

TEACHING THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS: THEIR PLACE IN THE AGREED SYLLABUS

If Religious Education of any kind is to have a place in the curriculum, it should be as well taught and effectively planned as any other branch of study (*Spens Report*, p. 207).¹

This apparently simple proposition contains food for much profound thought. In the first place, it implies what we all know to be true; that despite the sixteen years that have passed since the Spens Report was published, and despite the tremendous improvements that have been made (thanks, among other things, to an awakening public interest, compulsory provision for Scripture in school curricula and the compilation of Agreed Syllabuses, and to the efforts of voluntary bodies like the Institute of Christian Education, the Religious Education Press, the National Society and the Inter-Varsity Fellowship)—despite all this, it is still true that Scripture is not “as well taught . . . as any other branch of study.” None would be readier to admit this than the conscientious teacher of Religious Knowledge, who compares his own qualifications—as likely as not of degree standard—in history or physics, classics or geography, with his much less impressive formal credentials, and his much more inadequate equipment for teaching what in so many ways is the most important subject of all. I shall try to say something later on of qualifications for the Scripture specialist, but meanwhile the fact remains that, with its limited allocation of time, its comparatively infrequent adoption as an Examination subject, and a long tradition of inefficiency and lack of interest,² “R. K.” remains a subject apart, and the old taunt of the “Cinderella of the curriculum” has not lost all its point.

In acknowledging this state of affairs, the Spens Report points to the remedy in two phrases: *well taught* and *effectively planned*. It will perhaps be profitable to begin by considering these two phrases.

¹ *Secondary Education, with special reference to Grammar Schools and Technical High Schools* (H.M.S.O., 1938).

² In all fairness it must be said that the “long tradition of inefficiency and lack of interest” was more common in the Grammar Schools with their inadequate allocation of time than in the elementary schools—and even in the Grammar Schools there were many shining exceptions, especially in Girls’ Grammar Schools.

I

First of all, then: *well taught*. Before any subject can be well taught, there are certain indispensable conditions that must be fulfilled. First and foremost, the teacher must have a clear idea of what he is aiming at. Then, he must have a sound knowledge of his subject, and confidence in his own command of this material. In the third place he must have the technique and skill to communicate this material to his class; and finally there must be real interest and enthusiasm—nay, conviction—as to the worth-whileness of the task in which he is engaged.

(1) *A clear idea of what he is aiming at.*

What then is the real *aim* of the Scripture teacher? “Christians”, says Dr. Yeaxlee, “are the people of a Book. The Bible sets forth the facts on which their faith is based.”¹ And so our prime task is to teach the Bible to our scholars. But the Bible is a book whose value, whose appeal, whose excellencies are many-sided. It is, for instance, the supreme masterpiece of the world’s literature. As Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch said:

The Authorized Version of the Holy Bible is, as a literary achievement, one of the greatest in our language; nay, with the possible exception of the complete works of Shakespeare, the very greatest. You will certainly not deny this. As little, or less, will you deny that more deeply than any other book—more deeply even than all the writings of Shakespeare—far more deeply—it has influenced our literature.²

And so it is; its majestic simplicity and its haunting cadences, the thunderings and fires of Sinai and the still, small voice of Horeb, the stern denunciations and tender entreaties of priest and prophet, apostle and evangelist; page upon page of Holy Writ has burnt itself into the soul of our culture by the sheer beauty of its words and phrases. But we should be none of us satisfied merely to treat it as a literary text, and to lead our pupils to see in it only transcendent literary excellence.

Again, in the pages of Old Testament and New we have the most valuable historical documents of the ancient world. A couple of generations ago it was fashionable for those who regarded themselves as advanced thinkers to dismiss the Old

¹ B. A. Yeaxlee, *Handbook to the Cambridgeshire Syllabus* (London: S.C.M., 1940), p. 9.

² A. T. Quiller-Couch, *On the Art of Reading* (Cambridge U.P., 1920), p. 155.

Testament narratives as unhistorical and full of inexactitudes.

Now all this is changed. . . . It is no longer the Christian scholar who is out of date. The up-to-date scholars are now those who recognize the authenticity and authority of the Christian literature.

