay, op. cit., p. 299

Group thinking which leads out from personal spiritual
enrichment to motivation to Christ-like activity accomplishes
this goal.

Religion is primarily personal; however, it is
recognized that a person generally expresses himself most
completely when he is a part of a social group. The re-
sources of group thought may present more opportunity for
creativity, for Christianity to be applied to personal life
in new ways and with new meanings, than individual thought.
There is a close relation between discussion and worship.
One of the finest preparations for discussion is worship
and the conclusions reached through discussion may naturally
and effectively lead into worship. Elliott feels that
worship is the natural culmination when the group is:

> "facing a situation which deeply concerns them and
> upon which they are baffled, or when having decided
> upon a course of action which seems utterly beyond
> their ability to carry out, the group members seek
> for power and release hitherto untapped resources in
> themselves, in their group fellowship, and beyond
> them."[1]

Definite personal commitment to Christ is a primary goal in
group discussion in Christian Education. As each member
of the group thinks through the issues of Christianity he
is faced with the necessity of making his own personal
conclusion and decision. As the conclusion of a process

. . . . . .

1. Elliott: Discussion in Religious Education, p. 100

of group thinking the importance of personal commitment
to Christ by each individual will be intensified. His
commitment may be entirely private, but his expression
of his personal experience with Christ will be drawn upon
in future discussions.

The values of the discussion method as used in
teaching Christianity are great and its service has not been
fully utilized; however, it is not to be thought of in an
exclusive sense as "the method" of Christian Education. It
is not a panacea or an easy short-cut to Christian character
and activity; it is a helpful means to that end, but can
never by substituted for the realization of personal and
practical devotion to Christ.

The advantages of the discussion method in
secular, social and religious education have been summar-
ized by Herman Harrell Horne. It:

> "allows many members to contribute something to the
> presentation . .;
> has the advantage of spontaneity, freshness, enthusiasm . .;
> pays tribute to initiative and individuality;
> enables class and instructor to clear up misconcep-
> tions;
> arouses and keeps interest . .;
> stimulates thinking--when students themselves are
> discussing things, they usually think. Even those
> who don't speak, think.
> helps persons to express themselves . .;
> gives each individual the right to express his own
> opinion;
> in harmony with modern tendency of group participation;
> supplements book knowledge by personal experiences
> and observations;

encourages mental alertness and assimilation, rather
than absorption and memory . ."[1]

H.   Summary

Discussion method has been defined as cooperative,
purposeful thinking so expressed that there is common bene-
fit to the group and to each individual. It has been
shown that throughout the ages men have discussed, but that
the technique of group thinking as developed and practiced
in recent decades will insure its successful use in the
future.

It has been found that group thinking follows
the pattern of individual thought. Because it employs the
basic laws of learning, may contribute conditions to valu-
able concomitant learnings, is scientific in approach and
is experience-centered in emphasis, it is educationally
sound. Similarities and contrasts in the various types
of group thinking have been pointed out and it is concluded
that each has a contribution to make. Informal discussion
type has the added advantage of vital group participation.

The essential elements of informal discussion
have been treated in detail. The importance of an atmos-
phere of informality, friendliness and vitality has been

. . . . . .

1. Herman Harrell Horne: "University Students on the
    Discussion Method", School and Society, Vol. XVI,
    August 19, 1922, p. 218 ff.

stressed. The procedure includes stating the problem so that its issues are clear to each in the group, discussing for a solution the various possibilities which arise from all available experience, and reaching a conclusion of truth, principle or action which will vitally affect the future experience of each. Emphasis was placed on the personal qualifications and specific duties of the discussion leader; to be and to lead in such a way that his role is example and guide. Vital group participation is the peculiar advantage of informal discussion and in its realization lies the essential value of the method. Questions and summaries are keys of the technique. Expert opinion and emotion are contributing factors without which discussion would be meaningless and would lack authority and vitality.

The successful use of the discussion method in secular, social and religious education recommends it for further study and use in these realms. Its particular ability to relate spiritual truths to life-situation, to realize fellowship in expression of Christian experience, illustrate the contributions which the discussion method may make to Christian teaching.

That the method has limitations is undeniable, limitations imposed by persons, by the mere mechanics of the method, by its lack of adaptability to certain material and personalities, and by the factor of time. However, it is valuable in its realization upon experience, stimulation

of reflective thought, development of inner authority and facility of critical judgment, appreciation of the experiences of all and creation of new experiences.

CHAPTER III

THE BASIC RELIGIOUS PROBLEMS

OF HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH

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OF HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH

A. Introduction

The high school youth has problems in all spheres

of life, social, economic, educational and religious.

Much research and planning has been done to help youth

solve his problems in social, economic and educational

adjustment. It is of imperative importance that he be

helped to solve his religious problems if he is to have

a growing spiritual experience. To help him accomplish

a satisfying adjustment to his religious difficulties it

is necessary to understand the high school youth, his

status and progress physically, mentally, socially, emotion-

ally and religiously; to understand the relation of areas

in his experience to his religious problems; and to recog-

nize the specific nature of his problems of faith and

practice. It is recognized that there is a close relation-

ship between the youth's religious problems and his ethical

problems; however, this study is limited to his religious

problems. The purpose of this chapter is to set forth

briefly the general characteristics of the high school youth

which affect his religious development; to locate in his

experience the reasons for his problems; to define his

basic religious problems; and to suggest a method of
meeting these problems.

B. General Characteristics of High School Youth

Palmer has described adolescence as a whole
as "the crucial period of human life, the pivot upon
which the rest of life turns, . . . the transition from
childhood to maturity."[1] The importance of this period
of life is emphasized by the recognized fact that in the
majority of cases decisions affecting the three major
relationships of life, the home, vocation, and religion,
are made in adolescence.[2] G. Stanley Hall, one of the
earliest psychologists in the field of adolescence
characterizes it thus:

> "It is the age of sentiment and of religion, of rapid
> fluctuation of mood, and the world seems strange and
> new . . Character and personality are taking form,
> but everything is plastic. Self feeling and ambition
> are increased, and every trait and faculty is liable
> to exaggeration and excess . ."[3]

Preparatory to a study of high school youth it
is necessary to place him in relation to the period as a
whole. Chronologically, adolescence is divided into three
periods: early adolescence, from around twelve to around
fourteen; middle adolescence, from around fifteen to

. . . . . .

1. Leon Carlos Palmer: Youth and the Church, p. 1
2. Cf., Ibid., p. 11
3. G. Stanley Hall: Adolescence; Vol I, pp. xiii, xv

around seventeen; and later adolescence, from around

eighteen to some point in the earlier twenties when

young people may be considered adult. For purposes of

comparison Palmer says that "Professor Coe designates the

three stages of adolescence as impulsive, sentimental,

and reflective."[1] The changes in physical life are

particularly conspicuous in the early period; social

development occupies much of the thought of the middle

adolescent; and there is great emphasis upon the rational

faculties of the young person in the later period. The

relative growth of these periods is artistically described

by Burkhart:

> "in a real sense, [youth] has its spring, the budding
> of manhood and womanhood; it has its summer, the height
> of physical growth; it has its fall, the time personality
> takes on its fuller colors; it has its winter, the
> time of cold, deliberate doubt and storm and passions
> of maturing life."[2]

Shaver describes seniors, middle adolescents, "Their ages

are approximately fifteen, sixteen and seventeen. In the

public educational system they are usually found to be

enrolled in the Senior High School."[3] It is with this

period of adolescence that this study is concerned.

The physical life of the high school youth is

. . . . . .

1. Palmer, op. cit., p. 4
2. Roy A. Burkhart: Understanding Youth, p. 31
3. Erwin L. Shaver: How to Teach Seniors, p. 11

characterized by unbounded energy; he is willing to attempt

almost anything physically. There is gradual development

of bodily contour and the awkwardness of the preceding

period is gradually disappearing. The middle adolescent

is comparatively mature sexually. What was curiosity

about sex in the intermediate becomes desire to the senior.

The evident interest in bodily care is explained by Mudge:

> "At the beginning of middle adolescence a new interest
> in their own appearance is observed, which is probably
> in part due to a desire to interest persons of the
> opposite sex and a derived desire for still wider social
> appreciation."[1]

The high school youth has a particular physical attractive-

ness, a freshness and energy, which is not equaled in any

other period of his development.

The high school youth has been described as an

amateur philosopher[2]; he is increasingly prognostic. The

significance of his mental development is emphasized by

Mayer, "The most outstanding fact of this period [middle

adolescence] is the discovery of mental powers . . Abstract

thinking becomes common."[3] Though there remains evidence

of such traits of the earlier period as hasty opinion and

. . . . . .