Such is the testimony of one of the world's greatest scholars, Sir Frederic Kenyon,¹ whose recent death was so great a loss. Furthermore, at every point and turn in the Old Testament story we are brought into vivid contact with the great peoples whose stories fill the pages of Ancient History. Sumerian and Egyptian, Assyrian and Hittite, Babylonian and Persian, Greek and Roman, all have dealings with the Jew, and in his chronicles their history lives again. But to attempt to teach the Scriptures merely as history would surely be as inadequate and unsatisfying as to limit oneself to the literary aspect.

What then is the value of the divine oracles? As we read the pages, we find in precept and parable, in example and exposition, lofty principles of moral conduct; the Decalogue rising far above the codes of neighbouring peoples as the Sermon on the Mount shines down the ages, the peak of all human moral law; Proverbs and Psalms, Prophecies and Epistles, all take their stand on man's dignity as the crown of creation and his consequent ethical responsibilities.

And yet even this is not the ultimate value of the Scriptures, for moral teaching throughout the Bible is always subordinate to the religious. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful"²; but the blessed man is also "he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered"³. Our Lord counsels men to "strive to enter in at the strait gate," but He commands them: "Ye must be born again"⁴. And so the Spens Report sums it up:

No boy or girl can be counted as properly educated unless he or she has been made aware of the fact of the existence of a *religious* interpretation of life.⁵

The aim of the Scripture teacher must be to teach the Bible, not a body of dogma or doctrine, but the Bible, supreme

¹ F. G. Kenyon, *Trans. Vict. Inst.*, LXXXII (1950), p. 224.

² Psa. i. 1.

³ Psa. xxxii. 1.

⁴ Luke xiii. 24; John iii. 7.

⁵ Spens Report, page 208.

reservoir of religious truth; that of his pupil as of Timothy it may be said:

From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation.¹

(2) *A sound knowledge of his subject.*

The second qualification suggested was that the teacher must have a sound knowledge of his subject, and confidence in his own command of his material. It is precisely because many teachers feel themselves deficient in this respect, the Spens Report noted, that there was often a reluctance to teach the subject:

It is true that we have been informed that a large number of teachers have shown in recent years unwillingness to teach Scripture. Their disinclination to take part in Religious Instruction does not, however, necessarily mean that they believe this instruction to be without value. It may indicate not so much that they are indifferent to this side of education, as that they are uncertain about both its purpose and methodology, and that they are naturally reluctant to teach a subject to which they do not feel they are qualified to do justice.²

It is probably in this connection that the most striking advances have been made since 1938. The Report³ in fact recorded that there had been a very considerable increase in the provision of vacation courses and other academic courses in Divinity, and this increase has continued. Vacation courses have multiplied, those organized by voluntary societies (such as the Christian Education Committee of the I.V.F. Graduates' Fellowship) as well as the more official ones. Local Authorities, Institutes of Education, University Extension Boards and similar bodies arrange courses of evening lectures during the winter months (as does also, in London and a few provincial centres, the London Bible College); and, more significant still, it is now possible at some universities to take Scripture Knowledge as an integral part of a degree course, for instance as a principal subject in a General B.A. degree. Sheffield has its own department of Biblical History and Literature, where it is possible for a candidate to present himself for an honours degree. London, in addition to its B.D. degree, offers a Diploma

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 15.

² P. 207.

³ P. 214.

in Theology and also a Certificate in Religious Knowledge; similar Diplomas and Certificates are now offered also by certain other universities.

The last dozen years have also, despite the incredibly difficult conditions due to the War, seen the publication of a great number of valuable, helpful and practical books on the subject. To mention only a few, there are the excellent Lesson Books of the Religious Education Press, containing such a wealth of actual teaching material suited to the varying stages of the Syllabus; the volumes of the Junior Clarendon Bible, attractive and yet scholarly commentaries especially useful in the senior forms of Grammar Schools; for younger children Messrs. E. J. Arnold's "Religious Instruction Series" of delightfully produced class-books by Mr. E. W. Crabb; not forgetting those invaluable vade-mecums for the Scripture teacher published by the I. V. F., *The Scripture Lesson*, *The New Bible Handbook*, and *The New Bible Commentary*.

Then there are various periodicals. The R.E.P., with which the name of Mr. E. H. Hayes is so completely identified, produces its *Teachers of Today*; and some periodicals published primarily for the use of Sunday School teachers by bodies like the Children's Special Service Mission often contain valuable aids. Finally there is *Religion in Education*, containing, with a wealth of other things, an extremely useful annotated book-list which keeps the teacher up-to-date with what is appearing from the publishers in this field.

With all these aids at his disposal, the teacher who really wishes to master the subject will find his task very much simpler than did his colleagues of a generation ago.

(3) *Technique and skill in communication of material*

Our third requirement in the Scripture teacher was the technique and skill necessary to communicate his material to his class—all that is summed up in the Spens Report's rather ugly word "methodology". It ought to be pointed out first of all that "R.K." in the Schools is in the hands of teachers who have spent at least a year or so receiving formal instruction and training in teaching methods, and have since been engaged continuously in developing their own technique in the craft of imparting information. We shall later discuss briefly some points connected with the actual teaching of the Prophets;

meanwhile the Spens Committee's comment provides a useful summing-up:

There are obvious reasons why many members of the teaching profession do not and cannot regard the study of the Bible merely as one of a number of classroom subjects. This fact does not, however, in our opinion afford the slightest justification for the idea that the teaching of Scripture cannot be as expert and effective as any other teaching. We hold that the Biblical Literature contains a body of perfectly intelligible ideas, which can be systematically presented and studied; and that it is possible for a teacher so to approach that literature and present those ideas that the difficulty of appearing to take sides in traditional controversies may be avoided. Not only is the Bible a unique record of one side of human experience, but its study provides a valuable intellectual discipline, and quickens the interest of many young minds. The approach to the study of Scripture which we have in mind is historical and objective, the temper and method of the teaching being such that the teacher's primary purpose will have been attained when he or she has made the pupil understand the meaning of the book which is being studied; and by *meaning* is to be understood the meaning so far as it can be ascertained, for those who wrote the book and for those for whom it was written.¹

(4) *Conviction as to the worth-whileness of the task.*

This leads us naturally to our fourth point—interest, enthusiasm and conviction. To what extent is it essential that the teacher of "R.K." should be a believing or orthodox Christian?

Professor Victor Murray discusses the question by comparing it with requirements for teaching other subjects:

Must the teacher be expected to accept Milton's Hebrew cosmogony and his doctrine of Sin and Retribution before he is considered to be a "suitable" person to teach English? In a history lesson, could a Tory be trusted to deal with the Trade Union Movement or a Socialist to discuss the Industrial Revolution? "Suitability" in this sense would require a large staff of teachers classified according to their personal agreement with their subject matter. This surely, therefore, is a misuse of terms. What the teacher of Milton requires is not a personal agreement with Milton, but a respect for him, a sense that what Milton says is worth saying and is said worthily and well, and an appreciation of the context of life and thought in which Milton wrote. Admittedly, the teacher of religion is not in quite the same position, because, in the world outside, the religious values represented in the School by Scripture are matters of personal conviction and association. Nevertheless, so far as the *content* of Scripture is concerned, "belief" is not essentially different in kind from what it is in the case of Milton.²

¹ Pp. 208-9.

² A. V. Murray, *The School and the Church* (S.C.M., 1914), pp. 32 f.

The Head Master of Rydal School touches on the same question. Referring to a Rationalist suggestion that children should be taught in outline the great faiths of the world impartially in order to produce a spirit of large-minded tolerance in the growing generation, he says

If they [i.e. the teachers] were religious men they would no more suggest that one religion was as good as another than a musical man would say that one tune was as good as another, or an athlete that one game was as good as another.¹

Another Head Master, Mr. Gordon Humphreys, says that the teacher

must be a man of religious conviction himself, one who knows God and walks in His precepts. Above all, like Chaucer's "poore persoun" it must be true of him:

But Christes lore, and His apostles twelve,
He taughte, but first followed it himselve.²

So the Head Masters, at all events, seem to hold that the teachers to whom they entrust Scripture teaching must be men of religious conviction, deeply convinced of the importance of that which they are to communicate.