1. Evelyn Leigh Mudge: Varieties of Adolescent Experience,
   p. 28
2. Cf., Ibid., p. 109
3. Herbert Carleton Mayer: The Church's Program for
   Young People, p. 34

impulsiveness, the ability and attempt to do reflective thinking are increasingly manifested. At this period increased mental power is shown by the fact that the high school youth is able to remember ideas, both concrete and abstract, whereas in earlier periods he remembered only the concrete. Middle adolescence carries added significance when it is realized that not only is the youth nearing physical maturity but also mental maturity, as emphasized by Mudge, "Of course, experience and balance are to be acquired later, but the fundamentals of intelligence are normally thoroughly developed by the age of sixteen or seventeen."[1]

Middle adolescence is a period of social discovery, further discovery by the youth of himself as an individual, but more than that, the discovery of himself in relation to others. This fact is borne out by Luella Cole when she says that:

> "Adolescents are tremendously sensitive to social stimuli; no other problem seems to them as serious as the establishment of themselves in their own society. They react faster to prestige within their group than to most forms of adult approval."[2]

Generally high school youth have outgrown the mutual repulsion to the opposite sex apparent in the earlier period

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1. Mudge, op. cit., pp. 24-25
2. Luella Cole: Psychology of Adolescence; Revised, pp. 264-265

and they are showing marked interest in social life. This
social life usually finds expression in "the crowd", a
group of both boys and girls, preferably an equal number
of each; it is in this "crowd" that he particularly seeks
to establish himself socially. It provides the normal
medium for his heterosexual social development. There is
a gradual narrowing of social interest within the group
to the selection of a particular friend; dates are more
frequent and growing in seriousness. Whether in the crowd
as a whole or with a particular friend the tenor of the
social life is what Mayer calls a dominant trait of middle
adolescence, the "love of a 'good time'".[1]

In keeping with G. Stanley Hall's portrayal
of adolescence as the "storm and stress time of life",
middle adolescence presents either one great emotional
crisis or a succession of smaller ones. Intensity is the
distinguishing keynote of the high school youth's emotional
life as shown by Mayer, "Probably no other time in life has
such a wealth of emotional intensity."[2] The nature and
control of these powerful emotional drives are important
determining factors in the emerging personality of the
youth.

Religiously the high school youth is experiencing

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1. Mayer, op. cit., p. 35
2. Ibid., p. 34

a new awareness and a personalizing of religious truths
and principles. Statistics presented by Kupky and Mayer
bear this out:

> "If the statistical collections of Starbuck and Stanley
> Hall are dependable, in men most conversions occur
> at sixteen, while in women very many conversions occur
> not only at sixteen, but at thirteen."[1]
> "The studies of Dr. Starbuck showed the sixteenth
> year as peak of the wave [of decisions] . . . 29.1%
> decided in middle adolescent years."[2]

The unbounded physical energy, intensity of emotional
drive, and personal faith find expression in the youth's
desire to dedicate himself to sacrificial or heroic service.
There is an increased appreciation of the mystical and
devotional elements in religion; these grow out of his
heightened emotional life. The high school youth wants
a religion that is practical for solving his particular
problems. The final solution as shown by Moore is:

> "The very heart and center of the goal of religious
> education for this age level is to lead the middle
> adolescent youth to the acceptance of Jesus Christ
> as Saviour, Lord, and Master."[3]

In conclusion, the middle adolescent period is
important in the progress of youth toward maturity. In
this period he reaches physical maturity, makes gains in
his ability to do reflective thinking, develops as a

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1. Oskar Kupky: The Religious Development of
   Adolescents; Translated by William Clark Trow, p. 66
2. Mayer, op. cit., p. 297
3. Mary Ann Moore: Senior Method in the Church School, p. 28

normal individual in his social environment, his emotional
life contributes to his growing personality, and religion
becomes a personal and dynamic factor. The importance of
these general characteristics of the middle adolescent
period to the whole of adolescent development, as Cole
describes that development, is apparent:

> "In order to pass from childhood to adulthood the
> adolescent . . . must develop heterosexual interests,
> he must become free from home supervision, he must
> achieve economic and intellectual independence and
> learn how to use his leisure time, he must make new
> emotional and social adjustments to reality, and he
> must begin to evolve a philosophy of life."[1]

C. Relation of Areas of Experience of
High School Youth to Their Religious Problems

In addition to understanding the general character-
istics of high school youth, it is necessary to investigate
his environment to determine the factors contributing to
his religious problems. The three main areas of exper-
ience which have a relation to his religious difficulties
are the home, the school, and the church. The social life
of the high school youth is largely tied up with the home,
the school and the church. Though the community and friend-
ships outside the three suggested areas have some bearing
on the youth's religious life the influence is not so
marked and for that reason will not be discussed separately.

. . . . . .

1. Cole, op. cit., p. 13

1. Relation of the Home

Basic to the relation of the home and of parents to youth's religious problems is the underlying need and experience of emancipation, known as "psychological weaning", of the adolescent from his parents. Dimock says:

> "No more crucial need than this confronts the adolescent. It is generally assumed by psychologists that if wholesome development is to take place in the individual, the achievement of emancipation and independence, should be complete by the time the organism is physiologically mature."[1]

This struggle from dependence to independence, from government to guidance, and from parental authority to self-determination[2] is bound to produce conflicts. These conflicts which adolescents have with their parents are responsible for emotional disturbances in the lives of youth, especially when neither the parents nor the children realize the true source out of which the conflicts grow.

It is natural, as Taylor brings out, that "as their capacity for abstract thinking develops, all standards, ideals, and beliefs come in for a share of questioning, especially those held by their own parents."[3] Because parents have imposed in childhood their ways of believing and acting upon their children it is natural for them to

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1. Hedley S. Dimock: Rediscovering The Adolescent, pp. 142-143
2. Cf., Palmer, op. cit., p. 8
3. Katharine Whiteside Taylor: Do Adolescents Need Parents?, p. 229

expect to continue; it is also natural for them to feel

alarmed at the insistent attempt of their youth to break

away from these patterns, especially in religion. The

necessity of emancipation of youth in its religious think-

ing is emphasized by Taylor:

> "Nowhere is it more necessary to respect the young
> adult's inner vision than in his evolving concepts
> of religion, yet in no area is it more difficult to
> give. This seems to hold true both among parents
> of rigid orthodox beliefs and those equally rigid
> in their agnosticism or their atheism."[1]

In attempting to control rigidly the religious

thinking of their youth parents not only stifle religious

growth, but they also make youth's religious problems

more acute. To have a problem is not of itself harmful,

but to inhibit its being brought out into the open for

positive solution is often disastrous. Youth finds it

difficult often to correlate the religious teachings of his

parents with their actual practices. To him they appear

inconsistent in urging upon him beliefs and practices, such

as church attendance and prayer, which they themselves

disregard in their own lives. His problem may be compli-

cated by the difference of religious faiths of his parents.

Yet parents may contribute to the religious growth of

their youth by their active interest, their sympathy,

their counsel, and their assurance of confidence and under-

standing.

. . . . . . o

1. Ibid., p. 215

2. Relation of the School

The relationship between the school and religion
is inherent in what Garrison says, "The mental and social
development of adolescents are closely related to a
religious awakening and the growth of moral concepts."[1]
The school is in a position to control to a large degree
the mental development of youth and thereby affect his
religious thinking. In many instances the authority of
the school takes precedence over that of the home or of
the church. Its influence in the social realm is also
particularly strong at this period. As he associates with
friends of different faiths and backgrounds and his exper-
ience is enlarged he is confronted by opposing religious
viewpoints and practices and by different ethical standards.

The intellectual maturity which high school
youths are approaching manifests itself in the form of
general questioning of authority and demand for evidence
and a desire for knowledge in terms of explanations.[2]
Since youth is naturally skeptical, Averill points out
that, "A . . . reason for the religious doubting of youth
is to be found in the disturbing influence which their
study of science in the secondary and higher schools has

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1. Karl C. Garrison: Psychology of Adolescence, p. 188
2. Cf., Cole, op. cit., p. 12

upon their faith."[1] The apparent conflict between science
and religion disturbs him and he naturally questions,
"Do the findings of science make religious faith incon-
sistent with the facts of the universe?"[2] In a world of
study in which science is constantly refuting ideas of the
past and is generally critical of the beliefs of the past
in all fields of thought it is reasonable and to be expected
that the high school youth tends to hold in question, if
not actually distrust, his inherited religious beliefs.
He tends to assume that religious convictions are of less
importance than scientific theories and findings. These
tendencies are shown in a case study reported by Averill:

> "The study of Botany in my senior year in high school
> aroused my first misgivings regarding my faith. After
> all, I queried, how do we know that we are not made up
> of gases from the air? I became scientific minded,
> it appears."[3]

That the study of science is able to produce evidence and
explanations is undeniable; however, it is unable to
satisfy completely the second phase of youth's growing
intellectual maturity, a desire for knowledge in terms of
meanings and values. This lies finally in the field of
religion.

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1. Lawrence Augustus Averill: Adolescence, p. 184
2. Cf., Sidney Adams Weston and Samuel Ralph Harlow:
   Social and Religious Problems of Young People, p. 171
3. Averill, op. cit., p. 400

3. Relation of the Church

There is evidence that the church in a broad sense is a relative factor in the religious problems of youth. As Averill points out:

"The religious education of the past has failed to take into account the circumstance that there comes inevitably in every life an unfolding of the intellect and a growth of reason, and that when this emancipation of the thought life occurs, the individual is prompted to scrutinize sharply what he has been taught heretofore."[1]

In failing to prepare for this time of disturbing conflicts the church often loses its opportunity to reconcile the God of the secular school with the God of the Sunday School. Compared with the school, the church often seems out-of-date in its methods which to the youth reflects upon the truths which the church seeks to present. The inconsistencies of the adults in the church, including the leaders, lead him to question their beliefs. The degree of youth's skepticism is proportionate with the degree of shallowness, superficiality and inadequacy of the concepts which he has been taught.

The charge that youth is irreligious is refuted by Palmer:

"He who says that youth is naturally irreligious does not know youth. The religion of youth may not be paraded for the general public and it may not express itself in conventional forms and places, but that it

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1. Averill, op. cit., pp. 394-395

is a real and vital fact in the life of normal adoles-
cents every one who has shared the intimate confidences
of boys and girls of this age knows."[1]

Richmond holds that though they may not be expressed in

actual church activities, the religious loyalties and

devotion of high school youth to a person or a cause are

present and vital.[2] In assuming his role of "growing up"

it is more likely that he will choose to attend the adult

church service in preference to the Sunday School. The

high school youth through his growing ability to do ab-

stract thinking finds a new power of spiritual appreciation

and worship, as interpreted by Mayer, is for him its natural

expression:

> "Worship is not a purely emotional process; neither is
> it coldly intellectual. It is rather the purposed
> focusing of ideas and their emotional tones on specific
> centers."[3]

Youth seeks a center of personalization and is satisfied

only as he realizes an experience of God in his life.

D. Basic Religious Problems of High School Youth

Religious problems of high school youth are in-

evitable. These difficulties arise particularly in middle

adolescence because this is the time of transition from

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1. Palmer, op. cit., p. 69
2. Cf., Winifred V. Richmond: The Adolescent Boy, p. 206
3. Mayer, op. cit., pp. 222-223

childish credulity to intellectual faith, because the
spirit of the age is critical and scientific, and because
most young people have not had an adequate religious
education in childhood.[1] The young person claims as his
right the chance to question everything, to evaluate, and
to come to his own conclusions. He seeks to put everything
to a test as to whether it is reasonable, practical and
vital. Mudge emphasizes the importance of recognizing
adolescent doubt "as a normal and natural thing. Normally
and with a wholesome environment it will develop in the
direction of a deeper, better reasoned, and more satisfying
faith."[2] To question "Whence do I come? Why am I here?
and Whither do I go?" is natural.

In view of the scope and importance of his relig-
ious problems the high school youth needs sympathetic,
reliable and honest guidance in determining the nature of
his problem, in facing it, and in reaching a conclusion.
By encouraging confidence a negative experience such as
Averill quotes may be avoided:

> "I passed through a period in the early and middle
> teens in which I seemed barren of religious faith . .
> My doubts and disquietude seemed too vague and
> indefinite to tell anybody about, and I kept them
> strictly to myself."[3]

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1. Cf., Palmer, op. cit., pp. 70-74
2. Mudge, op. cit., p. 125
3. Averill, op. cit., p. 405

What appear to be the most common religious
problems of this period are evident to one scanning the
chapter titles of recent publications on this subject.
Youth Looks At Religion, in which the author, Arthur C.
Wickenden, deals with what he considers problems typical
of young men and women of high school and college age,
includes:

"Living By Faith
Is the Bible the Word of God?
How Shall We Think of God?
Jesus Christ, the Son and Saviour
New Realism About Sin
Prayer
A Case for Immortality"

Weston and Harlow present recorded discussions on Social
and Religious Problems of Young People, including such
subjects as:

"Jesus' Place in Religion
The Bible in Modern Life
Why Pray?
Is Death the End?"

In a pamphlet, Youth Can Count . . Now and Tomorrow, Paul
Harris, Jr., records the following religious questions
coming from Hi-Y Club and Girl Reserve Club members:

"Can a person trust in God today?
Do you believe the Bible?
Do you believe that prayer gets results?
Do you believe in the power of love?"[1]

The International Council of Religious Education Curriculum
Guide indicates that the middle adolescent's religious

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1. Paul Harris, Jr: Youth Can Count . . Now and To-
morrow, pp. 52, 53

interests center around such phases as Jesus Christ, the
Bible, prayer, worship, and on being a Christian.[1] As
indicated by these sources the predominate religious questions
of high school young people are concerned with the following:
religion, faith, a philosophy of life; the nature of God;
the Bible; identity of and relation to Jesus Christ; reality
of sin; prayer; and immortality.

1. Basic Problem in Relation to Faith

The high school youth is faced with the problem of
determining the place of religion in his life, of working
out an adequate philosophy of life, of justifying faith.
This philosophy of life Richmond means when she says:

> "He is not so much concerned with heaven and hell as
> with his place in the universe; the meaning and purpose
> of life, whence we all come, and whither we are bound
> are still questions of paramount importance to the
> adolescent boy."[2]

In view of his studies of the material universe the high
school youth questions the reasonableness of faith as
operative in life. He needs to see that faith is the first
step in scientific procedure, and that faith is universal
as Wickenden points out:

> "Applied to religion, the irreligious person lives by
> his faith as surely does the man of religious conviction;
> the difference lies in the nature of their respective
> faiths."[3]

. . . . . .

1. Cf., The International Curriculum Guide; Book Three,
    Christian Education of Youth, pp. 124-128
2. Richmond, op. cit., p. 206
3. Arthur C. Wickenden: Youth Looks At Religion, p. 48

The practical value of religion to him personally is the focal point of one of his basic religious problems.

2. Basic Problem in Relation to God

The basic problem in relation to God is stated by Palmer, "They wish to be assured as to the existence, personality and power of God."[1] Again the emphasis upon the materialistic universe leads to doubts and questions as to the reality and nature of God. Such concepts of God as Harris enumerates complicate the youth's thinking: God is a myth; he created the world but is letting it alone now; he is a force, like electricity, but not a person; he is a loving Father, trying to help men develop.[2] Weston and Harlow indicate the heart of the problem as:

> "The conflict between the seemingly impersonal, ruthless working out of natural law with the affirmation of religious faith that God is a loving Father who cares for each individual as for a child."[3]

In youth's natural and normal revolt from authority he is apt to discard the one fact which will help him to understand the world, the fact of God. A personally satisfying, reasonable, practical knowledge of God is the underlying objective of young people.

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1. Palmer, op. cit., p. 76
2. Cf., Harris, op. cit., p. 49
3. Weston and Harlow, op. cit., p. 179

3. Basic Problem in Relation to the Bible

The problem of the place and authority of the Bible arises out of the scientific spirit of youth. They find it difficult to be certain about it because it includes such things as miracles which they consider unscientific. Piper presents the problem in this way:

"From the beginning of the junior high school period through the sophomore year in college young people have questions concerning religion and its relation to their growing store of information about science, history and life. The questions arise chiefly because, although young people may have a fund of Bible stories and memory texts, they have never grasped the meaning of the Biblical revelation as a whole."[1]

This lack of meaning accounts for the fact that very few young people read the Bible regularly. Chave includes in the opinions which youth may have of the Bible the following representative ones: the Bible contains all that is necessary to guide us to eternal salvation; the Bible is concerned with trivial and outworn beliefs; I don't understand the Bible and don't try to; the more I understand the Bible the more help I get from it; I have nothing but contempt for the Bible and its readers.[2]

4. Basic Problem in Relation to Jesus Christ

The claim of Jesus Christ to uniqueness in relationship to God, His claim and the teaching of His deity, are

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1. David Roy Piper: Youth Explores the Bible, p. vii
2. Cf., Ernest L. Chave: Measure Religion, p. 67

the basis of some of the most serious problems of the
high school youth. Wickenden states the difficulty, "to
find such vital meaning in such affirmations of the meta-
physical union between the human Jesus of Nazareth and the
God of the infinite expanses of space."[1] It is difficult
for the youth to interpret with meaning such terms as "Son
of God", "Saviour", "Lord". Until he has a working conception
of the meaning inherent in these terms not only his religious
knowledge is inadequate, but his religious experience is
incomplete. Again Chave gives various opinions which may
be held by young people: Jesus was a Jewish religious
teacher who died for his faith; Jesus is an idealized hero;
Jesus was a great man, but only a man; Jesus is the Saviour
of the world; Jesus was God in human form.[2] The youth is
beginning to feel consciously the impact upon his conceptions
of the two schools of thought as to the identity of Jesus
Christ, the liberal and the orthodox. Both schools seek
to challenge young people to allegiance to Him, but it is
evident that as their underlying teachings differ so will
the meaning of the personal commitment differ.