This does not, of course, mean that the Scripture teacher must satisfy tests as to his orthodoxy or his attitude to the hundred and one points of detail upon which earnest and intelligent Christians have held and do hold a diversity of opinions. Such a test would be as undesirable as it would be impracticable; but it seems impossible to resist the conclusion that the teacher who in his heart feels that the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ set forth in the Old and New Testaments is out of tune with the modern mind, and irrelevant to contemporary experience, ought to avail himself of the provisions of the "saving clause as to the position of teachers" in the 1944 Act.³ However well acquainted with the Bible text and with modern understanding of it, and however skilled in the pedagogic arts, one feels that without conviction and enthusiasm the teaching must miss its object to a great extent. Even an

¹ Donald Hughes, *Some Educational Foundations* (Epworth Press, 1945), p. 22.

² "The Use of the Bible in School Education," *Trans. Vict. Inst.*, LXXX (1948), p. 98.

³ *Education Act 1944* (7 & 8 Geo. 6, ch. 31): "No teacher in any such school shall be required to give Religious Instruction or receive any less emolument or be deprived of, or disqualified for, any promotion or other advantage by reason of the fact that he does or does not give religious instruction or by reason of his religious opinions. . . ." (*para.* 30, p. 25).

Ernest Renan could hardly, one imagines, provoke a great interest in the Word of God in a class of schoolboys, however fascinating the pictures he might evoke of the background and the setting of its narratives.

II

Such, then, would seem to be the chief desiderata if the subject of Religious Instruction is to be "well taught"; what of the other need, that it be *effectively planned*? As is well known, this has been to a great extent provided for by Act of Parliament. The "Agreed Syllabus", what it is, how it is produced, and what the various syllabuses contain, has already been the subject of an article in this QUARTERLY by the present writer.¹ Suffice it at this point to say that the 1944 Education Act laid upon each Local Education Authority the duty of either compiling its own Syllabus of Religious Instruction in consultation with representatives of the Churches and of the Teachers, or (again in consultation) adopting one produced already by some other Authority.

With the Agreed Syllabus ready to his hand, the teacher of Scripture is spared the task—or deprived of the joy, according to the way one looks at it!—of constructing his own syllabus, of deciding what shall and what shall not be taught. Furthermore, the syllabuses usually give considerable aid to the teacher. Very few follow the example of Gloucestershire in giving merely a scheme of work, a bare outline list of topics to be treated at the various stages, but even in this case there is a list of useful books appended, to which the teacher can turn for his material. More syllabuses err—if indeed error it can be called—on the side of an *embarras de richesse*; they have the appearance at least of text-books for honours students in Theology, so that one writer has lamented that "the school leaving age will have to be raised to 70 if the work is to be done!"²

In addition to the Syllabuses, moreover, there are many valuable manuals designed to supplement the various subjects prescribed. Pride of place must be given to the Lesson handbooks produced by the Religious Education Press, of which mention has already been made. Here, lessons are planned and worked out in detail, and a wealth of assistance provided

¹ Vol. XX (1948), pp. 252-271.

² A. C. Toyne, *Religious Teaching in Schools* (R.E.P., 1944), p. 64.

for the seeker. In addition there are such works as Dr. Yeaxlee's *Handbook to the Cambridgeshire Syllabus*, and—designed in a more general way to be used with any of the Agreed Syllabuses—Mr. J. W. Harmer's *The Scripture Lesson: A Handbook to the Agreed Syllabi* (I.V.F., 1946). Certainly there can be no excuse in these enlightened days for any Scripture teaching not to be "effectively planned".

III

So far we have discussed Scripture teaching in quite a general sort of way. We propose now to turn our attention more specifically to the Old Testament, and in particular to the Prophetic Books. Before examining in detail a few of the Agreed Syllabuses actually in use and seeing what parts of the School Course they allot to the treatment of the writing prophets, it might be worth while to touch on another question that is sometimes raised: why study the Old Testament at all in the Secondary School?

Of recent years [wrote a teacher in 1944] the question: "ought the Old Testament to be studied in School or ought we to keep to the New?" has come to the front. There is a body of opinion which answers "Keep to the New"; and much has been written with a lingering hope that this may come to be the case. On the other hand many teachers feel that, if it should, much would be lost, and that for many reasons.¹

This view, that the Syllabus might profitably be limited to the New Testament, has, at first glance, much to commend it. Those especially who have but one period a week in which to cover all the ground may feel that, limiting their attention to the Gospels and the Spread of the Early Church, they could better do justice to their subject. Yet this advantage could be no more than apparent and superficial, if only because the Gospels can in no real sense of the word be understood at all without the long preparation for the gospel in the unfolding story of the Old Covenant. Our Lord had constantly the words of the Law and the Prophets on His lips, and the sermons of Peter and John and the Epistles of Paul and the writer to the Hebrews have the Scriptures—that is to say the Old Testament—woven into their very warp and woof. The Old Testament is so obviously the *religious* preparation for the New; but it is much more beside.