5. Basic Problem in Relation to Sin

     With increased insistence the problem of personal
sin faces the high school youth. As he comes to under-

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1. Wickenden, op. cit., p. 91
2. Cf., Chave, op. cit., p. 87

stand the motives and factors at work in such events as the
present war illusions concerning the inherent goodness of
human nature are shattered. He becomes acutely conscious
of the problem of sin in mankind and in himself. His own
shortcomings and failures in achieving his ideals and a
growing conviction of personal guilt because of actual acts
of sin make him aware of the reality of his own sin. Rich-
mond recognizes as evidence of youth's consciousness of sin:

> "The load of guilt, conscious or not, that practically
> every boy carries, the need for reconciliation, for
> setting himself right with life, which he feels in
> the way of unrest and dissatisfaction with himself,
> the longing for sympathy and understanding, for con-
> tact with a power greater than himself that is 'mighty
> to save'."[1]

"Starbuck, James, and Coe," according to Belden, "have drawn
our attention to the frequency with which adolescent con-
version is attended by mental agony over sin, real or supposed."[2]
The problem is not solved by its mere recognition, but it
finds solution in religious experience; the youth's problem
is how to find forgiveness and a sense of wholeness.

6. Basic Problem in Relation to Prayer

In the realm of practical religion prayer presents
to the high school youth some of the most baffling difficul-
ties. This is his question, as stated by Weston and Harlow:

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1. Richmond, op. cit., p. 207
2. Albert D. Belden: The Religious Difficulties of
   Youth, p. 63

"In the light of modern science and psychology, can the intelligent modern man believe that prayer can accomplish anything apart from the person who offers the prayer?"[1]

Science has impressed the youth with the existence of un-changeable laws in the universe which prayer would seem to violate. Psychology interprets prayer as auto-suggestion or even a form of self-deception. However, because prayer is recognized as a universal religious experience the youth accepts some value in it; in addition to this, his personal experiences in prayer and those of his family and friends indicate its validity. He is faced with confusing views of prayer: Prayer is a superstitious relic of pre-scientific days; any intelligent person should believe in prayer; no one can be certain about God or prayer; prayer is direct communion with a supernatural God to get specific help.[2] Youth seeks to understand the real nature of prayer, its relation to natural law, and its effectiveness in practical life.

7. Basic Problem in Relation to Immortality

Youth asks with unusual interest and desire the age-old question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" Though he is in the prime of physical health he comes to face the thought of death and seeks to understand it and

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1. Weston and Harlow, op. cit., p. 248
2. Cf., Chave, op. cit., pp. 40-41

questions concerning the future life. Belden says that:

> "There is a tendency present at some time in all
> earnest youth, to endeavor to visualize life and
> destiny as a whole, to see it all of a piece: and
> this, too, brings the soul rather sharply up against
> the fact of death and the problem as to whether any-
> thing lies beyond it."[1]

Youth realizes that the present life is bound to be influenc-
ed by what he believes concerning death and immortality.[2]
In view of evidence from science pro and con he seeks for
an explanation from religion.

E. Adaptability of Discussion as a Method to Meet the Basic Religious Problems of High School Youth

There is unusual value in the use of the discussion
method in dealing with the religious problems of high school
youth. Moore explains:

> "This method [discussion] is most effective with the
> senior high school boys and girls. They are vitally
> concerned with life problems and everyday experiences
> that lend themselves to this mode of treatment."[3]

Carrier suggests the use of discussion in teaching kinder-
garten and junior children[4], however, it is recognized that
it is peculiarly suited to middle and late adolescents and
to adults.

In the first place, its adaptability is seen in
that it capitalizes upon the high school youth's natural
desire to be part of a group. In group participation he

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1. Belden, op. cit., p. 108
2. Cf., Wickenden, op. cit., p. 136
3. Moore, op. cit., p. 165
4. Cf., Blanche Carrier: How Shall I Learn To Teach
   Religion?, pp. 132-148

comes to establish himself religiously as well as mentally
and socially. To be able to express their religious
problems and through cooperative thinking under the wise
guidance of an understanding leader to come to an apprecia-
tion of Christian principles is a stimulating and vital
experience for young people. They choose discussion them-
selves because it allows for their vital participation.

In the second place, discussion's adaptability
as a method to meet the religious problems of high school
youth is seen in that its primary purpose, as Shaver puts
it, "is not to obtain a definite body of organized know-
ledge, but to come to a Christian solution of some troubling
or social question."[1] As brought out earlier, the high
school youth desires religious knowledge in terms of ex-
planations and meanings.[2] To meet this desire Barclay
points out that group discussion "is essentially a coopera-
tive effort toward the discovery of the meaning of experience."[3]
In the light of differing opinions and under positive
guidance the high school youth faces his religious problems
and begins to formulate his own religious views.

In the development of his whole personality
discussion may contribute to intellectual honesty, open-
mindedness, suspended judgment, and criticism, including

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1. Shaver, op. cit., p. 51
2. Ante, p. 59
3. Wade Crawford Barclay: The Church and a Christian
   Society, p. 307

self-criticism. The development of these traits is in-
valuable to his religious thinking. In conclusion, Harner
believes that the discussion method "now rests in our hands
as a new and valuable tool, for whose help in our work with
youth we may indeed be grateful."[1] It is not the only
method, but its features may provide in a special way for
religious growth through the discussion of religious
difficulties.

F. Summary

The high school youth has been found to be
characterized by unbounded physical energy; mentally he is
reaching maturity, his ability to do reflective thinking is
increasing; he seeks as at no other period, social approval
and recognition in some group; emotional intensity keynotes
the developing personality; and the high school youth is
religiously inclined and seeks to evaluate and accept reli-
gion personally. Youth's natural development in relation
to his home, his school and his church background has been
seen to contribute to arousing his religious difficulties.
These doubts and religious problems, expressed or unexpressed,
center around his view of religion, his understanding and
interpretation of God, the Bible, the Person of Jesus Christ
and his relationship to Him, his increasing consciousness of
sin, the nature and practice of prayer, and his questions

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1. Nevin C. Harner: Youth Work in the Church, p. 149

concerning immortality. To minimize youth's problems serves
to make them more acute. It has been shown that discussion
has unusual possibilities as a method in meeting the relig-
ious difficulties of high school youth because it provides
opportunity for his integral participation in a group and
because it is experience-centered.

CHAPTER IV

THE USE OF THE GOSPEL BY JOHN IN DISCUSSION

TO MEET FOUR BASIC RELIGIOUS PROBLEMS

OF HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH

CHAPTER IV

THE USE OF THE GOSPEL BY JOHN IN DISSCUSSION

TO MEET FOUR BASIC RELIGIOUS PROBLEMS

OF HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH

A. Introduction

Following the discovery of the basic religious

problems of high school youth and the study of discussion

as a method particularly adaptable to youth, the problem

arises as to how content may be presented in discussion to

meet these problems. In dealing with religious problems

the content is primarily the Bible. Whatever from exper-

ience and other sources contributes to understanding and

meeting the problem has a place in supplementing the

Biblical material. The Gospel by John has been chosen

to provide illustrative material because it presents

solutions to a variety of problem situations. It is not

intended that all the material in this gospel be presented

but the portions have been selected which will serve as

adequate illustrations. Neither is it within the scope

of this study to deal with all the basic religious problems

which confront high school youth, but with those which

are representative and which may best be illustrated using

the Gospel by John. The basic problems in relation to

the identity of Jesus Christ, sin, prayer, and immortality

have been chosen. In dealing with these subjects the treatment is not to be considered as complete, but as suggestive.

B. Use of Biblical Material in Discussion

The Bible has an essential contribution to make to the solution of youth's religious problems. The introduction of Biblical material into discussion is justifiable on the grounds that in religious matters it is expert opinion and reliable source material.[1] The unique contribution of the Bible to discussion is emphasized by Athearn and Athearn:

> "Leaders of goup discussion in religious education
> have a wealth of source material for use which should
> be appropriated for personal enrichment and as back-
> ground material for the discussion period. The Bible
> itself is the most valuable source for all religious
> truth, and in the hands of a trained and experienced
> leader it may be the only discussion guide needed."[2]

The Bible is particularly suited to meet the religious problems of youth as he sees them in the light of the different phases of his life. The Bible presents life situations, personalities, environment, problems, and a solution with the different elements of the situation in view. Elliott has pointed out that, "The Bible is a record of life situations and how they were met. It is a book written on a problem basis and is particularly suited

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1. Ante, p. 37
2. Athearn and Athearn: Discussing Religion Creatively,
   p. 87

to problem study."[1] Youth's appreciation of the Bible
itself will be greatly enriched as he comes to realize
that it is a storehouse of life's religious experiences.
He will come to understand the teachings of the Bible
as he understands the life situations out of which they
grew. He will see that his problem bears resemblance to
the problems which are dealt with directly in Scripture
and as he follows the steps to the solution presented there
he will find the solution to his own problem in a new and
more meaningful way.

The attitude toward the Bible and method of its
use in discussion of youth's religious problems is important.
It is necessary that the adolescent be allowed to approach
the Bible for himself and under the sympathetic guidance
of an experienced leader arrive at conclusions which are
in reality his own. If this approach to Scripture is made,
he is enabled to face his religious problem apart from and
yet in relation to the conflicting factors which have
affected his view of the problem in the past. He will re-
spond to this approach because it recognizes his growing
ability to evaluate and apply material, because it appeals
to him as being scientifically honest. Elliott stresses

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1. Elliott: Group Discussion in Religious Education,
    p. 69

the importance of this attitude toward Scripture, "The same spirit of frankness and honesty is necessary in examining Biblical material as for any other type of discussion."[1]

Three general steps in "life situation Bible discussion" have been suggested by Elliott. The first step is to discover the aspect of the situation which is pertinent to the life situation of the group; secondly, a careful selection of Scripture which contains incidents in which the same essential issue was faced; and thirdly, an open-minded and thorough consideration of what the viewpoint presented in Scripture would involve in relation to the life situation under consideration.[2] The purpose of the remainder of this chapter is to show by illustration how specific religious problems of high school youth can be met following these steps of procedure in life-situation Bible discussion.

C. The Discussion Method in Relation to Basic Religious Problems Illustrated

It is important in relating discussion as a method to material in the Gospel by John to meet the basic religious problems of high school youth to restate the essential factors of the discussion method and to summarize

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1. Ibid., p. 74
2. Cf., Ibid., p. 69

in general the religious difficulties of high school youth.

The spirit of freedom and a sense of the importance of the subject under discussion are imperative. The incident from the Bible may be used to introduce the discussion, but the main place which the Bible takes in discussion procedure is in the body of the discussion. Before Biblical material is introduced for discussion it is necessary to get the problem as it appears to the group clearly before it. It is well to recognize and discuss the reasons why the problem has arisen and the areas of experience which have affected the youth's religious thinking on the subject. Having recognized clearly what the problem is and the contributing factors, he is in a position to discuss the Biblical material purposefully and to reach some conclusion which will be helpful to his further thinking.

When youth is discussing his problems the role of the leader is to guide youth's thinking effectively, to be aware of all the aspects of the problem, and to make helpful suggestions when they are needed. Because of the leader's training and experience, the group will probably look to him to suggest the Scripture portions which have a bearing on the problem at hand. By his sincerity and tact he will be able to guide the discussion of Scripture so as to avoid unprofitable by-paths, to encourage the maximum participation and to make valuable the clash of opinion. His skilful use of questions will draw from the

group otherwise undiscovered light which the Scripture
passage throws upon the subject. The leader's own spiritual
stability will be reflected unconsciously in the thinking
of the group, but his own opinions are never to exclude a
spirit of fairness.

It is of primary importance that throughout the
discussion the individual youth be kept central. His
whole development, his background, his problems, his ways
of thinking, and his reactions and conclusions are para-
mount. A thorough understanding of youth as he faces his
religious problems involves an understanding and apprecia-
tion of his home background and of the influences of the
school and church upon his thinking. As both the leader
and the youth himself recognize and face the conflicts
growing out of these various influences, they will be
able to work toward a constructive solution. The similarity
of problem in the light of conflicting background and the
conclusiveness of solution which the Bible presents make
its use invaluable to youth.

As Elliott has suggested[1] the first step in
discussion is to get the specific problem clearly before
the group. Each youth is to have the opportunity to bring
into the discussion factors of the problem as he sees it,
doubts which have arisen from study in school, prejudices

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1. Ante, p. 78

formed in his school, church and home life relative to the subject. This sharing of viewpoint will contribute to an understanding by all of the exact nature of the difficulty. Once the problem has been clearly defined the discussion proceeds to discussion for a solution. At this point a particular passage of Scripture is to be introduced by the leader or some member of the group. The selection of a helpful passage or passages is part of the preparation which the leader or the group has done. In introducing a passage of Scripture it is essential for the leader or an expert in the group to locate the setting of the passage in its wider context. With this first step in mind suggestive illustrations are given as to how passages in the Gospel by John may help too meet four of youth's religious problems as he discusses them. It is not assumed that the illustrations include necessarily the whole discussion method procedure, but refer only to that portion of the discussion in which the Bible is used particularly, discussing for solution.

1. Basic Problem in Relation to Jesus Christ

One of the basic religious problems of youth concerns the identity of Jesus Christ; Who is He? is his question. The teaching of the home and church that He is the Son of God is contradicted often by what he learns in school. The youth finds it confusing that the lives of those who believe Him to be the Son of God and who profess

to follow Him are sometimes so inconsistent with His life and His teachings. The Gospel by John is particularly suited to a study of this question because the theme of His identity runs throughout. Three approaches may be made to the problem: discussion centering around the claims of Jesus Himself in John; discussion of the testimony of witnesses; and discussion of evidences from His life and work.

a. The Claims of Jesus Christ in John. It is recognized that for a complete understanding of Christ's identity all of the claims are essential. It is the intention of this study to be suggestive rather than conclusive. One claim which will illustrate how the youth's life-situation religious problem of Christ's identity may be met in a life situation as presented in the Bible is found in John 14:1-11, the claim which Jesus made, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." This passage includes as a step in the natural situation leading up to this claim the words of Jesus, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

After the passage has been introduced the discussion will center around responses to the question: "How is the problem which the disciples faced similar to my problem?" The youth will recognize that this incident took place late in the association of the disciples with Jesus, and, in view of this, the fact that the disciples still did not

understand the meaning of Jesus' statement and questioned
Him will give him courage to face his doubts openly and
constructively. He will realize that Thomas faced the
problem of the "unknown", "We know not whither thou goest,
how know we the way?" Thomas did not understand what Jesus
meant by "the way". He was puzzled by Jesus' reference to
things that he could not sense in his material world. The
youth questions from his study of science in school how he
can believe in things which he cannot test with his senses.
The home and the church seem to assume his ability to
believe in spiritual things for which he has no material
evidence. The desire of Philip, "show us the Father", grows
out of Jesus' statement, "from henceforth ye know him, and
have seen him [my father]". Philip wanted actually to see
the Father. The youth, too, has the problem of reconciling
his actual experience with Jesus' statement. The youth will
bring out that the disciples were perplexed by Jesus' use
of the word "know". In his study great stress is laid on
knowledge of facts; the relationship of the knowledge of
facts to the spiritual world is his problem.

The next thought- and discussion-provoking question
may be, "Were Jesus' answers to the disciples' problems
satisfactory to them?" The youth is given the task of
evaluating the claims of Jesus in terms of their meaning
to the disciples in view of their problems. He sees that

Jesus, in claiming in response to Thomas' question, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life," united the human, their knowledge of Him as a person, with the divine or unseen. He personalized religion so that it consists in a Person rather than a system. He told Thomas that "the way" was He, Himself. In Jesus' statement, "If ye had known me," He emphasized for the disciples the necessity of understanding more than the outward manifestation, the human aspect; He emphasized the necessity of appreciating the inward nature and character of Jesus Himself, the divine aspect. In reply to Philip's desire to see God, the Father, Jesus in claiming, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," points to Himself as the One Who reveals God, as God in flesh, the union of the human and the divine. The youth recognizes that these spiritual truths were hard for the disciples to grasp and he appreciates anew the final appeal which Jesus makes, "Believe me for the very works' sake." If they still could not understand what He meant by His words, they were urged to believe on the basis of what He had done. What Jesus claimed was backed up by the undeniable evidence of His works.