¹ Miss Phyllis Hall, "Ought the Old Testament to be taught in Schools?" *Religion in Education*, xii (1944), p. 17.

It is the *linguistic* preparation also. Even those who have neither Hebrew nor Greek must become aware that the New Testament writers were men whose thought was cast in the same moulds as that of their forefathers, and so, familiarity with the Old Testament text will often illuminate the sense of the New. Again, without a knowledge of the stories of the Patriarchs, the Laws of Moses, the history of the Kingdoms, the message of the Prophets, the music of the sweet Psalmist of Israel and the developments of the centuries immediately prior to our Lord's coming, how much we should miss of the plain meaning of the Gospel stories.

But more than all this, the Old Testament has an intrinsic value as a great religious book. As Professor Rowley has said:

If we would truly understand it, it is well to give it scientific study; yet if we give it only scientific study, we shall miss its richest meaning. The patient study of the date and origin of its books, of the sources employed in their compilation, and the method of that compilation; the study of all that vast wealth of material now available to us, disclosing the background of world history in which Israelite history must be set, and the cultural and religious outlook of Israel's neighbours and masters; the study of her own religious growth, and the examination of the religious ideas found in the Old Testament; all of these things are abundantly worth while, because they enable us to read it with understanding and to see it in true perspective. But if we have only this kind of understanding, even though our knowledge is encyclopaedic, and have no appreciation of the sublimity of its message, we have not learnt to read it.¹

Finally, we may add that if there is a message for us to read in the Old Testament, this is true of no part more clearly than of the Prophets. Their surroundings are so strangely similar to our own. Amos denouncing social inequalities; the post-exilic prophets with their sense of anti-climax that their Return from Exile had not been all they had looked forward to when it was yet in the future; and, so very strikingly, Haggai's description of the people's plight:

Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.²

How amazingly contemporary it all sounds! And in the midst of such situations comes the message: "Thus saith the Lord

¹ H. H. Rowley, "The Use of the Old Testament," *Religion in Education*, vii (1940), p. 3.

² Haggai i. 6.

of Hosts. . . ."; "Hear this word that the Lord hath spoken. . . ."; "The word of the Lord came unto me, saying. . . ."

IV

That the compilers of the Agreed Syllabuses recognize the value of the Old Testament in general and of the Prophetic books in particular is seen from the amount of space allotted to them. It is now our intention to examine a limited number of Syllabuses in actual use in an area at the present time from this point of view; but in order to keep the study within manageable bounds, we shall confine ourselves to the portions of the Syllabuses applicable to the main course of the Secondary School, that is the age groups from eleven to sixteen. But it should be borne in mind that most children arriving at the Secondary School will already have heard something about most of the major figures of our period during their stay in the Primary School.

We set out in tabular form the provision made for the study of the Prophets in the relevant portions of the syllabuses under discussion.¹

It will be seen that each of these Syllabuses includes the historical background and the main figures of the Prophetic Movement in the second year of the course, while the Sunderland and Liverpool Syllabuses, going into more detail, prolong this survey into the third year. Bootle returns to a study of the teaching of the Prophets in the fourth year, while Cheshire devotes the third and fourth years to a careful survey of the Prophetic books, leading up from an examination of the earlier prophets who left no written works. Lancashire and Liverpool prescribe the Prophets among other topics for the 14-16 age group. Roughly speaking, then, the pupils will learn of the Prophets as historical figures in the Scripture narrative during the second, or perhaps the third, year of the course; while at a later stage they will deal with them again with special reference to their teachings.

The question is, of course, as to how all this wealth of material is to be fitted into the small allowance of time that we have for dealing with it—in the Grammar School one period per

¹ The Cheshire, Lancashire and Liverpool Syllabuses are new compilations under the 1944 Act, and have superseded those examined in the article on "The Agreed Syllabus" in this QUARTERLY for October 1948.