Attention is turned to discussion of the question, "Do Christ's claims help me to know Who He is?" From his preceding evaluation of Christ's answers to the disciples who were perplexed by the same problems as he, he will have

light on his problem. He will come to see that Jesus was
truly human as the disciples knew Him and yet more. He will
better understand how the human aspect of Jesus was not
all, but the avenue of connection between them and the
Father, Who is Spirit. "He that hath seen me hath seen the
Father." In being both human and divine He was the connect-
ing link between them and God, the Father. That Jesus did
not underestimate the value of material evidence but showed
that the connection between it and the spiritual realm was
in Himself will help the youth to see new value in believing
in Him. By personalizing belief and focusing attention
upon Himself as "the way, and the truth, and the life"
Jesus places the emphasis upon His own person and not upon
the inconsistencies of people in the church and the home
which have perplexed the youth. Jesus' reference to His
works as evidence of His deity and oneness with God, the
Father, shows to the youth that what He did and what He was
cannot be disassociated. The fact that Christ does not
seek to show how He was the Son of God, but urges acceptance
of His deity and realization of the truth of it in experience
will change the youth's problem from "How could He be the
Son of God?", the problem which has been presented in school
and by his associates, to "How may I test His deity in my
experience?" The very terms which Christ used to express
His deity, "the way", "the truth", "the life", will appeal

to the youth's interest. He seeks to know truth and has a
zest for living. The purpose of a discussion of these claims
of Christ is not so much to establish theologically the
deity of Christ as to arouse in each youth a desire to
experience personally the truth of the claim.

b. Witnesses Concerning Jesus Christ in John. For the
purpose of illustration the life situation and testimony of
the man blind from birth, recorded in John 9:6-38, shows
how the Bible may be used to meet the youth's religious
problem concerning the identity of Jesus Christ. As the
youth traces and discusses the progress of the thinking
of the man born blind, in relation to this same problem,
he is helped in his own thinking. The element of opposition
increases the value of this incident in relation to the
youth's problem.

Discussion of the story itself will center around
the question, "What did the man born blind think of Jesus?"
The youth will discover that in the different stages of the
incident the man had different reactions, but all progressive
toward a climax. The man's first impression of Jesus is
given simply in the statement, "The man that is called Jesus
made clay, and anointed mine eyes and I received sight."
From this statement the youth will note that the man merely
recounts the facts. First of all he recognized Jesus as a
man and the healing as a fact and did not seek to interpret

the meaning further. He states frankly the instructions given by Jesus, his obedience and the result. He shows this same spirit of frankness when questioned by the Pharisees and confronted by opposing views concerning Jesus.

When asked by the Pharisees for an interpretation of Jesus in the light of what happened to him, he replied that, "He is a prophet." As this reply is discussed the youth will see that the man that had been blind progressed from the idea of Jesus as an ordinary man to consider Him as unusual. When the Pharisees interviewed him again they state positively their view of Christ, "We know that this man is a sinner." In response, the man wisely does not make an interpretation, but tenaciously holds to his experience. Again the Pharisees probe the man for an interpretation of how it happened. The logic of the man's answers is unusually valuable to the youth as he follows it. He reverses the questioning and inquires why they want to know, do they wish to become disciples? Upon their admission that they do not know whence He is, he logically proves that since God does not hear sinners and since He heard Him in giving Him power to open his eyes, therefore Jesus must be from God. "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." is his premise. The climax of his thinking comes when Jesus reveals Himself to him as the Son of God and he is ready to believe on Him and demonstrates his belief by

worship.

Having discussed the progress of the blind man's reasoning, the youth next analyzes the opposition which he faced. He realizes that this opposition came from the organized religious groups of the day. It stemmed from prejudice and from preconceived ideas. The youth senses that even the parents, because of their fear of the consequences, played a negative part in the solution of his problem. The final exhibition of opposition was his ostracism from the popular religious group of his day.

As the youth follows the progress of the man's thought and feels with him the opposition he evaluates the life experience portrayed in terms of his own experience. He is led to see that the crux of the thinking of this man rested upon his initial contact with Jesus and that as he affirmed what he knew from experience he made progress in his understanding of Who Jesus Christ is. So as he, the youth, appropriates and lives up to the light that he has on the subject, more is given him until he is finally prepared to understand that Christ is the Son of God. He has new insight concerning the underlying causes of the opposition to the teaching of Christ's deity which he meets in his own experience. As he views the parents of the blind man, blind from birth, he may see their resemblance to people whose inconsistent lives are the result of com-

promise so as not to lose position. It is natural for the
youth to admire the man born blind for his courage and
intellectual and spiritual honesty in the face of certain
ostracism; it is natural for him to want to manifest the
same heroic spirit. The discussion of the incident of the
blind man will have meaning for the youth not primarily
as he theoretically understands it, but as he derives from
it a desire to experience a contact with Jesus Christ which
may be the basis for his own view of Christ's identity.

c. Evidence Concerning Jesus Christ in John. Evidence
in the Gospel by John which reveals His identity includes
the miracles, His sinless life, and His death and resurrec-
tion. The evidence of the feeding of the five thousand in
John 6:5-14 has been chosen as an illustration of how a real
life situation may be discussed by youth in seeking a
solution to his problem of the identity of Jesus Christ.

The youth discusses as an observer his impressions
of the episode as the record gives it. Through the eyes
of each of the characters and the multitude he sees the
situation. Through the eyes of Jesus he visualizes the
hunger of the swarming crowd; he sees the barrenness of
the surrounding countryside. He senses the longing of
Jesus for an expression of faith as He asks the question,
"Whence are we to buy bread that these may eat?" With
materially minded Philip's answer the youth is made aware

of the reality of the situation as it appeared to one of
the disciples. He concluded that it was financially im-
possible to feed so many. The scene then turns to the
brother of Peter and the youth is conscious of his despair,
"but what are these [the five loaves and two fishes] among
so many?" The expression of wonder on the face of the
little lad is a part of the dramatic scene. Having observed
the individuals the youth turns to his impressions of the
expectant crowd seated in orderly groups; he sees them fed
until they are satisfied and he sees the left-over food
collected. The emphatic conclusion of the multitude,
"This is of a truth the prophet that cometh into the world."
has increased meaning for the youth in the light of the
whole situation.

The next step is a frank discussion of the personal
opinion of each youth as it has grown out of his attempt
to view the situation as an eyewitness. On the basis of
his study in school the youth reasons that it is impossible
for food to be increased to such proportions as the account
presents. He argues that starving thousands are not fed
in such a way today. Yet the facts of the incident cannot
be disregarded. He is confronted with the necessity of
finding the most satisfactory explanation. The relative
value of all the possible explanations is to be discussed.
The youth is asked to evaluate in the light of the real

life situation presented in the account what view he
considers to explain the story most adequately. He views
the situation psychologically and is allowed to express
his opinion with the responsibility of showing that it is
the satisfactory explanation. He is in a position to re-
evaluate his own opinions and those held by others. Though
the youth may not come to the conclusion that Jesus Christ
is the Son of God from this one study, however, this pre-
sents a helpful approach to his whole problem.

2. Basic Problem in Relation to Sin

One of the basic religious problems of high school
youth centers around his growing conviction of personal
guilt; he faces the reality of sin about him and in his
own life. His questions are, "What is sin?" and "Why do
I sin?" His problem is accentuated often by a stress of
negative teaching concerning sin in the home and in the
church; sometimes his repulsion toward religious things
has grown out of dogmatic presentations by adults or by
the inconsistent example of church leaders and even parents.
The school's emphasis upon mechanistic behavior tends to
minimize the guilt and personal nature of sin. The teach-
ing of Jesus Christ concerning the nature and action of
sin as recorded in John will prove helpful in meeting this
problem. The passage which has been chosen to form the
background of the study is John 8:32-47.

The first approach to the study of Jesus' teaching about sin may be to ask the members of the group to point out and discuss the contrasts in the passage. The youth will notice such contrasts as truth and a lie, son and bondservant, freedom and slavery, God as Father and the devil as father, sinlessness and lust, belief and unbelief. Once his interest is aroused by the sharp contrasts which are drawn the youth is ready to follow and discuss the reasoning of the parties engaged in the word battle. He discovers that the Jews think of freedom only in terms of political freedom whereas Christ argues that a man is not free unless he is spiritually free. The Jews press the fact that they have special religious position because of their relationship to Abraham. Jesus counters that if they were Abraham's true children they would act like it, but the fact that they seek to kill Him, a thing which Abraham would not have done, explodes their claim. He further states that their hatred of Him shows that their claim to sonship of God is false also and charges them that their real father is the devil as demonstrated by the way they act. Jesus concludes that their refusal of the truth is "because ye are not of God". It is helpful in understanding Jesus' reasoning for the youth to state and discuss it in reverse. Because they were not of God they did not believe Jesus; because they did not believe the

truth Jesus told them they hated Him; and because they
hated Him they tried to kill Him.