	Lancashire	Cheshire	Liverpool	Sunderland	Bootle
Yr. 1. (11-12)	Outline of O.T. (1) Stories Jesus learned as a boy; How God taught His People. Creation and Fall to Division of Kingdom	Outline of the History of the Hebrews (1) Abraham to the Division of the Kingdom	Revelation of God to His People (1) Through the Patriarchs. Abraham to David		O.T. Outlines (1) Abraham to Moses
Yr. 2. (12-13)	(2) (contd.) The Division of the Kingdom to Jonah, Obadiah and Ruth	(2) The Division of the Kingdom to the Coming of our Lord	(2) Through the Prophets. Solomon to the Exile		(2) Joshua to Solomon (3) Rehoboam to Herod the Great
Yr. 3. (13-14)	Heroes of the Faith Patriarchs to Kagawa, Niemöller (O.T. prophets are a mere episode)	Earlier Prophets Moses, Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah of Jerusalem	(3) History of God's Chosen People from the Exile to the Coming of Christ.		God's Revelation to His Covenant People: (1) Moses to Division of the Kingdom
Yr. 4 (14-15)	A course in 4 sections of which the first is "The Revelation of the Holy Spirit in the O.T." (Section can be shortened where pupils leave at 15, but it is expressly stated that Prophets must not be omitted.	Later Prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Unknown Prophet of the Exile (Deutero-Isa.), Haggai, Zechariah, The Unknown Prophets of the Restored Community (Trito-Isa.) (The Christian Faith)	No provision for studying the Prophets (but copious extracts set from the Prophets in years 2 and 3)	"The Book about God" (beginning with J, E, P, D, etc.)	(2) In Genesis (3) Through the Prophets
Yr. 5 (15-16)					The Psalms (as an alternative to Church History)
					7 suggested courses; including Genesis, and Literary evolution of books of the Bible

week; in the Modern Secondary School perhaps a slightly more generous allocation of two or three periods. When we remember that the time we can give to the Old Testament portion of the syllabus is usually little more than one third of the time available in any year for Scripture teaching, it is clear that for each of the essential figures of the Prophetic Movement we shall be very fortunate indeed if we can spare more than two periods, more often only one. What then shall we do with our time?

First, let us consider the second year lessons on the prophetic figures. The 1939 Cambridgeshire Syllabus has a rubric which sets forth the aim it considers the teaching should have in mind:

Much of the material can be taught as stories from the Old Testament, the Apocrypha and other sources; ideas of the extent of Alexander's conquests, the Dispersion and the Roman world might be conveyed by the use of maps.¹

The dual purpose is first to present the figures of the Prophets as living figures, and then to fit them into their place in the completed picture. To deal with this latter point first, it is clear that each child ought to have a reasonable picture in his mind of the map of the Middle East, not in too great detail, of course, but he certainly ought to know such things as which is Tigris and which Euphrates, whether Babylon is north of Nineveh or *vice versa*, and the difference between Syria and Assyria. One interesting plan that has been tried with success is to teach the map at the beginning of the term by associating the geographical locations with the various desks in the classroom. Jones in the second row from the front of the class becomes Jerusalem, Smith half-way towards the back right-hand corner is Babylon, and Williams in the middle of the back row is Nineveh.² And with the map should be learnt a very simple outline of dates.

As to the more difficult task of "making the prophets live", here is an interesting suggestion for a lesson on Amos at this

¹ P. 60.

² This suggestion was made at a meeting of the Graduates' Fellowship (Schools Section) about ten years ago in a paper by Mr. J. G. H. Leask, M.A., which does not appear to have been published. A useful treatment of the subject will be found in *The Scripture Lesson* already mentioned, chap. xvii.

stage. It is by Miss Margaret Avery, and is called "How Amos the Shepherd preached the Word of God":

- (i) Give a vivid picture of the rugged hills sloping steeply to the Dead Sea—their scanty pastures dotted with thorny scrub, stunted fig and mulberry trees; and squat and ugly, but valuable little sheep.
- (ii) Amos on the hills—watching the "seven stars and Orion" and hearing God's voice in the winds on the hill-tops; loneliness, hardness, courage in fighting wild animals (children could discover these points from the text).
- (iii) Amos and the Cities. Describe prosperity following on successful Syrian Wars: growth of new official class: big estates: corruption in law courts: cheating in business: idleness, frivolity and luxury (with some help the class could find all this from references).
- (iv) The Call. "Go prophesy unto My people Israel"; an *unpaid* prophet. Driven by the Spirit of God to prophesy.
- (v) Amos and Amaziah at Bethel (ch. vii)—a vivid story.
- (vi) Beginnings of the O.T. Amos writes down the stirring oracles which he may not speak.
- (vii) His message—"God is a just Judge".¹

This lesson is quoted in order to show how abundant is the material for several lessons on this arresting figure, the difficulty is going to be obviously (and especially where we are rationed to one lesson only!) what to choose among all the riches at our disposal. At all events, it is clear that in the Bible story itself, without a lot of "background" material, there is narrative to grip and to enthral.

When we come to the later treatment of the Prophets, at a more mature stage of the child's development, it is the teaching and the ideas that we wish to bring out, but even so, as the 1939 Cambridgeshire Syllabus says,² speaking of the People of God:

Yet the People is made up of individual men and women, and their story is its story. From the very first, the individual stands out. . . . How far the great men of any nation are the moulders, or the products, of their time may be disputed; but certainly in their personal history the history of their times is best understood. Biography is always more attractive than bare history, and emphatically so to children. Movements of thought will leave them cold; but they understand men and women. Abraham (and the others) are live people: and in their personal story is told the story of the people of God. It cannot always be so told. There are vital movements which are associated with no particular names. But wherever possible, the story should centre in the individual.

¹ *Religion in Education*, iv (1937), p. 225.

² P. 68.

With the great prophets, this is very much so. Each was a great protestant, who saw evil around him and denounced it, and saw the will of God and proclaimed it. So Mr. G. L. Heawood, the Head Master of Cheltenham Grammar School, suggests¹ that each prophet may be approached by a five-fold *questionnaire*:

- (i) Who was he, and when did he live?
- (ii) What did he say was wrong?
- (iii) What was said to him?
- (iv) What did he say about God?
- (v) What did he say men ought to do?

Mr. Heawood suggests that these questions should be put on the blackboard with appropriate references, which the boys should hunt up for themselves; the boys' answers would form the basis of discussion. He continues:

Some explanation will, of course, be necessary in any case, and can easily be worked into the discussion, e.g.: The political situation, illustrated if desired from i. 1–iii. 12. The meaning of the word *seer* (not a professional prophet) in vii. 12. What Bethel implied (cf. modern equivalents). The novelty of Amos' teaching and the reality of the opposition to him must be made emphatically clear.

The whole is rounded off by the teacher's summary.

One final point that Mr. Heawood discusses² is the use of the Syllabus. All the Agreed Syllabuses are emphatic that they are guides, not masters; aids, not autocrats. Their words are eloquently summed up by Archbishop William Temple in the Foreword to the 1930 York Syllabus:³

It is very important that its real purpose should be appreciated. In every department of education, what matters most is the free play of intercourse between the mind of the teacher and the mind of the learner; but in no department is this so important as in connection with religion. The syllabus should, therefore, be used with great freedom and elasticity. It is a guide, but nothing more. The wise traveller who visits, say, Florence, does not feel bound to see every sight mentioned in his guide-book; he quickly finds out which objects of interest are of importance or value to him personally and gives less attention to the rest. A guide-book is a servant, not a master, and this syllabus is a guide-book for those engaged in the difficult, but supremely important work of religious instruction.

¹ *Religion in School* (S.C.M., 1939), pp. 138 ff.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 88 f.

³ P. 2.

With this view Mr. Heawood agrees, and makes the interesting suggestion that instead of rushing through all the prophets in the term allotted to them in the Syllabus, the teacher might spend all the time available on one prophet, say Amos.

His class may in this way learn more of the meaning of the Old Testament, the place of the Prophets, and God's ways with men than by any other method.

In this brief sketch it has been possible only to touch upon the great subject of How to teach the Old Testament Prophets in Grammar Schools and Secondary Schools; but enough has perhaps been said to show that here indeed is a great field for study.

Birkenhead

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