Having followed the debate between the Jews and
Jesus the youth is ready to study and discuss the under-
lying factors involved in sin. He sees in the Jews an
example of pride and hypocrisy; they claimed to be religious
and yet did wicked things. Though sin appears to give more
freedom in reality it forms chains of thinking and habits.
The youth is led to see that sin is more than outward act,
that it is first of all based on choice and an inward will,
"the lusts of your father it is your will to do." He will
realize that what one is inwardly determines what he does
outwardly; that what one believes affects what he does;
that the root of sin as Jesus traced it is unbelief.

In the light of his conclusions concerning the
general underlying nature and cause of sin the youth is in
a position to understand better why he sins; that his
inherent tendency, the result of choice of evil instead of
God, makes him will to do the wrong he does. Just as the
Jews' actions were the result of their choice so is his
outward sin the result of inward choice. He sees the
inadequacy of the theory which he has confronted in school
that sin is only being out of harmony with social custom.
He goes in his understanding beyond the negative approach

which his parents or church associates may have given
him of condemnation and disapproval without helping him
to understand the basis of his problem. He is helped to
see that his solution lies in asking Christ to change his
inward tendency which has resulted from his choice of evil
instead of God and by His strength day by day to change his
desires and deeds.

3. Basic Problem in Relation to Prayer

The practical problem of the nature and effective-
ness of prayer confronts the high school youth. As his
view of the world around him enlarges he feels the inade-
quateness of his childish views concerning prayer. He
realizes that almost everyone believes in prayer in some
sense, but that very few actually pray. From his school
training he is given the impression that prayer is un-
reasonable because it seeks to change natural law or the
impression that the only real value of prayer is in its
psychological effects upon the person himself. In his
desire to be intelligent he will discard any practice that
seems merely superstitious. Unless he understands to some
degree how through prayer a human being can actually con-
tact God he sees no value in praying in spite of how much
the church or his parents may urge it upon him. As a
background for a discussion of the nature and effectiveness
of prayer the youth is referred to John 15:1-16.

To correlate the study of prayer with his study
of natural law in the universe the first approach is for the
youth to discover and discuss the natural laws which
John 15:1-16 mentions. He will recognize the natural law
of the vineyard, that there must be an essential union
of the branch and the main trunk of the vine in order to
produce fruit. This is vividly illustrated from his study
of biological science. The youth is also keenly aware of
the natural law of love and friendship as a basis for re-
lationship.

The youth's attention is next drawn to a discuss-
ion of the nature and purpose of prayer in terms of these
natural laws. He sees that the simplest definition of
prayer is "asking", and, as illustrated by the figure of
the vine and the branches, it is asking for strength from
the stronger source. His conception of the purpose of
prayer is vastly enlarged. He comes to realize that the
highest purpose of prayer is to glorify God by what the
individual life produces. "Herein is my Father glorified,
that ye bear much fruit." This view necessitates a change
of motive from seeking purely personal gain to a spirit of
cooperation with God in producing results. In the light of
this higher conception of the nature and purpose of prayer
the reasonableness of its practice becomes more apparent.

The youth next discusses prayer as the connecting

link between two persons, God and himself, based on the
law of love. The high school youth is coming to idealize
love and understand it in terms of sacrificial partnership
for mutual benefit. From his own experience and from the
experiences of others he knows the power of love and friend-
ship. In his relation to God this same principle of love
and friendship is the underlying principle of prayer. Jesus
says, "Even as the Father hath loved me, I also have loved
you." and speaking of the response says, "Ye are my friends,
if you do the things which I command you."

The youth is made aware throughout the discussion
of these two natural laws, the law from nature and the
law of love, that there is one cardinal condition of prayer,
a vital relationship between God and himself. He will come
to see that much of the difficulty concerning prayer results
from the ignorance or the neglect of this relationship of
"abiding in" Jesus. "If you abide in me, and my words a-
bide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done
unto you" is the promise of Jesus. The whole matter of
what to pray for is governed by this relationship. The
youth understands that it is necessary for both the motives
and the requests to be in harmony with both members of the
union, God and himself. Prayer becomes to the youth an
inter-relationship of dependency and love and as he exper-
iences union with Christ, the Vine, prayer will become
a reality to him.

4. Basic Problem in Relation to Immortality

One of the high school youth's basic problems concerns life after death. He asks with an insistent desire to know, "Is there anything beyond death?" "Is death the end?" The question to him is not merely theoretical for he realizes that his present life is bound to be colored by his conclusions on the subject. He has probably been taught in school that matter is the only reality, the teaching based on a materialistic philosophy. The emphasis of social science may infer that his immortality is realized in terms of his contribution to society, a depersonalization of immortality. In nature he sees the law of change, but not of annihilation. As he studies the beliefs and practices of other races and peoples he finds that the belief in immortality is almost universal. His problem is narrowed down to what is to be his belief concerning personal immortality. He realizes that it is the accepted doctrine of Christians, but the lives of many of them seem inconsistent with such a belief. It is with the personal phase of immortality that this study will limit itself and the background material from John will include John 5:24-29 and John 11:25-26a. It is well to discuss why Jesus' teaching on immortality is valuable. If He is what He claimed to be, the Son of God, youth will conclude that He is the greatest authority on the subject.

The youth is first of all asked to discover and
discuss what life and death are according to John 5:24-29.
He will find that life is presented by Jesus as the opposite
of death, "out of death into life." He notices that life
is spoken of as eternal whereas physical death is not ever-
lasting. The source of life is in God, the Father, and in
God, the Son. He discovers that eternal life begins in this
life, "hath eternal life". It is apparent that eternal life
is not presented as the opposite of physical death but as
the opposite of judgment, "and cometh not into judgment",
that the Son of God is the one who will decide, "gave him
authority to execute judgment." The youth comes to realize
that Jesus throughout teaches personal immortality and pre-
sents two types, life or judgment depending upon the present
life, "they that have done good, unto the resurrection of
of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection
of judgment." As the result of his discussion of life and
death based on this passage the attention of the youth is
drawn from the subject of physical death primarily to a
consideration of the two types of personal immortality.

Preparatory to a consideration of the two types
of immortality the account of the death and raising of
Lazarus by Jesus, found in John 11, is to be given. From
the background of the story the youth discusses the two
meanings of life and death which Jesus gives

and the story infers; physical life is contrasted with
physical death and spiritual life with spiritual death,
or judgment as spoken of in John 5. Though apparently
contradictory, the phrase, "though he die, yet shall he
live," begins to make sense to the youth. The phrase
"shall never die" sums up for the youth Christ's teaching
concerning personal immortality.

Having discovered and discussed the meaning of
life and death in their spiritual sense the youth is
brought face to face with the specific condition of spiri-
tual life. Jesus said, "He that liveth and believeth on
me shall never die." and he "that believeth him that sent
me, hath eternal life." The effect for the youth of Jesus'
statement, "I am the resurrection and the life", will be
that immortality is not a religious theory but a Person,
Jesus Christ Himself. As the youth further believes on
Him the truth of his present personal immortality becomes
more real.

D. Summary

It has been found that the content of the Bible
is particularly suited to meet the problems of high school
youth because it presents life-situation experiences from
which the youth may derive solutions to his problems. As
he approaches the Bible for himself he finds in it problems

similar to his own in settings which arouse his interest;
he finds that conclusions reached by Biblical characters
have value for him in his present environment and experience.
It has been found that discussion of Biblical materials
necessitates freedom of expression of opinion and freedom
to express the problem as the youth sees it. The leader
usually introduces the Scripture portion to be discussed
in relation to the problem; he guides and stimulates pur-
poseful thinking concerning it by questions and summaries.
The spirit of fairness excludes any spirit of dogmatism.
It was found that the material which the Gospel by John
presents is especially well adapted to helping youth solve
four of his basic religious problems because it is life-
centered in nature.

In the discussion of passages relating to the
identity of Jesus Christ three simple approaches have been
made to the problem: approach from Jesus' own claim;
approach from the standpoint of a witness; approach from
the evidence in the life and work of Jesus. In general a
problematical, a logical, and a psychological illustration
have been given to show how the youth's problem of the
identity of Jesus Christ may be met by material from the
Gospel by John. In the three illustrations presented the
purpose and result were not to establish theologically the
deity of Christ primarily, but to arouse a sense of the

necessity and a desire in the youth, as he discusses, to test by his own experience the identity of Jesus Christ.

In helping youth to understand the nature and result of sin, the material in John has been shown to be practical because it reveals that the true basis of outward sin is the inward sinful nature. The illustration of how the youth's problem concerning prayer may be met pointed to the fact that prayer cannot be understood or effectively practiced until a relationship between God and the youth has been established in Jesus Christ. The problem of personal immortality has been found to go beyond the problem of physical life and death into the problem of spiritual life or death. The solution for the youth to these three problems is to be found not in theological understanding, but in an experience of relationship to Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

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A. Restatement of the Problem

The problem of this thesis has been to relate
specifically method and content in the Christian education
of youth. A study has first been made of the discussion
method, its definition, history, basic philosophy, types,
essential factors and uses. The basic religious problems
of high school youth have been investigated; this study
included the presentation of the general characteristics
of the middle adolescent and the areas of experience out
of which his problems arise. The relation of the discussion
method to Biblical content was illustrated by the use of
the Gospel of John in meeting four of the basic religious
problems of high school youth.

B. Summary

The study began with an inquiry into the nature
of the discussion method. It has been found that though
there have been evidences of the use of this method through-
out the centuries it is only within the past two decades
that it has received special attention and increased use
in the various fields of education. The discussion method
is an attempt on the part of a group to think cooperatively
and reflectively upon a common problem. Discussion thinking

follows the same fundamental steps in the learning process
which individual thought follows: realizing the situation,
definition of the issue involved, search in experience for
solution, and decision concerning a solution. It employs
the basic laws of learning, readiness, use and disuse,
and satisfaction and annoyance. In technique discussion
corresponds closely to the scientific method and in approach
to experience-centered teaching.

The different types of group thinking which were
described briefly are: the symposium, in which different
speakers present the different phases of the subject; the
forum, in which the subject is presented by an expert with
limited opportunity following for the group to discuss the
problem; the round-table, discussion carried on without any
organization or leadership; debate, in which argumentative
persuasion keynotes the presentation of two aspects of the
subject; panel discussion, in which the subject is informal-
ly discussed by a selected panel of experts before the group
as a whole has opportunity to discuss; and informal discuss-
ion, which provides for the participation of the whole
group with adequate leadership and the assistance of expert
opinion. It is with the informal discussion type of group
thinking that this thesis is particularly concerned.

The atmosphere for purposeful discussion has been

found to be that of freedom and cooperation. The three
major parts of discussion are the problem or situation,
the possible solutions to the problem and choice of solu-
tion. It is impossible to proceed to discussing for
solution until the problem is clearly stated and understood.
In discussing for solution the group draws from past and
contemporary experience and consults expert opinion on
the subject. Though the discussion may not lead always
to a consensus of opinion helpful conclusions are to be
reached.

The personal qualifications of the discussion
leader have been found to include his group interest, his
sincerity, his intellectual ability to analyze and synthesize,
his tactfulness and, in the discussion of Christian problems,
his own depth of spiritual resources. The specific duties
of the discussion leader are to establish rapport with and
in the group, to prepare, to be responsible for the intro-
duction of the problem and to stimulate effective group
thinking throughout by the use of questions and summaries.
Vital group participation is the goal and particular advant-
age of informal discussion. An important contribution which
discussion makes is the development of ability to think and
express oneself in the presence of opposing opinions.

The invaluable contribution which the discussion
method has made to the three major fields of education,

secular, social and religious, recommend it for further study and use in these fields. Because it is experience-centered and promotes fellowship the informal discussion method is particularly adaptable to Christian education.

The material of the third chapter revealed the general characteristics of the high school youth, the areas of experience out of which his religious problems grow, the nature of his specific religious problems, and the adaptability of the discussion method in meeting these problems. His make-up is a combination of unbounded physical energy, mental alertness, desire for social approval, emotional intensity and increased interest in the personal nature of religion.

It has been seen that the religious views of the high school youth are affected by his home, school and church environment. As he seeks independence he naturally questions and even doubts the religious beliefs of his parents. Their inconsistencies confuse him concerning the reality of religious truths and value of religious practices. In his school life the youth is confronted with views which seem to conflict with his previous religious teachings. The method and material of the school appeal to him as being authoritative. The church may be partially responsible for the youth's religious difficulties because it has not provided adequate training and because the lives

of its leaders do not always give him the consistent example for which the youth looks.

According to authorities it has been found that the basic religious problems of high school youth center around faith, God, the Bible, Jesus Christ, sin, prayer and immortality. He questions the reasonableness of faith and religion in the light of his study of the material universe. The existence, personality and power of God become real problems to him. Because the Bible is often discounted in school he has difficulty in knowing whether to accept it as authoritative and how to interpret and use it. The high school youth is perplexed by the opposing views concerning the identity of Jesus Christ. He seeks to understand what sin is and his relation to it. In the field of practical religion he has doubts and questions concerning the nature and value of prayer. In view of his materialistic teaching in school he questions whether to believe in a future life.

Discussion has been seen to be particularly adaptable as a method of meeting high school youth's problems because it capitalizes upon his natural desire to be part of a group and gives him opportunity to think through common problems with others of his own age. Because discussion is experience-centered it appeals to youth

and by discussing under competent leadership youth may
come to solutions which are in a real sense his own.

It was the purpose of the fourth chapter to show
the place of the Bible in discussion and to present the
contribution which the Bible makes in meeting the basic
religious problems of high school youth by giving suggestive
illustrations of how the Gospel by John may be used to
throw light on some of these problems. It was found that
the Bible is recognized as expert opinion and reliable
source material in the discussion of religious matters. The
Bible is particularly suited to meeting the religious prob-
lems of high school youth because it is life-centered, be-
cause it approaches problems in their life setting which is
the approach that youth must make to his problems. As the
youth is encouraged to study and discuss the Biblical
material first hand and purposefully in the light of his
problem he will come to appreciate the Bible in a new way.

Suggestive illustrations from the Gospel by John
were given as to how four basic religious problems of high
school youth, the identity of Jesus Christ, sin, prayer,
and immortality, may be approached and helpfully discussed.
According to passages in the Gospel by John concerning the
claims of Jesus, the witnesses to Jesus, and the evidences
concerning Jesus, it was discovered that the basic problem

of the identity of Jesus Christ was met then and is to be
met by the youth as he experiences relationship with Jesus
Christ. The illustration of discussion concerning the
problem of sin, based on John 8, leads the youth to under-
stand that sin, inward and outward, is the result of his
own choice of evil rather than of God. He comes to realize
that the freedom from sin which Jesus offers is the solution
to his problem. The youth is in a better position to
understand the nature and effectiveness of prayer after
discovering and analyzing some of its laws which are analogous
to natural laws which Jesus points to in John 15. His study
and discussion of material in the Gospel by John reveal to
him the basis of the Christian view of immortality and the
possibility of life everlasting through belief in Jesus
Christ.

It has been found that there is an integral place
in discussion for the Bible and that when it is used in a
life-situation approach it becomes effective content to meet
the religious problems of youth. This has been borne out
by the illustrations of the different life-situation ap-
proaches to the material of the Gospel by John to meet
specific problems of youth.

C. Conclusion

In conclusion, in the light of these findings
certain basic principles which underlie the discussion

method's contribution to the Christian education of youth
are to be emphasized. The first principle is the principle
of purposefulness. This includes the purpose of both the
leader and the group. Without youth's facing a definite
problem and earnestly desiring to find a solution there
can be little progress made in discussion. Throughout dis-
cussion the important purpose for the leader is the Christ-
ian development of the youth, the understanding of him,
his problem in the light of his background, his attitudes
and his conclusions. It is to be the purpose of discussion
to give the youth opportunity to meet life-situation problems
constructively and effectively.

The second basic principle in relation to the
use of the discussion method in the Christian education of
youth is definiteness of content. By content is meant both
traditional and experiential content. This study has shown
that the Bible has a unique contribution to make to the
discussion of religious problems by youth. Because it is
life-centered in nature and because it is reliable religious
source material the youth receives invaluable insight and
help by incorporating it in his discussions. The illustra-
tive Biblical approaches to specific religious problems
of youth have shown how the Bible may become meaningful and
valuable to him. It is recommended that the Bible be used

increasingly in the religious discussions of high school
youth.

The third basic principle is the principle of
effective leadership of the religious discussion of high
school youth. This principle includes the personal quali-
fications of the leader, his understanding of discussion
technique, and his preparation for the discussion and the
actual conducting of the discussion. As he sympathetically
understands the problems of the youth, his whole personality
and the environment which affects his religious thinking,
he will be able to help youth. A careful study of the
discussion method will prepare the leader to use it in-
telligently and effectively. He will understand his
position in discussion as youth's guide, a guide to the
youth's own discovery and understanding of spiritual
truths. By his tactful control, his suggestive help when
needed, and his encouraging stimulation of thought he makes
it possible for the realization of values otherwise im-
possible. Leadership of youth's religious discussion
challenges the highest possible training, but this training
must be vitalized by Christian devotion.

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